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Red Lights, White Hope: Race, Gender, and U.S. Camptown Prostitution in South Korea

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Claremont McKenna College

**Red Lights, White Hope:
Race, Gender, and U.S. Camptown Prostitution in South Korea**

submitted to
Professor Albert Park

by
Julie Kim

for
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ABSTRACT

U.S. military camptown prostitution in South Korea was a system riddled with entangled structures of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. This thesis aims to elucidate the ways in which racial ideologies, in conjunction with gendered nationalist ideologies, materialized in the spaces of military base communities. I contend that camptowns were hybrid spaces where the meaning and representation of race were constantly in flux, where the very definitions of race and gender were contested, affirmed, and redefined through ongoing negotiations on the part of relevant actors. The reading of camptown prostitutes and American GIs as sexualized and racialized bodies will provide a nuanced understanding of the power dynamics unique to camptown communities. The first part of this study consists of a discussion of Korean ethnic nationalism and its complementary relation to U.S. racial ideologies. Denied of an ethnonational identity, camptown prostitutes denationalized themselves by rejecting Korean patriarchy and resorting to White American masculinity to craft a new self-identity. Another component of this thesis involves American GIs and their racialized self-identities. Recognizing American soldiers as products of a specific political and social context, I argue that military camptowns were largely conceived as spaces of normalized abnormality that provided a ripe opportunity to challenge existing social, economic, racial, and sexual norms.

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I would also like to thank Professor Selig, whose class has taught me to fully embrace my identity as a woman and as a feminist. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the themes and topic of this thesis originated from your inspirational teachings.

I am infinitely indebted to my friends and family back in Korea. My parents, for our conversations that always steer me back to the bigger picture, and for your encouragement to never stop questioning, never stop learning. June, for covering my life with prayer and exemplifying a life of love, and lastly, Hannah, for your courage and inner strength that never cease to inspire me.

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INTRODUCTION

Rows of red brick houses lined across Itaewon, tanks running over young schoolgirls, mad cows and candlelight vigils. These are my earliest memories of America and American presence in Korea in the early 2000s. No doubt similar snapshots occupy the minds of many other Korean millennials, a common thread weaving us together in our collective identity as Koreans. These are, however, dimming images, slowly becoming buried into the depths of our memories, dismissed as bygones, shoved into our closet full of skeletons. They evoke shame, not pride. Confusion, not clarity.

The Korea that exists in my memories is the product of forgetting as much as it is of remembering. It is a form of *selective* memory, consisting of images and representations hand-picked by those dictating whom to remember and forget. The picture is indeed incomplete, and I question whose voices we have heard more prominently than others, whose faces we have rendered invisible in order to uphold others', or even our own. This study stems from the rude awakening of non-memory, of the very absence of marginalized voices in the national narrative, specifically regarding U.S. military camptown prostitutes. For as Katherine Moon points out, camptowns and camptown prostitution were as much a part of the history of U.S. involvement in Korea as General Douglas MacArthur and his military endeavors against North Korea.¹ Yet, the

¹ Katharine Hyung-Sun Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 27.

disparity of the space and importance they occupy in the minds of Koreans are glaringly evident. What follows is a small act of resistance against sterilized stories that erase people who contradict the beliefs we so dearly wish to hold onto, whose voices we have been complicit in silencing, one way or another.

Historiography

With the surge of nationalist and anti-imperialist movements in late 20th century South Korea grew a parallel increase in activist scholarship regarding U.S. military camptown, or *kijich'on*, women.² Before the 1990s, however, social activists and academics had paid little attention to the dynamics of hierarchized structures of gender, sexuality, race, and class in U.S.-South Korean military camptowns. Feminist activist movements largely focused on the underappreciated contribution of female factory laborers to South Korea's rapid economic development, or the plight of comfort women who were forced into sexual slavery under the Japanese empire.³ Although there were multiple factors that contributed to the erasure of *kijich'on* women in Korean national history, Moon notes that the belief of a prostitute's willful, consensual decision to sell her

² Throughout the course of this study, I interchangeably use the terms *kijich'on* woman, camptown woman, camptown prostitute, camptown sex worker to signify Korean women who worked in the sex industry in U.S. military camptowns.

³ For discussions of female factory workers' role in the rapid urbanization of Korea and the history of comfort women, see George E. Ogle, *South Korea: Dissent within the Economic Miracle* (London: Zed Books, 1990); Chunghee Sarah Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

body formed the basis of society's stigmatizing gaze towards her.⁴ It was only until recent years that academia has acknowledged the need to examine the economic, political, and ideological forces that forged intricate webs of relations within camptowns, relations that cannot be simplistically characterized as a natural result of unequal state powers. Ethnographic research on the work and lives of *kijich'on* women, buttressed by sociological and feminist theories, form the foundation on which the following study is built.

Existing historiography of U.S. camptown prostitution in South Korea has been heavily influenced by feminist theories that characterize military prostitution as the product of gendered notions of masculinity and femininity. Among others, Cynthia Enloe mounts a particularly forceful argument that military establishments are sustained by gendered ideologies that shape presumptions about proper sexual behavior.⁵ Militarization, therefore, has as much to do with masculine honor as it has to do with standards of feminine respectability. By describing how state institutions demand and exploit women's adherence to socially constructed feminine roles, Enloe demonstrates that the personal inevitably becomes the international.⁶ Normative notions of gender and sexuality, previously seen as private matters that remained tangential in their influence on

⁴ Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 9.

⁵ Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁶ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2014), 196.

international politics, were recognized as central elements in the formation of national identity, state policies, and inter-state relations.

Scholarly literature on *kijich'on* prostitution has analyzed camptown politics through this “gender lens,” contextualizing the experience of *kijich'on* women in a wider narrative of gendered ideology that developed in post-colonial Korea. Moon’s pioneering work prompted a wave of studies that explored the inseparable nature of gender and politics, domestic and international, and the colonizer and colonized in the Korean context. Expounding on Enloe’s examination of the “militarization of sex,” Moon concludes that both the U.S. and South Korean governments were actively engaged in appropriating women’s bodies as a means to defend national security and advance economic development.⁷ The “Camptown Clean-Up Campaign,” a joint U.S.-South Korea project executed as a response to rising racial tensions in base communities, validates the widespread sentiment among *kijich'on* women that an unfettered state pursuit of national security at the expense of female bodies constituted the crux of their oppression.⁸ In her analysis of U.S.-R.O.K (Republic of Korea) interstate relations, Moon reveals how the “exploitation and oppression of women are functions of the particular power dynamic between two countries.”⁹ Jin-kyung Lee reiterates Moon’s characterization of *kijich'on* women as politicized and gendered bodies: “[The Korean

⁷ See also Soh, *The Comfort Women*, 28.

⁸ Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 152.

⁹ Katherine H.S. Moon, “Prostitute Bodies and Gendered States in U.S.-Korea Relations,” in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, by Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (London: Routledge, 2012), 149.

state] saw camptown prostitution as having social value in smoothing out relations between South Korea and the United States, locally and internationally.” Whether it was for perceived economic gains or the Korean government’s political agenda, sexual entertainment for U.S. servicemen was consistently justified as a “necessary evil.”

Other scholars have further refined feminist analyses of *kijich'on* prostitution by exploring the interplay between gendered ideologies and nationalist movements that grew as a vehement response to U.S. neo-imperialism. Enloe notes that gendered ideologies are most prominently articulated, enforced, and reproduced during periods of nationalist mobilization.¹⁰ The rise of nationalism ushers in a time of “lesson-fashioning and mythmaking,” heavily imbued with what Enloe calls “gendered memories” and norms.¹¹ Nationalist ideologies have often served to privilege masculinity and patriarchal structures by means of silencing women:

When they are represented as sexual partners and as bearers of national traditions, women can either acquire nationalist prestige or lose it. It is precisely because sexuality, reproduction, and child-rearing acquire such strategic importance with the rise of nationalism that many nationalist men become newly aware of their need to exert control over women. Controlling women becomes a man's way of protecting or reviving the nation.¹²

Erecting national boundaries necessitates the demarcation of sexual boundaries that distinguish “good women,” who perform their proper gender roles as mothers, wives, and

¹⁰ Enloe, *The Morning After*, 237.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 238-239.

daughters, from “bad women” who are stigmatized for their improper sexual behaviors.¹³ Although women become symbolic representations of the nation, bearing what Nira Yuval-Davis calls the “burden of representation,” they are paradoxically “denied any direct relation to national agency.”¹⁴ Keun-joo Pae points out that *kijich'on* women’s status as social pariahs demonstrates that Korean men operated under a patriarchal nationalist framework in which a man’s honor was dependent on his ability to protect his women. She observes, “Korean society has rarely been generous to Korean women who are sexually involved with foreign men. Such women have been regarded as a threat that...brings shame to their men.”¹⁵ Similarly, Chung-moo Choi interprets post-colonial Korean discourse through feminist theories on nationalism, capturing the essence of Korean patriarchal nationalism: “Colonized Korean men not only deny feminine subjectivity but oppress Korean women, to shed their emasculated and infantilized image and prove their masculinity.”¹⁶ While military prostitutes were acknowledged as a necessary sacrifice for national interests, they were simultaneously seen as a symbolic “display of [U.S.] masculine domination over the women and men of Korea, constructing all Korean people as the sexualized feminine Other.”¹⁷ Thus, the active oppression and

¹³ Keun-joo Christine Pae, “Western Princesses—A Missing Story: A Christian Feminist Ethical Analysis of U.S. Military Prostitution in South Korea,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 29, no. 2 (2009): 126.

¹⁴ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London ; Sage Publications, 1997), 45; Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (U of Minnesota Press, 1997), 90.

¹⁵ Pae, “Western Princesses—A Missing Story,” 131.

¹⁶ Chungmoo Choi, “Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea,” in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, by Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (London: Routledge, 2012), 14.

¹⁷ Choi, “Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea,” 15.

stigmatization of *kijich'on* women were primary means of regaining national sovereignty and by extension, masculine pride.

Gender and sexuality have been the focal point of past research on U.S.-South Korean military prostitution, rightly so due to the extent to which gendered relations influenced camptown politics. However, the entangled nature of hierarchized structures of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality necessitates the adoption of multiple vantage points to understand the intricacies of *kijich'on* dynamics. In particular, a discussion of racial ideology in conjunction with gendered nationalist ideologies is critical in achieving a nuanced understanding of military camptown relations. An analysis of gender and sexuality need not relegate race and ethnicity to the backburner. In fact, as historians John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman point out, “[a]ttention to racial difference and race relations is one of the most important ways that the history of sexuality has extended its scope.”¹⁸

Recognizing the dearth of scholarship that examines how the “necessary intersection of racist and neoimperialist ideologies with gendered policies...further compounded the already existing imbalance of power” among different actors, I aim to analyze *kijich'on* women not only as gendered bodies, but as the racialized and ethnicized Other as well.¹⁹ In doing so, I question how the reading of *kijich'on* women as racialized

¹⁸ John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 390.

¹⁹ Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 127.

bodies can refine our interpretation of their self-identities and decisions, portrayed in publicized events, personal testimonies, and popularized cultural productions. Echoing Joane Nagel's assertion that "race, ethnicity, and nationalism are crucial components of sexual and moral boundaries and systems," the following thesis attempts to bring race and ethnicity to the forefront of historical inquiry regarding gendered politics in military camptowns.²⁰

In analyzing racial ideologies within Korean-American immigrant communities, Nadia Kim adopts the theory of racial formation introduced by Michael Omi and Howard Winant. She characterizes post-colonial Korea as a space of "imperialist racial formation," defined as a "sociological process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed."²¹ Following Kim's lead, I posit that military camptowns were hybrid spaces where the meaning and representation of race were constantly in flux, where the very definitions of race and gender were contested, affirmed, and redefined through ongoing negotiations on the part of relevant actors in *kijich'on* communities. Although military camptowns consisted of a diverse array of interest groups and identities, I largely focus on the "racial triangle" of heterosexual White American GIs, African American GIs, and Korean women to analyze the

²⁰ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 255.

²¹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55–6.

materialization of racial and gendered ideologies.²² While acknowledging that both the American and Korean governments were actively invested in institutionalizing camptown prostitution, this study aims to demonstrate that the unequal power relations unique to camptown communities were engendered and sustained by individual compromises. A heavy emphasis on the imbalance of state power elides the agency of individual actors in navigating through inequalities and the Othering gaze, often at the expense of another out-group.

The first part of the study consists of a discussion of ethnic nationalism and its complementary relation to U.S. racial ideologies. For as Kim aptly states, "American racialization would not enjoy its level of potency were it not for complementary ideologies in South Korea."²³ I interpret *kijich'on* women's acceptance of racialization along American color lines as a challenge against the patriarchal assumptions that undergirded Korean ethnic nationalism. Conferring power and national identity on those who maintained their racial purity, Korean men enforced a code of honor that marginalized "deviant" women as foreigners and outsiders while proffering virtual impunity to men who likewise crossed certain ethnic and sexual boundaries.²⁴ Such a strong association of blood and nationhood denied *kijich'on* women a national, thereby a

²² For a comprehensive list of relevant actors who participate in the construction and maintenance of camptown prostitution, see Enloe, *The Morning After*, 153.

²³ Nadia Y. Kim, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 7.

²⁴ For example, Rhee Syngman, the first president of the Republic of Korea, was married to a white Viennese woman and was not met with much opposition. While men are condoned, or even applauded, for crossing ethnosexual boundaries, women are heavily scrutinized and policed.

racial and ethnic, identity. As a response to this stigmatizing gaze, camptown women rejected Korean patriarchy and the men who were complicit in relegating them to the margins of society, but instead resorted to White American masculinity to achieve a new identity. Their sexual access to GIs offered them an opportunity to craft their self-identities in opposition to Korean ethnic nationalism that branded them as dirty, foreign, and unwanted.

A necessary corollary to this argument relates to *kijich'on* women's differential treatment of White and Black Americans. Why, in other words, did they subscribe to a specific subset of American masculinity? A thorough reading of race relations in camptown communities calls for a clear articulation of American racial hierarchies and ideologies that were implanted in Korea with little historical context. Rather than pointing to ignorance or long-standing prejudice against dark-skinned people as the source of race-based discrimination against African American GIs, I demonstrate that *kijich'on* women knowingly and willingly appropriated American racial ideologies to exert dominance over another group, creating the Other that is integral to the formation of self-identity.

Another component of this study involves American GIs and their racialized self-identities. While the acknowledgement of *kijich'on* women as legitimate agents is significant, a one-sided emphasis on the supply side of prostitution may result in an unfortunate “lack of understanding of the interaction between the demand and supply

sides of sex labour.”²⁵ After all, prostitution is a bidirectional exchange sustained through the pervasive and incessant demand for commercialized sex. Rather than perpetuating a monolithic image of the crass, aggressive GI Joe, I aim to critically analyze how ideologies surrounding race, gender, and nationality contributed to camptown inequalities, recognizing American GIs as products of a specific political and social context. What ideas of sexual and racial hierarchies did American servicemen²⁶ carry as they entered this foreign nation, and how were these preconceptions, myths, and anxieties actualized or disproven in everyday life? What racial and gendered norms were they exposed to and conditioned to live out prior to their stationing in Korea, and how did these ideas inform their actions and attitudes towards Koreans, more specifically *kijich'on* women? Contextualizing American GIs within the broader discourse of domestic and international politics in the 1960s and 1970s, I argue that military camptowns were largely conceived as spaces of normalized abnormality that provided a ripe opportunity to challenge existing social, economic, racial, and sexual norms.

A subset of *kijich'on* studies has adopted race and ethnicity as central themes, but an overwhelming majority has done so in the context of biracial children. As marginalized as their mothers, these mixed-race children, derogatorily called “*twigi*” or “GI babies,” were treated as outcasts who stood as embodiments of Korea’s political and

²⁵ Andris Zimelis, “Human Rights, the Sex Industry and Foreign Troops Feminist Analysis of Nationalism in Japan, South Korea and the Philippines,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 44, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 53.

²⁶ While I acknowledge that there were soldiers of different genders, races, and sexual orientations, I focus here on a specific subset of American GIs, namely heterosexual White and Black men, that I collectively refer to as “American soldiers,” “American GIs,” or “American servicemen.”

economic subordination to America. Moon and other scholars confirm through interviews with *kijich'on* families that Black Amerasian children were more stigmatized than their White counterparts.²⁷ In her ethnographic research on biracial children and their mothers, Margo Okazawa-Rey notes that military prostitution and biracialism contradicted the widespread myth of ethnic homogeneity that sustained Korean national identity and pride, leading Korean society to shun Amerasian people. Characterizing Amerasians as a “legacy” of U.S. imperialism, such scholars have often emphasized the ostracized status of interracial people as a means to call for state action, either on the part of the American or Korean government. While analyses of biracial children are relevant to my argument, they remain on the peripheries, as I will focus primarily on the racialization of *kijich'on* women.

A Note on Sources

I rely on an array of fictional and non-fictional sources to delineate the lives of *kijich'on* women and American soldiers in military base camptowns. A portion of the fictional works are novels that are based on factual events and personal experience, while others are purely allegorical pieces written to highlight specific aspects of camptown

²⁷ Black Amerasian children are less likely to be adopted or receive sponsorship to immigrate to America. See Margo Okazawa-Rey, “Amerasian Children of GI Town: A Legacy of U.S. Militarism in South Korea,” *Asia Journal of Women’s Studies* 3, no. 1 (1997): 71–102; Saundra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus, *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia* (New York: New Press, 1993), 196; Saeumt’ō, “Kijich’on, Kijich’onyōsōng, Honhyōradong Shilt’aewa Sarye [Kijich’on, Kijich’on Women, and Interracial Children’s Current Status and Case Studies],” 1997.

prostitution. By representing the voices and perspectives of Korean women and men, these pieces serve as invaluable tools that inform the reader about how the outsider's gaze differed from women's self-perceptions and how camptown women resisted movements that reduced them to nothing more than iconic figures. In addition, I utilize interviews, memoirs, and oral history records of former prostitutes, Korean-American immigrants, and American military personnel who served in the Pacific region at the height of the Cold War era. I adopt excerpts from interviews conducted by ethnographers, historians, and governmental agencies to supplement the limited number of personal memoirs and testimonies. All quotes of Korean texts are original translations unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER I: A BRIEF HISTORY OF U.S. MILITARY PROSTITUTION IN KOREA

While the following study analyzes the impact of U.S. camptown prostitution on local communities and individual actors at the microlevel, it is also critical to understand the inherently political nature of military prostitution by examining the active participation of the American and South Korean governments in consolidating the camptown system. I focus on the 1960s and 1970s, commonly known as the "heydays" of military prostitution, but will nevertheless engage in a general discussion of the governments' active role in exploiting *kijich'on* women.

The establishment of camptown prostitution was an immediate byproduct of U.S. military occupation. Following the demise of the Japanese empire, U.S. troops occupied Korea, landing in the port city of Incheon on September 8, 1945. By the end of the year, the first U.S. military camptown was set up in Bupyong.¹ More camptowns sprung up throughout the years, the largest ones of which were located in Itaewon, Ŭijŏngbu, Tongdŭch'ŏn, Kunsan, Songjŏng-ri, and Songt'an.² The vestiges of Japanese colonial rule, which created systems of enforced sexual labor that terrorized and exploited local populations, facilitated the seamless transition between two occupying forces that shared

¹ Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 19.

² P'yŏnjippu [Editorial Staff], *Sarang ũi p'umashi kŭ waegoktoen sŏng : maech'un ũi yangt'aebŷŏl sŏnggyŏk kwa silt'ae e kwanhayŏ* [*Money for Love, the Distortion of Sex: an examination of prostitution and its current state*] (Sŏul: Tŭnge, 1988), 95.

similar assumptions about the expendability of female bodies. The U.S. military built upon existing infrastructure, operating under the framework that prostitution was a necessary practice to maintain troop morale and alleviate any tension that might arise between Koreans and American soldiers. Despite public opinion, the United States Army Military Government (USAMG) initially showed no intention in eliminating or regulating prostitution.³ No longer able to overlook popular demand, however, it promulgated Regulation No. 70, "The Prohibition of the Trafficking of Women and Girls or of Contracts for Such Trafficking (*punyōja maemae ttonūn kŭ maemaegyeyagŭi kŭmji*)," in 1946.⁴ Cloaked in ambiguous wording, the law stipulated the elimination of licensed prostitution (*gongch'ang*) as a means to eradicate the "evil customs" of the Japanese colonial government and pursue gender equality, the "hallmark of liberal democracy."⁵ In reality, the law only served to push sex workers underground, promoting the growth of private, or unlicensed, prostitution (*sach'ang*).

Although the law imposed a punishment on both parties involved in prostitution, the government's scrutiny and control were predominantly directed at sex workers. The conditions to become a licensed prostitute grew more stringent as "certificates of health" were given out to women who underwent compulsory physical examinations and

³ Song-ch 'ol Hong, *Yugwak ūi yōksa [History of Prostitution]* (Sōul-si: P'eip'ō Rodū, 2007), 164.

⁴ Na Young Lee, "The Construction of Military Prostitution in South Korea during the U.S. Military Rule, 1945-1948," *Feminist Studies* 33, no. 3 (2007): 466.

⁵ Hong, *Yugwak ūi yōksa [History of Prostitution]*, 166.

treatments of sexually transmitted diseases (STD).⁶ Failure to comply often led to the loss of their licenses as well as forcible detainment. That the number of prostitutes only grew following the official promulgation of the law demonstrates that controlled regulation, not wholesale elimination, of prostitution was the ultimate goal of the USAMG.⁷ Na-young Lee deftly points out that even though the U.S. military government played a significant role in curtailing sex workers' rights, such policies could not have been "successfully enforced without Korea's elite leaders' implicit endorsement and direct assistance."⁸ Korean politicians specifically designated a number of dance halls for the purpose of entertaining U.S. soldiers, and the numbers of such licensed "entertainment establishments" escalated over time.⁹ The collaborative efforts of the Korean and American governments in the early years of U.S. occupation foreshadowed what was to become an enduring characteristic of military camptowns in Korea.

While the American military used prostitution to appease soldiers at the expense of female bodies, the Korean government promoted it to protect "virtuous" and "respectable" women from the threat of sexual violation. The fear of U.S. soldiers' aggression was not entirely unfounded. The early phases of U.S. occupation were marked by rampant violence, ranging from physical assaults to random rampages where soldiers

⁶ Lee, "The Construction of Military Prostitution in South Korea during the U.S. Military Rule, 1945-1948," 462-3.

⁷ One article in *Puin Ilbo* reported that the number of prostitutes grew from 2,000 to 50,000 within the first nine months of its promulgation. See *Ibid.*, 466.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 464.

⁹ *Ibid.*

“[drove] the Koreans off roads and into ditches.”¹⁰ Such pervasive disorder led the American military to conduct educational programs that instructed soldiers to be respectful of the “vast cultural difference and social customs,” instilling in them the lesson that they were “not in this country as conquerors” but as “friends.”¹¹ In regards to their relation to local women, Lieutenant General John R. Hodge urged soldiers to “keep [their] hands off Korean women,” defining any form of sexual relations with Korean women as an act of rape.¹² In adopting a “boys will be boys” attitude, however, the military allowed for an exception in its rule against fraternization by implicitly condoning sexual relations with prostitutes. The Korean government also saw merit in allowing sexual access to prostitutes as a means to contain foreign influence and protect the purity and integrity of the Korean people. Prostitutes were thus sent to the frontiers of the U.S.-R.O.K. no man's land as necessary sacrifices, where they no longer belonged to either world.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the official consolidation and expansion of camptown prostitution under Park Chung-hee’s junta. In an effort to assert its moral legitimacy after the military coup in May 1961, the government immediately issued the “Prostitution

¹⁰ Katharine Hyung-Sun Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 33.

¹¹ Seungsook Moon, “Regulating Desire, Managing the Empire: U.S. Military Prostitution in South Korea, 1945-1970,” in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, by Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 44; Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 33.

¹² Moon, “Regulating Desire, Managing the Empire: U.S. Military Prostitution in South Korea, 1945-1970,” 44.

Prevention Law (*yullak'aengwidŭng pangjibŏp*)” that formally outlawed prostitution, both licensed and unlicensed.¹³ However, hidden behind the façade of benign rhetoric was the intention to exploit women’s bodies to foster economic development and improve U.S.-R.O.K relations. In the following year, the government designated 104 special districts (*t'ŭkchŏngjiyŏng* or *t'ŭkpyŏlguyŏk*) where licensed prostitution was condoned, allowing the government to effectively monitor and control prostitutes.¹⁴ Within the next two years that number would increase to 146, with the government conducting mandatory 5-hour educational classes for sex workers on STD prevention, hygiene, anti-Communism, and English.¹⁵

In addition, Park’s government promoted the growth of prostitution by promulgating the “Tourism Promotion Law” in 1961.¹⁶ Prioritizing national security and economic development above all, Park promoted the sex tourism industry to improve the “leisure activities” of American soldiers, thereby encouraging a large scale influx of U.S. dollars. Congressional records of the time describe discussions among politicians who agreed that using prostitutes was the “only way to earn dollars without spending money.”¹⁷ Others suggested to emulate the Japanese government’s strategy in

¹³ Hong, *Yugwak ŭi yŏksa [History of Prostitution]*, 227.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 229, 232.

¹⁶ Na-Young Lee and Jae Kyung Lee, “History of US Camptown Prostitution in SK and Challenges of Women’s Oral History,” n.d., 4.

¹⁷ Chŏng Kir-hwa and Kim Hwan-gyun, *Uridŭl ŭi hyŏndae ch'immuksa : Han'guk hyŏndaesa misŭt'ŏri ch'ujŏk* (Sŏul-si: Haenaem Ch'ulp'ansa, 2006).

glamorizing prostitutes as patriots.¹⁸ In fact, *kijich'on* women testify that the characterization of prostitutes as “national ambassadors” was commonplace. Kim Yŏn-ja, a former camptown prostitute who poignantly relates the collective experience of *kijich'on* women in her memoir, recalled that during education classes, the instructor exhorted the women to “never lose [their] courage and pride” and “remember that [they] are patriots who are contributing to the national economy and earning foreign currency.”¹⁹ Another former *kijich'on* woman noted that Korean officials “told [them] to be cautious, that [they had] to be nice to the American soldiers and be clean when [they were] in contact with them” as representatives of the nation.²⁰ That the Korean government dubbed *kijich'on* women as national ambassadors and patriots was all the more ironic considering that many were shunned by their fellow Koreans, derogatorily called *yanggongju* (“Western princess”), *yangsaekshi* (“Western bride”), *yanggalbo* (“Western whore”), U.N. ladies, or U.N. madams.²¹

Before the 1960s, the Korean government's involvement in regulating camptown prostitution was minimal. U.S. military personnel expressed deep frustration at the lack of governmental support in executing health and sanitation policies, specifically with respect to the spread of venereal disease (VD) among American soldiers. In a note to his

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kim Yŏn-ja, *Amerik'a t'aun wang ŏnni, chukki obun chŏn kkaji ak ūl ssūda: Kim Yŏn-ja chajŏn esei [America Town's Big Sister: Kim Yŏn-ja's Autobiographical Essays]* (Sŏul-si: Samin, 2005), 123.

²⁰ Lee and Lee, “History of US Camptown Prostitution in SK and Challenges of Women's Oral History,” 7.

²¹ Chŏng-ja Kim and Hyŏn-sŏn Kim, *Migun wianbu kijich'on ūi sumgyŏjin chinsil : Miguk wianbu kijich'on yŏsŏng ūi ch'oech'o ūi chŭngŏnnok* (Kyŏnggi-do P'aju-si: Hanul Ak'ademi, 2013), 39.

superiors, an official from the Eighth United States Army (EUSA) International Relations Office (IO) observed the military's lack of negotiating power regarding prostitution control, as it had "no lever to force the ROKs [Koreans] to improve their efforts."²² He further noted that the "VD problem to them [was] a minor one."²³ Without the active support of the Korean government, the U.S. was limited to carrying out sporadic attempts to minimize the spread of VD. The tables turned, however, when the Nixon Doctrine was issued in 1969, signaling the withdrawal of U.S. military support from its Asian allies. Moon argues that the imminent threat of a security vacuum in the absence of U.S. forces jolted the Korean government into cooperation.²⁴ The economic damage that the country would incur as a result of troop reductions was not negligible. In the 1960s, 25% of South Korea's GNP originated from camptowns, with 46,000 Koreans earning 70 million dollars in 1969 alone.²⁵ By 1970, camptown prostitutes were generating 8 million dollars annually.²⁶ Fearing the loss of a significant source of foreign currency, Park's administration took great care to execute U.S. demands in regards to civil-military issues, specifically the "VD problem" and camptown race relations.

The joint 5-year endeavor of the "Camptown Clean-Up Campaign" from 1971 to 1976 was birthed as a result of changing power dynamics between Korea and America.

²² Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 50.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 58–67.

²⁵ Hong, *Yugwak ūi yōksa [History of Prostitution]*, 191; Lee and Lee, "History of US Camptown Prostitution in SK and Challenges of Women's Oral History," 5.

²⁶ Lee and Lee, "History of US Camptown Prostitution in SK and Challenges of Women's Oral History," 6.

Stringent measures were enforced upon camptown women, as they were required to carry VD identification cards that verified their licensed statuses as “clean” women.²⁷ Prostitutes who did not carry their cards were subject to fines, police arrest, or imprisonment.²⁸ Those who were found to be infected upon examination were sent to a detention center, colloquially known as the “Monkey House” among *kijich'on* women, to be held until they were fully cured.²⁹ On the other hand, American soldiers who were infected with VD were never heavily regulated or penalized.³⁰

In addition to curbing health and sanitation problems, the U.S. government sought to mitigate racial tension among American soldiers by using *kijich'on* women as mediators. Racial unrest in base communities had been brewing for some time prior to the 1970s. Conflicts between Black and White Americans as well as those between Black GIs and local Koreans occurred rather frequently.³¹ A major complaint of the Black soldiers was the Korean proprietors’ discriminatory treatment, as all-Black clubs offered services of lower quality and were located in less favorable places. A report from the EUSA added that such discrimination materialized in the form of “poor service, unfriendliness, and refusal to even serve black soldiers.”³² One African American GI lamented, “The Koreans tell us they don’t want us because we’re black. I ask a girl to go

²⁷ Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 26.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

³¹ Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 69.

³² *Ibid.*, 71.

to bed and she says no. My money is as green as anybody's."³³ Racism was only one of the many factors that led to a sharp increase of violence and racial unrest in military bases. Maria Höhn demonstrates that “widespread discrimination in the military, the strain of the Vietnam War, and the apparent failure of the liberal Civil Rights Movement” all contributed to rising racial tension within camptowns, ultimately resulting in the Anjǒngni Racial Riot in 1971.³⁴

The camptown of Anjǒngni was located near Camp Humphreys, a base in P'yǒngt'aek County that consisted of 500 Black soldiers among 1,700 GIs.³⁵ On July 9, 1971, a group of fifty African American GIs carried out a premeditated attack against five Korean clubs that exclusively catered to Whites. Ordering people to leave the premises, the protestors went on to demolish the establishments as a protest against clubowners and sex workers who refused service to African American soldiers. Koreans retaliated with a greater level of aggression and antagonism. Following the riot, a mob of a thousand local camptown residents attacked Black soldiers with sickles and rocks. An article in *Los Angeles Times* reported that the conflict quickly turned into one with Koreans and White GIs on one side and Blacks on the other, with some villagers even

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon, “Introduction,” in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, by Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 27.

³⁵ Maria Höhn, “The Racial Crisis of 1971 in the U.S. Military: Finding Solutions in West Germany and South Korea,” in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, by Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 326.

cornering a Black American and “beat[ing] him up.”³⁶ In protesting against Blacks, Koreans adopted American racist language, as they carried placards that read “We Don’t Need Any Niggers,” “Go Back to Cotton Field,” or “Blacks Get Out.”³⁷ The intensity and vehemence of the Anjŏngni Racial Riot alarmed the U.S. military and South Korean government, prompting a series of policies to iron out race relations in base communities. An article in *New York Times* noted that officers with “special training” conducted racial awareness programs, and movies that conveyed messages of racial harmony were made required viewing during duty hours.³⁸ It was the camptown women, however, who bore most of the burden of bridging racial differences. They were subject to mandatory education classes that urged them to treat all soldiers equally, and were penalized if soldiers reported them of doing otherwise.³⁹ The Korean government’s loss of considerable leverage neatly coincided with the American military’s agenda to alleviate racial tension, which resulted in multiple layers of oppression for *kijich’on* women.

The most recent way in which camptown women were used as a means to an end pertains to the murder of Yun Kūmi, a *kijich’on* woman in Tongduch’ŏn who was brutally mutilated and murdered by an American GI in 1993. Rather than igniting a public debate on the rights of camptown sex workers, this incident triggered an anti-American

³⁶ “Angry Mob of Koreans Protests Racial Brawl,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 1971.

³⁷ *Ibid.*; Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 72.

³⁸ Richard Halloran, “U.S. Army Division in Korea Combats Racial Flare-Ups: The Black Flag Incident Racial Picture Is Complex Education Is Required 20% of M.P.’s Black,” *New York Times*, December 4, 1973.

³⁹ Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 87.

movement that was founded upon a masculinist-nationalist agenda.⁴⁰ The image of Yun was idealized as a metaphor for the shameful subjugation of the Korean people, galvanizing nationalist sentiments. Flyers promoted during this anti-American movement often dubbed Yun as the nation's "sister" and "daughter."⁴¹ Only after their death were *kijich'on* women able to become "true Koreans." Kim Yŏn-ja was deeply disappointed at the turn of events following Yun's death. She asserted, "We are not looking for people's sympathy. If Yun Kūmi were still alive, spending her days in the camptowns with drugs and alcohol as her only solace, I wonder how many people would have given her any thought."⁴² As such, the history of U.S. military camptowns is interlaced with institutional exploitation, violence, and deep-seated stigma against sex workers. At the same time, it is a story of women who resisted identities that were superimposed on them and who devised ways to construct self-identities on their own terms.

⁴⁰ Confederation of Korean Women's Hot Line, *Han'guk yŏsŏng inkwŏn undongsa (History of Korean Feminist Movement)* (Sŏul-si: Hanul Ak'ademi, 1999), 339.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 342.

⁴² Kim Yŏn-ja, *Amerik'a t'aun wang ŏnni, chukki obun chŏn kkaji ak ūl ssŭda*, 253.

CHAPTER II: KOREAN ETHNIC NATIONALISM

In the following discussion, I adopt Nagel's social constructionist framework in defining the concepts of race, ethnicity, and sexuality in order to articulate the various mechanisms that drive human relations. The fluid nature of ethnicity, defined as "differences between individuals and groups in skin color, language, religion, culture, national origin/nationality, or sometimes geographic region," is especially pertinent to this study, as the meaning of ethnic differences is often a "matter of location."¹ One's skin color, for example, carries different connotations depending on one's physical locality and is a "socially defined, historically and situationally changeable, and sexually loaded" fact.² Similarly, Omi and Winant characterize race as "not a biologically given but rather a socially constructed way of differentiating human beings."³ Sexuality, although somewhat attached in its meaning to physiology, is also a socially defined concept that delineates "appropriate sexual tastes, partners, and activities."⁴

Scholarship pertaining to nationhood and nationalism likewise abounds, but I adhere to a limited number of definitions. The concept of nation is most succinctly captured in Benedict Anderson's oft-quoted phrase, "imagined community," which

¹ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.

² *Ibid.*, 38.

³ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 65.

⁴ Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, 8.

denotes the constructive aspect of nation-building. Nagel concurs, as she defines nation as an "empty vessel waiting to be filled by the symbolic work of nationalist founders and defenders."⁵ Others, such as Enloe, view nation as a specific group of individuals, united under the belief of a common past, culture, and destiny.⁶ On a similar vein, nationalism is an invention of what had not previously existed, rather than the "awakening of nations to self-consciousness."⁷ Nagel conceptualizes it as an ideology, one marked by "ethnocentrism where nationalists assert moral, cultural, and social superiority over other nations" as a means to control the nation's own destiny.⁸

The actors involved in the invention of nation and promotion of nationalism are of primary importance, as they demonstrate the entanglement of gender and nationalism. As Enloe forcefully demonstrates throughout her work, nations and nationalism have "sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope."⁹ Nationalism, therefore, is a necessarily gendered discourse, as not all genders hold equal position and authority in nation-building.¹⁰ Moreover, Nagel argues that as a "code of honor that defines who is and is not a real" member of the nation, nationalism gives birth to a moral economy that is heavily gendered, sexualized, and racialized:

National moral economies provide specific places for women and men in the nation, identify desirable and undesirable members by creating gender, sexual, and ethnic boundaries and hierarchies within nations, establish criteria for judging good and bad performances of nationalist masculinity and femininity, and define threats to national moral and sexual integrity.¹¹

⁵ Ibid., 157.

⁶ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, 45; Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 7.

⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 15.

⁸ Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, 148.

⁹ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, 44.

¹⁰ Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, 159.

¹¹ Ibid., 146

Creating normative standards of sexual behavior licenses, and even encourages, the active punishment of deviants, which in turn creates a renewed spirit of solidarity among the insiders. As such, the persecution of an out-group becomes an integral part of defining the in-group.

The Birth of Korean Ethnic Nationalism

For several decades, Koreans have unquestioningly subscribed to the mythic belief of their nation's ethnic homogeneity, and this description of Korea has been referenced in both academic and non-academic spheres. Eric Hobsbawm, a prominent British historian, famously remarked on the East Asian countries China, Japan, and Korea as "among the extremely rare examples of historic states composed of a population that is ethnically almost or entirely homogeneous."¹² In Nora Okja Keller's novel *Fox Girl* (2002), a story of Amerasian teenagers in the camptown of Kunsan Air Base, Hyun-jin's Korean stepmother represents the prevalent spite spewed against *kijich'on* women and their mixed blood children, justified through the enduring principle of ethnic homogeneity. She exclaims with enthusiasm, "It's in the blood. Everyone's life is mapped from the moment of birth... You will never look like me. Blood will always tell."¹³ Ironically, something as permanent as blood could easily be overturned by a woman's sexual interaction, confirming what Eun-shil Kim observes about women's inferior status in Korea, "A Korean woman's membership to the nation is contingent upon her

¹² E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 66.

¹³ Nora Okja Keller, *Fox Girl* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 50–51.

dependence and subordination to a man. She cannot be without a father or husband, and if she is, her sexuality is deemed deviant."¹⁴

American expatriates who were involved in Korean politics and culture often recognized the people's deep attachment to their blood-based community. E. Grant Meade, who served as an American Military Government officer in Korea from 1945 to 1946, noted, "The Koreans today are a most homogeneous race and there are only some 300 Korean surnames...indicating the tendency of the people in these areas to keep to themselves."¹⁵ Such descriptions further conflated the Korean nation and race by confirming the trope of the "Hermit Kingdom" that was frequently used among Westerners to refer to Korea. James Wade, an American professor and journalist who lived in Korea in the 1960s, likewise made a perspicacious observation on the conception of Korean ethnonational identity. He stated, "Koreans insist that they are a united people with a common destiny as well as a common history and language...[and] cherish an inflated notion of their national morality, and a mystical attitude about their racial superiority."¹⁶

Such sentiments of national blood-based kinship were widely expressed and understood by Koreans and non-Koreans alike, conveniently overlooking the nation's history of foreign invasion and racial and cultural intermingling that precluded the maintenance of a pure ethnic lineage. In reality, Korean ethnicity is a transnational and

¹⁴ All quotes and excerpts of Korean texts are original translations unless otherwise noted; Katherine Moon et al., "[jwadam] gukgau anoga gaenun anida: migugui gunsajuuiwa gijichon yeoseong [National Security Is Not Individual Security: American Militarism and Kijich'on Women]," *Tangdae Pip'yŏng*, 2002, 99.

¹⁵ E. Grant Meade, *American Military Government in Korea*. (New York,: King's Crown Press, 1965), 18.

¹⁶ James Wade, *One Man's Korea* (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1967), 12.

transethnic mixture of ancient peoples from various East and Central Asian localities, including China, Japan, Manchu, and Mongolia.¹⁷ Bruce Cumings questions the common tendency among Koreans to essentialize themselves by believing that they have a quality that makes "them and only them real Koreans, tracing a unique, homogeneous bloodline back some five thousand years."¹⁸ However, he adds, "there is no homogeneous category called Korean – no racial essence, no homogeneous ethnicity, no unique genetic stamp."¹⁹ Korea is and has always been a politically negotiated, ideologically constructed entity that has transformed through changing times. Despite the falsity of the belief, however, ethnic nationalism in Korea has engendered a deep-seated "reality of its own" and gained considerable traction in political and social spheres.²⁰ The validity or objectivity of supposed facts rarely takes precedence in the invention of nations. As Anderson illustrates, "Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity or genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."²¹ In his discussion of the origins of Korean ethnic nationalism, Gi-wook Shin also notes, "For it is seldom *what is* that is of political importance but what people *think is*."²²

Ethnic nationalism formed the foundation of the modern Korean state, functioning as a "major form of 'mechanical solidarity'" among Koreans.²³ In tracing the

¹⁷ Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997); Jinkyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

¹⁸ Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

²⁰ Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 3.

²¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 15.

²² Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 3.

²³ *Ibid.*, 17.

historiography of the Korean ethnic nation (*minjok*), Henry Em contends that the modern construct of *minjok* originally had its roots in movements that strove to create “more democratic, more inclusive forms of political actions.”²⁴ Emphasizing a common history of peoplehood, a new wave of intellectuals redefined Korea’s collective identity as a homogeneous entity that shared a “deep, horizontal comradeship” despite internal divisions and regional loyalties.²⁵ Political activist Sin Ch’ae-ho was the first nationalist historian to articulate a historical narrative based on the ethnic nation, using *minjok* as a means to reify national sovereignty and unite the Korean population.²⁶ It was against this backdrop of a budding nationalist historiography that anti-colonial discourse developed following Korea’s annexation to the Japanese empire.

In resistance to colonial forces in the 20th century, Korean nationalists employed the unifying identity of *minjok* to redirect people’s allegiance and assert political autonomy.²⁷ In an effort to justify imperial encroachments on their neighboring states, the Japanese developed a racial theory known as Pan-Asianism that fostered "cooperation and solidarity among the yellow race" to resist Western invasion.²⁸ By fusing all Asian ethnicities together under its imperial umbrella, Japan sought to legitimize its assimilationist policies and suppress anti-colonial oppositions. Shin argues that Korean nationalists who opposed Japanese rule formed a counter-narrative that "racialized the notion of the Korean nation, stressing ideas of shared blood and ancestry" that

²⁴ Henry. Em, *The Great Enterprise: Sovereignty and Historiography in Modern Korea*, Asia-Pacific; Asia-Pacific. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 77.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 17; Lee, *Service Economies*, 15; Nadia Y. Kim, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 23–6; Em, *The Great Enterprise*, 83.

²⁸ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 35.

distinguished Koreans from the Japanese.²⁹ In the post-colonial context, ethnic nationalism further intensified, constituting the core of anti-American rhetoric. The *minjung* movement, a social movement that culminated in the resurgence of democracy, redefined nation and national identity "in terms of national struggles for liberation from foreign dominance," rejecting neo-imperial U.S. presence and its comprador authoritarian regime.³⁰ Kim describes the development of Korean nationalism as a product that was "birthed alongside its twin, a shared sense of collective inferiority to their oppressor."³¹ From the onset of modernity, ethnic nationalism stood as an ever appealing ideology that cultivated solidarity among Koreans.

Ethnic nationalism also served as a vital political apparatus for the Korean government to influence domestic affairs. Even as different regimes pursued a range of political ideologies and national agendas, they rarely contested the nation's ethnic homogeneity. In fact, such assumptions were used to mobilize and direct Korean people to a desired path. Citing the leaderships of Rhee Syngman and Park Chung-hee as primary examples, Shin states, "The notion of nation and national identity in contemporary Korea does not merely 'describe' the constructed world view, but *prescribes* what is normatively right and therefore how one should conduct oneself."³² Rhee folded the Korean self-identity as a *danil minjok*, or unitary nation, into his anti-communist discourse to legitimize his precarious position as the leader of post-colonial South Korea and his claim as the rightful one of a unified Korean peninsula. With the

²⁹ Ibid., 54.

³⁰ Ibid., 173.

³¹ Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 25.

³² Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea*, 180.

support of Ahn Hosang, the Minister of Education, he advanced his newly minted ideology of *Ilmin Chuui*, also known as One Peoplism. In an article, Rhee contended that "as a unitary nation that has a long history, we are always one and not two. As one nation, we have to be one always."³³ Ahn further confirmed this notion, stating, "We are one people. One people has the same bloodline, the same fate, the same ideology."³⁴ Both Ahn and Rhee invoked national traditions, such as the Korean people's mythical ancestor *Tan'gun*, to establish the long history and "eternity" of the nation. Hyun-jin's stepmother in *Fox Girl* reflects the prevalence of such rhetoric as seen in her insult against Amerasian Hyun-jin: "Nothing but filth runs in your veins. My family can trace its roots back to Prince Tan-gun."³⁵

Similarly, the military dictatorship of Park Chung-hee accepted the basic premise of shared ethnicity and bloodline, further ossifying Koreans' ethnocentrism and valorization of racial purity.³⁶ Park's claim that the Koreans are "of one race and one people" supported his fervid pursuit of modernization.³⁷ By "capitaliz[ing] on Koreans' national shame," the dictator subjugated individuals under a collective identity and forcibly sacrificed them for the "greater good."³⁸ It is not a coincidence that *kijich'on* women's status worsened under Park's regime, as it introduced legal measures that institutionalized camptown prostitution for reasons of national security and economic

³³ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁴ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁵ Keller, *Fox Girl*, 124.

³⁶ Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 25.

³⁷ Chung Hee Park, *Our Nation's Path; Ideology of Social Reconstruction* (Seoul: Dong-a Pub. Co., 1964), 5.

³⁸ Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 25.

development.³⁹ Although ethnic nationalism underwent various iterations, the underlying assumptions have rarely been contested and have become entrenched in Korean national discourse.

Ethnic Nationalism and Kijich'on

In his analysis of European anti-Semitism, Anderson states that "racism and anti-Semitism manifest themselves, not across national boundaries, but within them...they justify not so much foreign wars as domestic repression and domination."⁴⁰ As a parallel illustration, this statement encapsulates the unfortunate reality of Korean ethnic nationalism. The strong association of ethnic purity and national identity brought about racist notions that were most intensely and belligerently directed towards the nation's own members, namely *kijich'on* women. An editorial published in *Chosun Ilbo* affirms this connection, stating, "Korea's self-perception as a single ethnic nation is the cradle of racism."⁴¹ I demonstrate that popular literature as well as personal testimonies speak to the twofold exclusion of *kijich'on* women as the racialized and gendered Other.

Korean men's preoccupation with women, who are perceived as the "guardians of tradition, culture, morals, and the Korean bloodline," is most evidently manifested in their phobia of sexually deviant women.⁴² In Ahn Chŏng-hyo's novel *Silver Stallion* (1990), set in a small village during the Korean War, the dignified village elder Old

³⁹ Confederation of Korean Women's Hot Line, *Han'guk yŏsŏng inkwŏn undongsa (History of Korean Feminist Movement)* (Sŏul-si: Hanul Ak'ademi, 1999), 307.

⁴⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 136.

⁴¹ *Chosun Ilbo*, May 20, 2003

⁴² Stella Oh, "From America Town to America: Fox Girl and the Ethics of Interracial Relations in South Korea's Camp towns," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 33, no. 2 (September 2007): 6.

Hwang, schooled in Confucian thinking and bred in a generational legacy of wealth, embodies traditional Korean mores of sexual and racial purity. In the aftermath of the rape of a young widow named Ollye, he expresses a mixed sense of pity and disdain towards the victim as he "could not free himself from the thought that, victim or not, she was a dirty woman."⁴³ Unable to withstand all the stigma and hatred, Ollye eventually becomes a prostitute for the *bengkos*, or the American "big nose." By then, Old Hwang "had ceased to exist" for Ollye, yet ironically, the old man himself "could not ignore Ollye's existence."⁴⁴ His thoughts betray a profound sense of insecurity and concern over his lack of control:

He was not a bit happy, suspecting that Ollye might join forces with the outsiders - perhaps even to fight him...The old man was frustrated because there were too many soldiers for him to do anything about, because the army camp was too big for him to do anything about, and because the world had grown suddenly too big and too complicated for him to do anything about.⁴⁵

Old Hwang's fears are then projected against Ollye, as he accuses her of going after the very men who violated her. He scornfully remarks, "I don't understand how you could do this with the foreign soldiers whom you should hate more than anybody else in the village because you were their first victim."⁴⁶ By excluding Ollye from the community, Old Hwang reasserts his diminishing authority and effectively hides his growing phobia of foreign influence.

Hyongbu, a character that appears in Heinz Insu Fenkl's autobiographical novel *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (1996), echoes this disparaging gaze towards women that

⁴³ Chŏng-hyo An, *Silver Stallion: A Novel of Korea* (New York, NY: Soho Press, 1990), 67.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 114, 127.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 127-129.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

reveals a deep-rooted fear. As he converses with In-su about a young girl, he blurts out, "But she's just a girl. A woman. A woman can ruin an entire bloodline. A woman can suck you dry of your strength."⁴⁷ Hyongbu's comment exposes the paradoxical reality that Korean men's contempt and show of power towards women was, in reality, a manifestation of their fear of emasculation and of the imminent loss of authority in the wake of foreign invasion. Such phobia materialized in the form of restrictive policies in the early stages of U.S. governance in Korea. Meade observed, "One of the initial orders received by the Group...stipulated non-fraternization with Koreans....The non-fraternization ban was more serious [than the other]."⁴⁸ A report in 1965 published by the EUSA of the United States Forces, Korea (USFK) reflects the Koreans' rationale for the maintenance of camptown prostitution, stating that excessive restrictions would be opposed by "certain segments of the Korean population...since it would mean that the mobility of the Korean female national in close, continuous contact with the American would be heightened to the extent that she would infiltrate in hitherto 'purely Korean' residential areas."⁴⁹ Women represented multiple meanings in the minds of Korean men as a source of both fear and derision, as men's masculinity rested in their ability to prevent women from crossing sexual and ethnic boundaries.

In conjunction with their deviant sexual behavior, *kijich'on* women were separated as the Other through their foreign appearance. Descriptions of their physical image stood in stark contrast to those of traditional Korean women, often as a means to

⁴⁷ Heinz Insu Fenkl, *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Dutton, 1996), 46.

⁴⁸ Meade, *American Military Government in Korea*, 103.

⁴⁹ Katharine Hyung-Sun Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 39.

point out the evident lack of Koreanness in military prostitutes. One such description reads: "She stood enthroned on her high heels, her blonde hair loosely falling on the sides of her face. The contours of her bulging breasts shamelessly appeared through her tight shirt, and she was wearing a short skirt that revealed her inner thighs, the grimy color of which betrayed what hid beneath the veneer of flimsy makeup on her face."⁵⁰ *Silver Stallion* is peppered with illustrations of "strange Yankee wives," one of which states, "This woman had painted her eyelashes thickly like caterpillars and her lips as red as blood, like a shaman."⁵¹ Upon seeing a woman whose blouse "showed the shape of her big breasts," Ollye's son Manshik concludes that she is not a decent woman, because "all respectable ones did their best to completely conceal the existence of their most feminine parts in loose dresses."⁵² The distinction between prostitutes and "respectable" women is further pronounced at the end of the novel, when Ollye returns to her traditional self by wearing her "farming clothes of loose pants and *chogori* vest with sagging sleeves...like any other countryside housewife."⁵³ Kim Yŏn-ja describes her daily routine of "erasing herself" as a time of the day when she put on her wig, fake eyelashes, and thick makeup.⁵⁴ Kim was not the only *kijich'on* woman who adopted Western standards of beauty. Those whose clientele consisted of black soldiers, for example, would perm their hair to be "more like the darkies," to the point where, as one former officer remarked, "it's

⁵⁰ An Il-sun, *Ppaetppŏl: an Il-sun changp'yŏn sosŏl [Mudflats: a Novel by An Il-sun]* (Sŏul-si: Konggan Midiŏ, 1995), 45.

⁵¹ An, *Silver Stallion*, 90.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁵⁴ Kim Yŏn-ja, *Amerik'a t'aun wang ŏnni, chukki obun chŏn kkaji ak ūl ssŭda: Kim Yŏn-ja chajŏn esei [America Town's Big Sister: Kim Yŏn-ja's Autobiographical Essays]* (Sŏul-si: Samin, 2005), 103.

almost like an afro."⁵⁵

Kijich'on women's abandonment of "natural" beauty and of traditional clothing and behavior was believed to deny them of authentic Koreanness, which compounded the feelings of discomfort and unfamiliarity expressed towards camptown sex workers. The musings of the male protagonist of Ch'ŏn Sŭng-se's short story, *The Scream of a Yellow Dog* (1974), capture this attitude, as the narrator ventures into the exotic world of a military camptown in search of a prostitute who owes his wife money. Walking through the desolate streets in daytime, he suddenly realizes "how happy he is" to be surrounded by women with "soft, clean faces with no make-up" and "chaste ladies dressed in long, loose skirts" back in his hometown.⁵⁶ He decides that he does not care for money as long as he finds and brings back Eun-ju, not Dabi Kim, referring to her name as a prostitute. In his mind, Eun-ju is not Korean until she leaves her wayward lifestyle behind. An irreducible foreignness of all things American, including *kijich'on* women, marked them as pollutants of a pure, pristine people and culture. Camptown women were hence "no longer considered to be Korean" but were instead defined by their American sexual partners.⁵⁷

American culture, represented through the vast array of imported goods and the women who associated with American men, was frequently characterized as artificially implanted elements that diluted the purity of Korean culture. Active resistance against such hazardous influence affirmed the self-identity of the Korean nation. In *Goppi*

⁵⁵ *Camp Arirang*, a documentary film, directed by Diana S. Lee and Grace Yoonkyung Lee, 1995; Keller, *Fox Girl*, 17.

⁵⁶ Ch'ŏn Sŭng-se, *Hwanggu ūi pimyŏng: Ch'ŏn Sŭng-se sosŏljip [The Scream of a Yellow Dog: Collection of Novels by Ch'ŏn Sŭngse]* (Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi: Ch'aek Sesang, 2007), 291.

⁵⁷ Lee and Lee, *Camp Arirang*.

(1988), a novel that delineates the lives of two half-sisters who become camptown prostitutes, the anti-American protagonist Jung-in emphatically asserts her Korean identity by decrying American culture:

We were not born with the knowledge of cowboys, pop songs, and jeans; such desires were invented by outsiders. Tantalizing images of tall, White men, the heroic John Wayne who defeats fierce Apache tribes, Gary Cooper, chocolate bars, a wonderful country filled with wonderful people all seduced young children with irresistible allure.⁵⁸

Her Korean husband, a political activist involved in anti-American nationalist movements, likewise describes American culture as morally depraved, one that "tramples on our nation's pure and innocent spirit."⁵⁹ In *Fox Girl*, Hyun-jin also points out this change in values: "When the Americans first ventured off the base and into our neighborhoods, we thought that they...were ugly...Slowly, though, we began to view their features as desirable...just as we had learned to crave the chocolate candy and cakes we had once thought sweet as dirt."⁶⁰ Even in academic sources, American culture is often represented in a negative light as decadent (*t'oep'yejǒk*), consumerist (*sobijǒk*), and hedonistic (*hyangnakchǒk*).⁶¹ Suspicion of foreign influence allowed for a corresponding contempt for *kijich'on* women who were considered primary beneficiaries of American presence. In the minds of Koreans, *kijich'on* women lacked moral strength, demonstrated in their failure to resist temptations of a glamorous American life, and thus deserved to be

⁵⁸ Yun Chǒng-mo, *Koppi : Yun Chǒng-mo changp'yǒn sosǒl [A Bridle: a Novel by Yun Chǒng-mo]* (Sǒul-si: P'ulbit, 1988), 141.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁶⁰ Keller, *Fox Girl*, 14.

⁶¹ P'yǒnjippu [Editorial Staff], *Sarang ũi p'umashi kǔ waegoktoen sǒng : maech'un ũi yangt'aebiyǒl sǒnggyǒk kwa silt'ae e kwanhayǒ [Money for Love, the Distortion of Sex: an examination of prostitution and its current state]* (Sǒul: Tǔnge, 1988), 95–99.

expelled to the margins.

In addition, America stands as a disruptive force that leaves the natural order of Korea and its people in disarray, uprooting the pure essence of Koreans. In *The Scream of a Yellow Dog*, the male narrator becomes sickened at the sight of Eun-ju's *gomusin*, traditional Korean rubber shoes, set beside a pair of military boots. He notes the incongruity of the two pairs whose vast difference in sizes was utter "violence."⁶² He later advises Eun-ju to leave the camptown, back to the natural ways of life: "Your feet are meant to walk the earthen paths of countryside villages, or the stone walkways in Na Hoon-ah's [Korean singer] hometown. Your lonely *gomusin* belong to another pair of black *gomusin* covered with sloppy lumps of red clay."⁶³ He tries to further convince her by describing how perfectly satisfactory life was even before the Americans arrived, pleading:

Would driving a luxury car on a highway, or going to health resorts be the only affluence and peace? The unsophisticated and slow gait of our good-natured ancestors who have walked down the rice paddies, the sweaty palms of your hometown folks who just grab your hands, even their smelly breath....Wouldn't all these give us a wonderful peacefulness?⁶⁴

America distracted and disrupted traditional Korean ways, and the protagonist, adopting a knowing, paternalistic tone, attempts to lead the strayed woman back to her natural course of life. As he concludes his entreaty, he says, "Eun-ju, yellow dogs must go with other yellow dogs, yellows with yellows," showing his fear of interracial mixture that

⁶² Ch'ŏn Sŭng-se, *Hwanggu ũi pimyoŏng*, 300.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁶⁴ Translation adopted from Lee, *Service Economies*, 139; for the original Korean text, see Ch'ŏn Sŭng-se, *Hwanggu ũi pimyoŏng*, 305.

threatens the integrity of the Korean people as a whole.⁶⁵ His preoccupation with Eun-ju signifies not so much a genuine concern for her well-being but a manifest declaration against American violation of Korean ethnonationality and a resulting desire to assert the nation's autonomy.

The Othering assault committed against *kijich'on* women was more than mere rhetoric advanced by high-level intellectuals. A paralyzing feeling of displacement, alienation, and disconnect from the nation of their birth was the living reality of camptown prostitutes, and this began with the merciless rejection of their closest family members. In a survey conducted with 88 *kijich'on* women in 1973, 78.4% of the respondents noted that they ceased contact with their families because they feared that their parents, relatives, and friends would find out about their occupation.⁶⁶ Many were aware that even their loved ones subscribed to shared cultural values of female chastity. Nan Hee, a former *kijich'on* woman, related the story of her brother's reaction when her sister-in-law told him "what [she] was doing."⁶⁷ She noted, "My brother really beat me up. He said he was all finished with me....Since then, I've broken all relationships."⁶⁸ A Korean immigrant with a camptown background likewise recalled the humiliation she suffered from her cousin, who "asked [her] not to call him an elder cousin" because "he already knew that [she] had married a foreigner."⁶⁹ When Yang-hyang Kim-Kruse, a former prostitute who married an American GI, returned home after being forcibly taken

⁶⁵ Translation adopted from Lee, *Service Economies*, 140; for the original Korean text, see Ch'ŏn Sŭng-se, *Hwanggu ūi pimyŏng*, 308.

⁶⁶ Kyusik Kwŏn, "Yullakyŏsŏngŭi Shilt'ae [A Sociology of Prostitution]," *Yosong Munje Yon'gu* 3 (1973): 155.

⁶⁷ Saundra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus, *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia* (New York, New Press: 1993), 201.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Chul-In Yoo, "Life Histories of Two Korean Women Who Marry American GIs" 1993, 197.

to work at a brothel for U.S. servicemen, her parents "looked like they were ashamed of" Kim.⁷⁰ She stated, "They were ashamed of me going to church with them, ashamed of me going to my uncle's and aunt's houses. One of my cousins told me, 'Don't come around our place.' I felt like a total...outsider, so I felt that the army base was more comfortable for me."⁷¹ Kim Yŏn-ja's memoir includes multiple stories that demonstrate the callousness with which the *kijich'on* women were treated, most prominently manifested in family members' reaction to the women's death. Some came only to take what few possessions remained, neglecting to organize a proper funeral, while others came to profit out of the government's settlement offered to prevent lawsuits against American GIs.⁷²

Literally relegated to obscure corners of the country, *kijich'on* women were wiped out of existence from the minds of Koreans. A middle-aged man who grew up in rural Korea nonchalantly noted, "We all knew about the *yanggongju*, but it wasn't a part of our lives. We just knew that they were dirty. Everyone knew that." In his discussion of military camptowns, a Korean male serving in the U.S. Army remarked, "It is a disgrace to Koreans," reflecting the belief that camptowns were places "you [did] not want to go, and if you [did] go there or live there, you want[ed] to get out."⁷³ In *Land of Excrement* (1995), a short story known for its bold critique of U.S. imperialism in Korea, author Nam Chŏng-hyŏn uses the male protagonist Hong Man-su to allegorize the emasculated Korean nation. As Man-su narrates the mental and physical deterioration of his mother

⁷⁰ Takagi and Park, *The Women Outside*

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Kim Yŏn-ja, *Amerik'a t'aun wang ŏnni, chukki obun chŏn kkaji ak ūl ssŭda*, 142, 191–192.

⁷³ Sue-Je L. Gage, "'We're Never Off Duty': Empire and the Economies of Race and Gender in the U.S. Military Camptowns of Korea," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 6 (March 2013): 131.

after an American GI's rape, he expresses profound self-pity in regards to the ways the experience left a "deep wound in his heart."⁷⁴ He pleads to his deceased mother, explaining that such trauma necessitated the erasure of his memories of her. He bemoans, "I had no choice. I had to forget you, Mother, at all costs. Would you be angry if I say that forgetting you was the only way for me to survive?"⁷⁵ The Korean nation, embodied in Man-su's character, could only carry on its existence through the active removal of the violated, polluted, and corrupted. U.S. military prostitutes were thus tucked in the margins, viewed as societal excess that neither belonged here nor there. "We existed to be forgotten, buried in the depths of people's minds," wrote Kim of her experience of invisibility.

Kijich'on women internalized the perception that they stood "outside the bounds of both respectable Korean womanhood and authentic Koreanness," perceiving themselves as foreign and undesirable.⁷⁶ In *Ppaetpŏl*, a novel inspired by the nationally publicized murder of camptown prostitute Yun Kŭmi, one woman expresses with great cynicism, "I already stink of America, and I'll never get out of this dump. Besides, what kind of Korean man would want me?"⁷⁷ Many held the belief that they were not desirable in Korean standards, that meeting a respectable Korean man to settle with was highly improbable. In the aforementioned survey, one of the interviewees admitted that she could "never become a wife (*chogangjich'ŏ*)," even as she desired to get married later in

⁷⁴ Translation adopted from Lee, *Service Economies*, 136; for the original Korean text, see Nam Chŏnghyŏn, *Punji [Land of Excrement]* (Sŏul T'ŭkpyŏlsi: Tonga Ch'ulp'ansa, 1995), 40.

⁷⁵ Nam Chŏnghyŏn, *Punji*.

⁷⁶ Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 4.

⁷⁷ An Il-sun, *Ppaetpŏl*, 1:196.

life.⁷⁸ By pointing to her irreversible identity as a prostitute, she denied the possibility of being fully accepted into Korean society as a respectable woman. Sŭng-ja, one of the female protagonists in *Ppaetpŏl*, demonstrates the longing, widely shared among *kijich'on* women, to lead a normal life:

She wanted to leave this place, a forbidden zone flooded with uninviting red lights, and go out to the real world where people went on living normal lives. But she did not know how. There was not an inkling of hope in her dark future. She had spent too much time in the Red Light District, and the world outside seemed too daunting, too distant.⁷⁹

As such, even when camptown women had the "choice" to leave, the shame that gripped them, compounded with the belief that they were forever branded as filthy *yanggalbo*, bound them to the suffocating confines of the camptown vicinity.

The complete denial of an ethnonational identity led to what Jin-kyung Lee calls the "denationalization"⁸⁰ of *kijich'on* women, as they deployed their perceived foreignness to create a self-identity on their own terms. Their adamant rejection of Korean patriarchy, juxtaposed with a desire for White American masculinity, was the most prominent evidence of their reconstructed identity. Lee aptly summarizes this phenomenon: "Camptown women's association with GIs racializes them as foreign, excluding them from proper boundary of ethnonational community....Whether white or black, women's sense of this exclusion leads to their denationalization of themselves, their own active rejection of Korea."⁸¹ American men, therefore, not only represented the possibility of economic and social mobility, but a renewed sense of belonging and

⁷⁸ Kwŏn, "Yullakyŏsŏngŭi Shilt'ae," 165.

⁷⁹ An Il-sun, *Ppaetpŏl*, 2:173.

⁸⁰ Lee, *Service Economies*, 161.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

communal identity as well.

Economic opportunities are often cited as the primary factor that drove *kijich'on* women to American GIs. One ethnographer explains, "For these women, the U.S. evoked romantic impressions of physical and economic security because it was believed that no one was hungry or cold. Marriage to American soldiers symbolized eternal security and happiness."⁸² It was not uncommon for camptown women to see America as a "paradise" teeming with wealthy people. For instance, Noh Soon-ae, a Korean immigrant who entered into a contract marriage with an American GI, saw America as a country where "you [could] just pick up money off the ground."⁸³ Although the perceived economic advantages were indeed pronounced, the anticipation for a "new life" was more prominently invoked among *kijich'on* women. This new life signified a clean slate, a place where "prostitution [did] not follow them."⁸⁴ To camptown prostitutes, the biggest attraction of an American was that he did not care about a woman's past. Kim Myung-ja, seeing that she "had no hope for a future in Korea," married an American GI, to whom she "never told him about [her] past, and [she] never asked him about his."⁸⁵ Mi-ok, a friend of Sŭng-ja in *Ppaetpöl*, notes, "We're heading to a place full of strangers, where no one will know us. That's one good thing about Yankees. All they care about is enjoying the present, no matter what happened in the past."⁸⁶ A publication on the history of prostitution in Korea similarly explains that camptown prostitutes "approach U.S. servicemen, who pay little attention to the women's past and prioritize their current state

⁸² Yoo, "Life Histories of Two Korean Women Who Marry American GIs," 33.

⁸³ Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 65.

⁸⁴ Lee and Lee, *Camp Arirang*.

⁸⁵ Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 61.

⁸⁶ An Il-sun, *Ppaetpöl*, 2:11.

of happiness, with the hopes of marrying an American and starting a new life." Many women withstood the stigma attached to their occupation in the hopes of eventually reaching the Land of Opportunity and starting afresh.

Kijich'on women's assent to American masculinity served as an instrument of virile resistance against Korean patriarchy and the forms of power that denied them of an ethnonational identity. Korean men were often discussed in relation to American men, who were idealized as more loving, caring, and open-minded. Characters in *Ppaetpöl* express sentiments of wonder and surprise in seeing how their American partners treat them. Danny, Ok-ju's American boyfriend, is "gentle and kind, always saying 'Ladies First.'"⁸⁷ For Ok-ju, this attitude comes across as profoundly "new and fresh," as she was conditioned to think that "men were first, women came in last."⁸⁸ Ok-ju, Sŭng-ja's lifelong friend who accompanies Sŭng-ja into the camptown, reacts to American men's chivalry with the same shock and pleasant surprise. Carl, a quiet soldier, eventually takes hold of Ok-ju's heart by endearing himself with his kindness and "Ladies First" attitude.⁸⁹ In *Days and Dreams* (1983), a short story written through the perspective of a military prostitute, the narrator's coworker Sun-ja is determined to marry an American GI and leave Korea. She exclaims, "Why should we sacrifice our money and hearts to these Korean pricks? What good are they? GIs are cold as ice when they turn their backs on you but they'll propose if they like you...Can you think of a Korean man who would

⁸⁷ Ibid., 1:146.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ An Il-sun, *Ppaetpöl*, 2:20.

propose to one of us?"⁹⁰ Reflecting this reading of the Korean man as a foil to the American man, Kim Yŏn-ja admitted that she preferred Americans over Koreans, especially considering how her male family members and acquaintances mistreated her in the past.⁹¹

In her analysis of Korean military brides, Ji-yeon Yuh demonstrates that many Korean women married White American GIs because of "their idealization of them as 'white prince charmings'...and derision of Korean men as patriarchs."⁹² She notes, "American men, even the crass GIs, can be viewed as 'better' than Korean men....In the dreams of a camptown woman...there will emerge a Prince Charming who will sweep her away to a wonderful new life in the American paradise."⁹³ *Kijich'on* women viewed American men in a favorable light, especially in comparison to their domineering, sexist Korean counterparts. One of Yuh's interviewees, Mrs. Morgan, recalled fond memories of her friend's American partner, stating, "He was so good to my friend, you just couldn't find that kind of manner among Korean men....We all believed that they were better."⁹⁴ Another camptown woman, comparing her experiences with American GIs to those with Korean men, concluded, "[F]or their treatment of women, I think they [American GIs] are better than Korean men....I never came across a good Korean man – only the bad

⁹⁰ Translation adopted from Lee, *Service Economies*, 161; Kang Sŏk-kyŏng, "Nat kwa ggnŭm [Days and Dreams]," in *Pam kwa yoram : sosŏljip [Night and Cradle: a Collection of Novels]* (Sŏul: Mimŭmsa, 1983), 31.

⁹¹ Kim Yŏn-ja, *Amerik'a t'aun wang ŏnni, chukki obun chŏn kkaji ak ūl ssŭda*, 100.

⁹² Nadia Y. Kim, "'Patriarchy Is So Third World': Korean Immigrant Women and 'Migrating' White Western Masculinity," *Social Problems* 53, no. 4 (2006): 522.

⁹³ Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 39.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

ones."⁹⁵ Mina Moon, a recent immigrant at the time of the interview, also related a positive story of her friend's White American fiancé:

When I observe the white men here, I notice that they're so simple [easy-going] and they treat my friends really well...For instance, even if my friend's fiancé is really far from her somewhere, he'll still take her places, then leave, wait until she's done, and then pick her up (laughs); and he also does housework! Because getting Korean men to do that is so hard, you know? They [the white husbands] treat them so well.⁹⁶

It is important to note that the idealization of American men was not entirely unconditional and often crumpled with disillusionment, especially upon the realization that America was not as accepting of foreigners as it was portrayed. Notwithstanding this rather somber reality, the powerful and persistent image of the all-embracing American resonated with many *kijich'on* women as deeply liberating. Whether or not they were able to achieve their dreams of immigrating to America, the prospect of new opportunities, communities, and identities sustained camptown women.

⁹⁵ Sturdevant and Stoltzfus, *Let the Good Times Roll*, 203.

⁹⁶ Kim, "Patriarchy Is So Third World," 529.

CHAPTER III: AMERICAN RACIAL IDEOLOGY

Kijich'on women's decisions were not only a form of *proactive* resistance against Korean ethnic nationalism and its patriarchal foundation, but a *reactive* negotiation of American racial ideologies and hierarchies. To understand how race and gender took on different meanings in military camptowns, it is imperative to examine the social context from which American GIs came and the ways in which it influenced the varied interactions that took place. Following Seung-sook Moon's argument that "race informed...how its [the U.S. military's] soldiers were to relate to local women," I demonstrate that American servicemen were imbued with racialized notions of the Oriental Other, manifested in racist behavior and language.¹ The perceived inferiority of the Third World constructed America as "liberators," which elevated the military and its participants' moral status. U.S. presence in foreign nations thus opened an avenue for soldiers to affirm their superiority as Americans vis-à-vis the "primitive Orientals." The ambiguity of morality in these spaces also allowed Americans stationed abroad to contest pre-existing economic, racial, and sexual norms. Attempts to leverage the military to "move up the ladder" in American society did not go unnoticed, and *kijich'on* women's

¹ Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon, "Introduction," in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, by Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 20.

perception and representation of the American White-Black order capture the complex interplay between two groups that were made to feel inferior in relation to White hegemonic masculinity.

Orientalism as the Primitive and Conquered Other

In his seminal work on the development of Orientalism, Edward Said points out that "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony."² The intricate web of relations between America and Korea epitomizes Said's construct of the dominant Occident and dominated Orient. Chungmoo Choi notes, "The West has constructed the Orient and the non-West as a feminine or primitive Other to define the West as a center of masculine civilization."³ These representations are seen throughout fictional literature as well as testimonial accounts of American soldiers who served in Asian regions during the Cold War era. C. D. B. Bryan's award-winning novel *P. S. Wilkinson*, based on the author's personal experiences as a soldier in Korea, reveals the widespread notion that Americans had of Korea as a "Godforsaken place."⁴ The male protagonist, Lieutenant Wilkinson, counts down the days to his departure from Korea, a country full of people who will "eat anything. Dogs, cats, jeep reflectors. Paper towels. Soap. Each other."⁵ In relating his experiences to his family members after he returns home in 1960, he tells them that "life

² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 5.

³ Chungmoo Choi, "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, by Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (London: Routledge, 2012), 14.

⁴ C. D. B. Bryan, *P. S. Wilkinson* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

in Korea is unbelievable," admitting that American soldiers often "degrade them [Koreans]...humiliate them and in so doing debase [themselves] even more."⁶

Koreans quickly learned that Americans adopted the perspective of Lieutenant Wilkinson and viewed them as culturally, economically, and racially inferior. In the novel *Ppaetpǒl*, Danny is portrayed as a White American soldier whose mother instilled in him an admiration for Asian culture. He remembers that ever since his childhood, she would "cherish her Japanese porcelain and Chinese folding screen, which made Danny think of the Orient as a mysterious place overflowing with exotic beauty."⁷ His expectations are shattered upon his arrival, as he realizes that Korea is nothing but a country of uncivilized people who "use human feces as fertilizers and have rundown outhouses as their toilets."⁸ Such derision did not merely consist of muted complaints, but was explicitly expressed towards and felt among Koreans. A poll conducted in the 1960s, for example, indicated that a meager 13 percent of the Korean population believed that Americans "liked them."⁹

Accounts of military personnel or of interactions with them are rife with evidence indicating that Americans saw Korea as an undeveloped country in need of its American brother's assistance to develop a mature democratic system. Indeed, as Cumings notes, "officialdom was a rule arrogant, racist, resentful, and colonial in the imperfect American

⁶ Ibid., 105.

⁷ An Il-sun, *Ppaetpǒl: an Il-sun changp'yŏn sosŏl [Mudflats: a Novel by An Il-sun]* (Sŏul-si: Konggan Midŏ, 1995), 1:97.

⁸ Ibid..

⁹ Maria Höhn, "The Racial Crisis of 1971 in the U.S. Military: Finding Solutions in West Germany and South Korea," in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, ed. by Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 325–326.

way."¹⁰ Many Americans operated under the assumption that there was nothing to learn from Koreans, only heaps of lessons to teach them. Hanson Baldwin, a military editor of *The New York Times*, painted a dramatic image of the barbaric Koreans in the wake of the Korean War: "We are facing an army of barbarians in Korea, but they are barbarians as trained, as relentless, as reckless of life, and as skilled in the tactics of the kind of war they fight as the hordes of Genghis Khan."¹¹ He later concluded that Americans should be given "more realistic training to meet the barbarian discipline of the armored horde."¹² Invoking images of the primitive Orient became an integral part of America's imperialist projects abroad, as such racist discourse shrouded political agendas in the guise of benevolent aid. Richard E. Lauterbach, an American journalist who published his observations and experiences in the Far East, was stupefied by the utter lack of interest in Korean culture among military personnel. He recounted his meeting with a "red-faced, craggy-nosed Lieutenant Colonel," during which Lauterbach asked the officer whether anybody studied Korean.¹³ The colonel bellowed, "Hell, no. Even the Japs didn't learn the language and they're Orientals," informing Lauterbach that it was "easier for Koreans to speak our [Americans'] lingo."¹⁴

A complete disregard of cultural context on the part of American leadership trickled down to the lower hierarchies of the military stationed in Korea. In an effort to

¹⁰ Bruce Cumings, "Silent but Deadly: Sexual Subordination in the U.S.-Korean Relationship," in *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia*, by Sandra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus (New York: New Press, 1993), 174–175.

¹¹ Quoted in Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History*, Modern Library Chronicles; Modern Library Chronicles. (New York: Modern Library, 2010), 15.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Richard E. Lauterbach, *Danger from the East*. (New York.: Harper, 1947), 223–224.

¹⁴ Ibid.

educate Americans, a non-profit community center for camptown women, known as *My Sister's Place* (Durae Bang), organized Korean classes for military personnel.¹⁵ Minimal enrollments, however, eventually led to the program's disintegration. Meanwhile, *kijich'on* women frequented "Bridal Schools" that taught lessons on American culture and English, showing a stark reversal of priorities.¹⁶ James Wade captured the derisive attitude that justified the insulated lifestyle of American military officers in Korea, writing that many acted as if they did not wish to "have anything whatever to do with [Koreans]" and preferred to "associate only with [their] own kind."¹⁷ He described a time when he had overheard American GIs conversing about Koreans with deep scorn and contempt. Handing out pennies to hungry children begging for food, one wondered out loud how such a "proud and dignified" people could "let their kids run around like this." His friend replied, "I don't see how your [army guide]book gets that stuff about proud and dignified. All the people we've seen so far have been filthy beggars, or farmers living in huts worse than animals. They're not even civilized, let alone dignified or proud."¹⁸

That this incident was not an isolated event is evident in similar sentiments expressed among American veterans who served in the Korean War, Vietnam War, or peacetime Korea in the 1960s and 1970s. A considerable number of veterans, asked of their first impression of Korea, commented on the staggering stench that emanated from the land even before their arrival. James R. Zeasman, who served in Korea from 1946 to 1948, recalled, "You could smell Korea from 50 miles off shore and I think most

¹⁵ Confederation of Korean Women's Hot Line, *Han 'guk yŏsŏng inkwŏn undongsa (History of Korean Feminist Movement)* (Sŏul-si: Hanul Ak'ademi, 1999), 315.

¹⁶ J.T. Takagi and Hye Jung Park, *The Women Outside*, 1996.

¹⁷ James Wade, *One Man's Korea* (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1967), 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

anybody who has visited the Orient would say the same thing." Explaining the sanitary systems as the cause of the putrid odor, he commented that one gets "used to it very soon" because it was "just the normal smell."¹⁹ Mr. Zeasman continued, charging the Japanese as the responsible party for turning Korea into a "backwards" society while also noting that American troops "thought they were very superior," acting as if they "own[ed] the country" when they were in another's.²⁰ The testimony of Thomas H. Burkhalter, a Korean War and Vietnam War veteran, complements this mindset, as Mr. Burkhalter stated that Koreans had "never gotten their country anywhere close to where they wanted it to after having been a vassal state of Japan....The social fabric, the governmental fabric...was either nonexistent or very weak."²¹ Like Mr. Zeasman, Mr. Burkhalter carried an impression of Korea as a "disorganized" and "primitive" country with a strange smell that "permeated the entire country."²² In an explanation of why his family did not accompany him, a veteran who was stationed in Kunsan, Korea in the mid-1970s clarified that "family couldn't go with over there. That was still too dangerous, too backward a place. Very, very, very poor country."²³ Imposing their normative notions of civilization and "advanced" political systems, American veterans shared an

¹⁹ James R. Zeasman, interview by Mark Van Ells, 1995, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program, Madison, WI, Online, http://www.wisvetmuseum.com/collections/oral_history/transcriptions/Z/Zeasman,%20James%20_OH%20384_.pdf (accessed October 24, 2016).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Thomas H. Burkhalter, interview by Mark Van Ells, 1996, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program, Madison, WI, Online, http://www.wisvetmuseum.com/collections/oral_history/transcriptions/B/Burkhalter,Thomas%20_OH%20509_.pdf (accessed October 24, 2016).

²² Ibid.

²³ Russell L. Scheu, interview by James McIntosh, 2000, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program, Madison, WI, Online, http://www.wisvetmuseum.com/collections/oral_history/transcriptions/S/Scheu,%20Russell%20_OH%20467_.pdf (accessed October 24, 2016).

overwhelming consensus that Korea, along with its neighboring Asian countries, was primitive, backward, and severely underdeveloped.

The military, which "carried with [it] all of the prejudices and antagonisms generated by months of bitter warfare and propaganda against an Asian people," played a major role in constructing and perpetuating racist notions of the Orient.²⁴ Wars in the Pacific region were often portrayed through racialized images of the Asian Enemy, engendering derogatory epithets such as "gooks," "slants," "slopeys," or "chinks."²⁵ American troops were thus conditioned to dehumanize Asians and treat native populations with contempt and smug condescension. Lloyd Lewis notes that soldiers who served in the Vietnam War received the indoctrination that the "enemy [was] Oriental and inferior."²⁶ As a confirmation of Lewis's argument, a Vietnam War veteran illustrated how troops were told not to "trust anyone that was different from you."²⁷ He acknowledged that Vietnamese people did not "register as people" but instead were "objects" or the "enemy" to him.²⁸ The ambiguity of this professed difference led to a general confusion regarding who exactly the enemy was.²⁹ After all, communists did not go about with a form of identification that clearly indicated their political ideology. The

²⁴ Lisle A. Rose, *Roots of Tragedy: The United States and the Struggle for Asia, 1945-1953* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976), 98.

²⁵ See Katharine Hyung-Sun Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 33; Rose, *Roots of Tragedy*, 238.

²⁶ Quoted in Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 33.

²⁷ William B. Williams, interview by Jim Kurtz, 2006, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program, Madison, WI, Online, http://www.wisvetsmuseum.com/collections/oral_history/transcriptions/W/Williams,%20Will%20OH%200688_.pdf (accessed October 24, 2016).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Mr. Burkhalter noted that his troops often asked, "Colonel, how the hell do we know the bad guys are?" He was frustrated that the "enemy wasn't clearly recognized" in Vietnam; see interview with Thomas H. Burkhalter

lack of a structured mechanism to distinguish friends from foes led to the development of the idea that any and every “‘nonwhite’ constitute[d] ‘the enemy’,” making a sweeping generalization of all Asians as foreign, degenerate, inhuman, and "gookish."³⁰

American racist and neo-imperialist ideologies were employed against the Japanese, Vietnamese, and Koreans alike. In his history of the Korean War, Max Hastings discusses a comment by Selwyn Handler, a Marine, who stated, "Koreans were just a bunch of gooks. Who cared about the feelings of people like that? We were very smug Americans at that time."³¹ Lieutenant General Hodge's infamous remark that "Koreans are the same breed of cats as the Japanese" generated tremendous outrage, as it stood as an expression of Americans' underlying racism against Koreans.³² In *Japan Diary*, American journalist Mark Gayn included multiple accounts of military officers who exhibited overtly racist behavior. One lieutenant, seeing that Koreans were "dirty and treacherous," advised that psychological warfare was the "only way to show these gooks we [Americans] won't stand for any monkey business."³³ Gayn saw that commanding officers and soldiers often contemptuously referred to Koreans as "those goddamned gooks," which "generate[d] much resentment against the Americans."³⁴ Veteran Danny Friedman recounted that before heading to Vietnam, everyone was "talking about Vietnam all the time," relaying myths about "women who put razor blades

³⁰ Sue-Je L. Gage, “‘We’re Never Off Duty’: Empire and the Economies of Race and Gender in the U.S. Military Camp Towns of Korea,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 6 (March 2013): 134; Nadia Y. Kim, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 55.

³¹ Quoted in Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 33.

³² E. Grant Meade, *American Military Government in Korea*. (New York,: King’s Crown Press, 1965), 359.

³³ Mark Gayn, *Japan Diary* (New York: W. Sloane Associates, 1948), 349.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 354, 382.

in their c--ts" that showed that they were not human but mere "gooks and slopes."³⁵ Ron Sable, another Vietnam War veteran, recalled, "You see this kind of viciousness towards Vietnamese on a daily basis. Not that they were shot, but certainly physically abused – and nobody talked about them as anything but gooks. All officers and enlisted people did."³⁶ Premised on racist ideologies, U.S. neo-imperialist wars in Asia further instigated acts of hatred and bigotry against native populations.

Coupled with the racialized image of the Asian Enemy was the characterization of the average GI Joe as a "liberator."³⁷ The self-perception as one who paved the path for freedom, individual rights, and democracy to prevent the self-destruction of the Third World³⁸ heavily influenced the ways American servicemen related to the local Korean population. Cliff C. Borden, an intelligence officer who was stationed in Korea both during the Korean War and in peacetime, described soldiers as being liked among Koreans because Americans, being "raised in American culture where they value individual life," would "try to better their [Koreans'] daily life as much as [they] could."³⁹ Air Force veteran Russell L. Scheu also described the soldiers as being "liked more there

³⁵ Richard Stacewicz, *Winter Soldiers: An Oral History of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 152.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

³⁷ Yoo notes that in the early stages of American military governance (1945-1948), Koreans welcomed Americans as liberators who freed them from Japanese rule. Kim goes further to say that Americans enjoyed a general level of goodwill and popularity among Koreans until the 1970s. See Chul-In Yoo, "Life Histories of Two Korean Women Who Marry American GIs" 1993, 26; Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 49.

³⁸ Alfred Crofts, a member of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMIGIK), described that officials justified the disarmament of Asian nations, such as Japan and Korea, by framing it as a preventative measure so that "the Gooks don't start another war." See Alfred Crofts, "The Case of Korea: Our Falling Ramparts," *The Nation*, 25 June 1960, 544.

³⁹ Cliff C. Borden, Jr., interview by Mik Derks, 2004, Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program, Madison, WI, Online, http://www.wisvetsmuseum.com/collections/oral_history/transcriptions/B/Borden,%20Cliff%20-%20WPT%20-%20OH%201004_.pdf (accessed October 24, 2016).

[Korea] than any place I've ever been, including this country [America]."⁴⁰ Similarly, Korean War veteran Robert Bailey carried a positive self-image. He took great pride in the achievement of Americans, saying, "Look at what we have achieved. We can go anywhere in the world. Where there is democracy, you can walk with your head high, don't worry about a thing."⁴¹ Asked whether Koreans owed the country's current infrastructure to the soldiers, he replied, "Oh yes, and the United States...the government providing this."⁴² Koreans themselves affirmed this glorified self-image by "acclaiming [Americans] as liberators."⁴³ In an open letter to General Hodge, the conservative newspaper *Chosun Ilbo* expressed deep gratitude for the Americans, emphasizing that the "Korean people will always remember that your country, making great sacrifice in this war, swept away the Japanese from our land."⁴⁴ The framing of proxy wars against the Soviet Union as a just struggle, along with the native population's affirmation, led American soldiers to view their presence as benign, if not invaluable.

Positive self-perceptions bred in American soldiers a sense of entitlement, manifested in their interactions with *kijich'on* women, who were the soldiers' primary point of contact with the Korean native population. Cumings notes, "[W]e were there protecting freedom, our Koreans were good democrats....we were altruistically supporting Koreans until they could take wing on their own....It was ultimately this milieu, founded in neo-imperial hierarchy, that justified the sordid conditions of the camp

⁴⁰ See interview with Russell L. Scheu

⁴¹ Robert Bailey, Jr., interview by Jason Goley, 2000, Korean War Oral History Collection, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida, Online, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00005629/00001> (accessed October 24, 2016).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Lauterbach, *Danger from the East.*, 185.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 237.

towns."⁴⁵ In an effort to diffuse racial tension erupting at an alarming frequency, the 24th Psychological Operations Detachment (PSYOP) team distributed flyers that urged *kijich'on* women to treat their clients equally, reiterating the reasons Americans were in Korea: "Remember U.S. personnel are here to help you defend the Republic of Korea from North Korean invasion and subversion. In order to...help the security of your country...[y]ou are urged to treat all U.S. customers equally."⁴⁶ A research report on the conditions of *kijich'on*, *kijich'on* women, and their interracial children notes that one of the demands of the American military at the height of racial riots was based on the argument that *kijich'on* women were "unhygienic" and "negligent" of the fact that "Americans were VIPs who came to save Korea."⁴⁷ An editorial article in *Donga Ilbo* wrote that many American soldiers questioned "what Koreans have done for them" when they have "spilt blood and fought for Korea" in soul-crushing loneliness.⁴⁸ A former prostitute also remarked on the widespread notion that Koreans were indebted to their Saviors: "They [Americans] think: 'Koreans will lose their land if we aren't here. We are needed here because of Kim Il Sung. So we must be treated well. They can't live without us.'"⁴⁹ Korea's lack of bargaining power, resulting from the disparity of state power, further justified the supposition that sexual accessibility served as an appropriate display of gratitude for the services rendered by American soldiers.

⁴⁵ Cumings, "Silent But Deadly: Sexual Subordination in the U.S.-Korean Relationship," 175.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 89.

⁴⁷ Saeumt'ō, "Kijich'on, Kijich'on'yōsōng, Honhyōradong Shilt'aewa Sarye [Kijich'on, Kijich'on Women, and Interracial Children's Current Status and Case Studies]," 1997.

⁴⁸ *Donga Ilbo*, June 18, 1971

⁴⁹ Sandra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus, *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia* (New York: New Press, 1993), 210.

The position of power that American GIs occupied ironically generated the belief that "they, rather than the women, [were] the victims."⁵⁰ In her ethnographic research on mixed-blood children, Okazawa-Rey observes, "In their [GIs'] opinion, there is a game going on between the men and women, both trying to outmaneuver the other, and the GIs are particularly vulnerable because many assigned to Korea are young, often just out of basic training and inexperienced."⁵¹ Army officials attempted to "warn off the young men" from becoming excessively involved with camptown women, claiming that "these guys are lonely, homesick, and scared, they'll fall for anything that makes them feel good."⁵² An army captain who served in Korea in the 1980s cautioned young enlistees to remain aware, as he believed their lack of experience made them more susceptible to camptown women who "sought to exploit the boys for money."⁵³ Novelist Ahn includes an account of a boycott organized in Songtan Camptown, during which a group of American soldiers protested against the high prices of goods, including the bodies of *kijich'on* women, and distributed flyers that demanded, "Shoes \$5, Short Time \$5, Long Time \$10." The protest enraged camptown women, who criticized the American soldiers for equating their bodies with a pair of shoes. Ahn takes the liberty of illustrating the self-victimizing attitude embedded in this boycott:

Dear Fellow Americans:

We who are stationed in Korea came to combat Communism and protect democracy, but also to enjoy a more stimulating experience. Korea, the land of wind and stones, rain and snow, vermin and drought, and above all, Kimchi. We are enduring the worst of the worst in this "Kimchi Country" that's filled with rice

⁵⁰ Margo Okazawa-Rey, "Amerasian Children of GI Town: A Legacy of U.S. Militarism in South Korea," *Asia Journal of Women's Studies* 3, no. 1 (1997): 76.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Quoted in Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 21.

paddies, kimchi, and dog meat, not to mention the inconvenient toilets and odd customs that make us take our shoes off at home. But how do they treat us? All they look for are ways to take advantage of us and take our money. We must unite and fight against the storeowners and prostitutes who are bent on ripping us off.⁵⁴

Seeing themselves as victims of ingratitude rather than beneficiaries of privilege, American soldiers conveyed much dissatisfaction in the ways they were treated by Koreans. Grim conditions of camptowns, along with a general lack of institutional support from the military, contributed to the image of Korea as a "hardship tour" that came only in second on rankings of the most undesirable locations for military deployment.⁵⁵ This furthered the sense of victimization among American GIs, who felt that even the generous access to Korean women was not sufficient to compensate for their suffering.

Racialized beliefs of the Orient blended with the concomitant sexualization of the Oriental woman. Orientalism, as Said points out, has always been "an exclusively male province," where women, as "creatures of a male power-fantasy," are portrayed to be "more or less stupid, and above all...willing."⁵⁶ Denied of agency, or the "very possibility of development, transformation, or human movement,"⁵⁷ the Oriental woman has been stereotyped as exotic, docile, subservient, promiscuous, sexually enthusiastic, and depraved.⁵⁸ In her discussion of Asian women in American film, filmmaker Renee E. Tajima writes of popularized images of Asian women in mass media: "These 'Oriental

⁵⁴ An Il-sun, *Ppaep̄p̄l*, 2:75.

⁵⁵ *Donga Ilbo*, June 9, 1971.

⁵⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 207.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁵⁸ For more on the stereotypical image of Asian women, see Aki Uchida, "The Orientalization of Asian Women in America," *Women's Studies International Forum* 21, no. 2 (1998): 161–74; L. Hyun-Yi Kang, "The Desiring of Asian Female Bodies: Interracial Romance and Cinematic Subjection," *Visual Anthropology Review* 9, no. 1 (1993): 5–21.

flowers' are utterly feminine, delicate, and welcome respites from their often loud, independent American counterparts. Many of them are the spoils of the last three wars fought in Asia."⁵⁹ Western imagination of Asian women has continued to be constructed through the constant reproduction of such idealized and sexualized illustrations.

Notes from a Sea Diary, a travelogue written by Nelson Algren as he visited different Asian ports, is saturated with female characters who affirm stereotypes of Asian women as sexually willing, passive, and unintelligent. Adopting a condescending tone, Algren described his eclectic experience with prostitutes in Japan, Korea, India, and Hong Kong. In a brothel in Korea, he met Po-Tin, a country girl who "lived in a little *kimchi* house with an earthen floor, where *kimchi* mice ran in and out in the light of a *kimchi* moon."⁶⁰ Po-Tin rarely spoke, and even if she did, it was in the form of unintelligible Pidgin English or demure giggling. Before going to bed, she excitedly asked, "You take Po-Tin longside ship? You take Ny-agara Fall by Cal-ifornia? Me cook for you."⁶¹ The next day, Algren decided that despite her beauty, he would not "live with Po-Tin until the Westernization of Korea had gotten farther along."⁶² In Japan, he met a girl at a bar who, in Algren's words, "swung about darting her pink tongue tip at me and then smilingly spread her legs."⁶³ Algren thus framed himself as the passive recipient of unsolicited sexual invitations. His encounter with Asian women consisted exclusively of

⁵⁹ Renee E. Tajima, "Lotus Blossoms Don't Bleed: Images of Asian Women," in *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women*, by Asian Women United of California (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 309.

⁶⁰ Nelson Algren, *Notes from a Sea Diary: Hemingway All the Way*. (New York: Putnam, 1965), 55.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 71.

prostitutes, which only reinforced pre-existing racist and sexist stereotypes of Asian women.

The expectation that all Asian women are promiscuous can be observed across varied accounts. Upon seeing a young Korean girl whose “face was covered with rusted sores,” the American GIs whose conversation Wade overheard roared, “Here's one of those Gook women they're talking about all the time. Ain't she a sexy sight, though?”⁶⁴ Another jested, “Look at this one here, men! She's a real beauty. I can't wait to get stationed and find me a steady shack job like that!”⁶⁵ Vulgarity aside, these remarks demonstrate that soldiers carried with them certain expectations of Asian women, specifically regarding their sexual appeal and availability, and planned to act upon their preconceived desires. Wade himself advised his readers to visit a *kisaeng* restaurant, a form of entertainment the roots of which lay in commercialized sex, in order to “sample the true exotic flavor of this Oriental culture.”⁶⁶ Regardless of their background, Americans could not escape the ubiquity of racialized and sexualized stereotypes of the Oriental Other.

The construction of the Korean female as a romanticized Oriental woman heavily influenced camptown relations. *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, a military newspaper for U.S. troops in the Pacific region, encouraged soldiers to pursue Korea's “nighttime actions.” One such article read: “Picture having three or four of the loveliest creatures God ever created hovering around you...all saying at once, ‘You are the greatest.’ This is the Orient

⁶⁴ Wade, *One Man's Korea*, 106.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 139.

you heard about and came to find."⁶⁷ In *Ppaetpöl*, Steven, an American GI, recently arrives in Korea and seeks to confirm the rumors he heard of the country. During his tour of duty in Germany, he heard various stories about Asian women, that they served their men "like kings" and were among the "cheapest commodities" in Asia. Unfortunately, he is disappointed when he realizes that reality does not match up to his expectations: "Everywhere he went, he could not find a hint of the exotic flavor that all the movies and tall tales touted about."⁶⁸ Carl, Ok-ju's American husband in *Ppaetpöl*, likewise finds appeal in Ok-ju because she fits the description of a typical Asian woman as submissive, frugal, and patient.⁶⁹ As such, American soldiers' experience in camptowns was a function of both materialized and thwarted preconceptions.

Although such expectations can seem innocuous at face value, they often emerged in the form of prejudicial behavior. In an interview with Moon, a U.S. army chaplain described how preconceived notions affected American soldiers abroad and their relationships with local camptown women:

What the soldiers have read and heard before ever arriving in a foreign country influence prostitution a lot. For example, stories about Korean or Thai women being beautiful, subservient – they're tall tales, glamorized....U.S. men would fall in lust with Korean women. They were property, things, slaves....Racism, sexism – it's all there. The men don't see the women as human beings – they're disgusting, things to be thrown away....They speak of the women in the diminutive.⁷⁰

Although Koreans believed that camptowns functioned as a buffer between "respectable" women and prostitutes, American soldiers only developed a generalized perception of

⁶⁷ Quoted in Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 33.

⁶⁸ An Il-sun, *Ppaetpöl*, 2:180.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:243.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 33–34.

Asian women as promiscuous and morally depraved prostitutes. One army officer remarked, "They [American GIs] say Korea's filled with prostitutes, that most of these women are prostitutes because they never knew any that weren't."⁷¹ The justification that prostitution was a "way of life" in Asian countries was proven true in the eyes of American troops, and only worked to license acts of violence and exploitation.

Kijich'on as Spaces of Normalized Abnormality

Racialized and sexualized imaginations of the Orient and the Oriental woman constituted only a portion of American GIs' understanding of *kijich'on* women. *Kijich'on* represented spaces where both American men and Korean women could contest and reorganize previous economic, sexual, and racial norms. The elevated status of American soldiers, hailed as liberators, created a moral grey zone. Such murky boundaries of morality engendered the belief that stringent rules did not apply in foreign countries. What used to be unavailable, restricted, and penalized now became fully accessible, unquestioningly granted, and forgivingly condoned. Previous abnormalities⁷² were thus effectively normalized in the spaces of *kijich'on*. A sign that was put up on a building in Lieutenant Wilkinson's base captures the tacit acknowledgement that acts that would normally be condemned in American society took place in camptowns:

What you see here
What you say here
What you do here
What you hear here

⁷¹ Lee and Lee, *Camp Arirang*.

⁷² Here, I use the term "abnormality" not to impose a normative definition of what ought to be considered "normal," but to signify practices and arrangements that go against existing social norms, specifically sexual and racial norms in America. I argue that rules and principles that Americans were conditioned to adhere to in their own country were disrupted in the spaces of military camptowns.

When you leave here
Let it stay here⁷³

The protection of men's honor code can be observed in Mr. Burkhalter's discussion of camptown prostitution. Upon being asked how venereal disease was regulated in camptowns, Mr. Burkhalter faltered, "I honestly can't remember very well whether a lot of it [prostitution] went on. I remember that there were dances...and I think most of them were put on buses at the end...Did anything else go on? I don't know. It wasn't my job to police it up and see."⁷⁴ Whether Mr. Burkhalter was speaking out of willful ignorance, or simply refusing to implicate fellow servicemen, is not clear. His statement does imply, however, that there was a certain extent to which camptowns functioned as spaces of normalized abnormality.

The American military has often been represented as a gateway to social and economic mobility. In her research on the camptown of Tongduch'ŏn, Sue-je Gage notes that the "military service, historically and currently, has been considered a way for minority men to gain recognition and rights" in America.⁷⁵ Interviews with veterans of color reveal that their initial motivation in enlisting related to the restriction of economic opportunities in their homeland. Mexican American veteran Robert Gamboa cited the "lack of economic opportunity" as the primary reason of his enlistment.⁷⁶ He stated, "There was [*sic*] no jobs...I mean, I wasn't playing hooky."⁷⁷ In retrospect, he thought

⁷³ Bryan, *P. S. Wilkinson*, 17.

⁷⁴ See interview with Thomas H. Burkhalter

⁷⁵ Gage, "We're Never Off Duty," 133.

⁷⁶ Robert Gamboa, interview by Thomas Charlton, 2006, Waco and McLennan County Collection, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Online, <http://contentdm.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/6152> (accessed October 24, 2016).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

that if it were not for the military, he would not know "what would've happened to [him] here locally – no future."⁷⁸ Mr. Bailey, who grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, shared a similar story: "There were no jobs....I worked on small jobs, dishwasher, stuff like that, but there was no future there. So I joined the Army."⁷⁹ Strained race relations in the 1960s and 1970s were major factors that pushed men of color to the military. Korean War veteran Harold Coleman, also an African American who grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, recalled, "I did not see any need to stay in high school...because when I got out, there was not anything for me to do. Things were so segregated during that time. So I thought, probably going in the service I could get a better deal."⁸⁰ William B. Williams, an African American veteran who served in the Vietnam War, explained that he enlisted in 1962 to "get out of Mississippi," a place that was saturated with racial tension.⁸¹ He further noted that the military was "the only option really that many young Blacks had" and provided an avenue for "escape."⁸² Travelling with Marines, Algren added as a side thought in his notes that a "Negro's seaman's story is something else of course: a way out of a slum with equal pay and a tour of ports where color don't [*sic*] matter."⁸³ Restricted economic opportunities in America thus served as a strong push factor that drove American men to the military.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ See interview with Robert Bailey, Jr

⁸⁰ Harold Coleman, interview by Jason Goley, 2000, Korean War Oral History Collection, Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida, Online, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00005628/00001> (accessed October 24, 2016).

⁸¹ See interview with William B. Williams

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Algren, *Notes from a Sea Diary*, 42.

Limitations in social mobility stood in contrast to the immense material benefits that one could enjoy in a poor country like Korea. An American soldier, regardless of his rank or background, enjoyed "greater material plenty than even upper-class Koreans."⁸⁴ A *kijich'on* woman commented on American GIs' marked privilege: "Americans come here and they can eat whatever they want; they can do whatever they want to; they can buy whatever they want....They can use as much electricity or water as they need. Meanwhile, the government tells us to save...It's a world apart."⁸⁵ The opulent environment of base camps, insulated from the rest of Korean society, indeed speaks to the reality that "the highest Korean ultimately meant less than the lowest American in the entourage."⁸⁶ Military bases emulated White American suburbia, adorned with a plethora of recreational services and conveniences, such as golf courses, bowling lanes, shopping centers, movie theaters, and swimming pools, along with basic amenities, such as spacious houses, hospitals, and schools, that were extreme luxuries to an average Korean.⁸⁷ Low living costs, coupled with the strong purchasing power of the U.S. dollar, elevated American soldiers' economic position. A GI who served in Korea during the 1960s recounted that soldiers could have and do "anything [they] wanted...with not much money."⁸⁸ That the military lifted economic barriers served as a strong appeal to men of lower socioeconomic statuses.

⁸⁴ Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 35.

⁸⁵ Sturdevant and Stoltzfus, *Let the Good Times Roll*, 209.

⁸⁶ Cumings, *The Korean War*, 175.

⁸⁷ Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 58; Gage, "We're Never Off Duty," 129.

⁸⁸ Lee and Lee, *Camp Arirang*.

Kijich'on women were fully aware that American soldiers in Korea occupied a marginalized position in their home countries. Referring to soldiers with the derogatory term *goonbari*, *kjich'on* women who appear in *Ppaetpöl* speak of American soldiers with disdain, knowing that they themselves are the dregs of American society. Sŭng-ja resolves to use her American partner as a "stepping stone" and abandon him after she arrives in America.⁸⁹ After all, she thinks, he is nothing but a *goonbari*, a member of the "lowest rungs of American society."⁹⁰ Exasperated by American GIs' treatment, another woman exclaims, "They're only here because they'd end up in jail in their own country. You know how many of them don't even know how to spell their names?"⁹¹ Moon observes that in her interviews with *kijich'on* women in 1991 and 1992, none carried any illusion about America. Many criticized the U.S. for the "management of its economy, high unemployment rates, low educational standards, racial discrimination, and imperialist actions toward developing nations."⁹² Their exposure to the naked reality of American society enabled *kijich'on* women to understand its faults and contradictions with keen awareness.

American soldiers capitalized on their privileged economic position to envision and create camptowns as spaces of unlimited sexual opportunities. One soldier openly admitted, "I've had a lot of fun here. It was an experience. This is the best place for a single soldier. They can come down here and there's [*sic*] girls and food, beer, clubs.

⁸⁹ An Il-sun, *Ppaepööl*, 1:215.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ An Il-sun, *Ppaepööl*, 1:220.

⁹² Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 30.

Everything a teenager could ask for."⁹³ Describing the military-sponsored recreational trip known as Rest and Recreation (R&R), another combat soldier noted, "We'd heard the stories of the guys that had been on R&R and had concluded these days would probably be described as A&A – Ass and Alcohol."⁹⁴ A former camptown woman pointed out the difference in the ways American soldiers treated Korean and American women: "They say they don't hit women while they're drinking in their own country, but they can do as they please since they are in Korea, a poor country."⁹⁵ *Kijich'on* women were collectively seen as a *tabula rasa* on which American men could inscribe their wildest hopes and fantasies. Jonathan Simmons, a former GI in Korea, observed that prostitutes often "treat[ed] you like a king, and for the GIs, it was really special treatment."⁹⁶ He continued, "They couldn't believe a whore was treating them like this."⁹⁷ In her study on intermarried couples of Asian wives and U.S. servicemen, Bok-lim Kim describes that many men found security in the realization that "in their relationships to Oriental women their feelings, comfort, and welfare were given precedence."⁹⁸ Thus, she notes, "for the first time they felt accepted by solicitous, unquestioning women who respected them."⁹⁹ A Korean governmental report goes further to claim that international marriages appealed to American GIs because their low level of education limited their prospects of a respectable marriage in America. Not without its value-laden judgments, the report states,

⁹³ Takagi and Park, *The Women Outside*

⁹⁴ Yoo, "Life Histories of Two Korean Women Who Marry American GIs," 96.

⁹⁵ Sturdevant and Stoltzfus, *Let the Good Times Roll*, 214.

⁹⁶ Takagi and Park, *The Women Outside*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Bok-Lim C. Kim, "Asian Wives of U.S. Servicemen: Women in Shadows," *Amerasia Journal* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 1977): 98.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

"American soldiers, even alcoholics, divorcees, and men with pathological tendencies, can easily marry an attractive, obedient Korean woman."¹⁰⁰ The easy accessibility of docile Oriental women functioned as a strong motivational factor for American GIs, both prior to their deployment and during their tour of duty in Korea.

The military itself was complicit in sanctioning sexual practices outside the norms by means of its policies. Veterans concur that it was extremely difficult for American soldiers to receive approval to marry women they had met during their deployment. The practical barriers led many to offer empty promises of marriage and leave without fulfilling their vows.¹⁰¹ Mr. Zeasman explained the general lack of commitment among GIs: "It was difficult to marry a Korean national. Most of the guys would have a concubine, lived with them off post, just lived with the women for their tour of duty and then they left."¹⁰² Mr. Scheu also noted that "getting married was rather difficult to do." The unit would "investigate the girl" and would "try to talk 'em out of it, counsel them, and send 'em back home."¹⁰³ It was not uncommon for men to promise women to "marry [them] and take [them] back" to America to "cut down the price."¹⁰⁴ In relating his experience in Yokohama, Japan, former Ambassador Richard Ericson, Jr. pointed out that American troops in Japan employed a similar tactic to make marriage as difficult as possible. Officers required soldiers to have interviews with chaplains and receive parental

¹⁰⁰ Kijich'on yōsōng in'gwōn yōndae, "Kijich'on yōsōng chiwōn tūnge kwanhan t'ūkpyōlbōban: kijich'on yōsōngūi samkwa kukkaūi ch'aegimūl munnūnda," 2013.

¹⁰¹ See Saeumt'ō, "Kijich'on, Kijich'on yōsōng, Honhyōradong Shilt'aewa Sarye [Kijich'on, Kijich'on Women, and Interracial Children's Current Status and Case Studies]"; Sturdevant and Stoltzfus, *Let the Good Times Roll*, 203; Wade, *One Man's Korea*, 242.

¹⁰² See interview with James R. Zeasman

¹⁰³ See interview with Russell L. Scheu

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

consent and did not hesitate to "transfer people if things looked like they were getting too hot."¹⁰⁵ The American government's hostility towards people of color, expressed in legal sanctions against immigrants and anti-miscegenation laws, exacerbated unequal power relations in camptown communities.¹⁰⁶

In conjunction with policies that discouraged international marriage, the lack of institutional support for families and the short length of tour all contributed to American servicemen's adoption of abnormal sexual practices and arrangements. Korea was deemed a "noncommand-sponsored" tour, which absolved the U.S. government of any obligation to offer financial support for the family members of American soldiers.¹⁰⁷ GIs were thus institutionally discouraged from bringing their wives and dependents, with the expectation that they would be trained to become "combat-ready" soldiers.¹⁰⁸ In 1991, a mere 10 percent of the approximately 40,000 American troops in Korea lived with their families.¹⁰⁹ The constant rotation of soldiers, who would return after a short 13 to 18 month tour of duty, impressed upon American GIs the notion that they held few stakes and commitments and would not be held accountable for their actions. Servicemen were often caught in a state of limbo, with no social measures to anchor them and foster in them a sense of responsibility, accountability, and belonging. Gage points out that one of the fundamental characteristics of camptowns was this "transience, which itself has a

¹⁰⁵ Richard A. Ericson Jr., interview by Charles Stuart Kennedy, 1995, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Library of Congress, Online, <http://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000349> (accessed October 24, 2016).

¹⁰⁶ Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 2; Höhn and Moon, "Introduction," 27.

¹⁰⁷ Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 36.

¹⁰⁸ Okazawa-Rey, "Amerasian Children of GI Town: A Legacy of U.S. Militarism in South Korea," 73.

¹⁰⁹ Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 36.

kind of power – the power of temporality that demands no commitment."¹¹⁰ She adds, "With its impermanent nature and the yearlong deployments of soldiers, there is no required or encouraged commitment to others, to the environment, or to domestic affairs."¹¹¹ As such, a range of institutional obstacles were set forth by the military that further rationalized and normalized arrangements of a transient nature, utterly disregarding the permanent damage such practices brought upon the lives of *kijich'on* women.

Racial Order in Kijich'on

Racial dynamics further complicated camptown relations. Black Americans' statuses as soldiers in another country often afforded them the means to "question and unsettle their country's color line."¹¹² Several Black veterans recognized the differential status they occupied in foreign countries and spoke to the novelty of experiencing a color-blind society. Samuel L. Banks, an African American veteran who served in the Korean War in 1953, was accustomed to segregation and discrimination in the military. Despite Truman's Executive Order 9981, which officially desegregated the military in 1948, military units remained segregated until 1954, when the last all-black unit was disbanded.¹¹³ Although institutional measures were implemented, off-base discrimination and racist behavior among military personnel persisted, which explains why Mr. Banks was surprised to see that African American soldiers in Korea were allowed equal access

¹¹⁰ Gage, "We're Never Off Duty," 135.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Höhn and Moon, "Introduction," 19.

¹¹³ Oh Stella, "From America Town to America: Fox Girl and the Ethics of Interracial Relations in South Korea's Camptowns," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 33, no. 2 (September 2007): 140.

to all facilities and accommodations. He stated, "As had been true of Blacks who fought in World Wars I and II in Europe and Asia, we felt *freer* in a foreign land than in the land of our birth."¹¹⁴ Mr. Bailey agreed that his race did not elicit discriminatory behavior in Korea and that "over there you [Blacks] were treated like an ambassador."¹¹⁵ He continued, "We were treated real good [*sic*] by the people over there. You forget what color you are."¹¹⁶ Expressing a sense of alienation from his own country as a Black American, war veteran William Saunders also said, "[T]he only place I've ever really been an American was basically in Hawaii, a little bit there, and Korea and in Japan. I've never been an American in America. I've always been a second-class citizen in America."¹¹⁷ That African Americans' race carried different meanings abroad opened a channel to question American racial hierarchies.

The implantation of American racial ideologies in Korean society, along with Koreans' willful assent to the White-Black hierarchy, hindered and complicated the effort of African American soldiers to reimagine racial boundaries. Mr. Roh, a Korean immigrant who related his trip to a U.S. army base after the Korean War, easily noticed the inferior status that Black soldiers held among Americans: "The Black person always drove the car and the White person never drove....I realized that White Americans tended to discriminate against races a lot and that they were cold-hearted."¹¹⁸ White Americans

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¹¹⁵ See interview with Robert Bailey, Jr.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ William Saunders, interview by Kerry Taylor, 2011, Civil Rights History Project, Southern Oral History Program, National Museum of African American History & Culture and Library of Congress, Online, https://cdn.loc.gov/service/afc/afc2010039/afc2010039_crh0027_saunders_transcript/afc2010039_crh0027_saunders_transcript.pdf (accessed October 24, 2016).

¹¹⁸ Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 97.

were largely responsible for inculcating the native population with racial prejudice against Blacks. Mr. Bailey revealed that White soldiers spread rumors in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam that Black soldiers had tails, which prompted many to ask Black people to "show them the real tail."¹¹⁹ Other times, racial discrimination against Blacks was manifested in the subtler form of physical segregation. A former GI pointed out the deep history of institutional segregation that spilled over to local communities: "When the U.S. army came in the 50s, the army was segregated and the two towns were set up. One town for Black guys, one town for White guys. Over the years they blended...but you can still sense the history of it."¹²⁰ Hyun-jin in *Fox Girl* notices that "GIs divided the streets into White section and Black section."¹²¹ In *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, In-su's description of his bus ride to school is reminiscent of Jim Crow America: "In the front half sat the white GIs going to Yongsan...In the back half of the bus sat four Korean women...two KATUSAs, a red-haired man in civilian clothes, and all the Black GIs."¹²² Overt racism and physical demarcations between White and Black soldiers would continue to shape the meaning of race in camptown society.

Naturally, the military was the most conspicuous representation of American racial order, and Koreans mimicked race-based practices in the context of camptowns. Multiple accounts speak of the racial divide among *kijich'on* women, who were racialized as White or Black according to their American partners. These boundaries were strictly maintained, as women's businesses were negatively affected if they deviated from their

¹¹⁹ See interview with Robert Bailey, Jr.

¹²⁰ Lee and Lee, *Camp Arirang*; see also Oh, "From America Town to America," 140.

¹²¹ Nora Okja Keller, *Fox Girl* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 5.

¹²² Heinz Insu Fenkl, *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Dutton, 1996), 93.

racial roles.¹²³ Clubs were separated by the race of the customers they served, notably catering to White soldiers.¹²⁴ Black soldiers often complained about the marked difference in the quality of services, and their discontent most famously erupted in the Anjŏngni Racial Riot in 1971. The following excerpt from *Silver Stallion* reflects the materialization of American racial order in military camptowns:

There are two kinds of U.N. ladies...those who entertain the white Yankees and those who entertain the blackies...[T]here're even separate sectors for the whites and the blacks. The whites never sleep with any girl who has ever entertained a nigger. The whites treat the niggers like dirt...[I]f you ever allow yourself to go with a black soldier, you will be a nigger whore for good.¹²⁵

Kijich'on women displayed acute race-consciousness, creating an internal division among themselves and looking down upon one other for the color they represented. Kim Yŏn-ja wrote, "It was very rare for women to associate with different races. White *saekshis* would argue that *kkamdungis* [derogatory term for Blacks] are disgusting, while Black *saekshis* would fight back and say that Black GIs were nicer and weren't like those smelly and touchy White soldiers."¹²⁶ As American racial ideologies permeated Korean society, camptown communities quickly adopted racist practices and behaviors against Black GIs.

¹²³ Personal accounts of former *kijich'on* women describe the negative repercussions of crossing racial boundaries. One *kijich'on* woman who worked at a White GI club noted, "If we even dance with a Black GI, whites would reject us....If a White GI saw us with a Black GI, he would stop coming to us and we lost our business." In the wake of the Anjŏngni Racial Riot, an article in *Donga Ilbo* reported that clubowners serving White GIs were forced to distance themselves from Black GIs because Whites expressed deep resentment when Blacks crossed over to their "territory." Moon argues that *kijich'on* women did discriminate against Black GIs, but mostly "out of economic necessity," since "fraternizing with Black servicemen would mean physical abuse and a loss of income" from White soldiers. See Lee and Lee, *Camp Arirang*; *Donga Ilbo*, July 13, 1971; Moon, *Sex among Allies*, 86.

¹²⁴ Na-Young Lee and Jae Kyung Lee, "History of US Camptown Prostitution in SK and Challenges of Women's Oral History," n.d.

¹²⁵ Chŏng-hyo An, *Silver Stallion: A Novel of Korea* (New York, NY: Soho Press, 1990), 150.

¹²⁶ Kim Yŏn-ja, *Amerik'a t'aun wang ŏnni, chukki obun chŏn kkaji ak ūl ssūda: Kim Yŏn-ja chajŏn esei* [*America Town's Big Sister: Kim Yŏn-ja's Autobiographical Essays*] (Sŏul-si: Samin, 2005), 128.

Representation of Blackness in Korean Memory

Koreans' prejudice against Black soldiers are often explained away as nothing more than a direct result of American racial ideologies that were forcibly implanted in Korea. I argue, however, that Koreans, specifically *kijich'on* women, made the conscious decision to adhere to these ideologies, further reinforcing and justifying racism against African Americans as a means to fully incorporate themselves into the White hegemonic order. Negative representations of blackness were subject to the vicious cycle of imagining, actualizing, affirming, and reproducing stereotypes and fears of the Black Other. It is pertinent to examine how Black bodies were represented in Korean imagination, and how this served to strengthen American racial hierarchies.

African Americans were disproportionately represented in a negative light, standing in stark contrast to the romanticized image of White Americans. In *Ppaetpöl*, Sŭng-ja, who meets a Black soldier shortly after she parts with her White boyfriend, treats Brighton with disdain. Even as she admits that, unlike other cold-hearted GIs, Brighton is kind and considerate, she cannot help but “shudder at the sight of his body” that is “as black as coal.”¹²⁷ She continues to describe him as “old and ugly” and compares him to a gorilla and monkey.¹²⁸ He is branded as foreign because Sŭng-ja cannot “understand his heavily-accented English,” implying that the English of White Americans is the standard, and even authentic, one.¹²⁹ Similarly, in *Silver Stallion*, Black men are portrayed as undesirable. When the village children see the American *bengkos*

¹²⁷ An Il-sun, *Ppaetpöl*, 2:105, 2:126.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ An Il-sun, *Ppaetpöl*, 2:122.

for the first time, they are stricken by their “grotesque” appearance. One of them wonders, “Some of them have black skins. What do you think has happened to them?”¹³⁰ The soldiers with “charcoal-black skin” seem especially “horrible, like beasts when they grinned.”¹³¹ Black men are often likened to animals to accentuate their ugliness, as seen in *Fox Girl*, when Black Amerasian Hyun-jin finds a “darkie GI” sleeping next to Sookie’s mother: “His chest, covered with coarse kinky hair, looked dark – like the underbelly of the black pig our family once raised...I saw his white-white teeth mouthing ‘*Anyang haseyo, baby-sans*’ like a trained monkey.”¹³² Hyun-jin later asks Sookie why her mother goes with “the ugly, black dogs.”¹³³ Bearers of inhuman, beastly features, black bodies are continuously made the object of scorn and ridicule.

The negativity encoded in blackness is further pronounced when juxtaposed with whiteness. In her memoir, White Amerasian Pak Ok-sun conveyed Dick, an African American soldier who was deeply in love with her, as unattractive. Unlike her former White boyfriend with whom she envisioned a happy marriage, Pak defined her relationship with Dick as a loveless transaction. She was evidently repulsed by his sexual advance: “His face, oozing forth with grease, glared in the dim light. I took a big swig of Scotch and braced myself...as he pressed his dark red lips onto mine...his black, bulky body weighed on me like an animal.”¹³⁴ Dissatisfied with Dick, she secretly met Smead, a White GI, who proved to be superior in his ability to please her. She could not help but

¹³⁰ An, *Silver Stallion*, 42.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³² Keller, *Fox Girl*, 12.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Pak Ok-sun, *Nae pyöl ün öñü hanül e : Paegin honhyöra yanggongju üi sugi* (Söul: Wangja Ch’ulp’ansa, 1965), 42.

compare the two: “Every time Dick’s black skin touched me, I thought of Smead’s pristine body, and every time Dick’s thick, reddish lips came upon mine, I longed for Smead and his soft, pure lips.”¹³⁵ By noting the stark difference between her two lovers, Pak positioned blackness against purity, embodied in Smead’s whiteness. Blackness thus functions as a foil to whiteness, further elevating White men as the most desirable and favorable partners.

Blackness has also come to represent danger, eliciting unfounded fear among Koreans. The perception of Black soldiers as uneducated and poor evolved into the notion that they were susceptible to violence, crime, and unruliness. In fact, rarely did the word “Black (*hŭk-in*)” carry a positive connotation. One article in *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun* reported that due to poverty and dysfunctional families, one-fifth of America’s Black youth was illiterate and “ghettos” with a high concentration of African Americans were the hotbed of juvenile crimes.¹³⁶ Articles depicting lawless African American riots abounded, especially during the peak of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and the L.A. Riot in 1992.¹³⁷ A middle-aged female Korean immigrant admitted that prior to her immigration to America, she had a negative view of Black soldiers as “physically abusive.”¹³⁸ Another immigrant quoted that she “had the idea that blacks were dirty and aggressive from American films and from [her] experience with black soldiers.”¹³⁹ Due to her preconceptions of Black Americans as dangerous, she was “afraid to go outside”

¹³⁵ Ibid., 161–2.

¹³⁶ *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun*, August 2, 1967

¹³⁷ To name a few articles on African American riots (*hŭginp'oktong*), *Donga Ilbo*, June 6, 1968; *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun*, April 9, 1968; *Han'gyŏre*, May 2, 1992; *Donga Ilbo*, April 30, 1992; *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun*, May 1, 1992.

¹³⁸ Kim, *Imperial Citizens*, 95.

¹³⁹ Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 72.

when she first arrived in America.¹⁴⁰ Kim Chŏng-ja, a former *kijich'on* woman, also remarked on Black GIs' collective tendency to commit violence against, or even murder, White soldiers.¹⁴¹ Existing stereotypes against Blacks led to a closer scrutiny of their actions, hyper-accentuating certain deeds as evidence of their incorrigible proclivity towards violence. In *Silver Stallion*, despite the fact that Ollye is raped by a pair of one White and one Black soldier, rumors quickly spin into a racialized picture. Man-shik's friends taunt Man-shik by mocking that his mother "will have a black baby."¹⁴² Village members offer their own take on the event, with one woman claiming that the black soldier's "c--k looked like a black rubber stick" and others saying that "Ollye had bitten the black rubber stick off the Negro *bengko*."¹⁴³ The image and representation of the unidentified rapist becomes heavily racialized, as villagers seek evidence that confirm their preconceived ideas of blackness and its association with danger.

To *kijich'on* women, the black body represented a site of constant negotiation. Adopting American racial color lines allowed camptown women to position themselves above Blacks, affording them a place in the White hegemonic hierarchy. At the same time, however, Black GIs' status as Americans was sufficient for *kijich'on* women to form a romantic, or at times purely contractual, relationship. Koreans carried the belief that Black soldiers were more willing and caring than Whites, which was attributed to their desire to associate with anyone of a lighter skin. Hyongbu, in *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, speaks of Black soldiers as people "who're glad to get anything with skin

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Chŏng-ja Kim and Hyŏn-sŏn Kim, *Migun wianbu kijich'on ūi sumgyŏjin chinsil : Miguk wianbu kijich'on yŏsŏng ūi ch'oech'o ūi chŭngŏnnok* (Kyŏnggi-do P'aju-si: Hanul Ak'ademi, 2013), 146–7.

¹⁴² An, *Silver Stallion*, 144.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 64.

whiter than theirs.”¹⁴⁴ The innkeeper who exploited Pak Ok-sun as a pimp also tried to convince Pak, who was unwilling to sleep with a Black GI customer, by stressing that Black men took better care of their womenfolk than White men.¹⁴⁵ Camptown women who had African American partners frequently cited the relative kindness of Black soldiers to rationalize their decision to families and acquaintances who asked, “Why of all things does he have to be Black?”¹⁴⁶ When In-su’s mother asks Changmi’s mother, a camptown prostitute, why she is engaged to a Black GI when “there are plenty of handsome White men [she] could catch,” Changmi’s mother replies, “Oh, you don’t know anything. Black men are much nicer to women.”¹⁴⁷ In *Fox Girl*, Sookie’s mother, who fraternizes with Black soldiers, employs a similar rhetoric when she tells Sookie that despite the stigma, “darkies are the kindest. The most grateful. They go with anybody who is lighter than them.”¹⁴⁸ Even as *kijich’on* women perceived Black men as second-class Americans and were themselves stigmatized for associating with them, they would at times overlook this hierarchy, preferring any form of American masculinity to Korean patriarchy.

The fluidity of existing norms brought about an enduring desire among *kijich’on* women and American soldiers to reimagine and reconstruct boundaries. Such efforts, however, did not go unchallenged, as individual actors sought to deploy their own positionality and power against another out-group to form new self-identities. In their

¹⁴⁴ Fenkl, *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, 17.

¹⁴⁵ Pak Ok-sun, *Nae pyöl ün önũ hanũl e*, 141–2.

¹⁴⁶ Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 70.

¹⁴⁷ Fenkl, *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, 210.

¹⁴⁸ Keller, *Fox Girl*, 13.

transience, ambiguity, and mutability, camptowns represented a “No Man’s Land” in the truest sense.

CONCLUSION

In an effort to bring about a nuanced portrayal of *kijich'on* women, this study has examined camptown politics through the kaleidoscopic lens of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and race. The discussion inevitably loops back to the same overarching question: how do we form our identities, and how do we reconcile what we perceive ourselves as and what others perceive us as? In other words, how do we approach the Othering, essentializing, homogenizing, and objectifying gaze of which we are both victims and perpetrators? I believe this “gaze” that I speak of is a rather more insidious, deep-seated, and invisible form of violence than overt physical assault. The history of U.S. military camptowns in Korea is a collective narrative that speaks volumes about the violence of erasure and marginalization. It sheds light on not only the long-standing invisibility that *kijich'on* women were subject to, but also the invisibility of our own privilege, of our negligence to claim the legacy of *all* who have gone before us. It teaches us to never “let bygones be bygones,” but to intentionally seek insight from the past and understand how it pertains to the present and future.

I also believe there are plenty of lessons to be learned by examining American soldiers and their presence abroad. I resist the monolithic representation of GI Joe as much as I resist that of the ethnically and culturally homogeneous Korean. An individual’s decision, whether that is to become a sex worker or a soldier, is the result of

numerous forces that must be accounted for. This is not to argue that they were forced to do what they did or become who they became. It is an acknowledgement that the actions and perceptions of *kijich'on* women and American soldiers were deeply influenced by the cultural and social context in which they operated.

Although the study is focused on a specific time period and locality, I hope to have begun a train of thoughts that may be pertinent to today's society in a more general sense. The relevant questions do not stop at one research paper: if nation is an *imagined* community, why is it so often the case that the well-being of the nation trumps the priorities of individuals with real struggles and needs? Is creating the Other an inevitable part of creating Us? Is oppression an unfortunate but necessary aspect of society? Finally, how do we celebrate diversity in experience and perspective as a community while maintaining our collective identity? I hope that the conclusion of this study signals the budding of new journeys to question what *is* by tapping into what *was*.

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