

Silence, Shamans and Traumatic Haunting:

A Novel and Accompanying Exegesis

VOLUME II

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ABSTRACT

Silence, Shamans and Traumatic Haunting:

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Major Work: Typhoon Kingdom

In 1653, the Dutch East India Company's *Sparrowhawk* is wrecked on a Korean island, and Hae-jo, a local fisherman, guides the ship's bookkeeper to Seoul in search of his surviving shipmates. The two men, one who has never ventured to the mainland and the other unable to speak the language, are soon forced to choose between loyalty to each other and a king determined to maintain his country's isolation. Three hundred years later, in the midst of the Japanese occupation, Yoo-jin is taken from her family and forced into prostitution, and a young soldier must navigate the Japanese surrender and ensuing chaos of the Korean War to find her.

Based on the seventeenth-century journal of Hendrick Hamel and testimonies of surviving Korean "Comfort Women," "Typhoon Kingdom" connects two narratives through an examination of language, foreignness and traumatic haunting. The novel seeks to make a unique creative contribution to the small body of literature in English representing the diverse and traumatic

experiences of Korean “Comfort Women” and the tumultuous history of the Korean peninsula.

Exegesis: Writing at the Intersection of Trauma and Haunting: Narrative

Representations of Korean “Comfort Women” in English

An examination of narrative representations of the traumatic experiences of Korean “Comfort Women” that explores a new way of reading and writing about literatures on the subject. Chapter One provides an historical context examining events and their *forgetting*. Chapter Two presents shamanic performance as a seemingly eruptive and counter-hegemonic force that transcends the familiar confines of ritual to enact a communal memory and provide a means of engagement with historical trauma and its ghosts. And Chapter Three asks how Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Woman* and Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* exemplify the unsettling power of writing at this intersection of trauma and haunting.

THESIS DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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EXEGESIS

Writing at the Intersection of Trauma and Haunting: Narrative

Representations of Korean “Comfort Women” in English

INTRODUCTION

This image first: green flames flickering in the dark across the Korean peninsula, marking the blood-soaked earth where the restless dead refuse to lie still. If these *honbul*, ghost flames, are the embodiment of *han*, of Korea's past and present trauma and suffered injustices, then I am following these fires from question to question as I wrestle with my own creative practice, with what it means to write my own novel about the Japanese occupation of Korea, Korean "Comfort Women," and the Korean War (Cho, intro; Pilzer 26; Soh 80-81).

I have stood on farmland and hills where Koreans were slaughtered by the Japanese military, the American military and other Koreans, places where *honbul* are said to burn. Between 2002 and 2009, I spent four years in South Korea: on Jeju island, where thirty thousand *suspected* communists were murdered in 1949 (Cumings, *Korea's Place*, 221; Winchester 57), in Masan, where, in 2002, scores of unidentified decades-old corpses were washed from their hiding place in an abandoned mine by Typhoon Rusa (Chang iv, Hwang 115), and in Seoul, the seat of governments that have so often enforced authoritarian policies and attempted to conceal or ignore acts of historical violence suffered by their own people (Chang 8; Cumings 343; Pilzer 8; Soh 168, 173).

Summer of 2008, on a train out of Nakseongdae barreling north over the Han River, watching the sun light up skyscrapers and cars lining bridges, the

water wide and fast below. The woman who approaches me cannot stand fully upright, thinning brown hair permed into tight curls and outgrowing its dye at the roots. *Halmeoni*, I think, *grandmother*, as she spits on my shoes and shuffles away without a word. She could not have known that I worked as an editor for Seoul National University, that my shaved head did not mean I was one of 28,500 American soldiers still stationed in her homeland (Schmitt). But what to make of such a rare breach of social decorum? What, I wonder, did she experience that led her to this moment, to this action, and what ghost fires might she see when she closes her eyes at night?

If I imagine the very worst—that this woman, with two hundred thousand of her compatriots, was once sold or abducted into enforced prostitution for the Japanese military, that she returned home against all odds in 1945, only to find that her past and the divided peninsula now prevented her from any work other than prostitution in “camptowns” around American military bases, and that all of this was an horrific prelude to a war that would lay waste to her country and destroy millions of lives—how can our small interaction, such as it was, not haunt me?

That this is even a possibility is heartbreaking, and my research leads me, flame to flame, through testimony and narrative representation, as I read and listen to story after story of those who became “Comfort Women.” And as I attempt to recreate this historical trauma in my own fiction, I have also kept a record of my research in the form of this three-part essay, an examination of

narrative representations of the traumatic experiences of Korean “Comfort Women” that explores a new way of reading and writing about literatures on the subject. Chapter One provides an historical context examining events and their *forgetting*. Chapter Two, to honour the ghost flames and those who see them, presents shamanic performance as a seemingly eruptive and counter-hegemonic force that transcends the familiar confines of ritual to enact a communal memory and provide a means of engagement with historical trauma and its ghosts. And Chapter Three asks how Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Woman* and Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* exemplify the unsettling power of writing at this intersection of trauma and haunting.

CHAPTER ONE

Historical Context

“How does one tell a story about something that cannot be fully known?”

—Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame,*

Secrecy, and the Forgotten War.

As I prepared to write this essay, two difficulties quickly became apparent: first, the emotional strain of engaging with testimonies and narratives of Korean “Comfort Women” (and then wrestling with the guilt of wanting to look away from such immense suffering), and second, the huge amount of historical context needed to even begin discussing narrower aspects of the history and traumatic experience in question (and then wrestling with the guilt of not being able to engage with the subject in enough depth, and the fear of somehow betraying victim survivors). My response, as is so often the case for me, has been to write creatively on the subject, allowing my fiction to express these emotions and engage with questions for which there are perhaps no answers. As for context, I hope the following historical summary suggests how the traumatic experiences of Korean “Comfort Women” might fit into a larger narrative, albeit one that is

subject to cover-ups and “slippages in memory” (Cumings, *Korean War*, 62), as well as just how difficult it is to explore “that which is unseen and unspoken, that which has been lost, forgotten, made to disappear” (Cho, ch. 1).

A note on terminology: I use the label “Comfort Women” to describe the thousands of women, who, in the 1930s and 40s, were “restrained for a certain period with no rights, under the control of the Japanese military, and forced to engage in sexual activity with Japanese military personnel” (Yoshimi 39). The term “Comfort Woman” is a translation of the Japanese euphemism *ianfu*, and I am fully aware that its use elicits heated debate (Soh 70; Yoshimi 39). Jan Ruff-O’Hearn, a Dutch survivor of the atrocity, considers the term “an insult” (136), though the popular use of “sex slave” is also problematic, as other survivors consider it degrading and inaccurate (Pilzer xi; Soh 72). Still others debate the term “victims of forced prostitution” (Soh 72), or argue that “military” should be added to each term (Yoshimi 39). I believe that the language we use here matters, and yet I cannot settle on a term that expresses both the “wide range of varying experiences of victimized women,” and connects these individuals to the diverse narratives surrounding them (Soh 47). In short, nothing quite works, so I want to be certain that my terminology is at least understood, and “Comfort Woman,” for all its failings, serves this purpose. I have also added quotation marks around the term to show that I am aware of its history and meaning, and have capitalized both words as a small protest against the Japanese (and later Korean) military’s listing of these women in official documents as military supplies (216). The same

reasoning applies to my use of the term “comfort stations,” with the exception that I see no benefit in capitalizing either word. I also include a variety of terms throughout the essay, such as “sex slaves,” in an attempt to represent the diversity of language in current use (Mackie 64-65), though I realize some of these terms suggest the influence of feminist humanitarian narratives and other nationalist and partisan perspectives that at times fail to represent complex realities that defy uniform labelling (Soh 38).

1910-1945: “Comfort Women”

The *halmeoni* sits across the table from my partner, looks her in the eye, sips tea. *Now you know my story*, she says through her translator. Another pause, more tea. No hurry, it seems, despite her age and the urgency with which she and the other women of the House of Sharing near Seoul lobby the Japanese government for legal compensation over the crimes committed against them during the occupation, now nearly seventy years ago. Eye contact again, the old woman’s watery irises dark. *So*, she says. *I am trusting you with this. Please. Tell everyone.*

From 1910 to 1945, the Japanese occupied the Korean peninsula, using the country’s resources as their own, settling on Korean land and sending labourers to work in horrific conditions in mines and on industrial construction projects throughout the expanding empire (Cumings, *Korean War*, 105; Soh 18).

Following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Japanese use of Korean labour intensified to include conscripted troops and military sex slaves, and, by 1945, nearly four million Koreans (over eleven percent of the total population) lived abroad (Cumings 105; Soh 18). This included between fifty thousand and two hundred thousand women, who were coerced, sold or abducted into enforced military prostitution (Cumings 41; Hicks xix; Soh 23; Yoshimi 29). In some cases this involved violent kidnapping, in others deception or a form of “debt slavery,” which required women to repay sums through sexual service (Yoshimi 29). The “comfort stations” where these women were enslaved were, according to the Japanese military, established to discourage soldiers from committing rape, particularly following the atrocities witnessed at Nanking in 1937, and to prevent soldiers from contracting venereal diseases, though, unsurprisingly, “officially sanctioning sexual violence” that “victimized particular women and trampled on their human rights” achieved neither end (50, 65-66, 71). Still, for these reasons, and to provide “comfort” to Japanese soldiers at war, tens of thousands of women, some still teenagers, were shipped throughout Japan’s Asian empire to over one thousand “comfort stations,” where they were forced to have sexual intercourse with Japanese soldiers, the number of which varies within survivors’ testimonies from “seven or eight men,” to as many as “sixty men in a single day” (29, 73-74, 139).

While the majority of “Comfort Women” were Korean (Cumings, *Korean War*, 41; Tanaka 31; Yoshimi 30), new research also suggests that a very large and

previously unrecorded number of victims were Chinese (Qiu 6), and women from Japan, Taiwan, Myanmar, the Philippines, Indonesia and throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands were also victimized (Soh xii; Yoshimi 90-91). The vast network of “comfort stations,” or *ianjo*, spanned the breadth of the empire, their operations and the living conditions for the women varying hugely (Soh xiii, 115). Locations included present day China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Guam, Taiwan, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Borneo, New Guinea and Japan—in short, everywhere that Japanese troops were stationed (Yoshimi 91).

Despite the huge number of “Comfort Women” victimized by the Japanese military, in 1945, during the final stages of World War II, the Japanese attempted to destroy evidence of the atrocity, burning documents in hopes of avoiding prosecution for war crimes, and even disguising “Comfort Women” as nurses in the field (Hicks vii; Yoshimi 91). Shockingly, the Tokyo war crime trials essentially ignored these Korean victims, though both the Dutch and the Chinese pursued war crimes trials of their own (Hicks 228; Soh 22; Yoshimi 175). Professor Yuki Tanaka argues convincingly that the patriarchal machinery of allied military institutions led to its commanders’ inability to “discern the criminal nature of the comfort woman system” (109), so much so that a “system with striking similarities to that of the wartime comfort women system was hastily set up” in Japan at the end of the war in order to service the occupying American forces (166). Furthermore, many “Japanese were exonerated for testing

technologies of human torture and biological warfare” on Koreans, including “Comfort Women” (Cho, ch. 2), in exchange for information and technology that the American military would, ironically, later use against Koreans in the 1950s (Harris 230-32).

While the Japanese set provincial quotas for mobilizing Korean labourers, Japanese officials generally filled supervisory roles, using Koreans to recruit, deceive or abduct their compatriots into the service of the empire, which made the entire system “appear to be a Korean operation,” and left the new Korean government of the 1950s reluctant to investigate their own population, for fear that they would find evidence of mass collaboration (Cumings, *Korea’s Place*, 178). And indeed they would have done, as it was largely women from disadvantaged social backgrounds who were victimized (178; Soh 59), firstly by the patriarchal social structure of Korea, which existed before and during colonization (and, some would argue, continues), and then again by the Japanese occupiers, who took advantage of the “institutionalized everyday gender violence tolerated in patriarchal homes and enacted in the public sphere,” social norms that both allowed for the inexcusable atrocity, and have since contributed to the silences surrounding it (Soh 3, 38).

When I began this research, I believed that the issue had remained completely hidden for decades, when in fact there were numerous books, articles and films about “Comfort Women” produced before the 1990’s in Japan and, though fewer in number, South Korea (Soh 146). As early as 1947, Tamura Taijiro

wrote about “Comfort Women” in his novel, *Shunpuden*, and in 1973, Senda Kako published *Military Comfort Women*, a “challenge to investigate the actual conditions comfort women endured” (Yoshimi 33), which was also turned into a Korean film the following year (Soh 161). My own misconception regarding silence on the issue stemmed from the Japanese and Korean governments’ more recent reluctance to engage with the Korean redress movement; in 1991, in reply to an open letter from several women’s organizations in Korea, the Japanese government wrote “that there was no evidence of forced drafting of Korean women as comfort women and therefore no question of an apology,” with the issue of *forced recruitment* acting as the cornerstone for denial (Soh 63). Various iterations of authoritarian Korean governments have also ignored or silenced the issue, at least partly out of fear that individuals in positions of power might be recognized as former collaborators should too much light be shed on their colonial past (Pilzer 8). In December of 1991, however, the politics of the issue gained mass international exposure when three South Korean women “filed suit in the Tokyo District Court seeking an apology and compensation from the Japanese government” (Yoshimi 33). Following this public display of testimony, the Japanese historian Yoshimi Yoshiaki discovered “evidence that had survived the destruction of documents,” which he published in the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*, opening the door for official political discourse on the myriad issues surrounding Korean “Comfort Women” in Korea, Japan and abroad (Cumings, *Korean War*, 41; Soh 63; Yoshimi 35). Still, until the mid-1990s, there were

virtually no writings in English on the subject, and it took a 1996 U.N. report for the Japanese and even Korean governments to approve brief mention of the issue in middle-school history textbooks (Soh 173).

Trauma theory speaks to the horrific and “endless impact” traumatic experience can impose upon a life (Caruth 7). But the personal traumas of Korean “Comfort Women” continue to be intensified by the double injury of political and social subjugation (Soh 203). While the Japanese government has maintained that the 1965 reparations paid to South Korea act as blanket compensation for any issues stemming from colonization (Cumings, *Korea's Place*, 320), in 1993 Kono Yohei, Japan's chief cabinet secretary, announced the findings of government research into the issue, in which he acknowledged Japan's “direct and indirect” involvement—a statement Japanese officials have been trying to qualify and disown ever since (Soh 44, Yoshimi 36). Still, in August of 1995, the Asian Women's Fund was created by a group of scholars in collaboration with the Japanese government to offer compensation specifically to victims of the “Comfort Woman” system (Yoshimi 23-24). A number of women accepted financial compensation (most of them from the Philippines), but the Fund remains mired in controversy, largely because the money arrived through private donations, allowing the Japanese government to continue to deny any “legal responsibility” and refuse to compensate the women directly (24). This, coupled with the ambiguous wording of the Japanese Prime Minister's official apology at the time, led to outrage among victims and their advocates, particularly in South

Korea (23-25). The few Korean victims who accepted this compensation were publicly criticized (some receiving death threats) by compatriots who viewed their acceptance as a betrayal (Soh 96).

In 2001, the Tokyo International Women's War Crimes Tribunal, which held its final meeting of over 150 Asia-based NGO's at the Hague, publicly declared former emperor Hirohito posthumously guilty of "crimes against humanity" (Soh 42). Despite this, and contrary to a mounting body of evidence and testimony, in 2007 Prime Minister Abe of Japan stated again that "no evidence" of "forcibly recruited" "Comfort Women" existed (Cumings, *Korean War*, 40-41). Although he followed this with vague apologies, he did not retract his statement (40). I mention this as context for the most recent deal between the South Korean and Japanese governments, announced in December of 2015, which reportedly allocates one billion yen in compensation for former Korean "Comfort Women" (K. Kim). While the Japanese government's ongoing denials over the issue of forced recruitment of "Comfort Women" have understandably undermined confidence in the deal amongst the South Korean public (Griffiths), there are two further specific aspects of the agreement that merit brief mention here: first, the deal "does not explicitly state" that the compensation will come directly from the Japanese government, and second, the South Korean government must "look into" removing the bronze statue commemorating victims of the "comfort stations" that stands outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul (K. Kim).

According to staff and residents at the House of Sharing, with whom I spoke in person in July of 2016, many surviving victims believe the deal has little to do with them, and more to do with international economics, citing their experience of learning about the deal on television, without any direct consultation from even their own government. Perhaps this goes some way to explaining why a new statue was erected in December of 2016 outside the Japanese Consulate in Busan, leading to the withdrawal of Japanese diplomats from the city (Lies). In June of 2017, newly elected South Korean president Moon Jae-in cast doubt on the likelihood of the deal remaining in tact, though he failed to offer further details (Griffiths), ensuring that the “Comfort Woman” issue remains embroiled in nationalistic, historical and political debate, while the silences and voices of, and surrounding, the victims and their suffering remain complex, varied and deeply disturbing.

1945-1950: The War on Communism

The Texan and I stand outside his home on Jeju island watching his children race along a stone wall separating canola fields. His wife is Korean, his kids comfortable switching languages within a single short conversation, and indeed they yell a mixture of vocabulary as they laugh and play. The Texan points to the hills on the near horizon, tells me about caves used by the Japanese military.

“Maybe commie guerrillas too,” he says. “Easy to get lost in. Best to tie a rope around your waist before you go in.”

I ask him about communism and Jeju, and he tells me the American military and the Korean National Police rounded up thousands before and during the war.

“You don’t hear much about it back home,” he says, “but people here haven’t forgotten.”

I watch him stare out over fields and clay-tiled and thatched roofs, the waist-high stone walls around his own property, his kids chasing one another and giggling. He shifts weight from foot to foot, coughs.

After the atomic bombs devastated Nagasaki and Hiroshima and the Japanese surrendered in 1945, the Americans and Soviets mobilized to “liberate” the now leaderless Korea (Cumings, *Korean War*, 104). The Soviets arrived from the north, the Americans from the south, with the Americans deciding, without international consultation, that the peninsula should be divided at the 38th parallel between Pyongyang and Seoul (104). This seemingly arbitrary division, along with the repatriation of the massive Korean population living abroad (including forced labourers and “Comfort Women,” as discussed earlier), added to a general state of chaos on the peninsula (105; Soh 18). The United States effectively governed Seoul and the southern half of the peninsula, where they attempted to create a democratic state (ideologically opposed to communism) by installing

Syngman Rhee, who had been living in exile in America, as president (Cumings, *Korean War*, 106). The Soviets, meanwhile, either oversaw or allowed the rise to power of Kim Il Sung's communist government in Pyongyang (106). Within a few years, each government was essentially in place, largely without the consent of their general populations, as many in the South, for example, were "left-leaning" politically but forced to accept the Americans' choice of a "rightist" leadership (109).

As early as 1947, Kim Il Sung in the North was sending troops to fight on behalf of the communist side in China's civil war—men who would form "the main shock forces in the Korean People's Army" that would later fight in the Korean War (Cumings, *Korean War*, 111). But the battle against communism was already in full swing before this, at least in the eyes of the Americans, and General Hodge, the chief American commander in Korea, had already declared "war on communism" as far back as December of 1945 (115). From 1945 to 1950, in order to secure the South as an ally against communism in the region, and to secure Rhee's regime against political opponents, the American military and Rhee's Korean National Police killed an estimated 100,000 Korean civilians in the South who were suspected of communists ties or sympathies, and, once the Korean War began, murdered at least the same number again (138). These numbers are, however, just estimates, and there is still much debate over whether they were significantly higher (130). As my Texan friend hinted, many thousands

of these deaths took place on Jeju-do (129), a relatively small island off the south coast of the peninsula, where I lived for a year in 2002.

Despite the American's political interference after 1945, Jeju island maintained a grassroots political leadership that consisted of a number of peaceful but "strong, rooted People's committees" (Cumings, *Korea's Place*, 219). The struggle between leftist-leaning groups (some with direct connections to the communist North, many independent) and right-leaning factions supporting president Rhee's regime was becoming intense and at times violent throughout the peninsula (218). By 1948, the right-wing governor of Jeju, Yu Hae-jin, was subjecting the local population to "a campaign of official terrorism," using ultra right-wing youth organizations from the mainland to arrest thousands of villagers whose politics didn't align with his own (219). Not only were such groups terroristic and fascist, they also worked with the same Korean National Police that had collaborated with the Japanese occupiers only a few years earlier (Cumings, *Korean War*, 124). All of this, overseen by the Americans and president Rhee, enraged the local population "to touch off a guerrilla rebellion" (Cumings, *Korea's Place*, 220). The guerrillas numbered between three and four thousand, loosely organized into groups of one hundred, but did not share common command or even contact with each other (220), and less than ten percent carried firearms (Cumings, *Korean War*, 126). They used the "honeycomb of caves, tunnels, and defensive bunkers on the island" that the Japanese had created, along

with “caches of small arms” that had been left there (Cumings, *Korea's Place*, 220).

The majority of casualties in the conflict were civilians murdered by the government's right-wing police units, who tortured men, women, the elderly and children for information as to the insurgents' whereabouts (Cumings, *Korean War*, 128). Groups of civilians, including women and children, were seen being murdered with bamboo spears (Republic of Korea, National Assembly, 679; Merrill 186), and reports of sexualized violence against women included repeated incidents of public rape ending with the insertion of live grenades into women's vaginas (Cumings, *Korean War*, 124).

The fighting and slaughter continued into the spring of 1949, when the “American embassy reported that ‘the all-out guerrilla extermination campaign’” was finally over (Cumings, *Korea's Place*, 221). While there is much disagreement on numbers (Winchester 57), estimates by the Republic of Korea (ROK) news agency placed the number of dead islanders at 27,719, though Jeju's governor “privately told American intelligence that 60,000 had died, and ... 40,000 fled to Japan” (Cumings, *Korea's Place*, 221), and Kim Seong-nae, Professor of Religious Studies at Sogang University in Seoul, estimates that as many as 80,000 were killed (461). On the island, 230 of 400 villages had been destroyed, meaning that “one in every five or six islanders had perished and more than half the villages been destroyed” (221).

The sliding windows of our fourth-floor balcony rattle, blow open, shake so violently I worry the panes will shatter. Midnight during the worst typhoon we've seen hit Jeju, the winds obliterating the summer humidity, ripping through the half-dark city. My partner sleeps with earplugs, but I sit awake in our living room watching neon lights flicker outside in the storm. I try the TV a little past one, discover the roof antennae have shifted, that we now pick up a number of new channels, including one showing a Dutch football match. Twice the power snaps off and back on. Bricks and tiles fall from the building next door.

I would later learn that typhoon Rusa took the lives of 246 people in South Korea, sent flash floods down the slopes of volcanic Halla-san, the 33 meter-per-second winds causing billions of dollars in damage (Jung; Kim, Y.P.). The typhoon also flooded a mining village near the port city of Masan on the mainland, washing decades-old corpses from a region of abandoned coal mines—bones spilling from the bowels of the earth where 140 individuals had been secretly buried en masse not far from where I would later live (Chang iv, Hwang 115). Many of the dead, whose bones have never been identified, had bullet holes through their skulls, their hands bound behind their backs (Hwang 116).

While the bodies found near Masan are unlikely to have belonged to those killed on Jeju, it's difficult for me not to imagine a connection, if only because of where I experienced the storm that revealed the unclaimed bones of the massacred civilians. On Jeju, the families of those killed by the right-wing police force were unable to perform rituals for their dead, or mourn properly, for fear that they too

would be blacklisted as communists and harmed, and survivors now speak only of the hauntings and nightmares their trauma has induced (Cumings, *Korean War*, 131). But in August of 2002, I knew only that my windows were shaking, that I had never witnessed a storm so powerful. I still think about it when weather arrives, of sitting alone in the dark listening to the wind howl through every crack in the building. And I still wonder to whom the bones belonged. I wonder what it *means* to be buried in a mass grave, and what it might mean, and to whom, for these bones to return home.

1950-1953: The Forgotten War

“ROK, OK!” The old man laughs and places his hand on my thigh.

We sit on a wooden bench halfway up a hill within one of Jeju island’s designated parks, the hiking trail dusty in the late summer heat, gingko and pine snapping with insects. The man sweats, strands of grey hair pulled across a bald patch.

“Miguk?” he asks, pointing at my shaved head.

“Anniyo,” I say. *No, not an American soldier.* “Canada.”

“Ah, Canada.” Finger and thumb into an imaginary gun. He aims at a tree, fires, then pats his chest. Points a rifle next, picks off a magpie. “Canada. Soldier. Fighting!”

I point to him and he nods, waves his hand over his shoulder to signify that it was a long time ago, eyes glassy for a moment.

Canada sent 26,791 soldiers to fight in the Korean War, some perhaps next to this man (Herd). A small number compared to 1,789,000 Americans, but some clearly haven't forgotten my homeland's participation as one of sixteen countries that formed the United Nation's contingent of soldiers (United States, Dept. Veterans Affairs; Herd). The man slaps my thigh again, reaches up to my chin and rubs the weekend stubble. He clicks his tongue, shakes his head.

"Shave," he says. "Dirty."

We laugh, and he fishes in his pocket for a plastic-wrapped ginseng candy, hands it to me.

"ROK, OK!"

I find myself repeating him, as he stands and points down the hill. I touch my chest and point in the opposite direction.

He shakes my hand and turns to leave, then stops and swivels, snaps to attention and salutes.

On June 25th of 1950, after a year of border skirmishes between soldiers from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in the north, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the south, the communist DPRK launched a full-scale invasion of the ROK, marching southwards towards Seoul (Cumings, *Korean War*, 9). The fighting moved up and down the peninsula, with American-led U.N. soldiers

joining ROK troops, and, eventually, Chinese troops joining the DPRK forces, the two sides laying waste to nearly every inch of the peninsula (11-13, 29). By the official ceasefire in 1953, the war had taken “on average, at least one member from every family” in North Korea (63). Approximately “900,000 Chinese and 520,000 North Korean soldiers were killed or wounded, as were about 400,000 UN Command troops, nearly two-thirds of them South Koreans” (Oberdorfer 9-10). The American scholar Don Oberdorfer further estimates that “3 million people, roughly a tenth of the entire population of both sides at the time, were killed, wounded, or missing as a result of the war” (10), and his compatriot, historian Bruce Cumings, puts the total number at four million, at least two million of whom were civilians (*Korean War*, 35). Five million Koreans became refugees, and South Korean property losses were estimated at \$2 billion, “the equivalent of its gross national product for 1949,” with North Korean losses nearly the same (Oberdorfer 10). And yet, despite this magnitude of loss and destruction, the first usage of the term “forgotten” in relation to the Korean War came in a news article in May of 1951, two years before the armistice, when fighting had barely stabilized on the peninsula (Cumings, *Korean War*, 63).

Atrocities and war crimes mark our understanding of the War in Vietnam, and yet the same should surely be remembered of Korea, particularly as technologies of warfare developed during the Korean War, including napalm (Cumings, *Korean War*, 160-61), were later used by the American military in Vietnam and Iraq (Cho, ch. 2). The United States did not use atomic weapons in

Korea, though the administration did consider this more than once (Cumings, *Korean War*, 156). However, the “scale of urban destruction” was even greater than that seen in Germany and Japan during the Second World War (159). The American airforce dropped 635,000 tons of bombs and 32,557 tons of napalm on Korea (as well as defoliant), which outdistances the 503,000 tons of bombs used in the whole of the Pacific campaign of the Second World War (159). The American military and its UN allies effectively “carpet-bombed the North for three years with next to no concern for civilian casualties” (149). This so-called “saturation bombing” essentially meant that towns and cities, as well as their civilian occupants, burned to the ground (161). The United Nation’s Genocide Convention passed international motions banning the eradication of entire people groups in 1948, international laws which came into effect in 1951, but were completely ignored during this conflict, “just as the USAF [United States Air Force] was inflicting genocide, under this definition, and under the aegis of the United Nations Command, on the citizens of North Korea” (161).

The atrocities of this “forgotten” conflict, which was “savage in its destructiveness,” were not limited to the air war, however (Oberdorfer 10). The Nogeun-ri massacre, for instance, took place in July of 1950, when American soldiers machine-gunned to death “women, children, and elderly people” beneath a railroad bridge (Cumings, *Korean War*, 167). An Associated Press article that ran in 1999 cites testimony from both civilian survivors and retired American soldiers recounting the atrocity, explaining that American soldiers returned to the

site repeatedly over three days “to make sure they were all dead,” which suggests that the American military was attempting to ensure “there would be no survivors to tell the tale” (167-68). An estimated four hundred villagers were killed at Nogeun-ri, and at least “thirty seven other civilian massacres have come to light in the southern part of Korea, along with ‘countless massacres’ in the north” (Cho, ch. 2).

Cumings suggests that “[t]his element of the Korean War has disappeared from the collective memory,” and though he is mainly referring to attitudes in America (*Korean War*, 168), Koreans have their own reasons for forgetting, such as the aforementioned execution of 100,000 of their own citizens who were detained as suspected communists during the fighting (138), and, in a horrifying irony, South Korean soldiers forcing Korean women from the north into their own “Comfort Woman” system (Soh 215).

In 1953, with millions dead, wounded and homeless, the two Koreas signed an armistice with the two armies at a standstill along the 38th parallel, almost exactly where the conflict had started three years earlier (Oberdorfer 10). The armistice is still in place and, accordingly, the war has never ended, though the two nations remain separated by a fenced and heavily-mined Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) four kilometres wide and 250 kilometres long (1).

1953-2017: Legacies of Sexual Violence

Our Korean co-worker laughs as my partner and I stare through a shop window at rows of shining Dr. Pepper cans, American chocolate bars, magazines. We have travelled from Masan to the US naval base at Jinhae, twenty kilometres south along the peninsula's ragged southern coast. Our only goal is to eat at the American-run restaurant on the base, lured by the promise of cheese and other items my partner and I have been telling each other we can live without, but have secretly been coveting for the past eighteen months. To enter the compound, we have been searched twice, and have given up our passports for the duration of our visit, which leaves me feeling vaguely uneasy—perhaps because this is a security measure even sovereign nations do not require upon entry.

The setting sun glows to the west and small electric bulbs flick on around the perimeter of the base, illuminating a town that seems to orbit the military institution. Our co-worker laughs again, pulls us away from the small shop towards the restaurant.

“You can get anything here,” he tells us. “Anything.”

During my years in Korea I was only vaguely aware of any relationship between American military personnel and the sex trade: massage parlours in Seoul's Itaewon district, news coverage of the occasional bar fight near a military base, people's reaction to my features and shaved head before they learned I was

Canadian. But none of this suggested the magnitude of the “27,000 women [who] sell their sexual labor to U.S. military personnel in the bars and brothels” around American military bases and instalments in South Korea (Cho, ch. 1). And this is just the current contingent of “over a million Korean women who have worked in prostitution for the U.S. military” (Cho, intro; Moon 1). Far more have worked in the sex trade in general, and a Korean government agency reported that as of 2002 at least 333,000 Korean women worked as full-time prostitutes, many of these women catering to sex tourists from around the globe, most conspicuously to male visitors from Japan (Soh 202, 223), and the American military (Moon 1-3). The latter is not an accident of history, but rather “a system that is sponsored and regulated” by both the Korean and American governments (1).

I mention this not to heap sorrow upon sorrow, but rather to acknowledge that “women’s bodies and dignity are actively being sacrificed” for the sake of international relations and to placate yet another foreign military power in Korea (Moon 16). And this current sex trade and attitudes towards it are directly connected to the tragic legacy of surviving “Comfort Women.” Many victims felt that it was impossible to return home after 1945, either because of political upheaval and the difficulty of travel (Cumings, *Korean War*, 105), or due to the physical and emotional trauma inflicted by their captors (Soh 177, 203), which left them with the “endless impact” of their wounds and shame, caught “between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (Caruth 7). Many of these women felt they “had no

alternative but to continue working in the fetid brothels alongside U.S. military bases in Japan, Okinawa, Korea, and the Philippines” (Cumings, *Korean War*, 42). While some women attached themselves to American and UN troops during the Korean War, many widowed or orphaned by the violence, most believing that they could never regain social status after “divorce, rape, and/or pregnancy out of wedlock” (Moon 3), still other women involved in later “camptown” sex work surrounding American military bases were in fact the daughters of “Comfort Women,” and so in a shockingly literal sense, “inherited the unspeakable horrors of Japanese colonialism and the Korean War” (Cho, ch. 1). “Unspeakable” is indeed the right word here, doubly so, as the issue of “camptown” workers is still largely “forced out of Korean consciousness” due to social stigma, but also because these women are reminders of both the suffering of “Comfort Women” under Japanese colonial rule, and of the Korean War, “living testaments” to a series of historical tragedies and their legacies (Moon 8).

*

These four short examples of interconnected history suggest a much larger complexity that has led to interwoven layers of silence, testimony and narrative. It is from and into these complexities that narratives of and representing Korean “Comfort Women” have emerged. The more I read of Korea’s history and these women’s testimonies, the more impressed I am by the courage of survivors

willing to give testimony and take legal action. Given the “prevailing amnesia and stigma inscribed on these women,” it seems amazing that any testimony has emerged at all (Yang 83). At the same time, I more fully appreciate why the vast majority of survivors have never come forward publicly, instead choosing to remain “invisible and silent” (Soh 93), some from disadvantaged backgrounds without the social, legal or political voice to tell their stories and seek justice, some muted by the shame of their victimization within Korea’s “masculinist sexual culture,” and some simply ignored and forgotten by Korean and Japanese officials (203).

To add to this complexity, Korean “Comfort Women” and their narratives have been “multiply ‘othered’” by Japan, during and after colonization, by their own society’s stigmatization (Soh 244), and also by the strategic subjugation of knowledge within the politics of nationalist and academic debate over history and testimony (114). The Korean redress movement, which has contributed so much to the discourse on the issue, has also failed to acknowledge “subaltern voices of women as historical actors” that “might threaten postcolonial Korean nationalist discourse” (79). There exist “multiple dimensions of truth” and experience that are not well represented by literatures on the subject, which is doubly tragic given the layers of silence that needed to be broken for any discourse to begin at all (108).

Yet “memories have histories” too, and the counter-hegemonic stories of individuals and the diversity of their experiences take shape to emerge and haunt

in unexpected ways (Cumings, *Korean War*, 61-62), so that even systemic erasure might have the unintentional effect of making the “burial ground... all the more fertile for generating ghosts” (Cho, intro).

CHAPTER TWO

Archaic Ecstasy as Narrative: Korean Shamans and

“Comfort Women”

“...This is a life
without an image. But only
because nothing does much more
than just resemble. Do the shamans
do what they say they do, dancing?”

—John Newlove, *The Weather*.

There is a place on Jeju Island, off the south coast of the Republic of Korea, where water runs uphill.

This is true, our taxi driver tells us as he hands me a bottle of water. The man does not bother to pull onto the shoulder of what he calls *Dokkaebi dolro*, the ghost road, instead leaves the cab idling on the asphalt. The hills shimmer green from the typhoon season just past, and cicadas buzz like loose wires wound around branches. Wooden and stone statues with phallic heads and fanged, gaping mouths watch us exit the vehicle and pour water onto the ground. The liquid snakes between my feet up the incline.

Now, I can only laugh. After all, why shouldn't water run uphill on an island housing ten thousand gods? And it is to these gods and their mediums that I turn here, not as a way of seeking the mystical, but because shamanism is still an integral part of Korean society, a deep system of belief and worldview that continues to have a significant bearing on Korean culture (Hahm 92; C. Kim 7). In the following chapter, I examine Korean shamanic performance as a seemingly eruptive force that transcends the familiar confines of ritual to enact a communal memory and provide a means of engagement with historical trauma and its ghosts, all the while asking in what ways these *unsafe* narratives might provoke new ways of reading and writing about the traumatic experiences of Korean "Comfort Women."

"Ok," she says. "Yeah. Your students are going to come to class tired. Like, really tired."

We're walking from the five-storey grey and white apartment building in the new part of Jeju city towards the small language school where my partner and I have agreed to work for a year.

"They're just kids though," she adds. "And sometimes they're tired because they're being stupid, playing video games all night. And sometimes their parents keep them up working in restaurants or shops." Weathered palm fronds droop in the spring heat, the sky a warm haze. "But here's the thing," the teacher I'm replacing stops on the side of the road and makes eye contact. "Sometimes

they're tired because their parents get stressed about the grades you're giving them and take them to a shaman after work.”

“A shaman?” I ask. “Like...?”

She nods. “Yeah. Singing. Ghosts. Knife dances. You got it.”

The first written references to Korean shamanism appear in 1021 AD, but the system of belief and worship appears to have existed prior to the tenth century BC—female idols carved into caves of volcanic rock during the bronze age (C. Chang 30, 34). Ironic, since shamanism has largely survived through the centuries because of its elastic qualities, “intertwin[ing] with other, often less tolerant, religions” (Hahm 60), despite a well-developed canon of gods and rituals (A. Kim 119).

Korean shamanic performance acts as a representation of history and trauma, and, on a less tangible level, as a way of engaging with the past. While the latter is closer to the expressed purpose of shamanic ritual, the former is not something Korean shamans are ashamed of, for it is precisely to “create linkages and mediate the fissure between ‘trauma and spirit’” that the rituals exist (D. Kim 730). As American anthropologist David Kim writes, “the imagistic projection of alterity, which emerges from the fissure between presence and the limits of representation” is not a separate purpose (713). This connection between shamanism and dramatic presentation is not lost on the performing arts community in Korea, where versions of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* have taken on clear

shamanic characteristics (H. Lee 104). Ophelia, for example, can be portrayed as “a medium who is possessed by a ghost,” and who takes on the role of shaman when the time comes to summon forth the spirit of Hamlet’s murdered father (107).

Shamanism in Korea also has a long history of dissent and rebellion against cruel rulers, and the shamanic worldview does not necessarily hold to Platonic forms of philosophical dualism, rejecting the notion that male and female must exist in constant and direct opposition, even in the midst of engendered roles (Hahm 64, 86). While this is a contradiction, in terms of worldview: “[s]hamanistic persons can see why women in more militaristic cultures might feel mistreated; if society bestows prestige and honor upon those who derive power and wealth from the capability to destroy human life efficiently, women become mere prizes of war” (64).

On a broader social scale, Korean shamans

have become amplifiers for women who continue to struggle for their record in history, and they call for justice and reparations within the discursive turmoil of the present that still surrounds the comfort women issue. Perhaps because the *mudang* [shaman] *was* a figure of the abject, however, she now finds herself uniquely capable of expressing that which is so arduous to express. The shaman gives speech and form to an experience that ha[s] been silenced for generations.... (D. Kim 729)

There are a number of ways in which shamanism was and remains uniquely placed to give voice to the traumatic experiences of Korean “Comfort Women.” While I am not presenting shamanism as a cure-all for survivors, nor as the *only* means of representing the voices of those silenced by the atrocity and its legacy, shamans “perform socially essential ritual work” that has formed an integral part of Korean culture precisely *because* of its “relegation” to the domestic realm (Kendall x). And since the “domestic realm” is largely the responsibility of women in Korea, and because most shamans are women (Y. Lee 151), women often choose to, in the words of American anthropologist Laurel Kendall, “use possession as a strategy; in trance, they speak the unspeakable” (24). Nora Okja Keller, whose novel *Comfort Woman* I examine in the next chapter, has also noted that shamanism “allows women an unconventional voice in a traditional society” (Y. Lee 151). And it is within what Kendall has labelled this “feminist subculture” that she believes women find some measure of “ecstatic compensation for social deprivation” (24, 38). That said, shamans themselves occupy a strange social space: on the one hand, they are deemed essential by society in general, and are called upon for help by both men and women. On the other hand, such is the rigidity of Korean Confucian social decorum, and the more recent influence of Protestant Christianity, that they also pay a price as social outcasts, to the extent that their healing practices are still illegal, even if widely practiced (Kendall 60-61; C. Kim 160, 218).

While male shamans do hold positions of social importance in Korea, “most mansin [shamans] are women, and all mansin minister directly to women” (Kendall 27). Male shamans even perform rituals “wearing women’s clothing, down to the pantaloons... beneath his billowing skirt and slip” (27). Generally, while Korean men in households focus on rituals honouring ancestors (of Buddhist and/or Confucian origin), Korean women focus on rituals involving the gods and the spirits of the dead (144). While these two spheres “merge in [times of] affliction” (144), it is the express role of the shaman to aid households in navigating the perceived connection between affliction and the restless dead (148). Past war and displaced ancestors create particular difficulties for families, as such “ruptures imply a moral breach in the ritual continuity of generations and expose the family to supernatural danger” (149). Dealing with these issues requires the shaman to “interject a necessary element of flexibility into the tight structure of ancestor worship,” and the entire ritual life of a Korean household (150).

Much influence flows from this so-called domestic realm: Kendall notes how Korean women during ritual practice do not feed the gods as a matter of course, as in the Japanese tradition, but rather enact rites that are entirely separate from daily domestic duties, “the form and content of the rite[s] suggest[ing] accepted masculine behaviour, not [simply] domestic catering” (123).

Shamanic ritual not only comes from a place of *otherness* then, but is able to bring this otherness into the daily life of Korean society despite the

considerable constraints of social hierarchy. And such rituals are rarely private: “[t]he confessional’s anonymity is missing here” (Kendall 74), and in fact gives way to explicit performance, both within homes and small communities, and occasionally, as we will see shortly, on a larger public stage, allowing shamanic ritual to act as a communal gateway into a silenced history, a performance in which “[p]ast and present converge and at times become muddled” (D. Kim 733).

Two tiny stone figures stand on a bookshelf in my living room. Male and female idols watching as I type this. A gift from a fellow teacher on Jeju Island. *So you will remember us*, she said. If I’m honest, I don’t think about the statues much, and yet they’ve moved with my partner and me from home to home over four continents. Representations of representations. Another reminder of history and place, and yet, even as I gaze back at them, I am aware of the power of representation—to summon memory, to affect my emotions, to bridge the gap between the *thing* and the *thing*.

When David Kim writes about watching a shamanic ritual to set free the spirits of “Comfort Women” held in 2004 in the fishing town of Tongyeong (where I also taught for a year), he notices schoolchildren watching through their cell phones (734). Some of this is just practical—students holding up phones and angling their screens for a better view of the performance. But Kim also wonders “if there is a sense of safety through added layers of mediation, an attempt to keep the ghost at

arm's length or behind a small pixelated screen" (734). And where, I wonder, does this leave me? Reading a written account of a ritual performance representing the traumatic experiences of Korean "Comfort Women," which was observed by an academic commenting on the use of technology as a means of distancing oneself from said ritual. And I'm doing this research in order to create a piece of exegetical writing in support of a novel that attempts to further represent this history.

Though much of this distance is inevitable, my own research and writing, both here and in the form of my novel, are attempts to bridge this gap on a personal level, to bear witness to the traumatic experiences of Korean "Comfort Women" as an outsider. But this work is also an attempt to manage the discomfort and fear provoked by the subject and this shamanic retelling. As David Kim writes, "[t]here is something unsettling about ghosts that touches every generation in its own way," and the idea of a shamanic *kut*, or ritual, "inevitably intersects with the representations that shape the popular imagination of the spirit world" (734). Perhaps it is the *unsafe* nature of this shamanic performance, which includes direct interactions with the audience, and is "filled with breaks and fissures, which remove the fourth wall," that both fascinates and invokes fear (738). By including their audience in the ceremony, the shamans in Tongyeong bring them into the ritual aspect of the performance, and into a retelling of a recent history that has been muted by politics, academia and social pressures (Soh 203, 243). As Kim Seong-nae puts it, some corpses "speak only in ghostly

image[s] and in murky and subliminal spaces such as dreams and possession illnesses (“Mourning,” 472).

During the performance, the head shaman becomes “possessed” by a child taken from her family by Japanese soldiers during the military occupation of the Korean peninsula (D. Kim 732). As such, when the shaman interacts with the students hiding behind their phones, she addresses them as “older sisters,” which brings to the fore “one of the more painful realities of the spirit who has overtaken Kim *mansin*—the fact she is younger than the high schoolers in front of her” (735).

Grace Cho, an American sociologist and anthropologist, notes that

[i]f, in the most basic terms, studying ghosts allows us to rethink a society’s relationship to its dead, particularly to those who were subject to some kind of injustice, the ghost and its haunting effects act as a mode of memory and an avenue for ethical engagement with the present. (ch. 1)

Korean ghosts essentially fall into two categories: ghosts of known ancestors that deserve respect and must be satiated through ritual giving, and the spirits of those who are unknown, who “wander angry and frustrated, venting their anger on the living” (Kendall 99). These “yongsan” are often the ghosts of those who have died “violently or suddenly, when far away from home” (99). Since many thousands of “Comfort Women” died anonymously throughout the

Japanese empire of the 1930s and 40s, and since most survivors were left physically unable to produce the offspring who would one day honour their spirits through ritual feeding (Soh 177), the shamanic belief is that many of these women fall into the latter category, and require ceremony to aid their passage into the afterlife (D. Kim 725-26).

If the largely Korean audience in Tongyeong was alarmed by the reenacting of the trauma suffered by a “Comfort Woman,” then what followed did nothing to reassure or calm fears. David Kim recounts the head shaman crying out and collapsing on stage, leaving the audience to take sides, some calling for medical attention, others for further ritual (737). The other shamans, however, decide to “bleed” the collapsed woman with a diabetic’s lancet, and one begins “puncturing her fingers and toes, squeezing out blood from the tips of her body. At this point, some observers of the *kut* turn away in disbelief, or perhaps even disgust, as if some transgression has occurred” (737). After all, “[t]o perform shamanic acts in a stagelike setting is one thing, but when the living and breathing are apparently in danger, shouldn’t modern medicine take its rightful place?” (737). This is when a former “Comfort Woman” in the audience climbs onto the stage and kneels to cradle the quaking shaman’s head (737). The former “Comfort Woman” “strokes her hair and soothes her with words, which are lost in the cacophony,” and only then do “the spasms and pain begin to subside” (737). This key moment of the performance and ritual, Kim believes, “emerged from a constellation of danger, outside structure, and unannounced,” and this eruption, be

it artistic, spiritual or both, arrived bearing “the full force of history, which all must confront in their own way” (742).

There is a narrative present within this performance that is at least partly planned, one that emerges within the expected confines of ritual. But “[t]he fissures..., the spaces necessary for shamanic activity to extend its boundaries, remain potent, producing unpredictable and unforeseen events that have been waiting on the edges of ritual and structured representation” (D.Kim 747). So, paradoxically, this narrative, which emerges “from the ruins of history,” erupts without warning from within the familiar confines of ritual performance (743). Is this “possession gone awry” (747)? Or is it the very possibility of danger, or the unexpected, that allows for a truly engaging narrative, one that attempts to give shape to an opaque history by bringing it unexpectedly into the audience’s present? Even though this particular shamanic retelling of history fits neatly within the Korean nationalist discourse on the subject (Soh 24), I cannot help but wonder if the seemingly unsafe nature of the narrative also provides an example of a means of retelling narratives that do not fit with those regularly curated or accepted by mainstream partisan groups. If this performance breaks an historical silence, surely another *eruption* might bring to light a further subjugated event or narrative, allowing the dead to “speak without being co-opted by the language of agency and the agency of violence,” that is, the language of agenda, and/or of the state (S.N. Kim, “Mourning,” 472). The American ethnomusicologist Joshua Pilzer writes of surviving “Comfort Women” feeling freedom to sing what they

could not speak publicly, because the “opacity” of the relationship between singer and song offered them a necessary distance when needed (9). Perhaps a shaman’s relationship to her performance allows for similar freedoms: after all, a shaman’s role is to “summon and speak for the gods” and appease the spirits of the dead (Kendall 23), not please their audience (144). Bae Jok Gan, who became a shaman after surviving her experiences as a “Comfort Woman,” has addressed this, stating, “[w]hen the spirit entered my body, I knew nothing. I was no longer there” (Kim-Gibson 94). Such examples of shamans “speaking spontaneously” also present a means of engaging with the opacity of historical trauma (S.N. Kim, “Women”), with the event’s unknowability, for it is through “incomprehension and in our departure from sense and understanding that our own witnessing may indeed begin to take place” (Caruth 22, 56). Such an *accidental* or unexpected engagement with this hidden history, then, allows for a level of personal witnessing that might not be socially acceptable (or psychologically possible) otherwise, for the audience and performers alike.

A concern here, as David Kim puts it, is that the potential political motivations of the performers might turn “the subject into an object of trauma, as a figure, or even abstracted element, in a larger, singular, and ultimately postcolonial narrative” (744). That is, when one writes about an individual’s historical traumatic experience, the specificity of that event can so easily give way to a generalized or politicized narrative in which the subject of the trauma loses their individuality and becomes objectified. David Kim argues, therefore, that “the

emphasis should instead be on when structure fails,” wondering “if it must necessarily fail for a different kind of politics and temporality to surface” (744). Might the same be true of narratives aestheticizing, as in fictional accounts, the traumatic experiences of Korean “Comfort Women”? How might moving outside the confines of established “transnational memory,” without disowning the value of these existing narratives, make room for narratives that have been further subjugated, or perhaps even lead to the emergence of a unique creative engagement with this history (Soh 108)?

One approach may be to

focus on the gaps within narrative, in which the limits of expression are so often bound to the powers of horror, torture, death, and disease. Such testimonials carry the weight of the dead, not unlike the shamans who carry the boat into the afterlife; such work—indeed, the work of mourning and justice—is *unconditionally* necessary but should also be accompanied by more varied callings and responses. (D. Kim 746)

So what might these “more varied callings and responses” look like (D. Kim 746)? Pilzer reports a huge variety in the tone and content of songs sung by Korean “Comfort Women,” and also difficulty in curating such diversity (52, 60). He recalls an activist questioning his curation of a song containing jokes and references to sex, for fear that audiences might hear “the voice of a prostitute who

became a ‘comfort woman’ by choice” (60), a narrative that has not been included in the “pantheon of postwar victim archetypes” (10). David Kim also reports that many of the surviving “Comfort Women” watching the shamanic rituals in Tongyeong shared a joke over the absurdity of needing help getting to the afterlife, laughing and suggesting that they had surely “paid their dues” (745). Korean-American documentary filmmaker Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, who met with survivors in the mid-1990’s to collect testimonies for a film and book, reports feeling frustrated by the rote narratives of survivors who were used to giving testimony, noting that a “formula had been firmly established” for their stories by activists and journalists who had come before her (Kim-Gibson 118). She records survivor Park Oak Yeun telling her, “...now that I can understand better what we are trying to achieve, I can sort out what is important to tell, and what isn’t” (132). Despite this, the testimonies Kim-Gibson collected are full of opinions and memories that fail to correspond with accepted Korean nationalistic discourse, such as those of survivor Bae Jok Gan, who said: “I like the Japanese. Even now, if there were a good Japanese and the conditions [we]re right, I would marry him, not a Korean.” And, “...I still like the Japanese. I don’t blame them” (92).

Affecting representations, like the songs and testimonies collected by Pilzer and Kim-Gibson, emerge from the gaps in accepted discourse to fall outside the standardized narrativizing of victimization, which leads to a further question about the role of artistic representations (created by non-victims) as supplements

to existing narratives. There is a very real danger in speaking *for* victims. However, when

Gayatri Spivak asked the enormously difficult question ‘can the subaltern speak?’... the answer was a silent and rhetorically anguished ‘no.’ In relation to comfort women, one wonders if the question can still be raised in this current stage of postsilence, as their voices are now indeed vociferous, if not singular. Hyunah Yang’s work on testimonial and memory, however, suggests the question is still worth asking, as she finds residues of the subaltern in gaps of silence within testimonials, inconsistent memories, and most significantly in what she refers to as an attempt to “render an impossible representation possible.” (D. Kim 729)

In other words, even the *testimonies* of victims are subject to silences, and this, coupled with the continuing emergence of further narratives that have been actively subjugated historically or because they now fail to agree with a standardized victimization discourse, suggests that there are still large gaps in the historical record, still great silences calling for further responses (Pilzer 10; Soh 79). Moving “beyond the collective testimonials of survivor-victims, it should be stressed, does not disavow the fact that atrocities were suffered and occurred” (D. Kim 746), nor does the impossibility of fully understanding and mapping the traumatic experiences of Korean “Comfort Women,” which both “def[y] and

demand our witness” (Caruth 5). Quite the opposite, as “the story of a wound ... cries out... in an attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (4). Representing trauma will always be problematic (5), and any attempt will produce “a failure to tell these stories in their entirety, because there are too many uncertainties, and the very act of telling them in a way that makes sense would involve smoothing over the gaps” (Cho, intro). So instead of rewriting history, a writer might, like Cho, be “compelled to enter these empty spaces to find out what emerges, what one can learn from listening to silence” (intro), engaging in “a new mode of reading and listening that both the language of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition and suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand” (Caruth 9). What of those Korean “Comfort Women” who mourned when Japan failed to win their war (Soh 190)? What of those who felt genuine compassion or even love for enemy soldiers and officers (182-90)? What of those who believe further reparation payments from the Japanese government are unnecessary (Pilzer 126)? These women are still victims, and still deserve to be heard, should they desire this. When coupled with intense social and political pressures for conformity, however, such retellings become profoundly complicated and less and less likely (D. Kim 725). This subjugation of memory can stall investigation and representation of such trauma as narrative. But it can also open a door to the “productive possibilities of trauma,” forming an “opportunity to engage in and develop new reading and writing practices” (Cho, ch. 1, intro). My own awareness of these gaps in

representation has driven my research and creative practice, inspiring my attempts to include narrative threads that represent multiply subjugated historical experiences. For it is the gaps in history and the silences themselves that betray the existence of, and will continue to create space for, narratives ready to erupt (D. Kim 729).

As for “new reading and writing practices” (Cho, intro), might seemingly eruptive narratives, such as those found in Korean shamanic performance, act as a critical lens through which to read existing narratives representing the traumatic experiences of Korean “Comfort Women”? How might this permit “*history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not” (Caruth 11)? Might I mimic a shamanic “constellation of danger” in my own novel (D. Kim 742), wrestling with these questions and the voices of the dead to add my voice to theirs? Might I, like a shaman, “speak the unspeakable” (Kendall 23), and give further attention and “form to an experience that ha[s] been silenced for generations” (D. Kim 729)?

Steam billows and stings my eyes, the bathhouse loud with the sounds of moving water, children laughing, hands slapping muscle, feet slapping stone and tile, men chatting. There is a ritual to the cleansing here. A bench with a shower head, a coarse towel and chemical soap to scrub every inch of skin before entering the pools or saunas. Raw and clean, I head towards one of many baths in the *jjimjilbang*. I can tell that even those who don’t stare at my pale skin are making an effort not to by the way they lower their heads as I pass. Unsurprisingly, this

Canadian has chosen the least crowded pool, where only one man soaks. But before I can enter the water, a teenager touches my shoulder, points to the floating man and crosses his forearms. *No*. Perhaps because of the lack of panic or visible concern around me, it takes me a moment to clock the stillness of the man's chest, realize why he floats alone in the cedar-lined pool, eyes closed, head resting on the wooden edge, grey hair clean and parted. Those who pass stop to look at the dead man, but do not comment. Boys stare longer, but there is no fuss, no attempt by adults to shield their children from such a sight. The paramedics arrive within a few minutes, though they are in no hurry either, and they do not attempt to revive the man, instead lifting him gently from the pool onto a wheeled stretcher. The bathhouse has gone quiet, and young and old line the path from the pool to the doors as the man passes, naked and clean, just like us, ready to exit the house of the living for that of the dead.

CHAPTER THREE

Two Novels

“In the Korean blood there is Siberian blood, the shaman current; if the shaman doesn't receive the spirit, he can do nothing. As soon as the spirit descends on the shaman, the eyes come alive and the voice speaks. The magma is not just something under the volcano, but is something underlying our humanity as well...his fire within. If you look at the poets of Korea, many of them are, in a sense, shamans.”

—Ko Un, interview with Patricia Donegan, 2006.

Many prominent novels in English feature the Korean War—examples include Richard Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate*, Richard Hooker and W.C. Heinz's *MASH: A Novel About Three Army Doctors* (which was adapted for television), Toni Morrison's *Mercy*, Philip Roth's *Indignation*, and Ha Jin's *War Trash*. However, only four novels in English feature Korean “Comfort Women” as direct subject matter: Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*, Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*, Therese Park's *A Gift of the Emperor*, and William Andrews' *Daughters of the Dragon*.

While the latter two novels represent the historical atrocity (with varying degrees of accuracy), they offer little that cannot be readily found in English translations of survivors' testimonies, and fail to wrestle with issues of trauma and

survival, to engage with the deep complexities of the event and the diversity of its actors. Anthropologist Sarah Soh praises Park (along with Keller and Lee) in her seminal book *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan*, for adding “flesh and blood to the media representations of the paradigmatic story” (51). However, Soh also notes that Park’s *A Gift of the Emperor*, which was published in 1997, “fails to offer a larger historical picture of the military comfort system in the sociocultural context of colonial Korea” (51). Andrews’ 2014 novel, *Daughters of the Dragon*, similarly fails to engage with difficult questions of causality and diversity, instead reenforcing narratives already present in curated survivor testimony and previously published fiction about Korean “Comfort Women.” While these offerings are not without value, they are best read as fictional primers on the subject. Park, who emigrated from Korea to the United States in 1966 (Soh 51), writes, for example, “Japan became our fatherland in 1910 when it abolished the Yi dynasty, forcing King Kojong to retire, and annexing our country as its colony” (Park ch. 1). And, “we were taken from our homes under the pretense of being trained as nurses and factory workers and sent to the military brothels” (ch. 1). Similarly, Andrews, a former American marketing executive (Andrews, “About the Author”), writes, “[w]hen I was young, the provincial government insisted that all Koreans speak Japanese. I didn’t like Japanese—it sounded like they were angry when they talked, and maybe they were” (ch. 5). And, “[a]t ten minutes apiece—the soldiers’ allotted

time—I had serviced over thirty men that day. I was sore and exhausted and had to force myself to serve one more soldier” (ch. 7).

Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Woman*, published in 1997, and Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life*, published in 1999, however, offer more nuanced approaches. Keller and Lee use techniques to mimic seemingly eruptive narratives, such as those witnessed in Korean shamanic performance, in which trauma is staged as an uncontrolled outpouring of the past invading the present, of “break[s] in the mind’s experience of time” (Caruth 61). They achieve this replication of traumatic experience and its effects using fragmented narrative structures, coupled with representations of haunting and possession, to produce narratives that appear *unsafe* or *unscripted* despite the very artistic structures that house them. In doing so, the authors act as mediums and these novels become like haunted vessels, the authors’ own stagings of a suppressed and repressed historical trauma. In short, Keller’s *Comfort Woman* and Lee’s *A Gesture Life* appear to “speak the unspeakable” (Kendall 23), and act as potential structural examples of the further “callings and responses” mentioned earlier (D. Kim 746).

Narrative Eruption: Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Woman*

In the last chapter I referenced a shamanic performance that the shamans themselves described as creating “a flow of energy... so great that it produce[d] excess” (Kim 736). I have suggested that such a performance representing the

traumatic experiences of Korean “Comfort Women” is eruptive in nature, that it appears to come from elsewhere, the *other* speaking on its own terms. Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Woman* is a novel built on the same narrative conceit. Her main characters are Beccah, the daughter of a former Korean “Comfort Woman” living in Hawaii, and Akiko, the surviving “Comfort Woman” herself, who falls into shamanic trances and whose history we relive through flashbacks. While I agree that “Keller represents trauma in highly poetic terms, through dreams, visions, and myths” (Madsen 80), she also blends this trauma with haunting, creating a performance, or staging, that suggests both danger and threat, a structured form that appears unstructured and eruptive.

Keller, of Korean and German descent, was born in Seoul but immigrated to the United States as a child (Soh 52). Although my review is text based, when asked in a 1997 interview about whether she viewed herself as a shaman during the writing of her novel, Keller responded with: “I really felt that sometimes I entered a type of trance, that I was really connected to something higher [than] myself.... I was almost like a medium” (Cinader).

Much has been written on the impact of *Comfort Woman* with respect to re-imagining history, as well as on transnational issues of identity, race and representation. Further work has examined the novel as an example of writing trauma, and as an exploration of the shamanic mythology of Princess Pari. Sarah Soh is intensely critical of Keller’s novel, which she believes “offers very few concrete descriptions of the life of a comfort woman,” adding that “the cryptic,

fragmented personal memories of Akiko, who is portrayed as a mentally unstable woman given to shamanic mysticism, are difficult to read” (53). Soh, however, fails to note the complexity of the novel’s structure and the techniques Keller employs both to convey the impact of shamanism in her characters’ lives, and to convey a sense of narrative eruption to her readers. The work of Soh and other academics has focused either on the historicity of the novel, Keller’s recreation of trauma or her representation of Korean shamanism, but never on the ways in which these concepts appear to interact within the text to form a unique narrative that is at once artistically structured, and yet also appears to exist “outside structure,” to arrive “unannounced”—effectively the representation of a traumatic haunting, an outpouring of narrative amidst a “constellation of danger” that gives voice to that which is so often absent from both personal and historical testimony (D. Kim 742). In this respect, Keller’s novel is comparable to narratives witnessed in Korean shamanic performance (D. Kim 742).

Keller introduces a sense of threat in the novel through the voice of Beccah, who immediately alerts us to the ominous presence of the spirit world as she waits for her dead father to rescue her and her mother, “burning with his blue eyes the Korean ghosts and demons that fed off our lives” (2). Beccah’s childhood is marked by her mother’s interactions with the spirit world: “[when] the spirits called to her, my mother would leave me and slip inside herself” (4). She describes her mother’s dancing and possession in detail, and we are enveloped in the danger and fear experienced by our narrator as she watches her mother

“flailing, knees pumping into her chest,” dancing “without music” (6). There is also petulance, and the familiar trappings of a childhood defined by a child’s embarrassment of their parent (12); however, all of the emotions present for Beccah stem from the utter unpredictability of her mother’s actions as the woman delivers “messages to and from the city of the dead” (10).

At the end of the first chapter, we discover that Beccah has been delivering her story from a fictive present from which she announces that her “mother is dead” (Keller 13). But our narrator’s experience of her mother’s eruptions are still *present* for her, the sense of which is heightened when the second chapter begins from the point of the view of Beccah’s mother, under the chapter heading *Akiko*, who, seemingly from death, recounts her traumatic experiences. “We had heard the rumours,” Akiko tells us, of “girls bought or stolen from villages outside the city, sent to Japanese recreation centers” (19). Akiko is held captive in a “comfort station” from the age of twelve until she escapes at fourteen, but not before she is forced to perform sexual acts for the Japanese soldiers (15-16). We are given harrowing accounts of life in captivity, where the women are “forbidden to speak any language at all” (16).

One woman, Induk, does speak out, shouting: “I am Korea, I am woman, I am alive. I am seventeen, I had a family just like you do, I am a daughter, I am a sister,” and is murdered for her outburst, “skewered from vagina to mouth” as a “warning” to keep silent (Keller 20, 21). Keller then uses Induk as the recurring spirit which haunts and possesses Akiko, and therefore also Beccah, for the rest of

the novel, as if this woman's story and presence cannot be prevented from bringing the past into the present, from "entering [Akiko] with full voice" (36).

"One way in which to convey haunting," writes Cho, "is through the use of nonlinear temporalities, repetition, fantasy, and fiction" (intro). Keller's use of dual points of view that do not alternate evenly between Beccah and Akiko, but instead emerge seemingly at random, and flashbacks from flashbacks, lend themselves to a representation of a haunted existence, in which events are also linked in a manner reminiscent of traumatic experience and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), where "memories transcend individual and collective attempts to neatly separate past, present, and future" (S. Kim 42), and "'re-experiencing' breaks through as a form of 'remembering' in the present, which in severe cases can make the traumatic time of the past be literally experienced as the present" (Crawford 705).

Comfort Woman, then, is an expression of the connection between, or even blurring of, trauma and haunting. According to Cho, "[w]hen an unspeakable or uncertain history, both personal and collective, takes the form of a 'ghost,' it searches for bodies through which to speak" (ch. 1). To engage with the text as such, therefore, we must "rethink the ghost not just as the psychic representation of the dead or repressed but as a body assembled to transmit traumatic memory or a force of 'desiring production'" (ch. 1). Akiko herself, as medium, is this *body*—even her Japanese name is inextricably linked to her trauma and haunting, as she inherits the title from the dead Induk (Keller 54). When her future husband Rick

asks, without knowing her past, if he can call her Akiko, she says nothing, believing her trauma has erased her “right to use the name” she was born with, claiming the girl she used to be is “dead” (93).

So Akiko speaks to us from death in more ways than one, and her voice, through her narrative’s fractured timeline, acts as a production of traumatic haunting, seen when Keller moves from a flashback of Beccah’s birth to a past trauma. “I felt my mind slip back into the camps,” says Akiko, screaming for help as the Japanese doctor, now *present* in the narrative, rapes her “as the other soldiers had done” (35). We are given memories of childbirth that bring forth older memories of forced abortion (22), and further eruptions occupy Akiko’s flashbacks of working in a factory with Christian missionaries in Pyongyang, after she has managed to escape from the Japanese, where she tells us that her “daily routine at the mission house” was invaded by memories of the “comfort station” that “shatter[ed] the gaps between movement and silence” (64). “Whenever I stopped for a beat, for a breath” she tells us, “I heard men laughing and betting on how many men one comfort woman could service before she split open” (64). Akiko tells us blatantly that she was terrified to stop “cleaning, washing, cooking” in case the “camp sounds” emerged to “envelop” her, and she would find herself “back there” again (65). Even when Akiko is listening to the American pastor (whom she later marries) preach and slap the pulpit, she hears only “the sounds of women’s naked buttocks being slapped as they were paraded in front of a new arrival of troops” (70).

This novelistic technique of interrupting the linear progression of the story, of flashbacks leading to flashbacks that *occupy* the narrative, creates the illusion that this story is not wholly controlled or scripted, in an artistic sense, and yet it is also stylized to appear not wholly like the testimony of a trauma victim. Rather, the structure and style lead readers to *experience* something of both, to be subjected to a representation of narrative eruption, a shamanic staging of traumatic haunting.

Like the shamanic ritual described by David Kim, such a narrative leaves the reader feeling as though the storyline is unsafe, paradoxically unstructured within the confines of its form. And this feeling is reenforced by Beccah, now an adult (and self-admittedly unreliable) narrator, who begins to learn alternative family histories through her mother's inconsistencies, and through a chance encounter with a classmate from childhood, who provides a starkly different reading of shared experience (Keller 31-34). Beccah says she "grew cautious" of her mother's stories, "never knowing what to count on or what to discount" (32), and, after the encounter with a childhood acquaintance, adds, "I realized that not only could I not trust my mother's stories; I could not trust my own" (34).

This further sets the stage for the danger of the shamanic eruptions in Beccah's home, leaving her, and us, uncertain of what truths or untruths might emerge, what histories might be revealed as "the indefinite mix-up of fact and fiction, fantasy and experience, is restored in what might be described as a ghosted or haunted realism" (Clough qtd. in Cho, ch. 1).

In contrast to her mother's trances and dancing, Beccah approaches death by becoming an obituary writer for the *Honolulu Star*, where she has "recorded so many deaths that the formula is templated" in her mind (Keller 26). Yet when she must write her own mother's obituary, she realizes she does not even know "how to start imaging her life" (26). This is a stark contrast to the image of Beccah as a child covering her ears and shouting "I can't hear you" to drown out her mother's chanting (28). We also learn that Beccah cannot sing in tune, which moves her further from relating to her mother's singing and dancing, making it even harder perhaps, in the present thread, for her to understand her dead mother's life (29).

Grace Cho writes about attempting to shift from "a narrative about loss to an affective expression that registers the 'loss of loss'" (intro). Similarly, Keller tells us that "Saja the Death Messenger, Guardian of Hell," lives in her characters' home, and was, according to Beccah, the evil spirit her father preached of, that through her "mother's chants and offerings" became "more real" to her than even her absent father (43). It is not that Beccah registers her mother's history or trauma, but rather that she is left with both the silence surrounding her mother's actual experiences, and eruptions from this silence that make no sense to her.

Madsen notes that "Akiko is unable to articulate her traumatic experience except through her ritual mourning of the women who did not survive the 'comfort' camps. She does not even speak her trauma but sings it," even to her own daughter (80). Throughout the text we see references to silence and silencing in flashbacks to the camps (20), and to the factory where Akiko loses her hearing,

and where at times her “vision narrows,” as though her senses are failing in the aftermath of trauma (Keller 70). Yet Akiko tells us only that she could not hear her own voice, the loss of other senses significant only in relation to her inability to communicate (63). Even when her hearing is restored, she becomes aware of only one sound, a song that contains that which she “had almost forgotten: the enduring whisper of women who continued to pass messages under the ears of the soldiers,” and “a defiant Induk, bellowing” in Korean (71). Despite recognizing the loss of this personal and historical narrative, Akiko hardly speaks throughout her wedding, baptism and move to America, where she has “no face and no place” (103-04, 110). She exists, it seems, as a sort of silent phantom, lost in the realization that her “body was, and always would be, locked in a cubicle at the camps, trapped under the bodies of innumerable men” (106).

Family friend Auntie Reno’s dialogue is transcribed verbatim, but Akiko’s is not, further suggesting a disassociation from her voice and story. And yet a narrative emerges, or erupts, from Akiko’s silence. Just as Akiko once listened for Induk “in the empty spaces... between the beats of words and music,” Beccah is forced to interpret her mother’s actions and the gaps in their shared history (Keller 92). Beccah's uncertainty as to whether she is hearing her mother or Induk speaking through her mother also adds to the atmosphere of danger (38). Beccah appears to struggle with the transference of her mother’s ongoing disembodiment and loss of true voice even after the woman’s death, confessing that when she found her mother’s dead body, “its face was empty” (125), and recalling how,

when watching her mother in the garden, she “lost her voice” (126). And here Beccah realizes that her own “drowned” memories are surfacing, and that her mother missed much of her childhood “because she was looking into another world” (127).

After a second failed suicide attempt, rather than explaining her history as a “Comfort Woman,” Akiko tells Beccah a version of the shamanic story of Princess Pari, a woman who passed through the gates of hell to save her mother and father (Keller 47-51). But this semi-articulated connection between trauma, the effects of trauma and the shamanic worldview only leaves Beccah feeling more distant from her mother, particularly after the woman’s death, when she realizes that she, as Princess Pari, has “failed to rescue her,” is unable to “swim to the far shores of death” (51).

Madsen writes that “[t]hese discourses of dream, symbolism, and myth, which exceed in their representational power the limits of normal mimesis, demonstrate the ability of poetic language to transform history from event into a discourse that approaches the horror of the originary traumatic event” (82). While this seems an uncomfortable proposition, one that perhaps places too much emphasis on the power of the recreation, the word “approaches” is significant, and speaks to the techniques Keller employs to represent Akiko’s traumatic haunting and its transference to Beccah.

While Beccah is obviously traumatized in her own right by her mother’s ongoing shamanic outbursts, best exemplified when Akiko waves a knife over

Beccah's head and along the zipper of her jeans (134), Keller also gives us a sense of inter-generational haunting by including repetitions in the text from each character's point of view. Many of these examples are thematic, such as loss of voice and disembodiment, as Beccah describes memories of love that close her throat and make her hands heavy (132), and herself as "a trespasser out of place and time" (132). Others involve religious imagery and tension, such as Akiko's husband's recital of the Lord's prayer and the line from Beccah's poem about her father, "hollow be thy name" (131). Further examples are even more explicit, such as Akiko dreaming of soldiers pointing guns at her and mouthing "[p]at-ta-ta-tat" (115), only pages before Beccah describes her soon-to-be boyfriend's music with "ratatata ratatata" (130). While there is an implicit contrast between the causality of each character's emotional state, such repetition and parallelism also act as a warning in the text, conveying a sense of threat and leading us to fear that just as Beccah's mother "became the new Akiko" after the original Akiko's death (54), so too Beccah might replace her mother, and that the irrepressible voice of Induk, a silenced trauma-turned-haunting forever seeking *embodiment*, will one day inhabit her.

Akiko does appear afraid of passing on her haunting to Beccah, telling us, for example, that when her husband brought home dolls, she would hide them in a linen closet to protect Beccah from "the artificial dead," the toys' plastic skin reminiscent of "after-death skin, cold and hard though still faintly pliant," another reference to the dead Induk (Keller 55). Or, when a young Beccah cries at night,

“caught in a dream of sorrow,” Akiko wonders “what she has experienced in her short life to make her so unhappy, so afraid” (99). However, Akiko also urges her daughter to engage in shamanic ritual, “so that,” she tells Beccah “you will know what to do when I am dead” (157). And while Akiko is obviously concerned with protecting her daughter from the presence of evil spirits, her inability to control her own haunting means that this only contributes to the sense of danger in the narrative (45, 79).

Beccah’s realization that she did not know her mother and is “having a funeral for a *yongson*,” or *yongsan*, which, as discussed in Chapter Two, is “the ghost of a person who traveled far from home and died a stranger” (Keller 140), evokes memories for Beccah of stories and warnings that without proper ritual her mother will be condemned to such an afterlife (157-58). Following this, Beccah’s encounter with a homeless man in her mother’s garage marks the first time Keller invades Beccah’s storyline with an explicit element of the supernatural that Beccah acknowledges as such (167). Her hand heats when she touches the man, and “blue fire” sparks between them (168). Beccah tells us her “fingers still hummed” as she entered her dead mother’s house, and rather than subsiding, the feeling spread through her body, moving to her head, an experience that, in Beccah’s words, left her with the knowledge of “what needed to be done” (168). Predictably, this becomes executing the rituals her mother participated in, “caring for the spirits of the house” (169). She also remembers her mother’s words as they listened to a recording of her performing a shamanic ceremony: “[t]his will be

you one day,” an explicit expression of the potential for the haunting, and hence the trauma, to indeed engage with the next generation (172). Beccah then finds another cassette that her mother has left for her (though much of the narrative is addressed to Beccah’s grandmother), along with articles about “Comfort Women” and documents that include her mother’s Korean name and the names of her lost family in Korea (173). “I had to read these opening lines twice more before I understood who was who, that my mother once belonged to a name, to a life that I had never known about,” Beccah tells us. “That... my mother, once bound to others beside myself, had severed those ties—my lineage, her family name—with her silence” (173).

Akiko’s final chapter appears under a different heading, the woman’s Korean name, “Soon Hyo” (Keller 175). While this is representative of a trauma narrative emerging from silence, a name being reclaimed, the lack of resolution in the novel begs questions about whether the ghosts that haunted Akiko will be satisfied to wander as *yongsan*, or whether they will continue to seek embodiment in Beccah, who we learn was originally named Bek-hap (183). Despite a semi-cathartic ending for Beccah, the narrative remains largely inconclusive and full of threat, a danger that perhaps cannot be explicitly articulated, in part because the layering of themes, images and symbolism in the novel resists deconstruction. Madsen notes that while “Keller discredits the notion elsewhere” she utilizes the concept of the “pre-cultural (or that which is before and outside culture) through her use of myth, dream, and symbolism” (80). Symbolism, images of blood, and

dreams are certainly significant in the text, particularly Beccah's recurring dream of drowning (Keller 141). However, I would expand Madsen's definition to suggest that a representation of a shamanic-like narrative as an outlet, eruptive and seemingly outside of structure, spiritual and mythic in nature, is at least part of this pre-cultural expression, which combines with

[t]he rhetoric of trauma... throughout the narrative, in the recurring images that accumulate meaning until they meet and meld at the end, into a seeming plenitude of meaning that transcends particular technologies of subjectivization by displacing identity into a mystical realm outside the text, language, and culture. (Madsen 82)

Akiko's (Soon Hyo's) final words, final chapter, are largely descriptions of her own mother's life, during which the woman experienced traumatic violence under Japan's colonial government. She was forced "to marry a man she had never seen," and, in fleeing her home, "never heard her name again" (Keller 176-80). The chapter ends with Akiko promising to tell Beccah a "story about her grandmother," and to leave a box of memories (inside of which is the cassette) so that Beccah might "come to know her own mother—and then herself" (182-83). There is a sense in which Akiko succeeds in this by speaking after her death through a recording, becoming both "the spirit and the medium at the same time" (K.J. Lee 444), and yet her voice in the novel remains problematic. Beccah

speaks to us from a narrative present, while Akiko speaks only from death. We can easily imagine Beccah writing her story, or speaking directly to us, but what of Akiko? From where does her voice emerge, and how? Is Beccah already her medium, a vessel from which a silenced narrative might erupt and continue to erupt?

Perhaps so, and, given the context of the entire novel, Akiko's final words ring as both a comfort and a threat when she says, "I speak for a time when I leave my daughter, so that when I die, she will hear my name and know that when she cries, she will never be alone" (Keller 183). Beccah's memories resurface as the narrative draws to a close, and we learn that during her first menstruation she also experienced possession by Induk (188), and she now wonders if her mother had been telling her story through ritual all along (191). A further memory resurfaces of her mother and father arguing, of her mother asserting her given name, "Soon Hyo, the true voice, the pure tongue," and shouting of her rape by Japanese soldiers (195). Beccah recalls her father begging her mother to "protect" their daughter with her "silence... from that shame" (196). Through this, Beccah comes to some understanding that though her mother "consorted with her spirits," she knew Beccah watched, was, in fact, counting on it (197). Beccah admits that she "stopped seeing" her mother when she was a teenager, declaring that she will now act as her mother's Princess Pari—another development that is both cathartic and ominous, as the Korean name Pari literally means "the abandoned" (K.J. Lee 434). She then performs shamanic rituals for her dead mother (Keller 208), the

“proper rites of the dead” that, as we have been told since the start of the novel, Induk and the other dead “Comfort Women” did not receive (38). Beccah is primarily motivated into action by memories arriving out of place in the timeline of her story, emerging from the past to occupy her present, both threatening and cathartic in nature, erupting and giving voice to a new narrative.

Cho tells us that

Abraham and Torok’s method for revealing a phantom is to focus on gaps, on that which was suggested but still silenced in their clients’ speech, and their treatment of haunted individuals involved wresting the phantomized secret from its hold over the individual’s psyche by ‘staging’ it and, thus, releasing it into the world. (ch. 1)

Similarly, Keller’s Akiko seeks to stage her own trauma, to articulate that which she cannot speak, through ritual and trance, even after her own death, and Beccah does the same in life by performing her mother’s rituals. Madsen notes that the “conclusion of the narrative, then, enacts the recovery of traumatic memory and its reintegration into the narratives recalled by Beccah. As a consequence, daughter is united with mother, the unity of the generations is preserved, and ritual is united with history as body is united with spirit” (81-82). Certainly there are ways in which the novel fits tidily into such an industry-friendly stereotype of Asian-American literature—the mother daughter

relationship, the family secrets—however, the techniques Keller employs to convey a sense of haunting and threat, a staging of her own, of the *other* speaking seemingly unscripted through the gaps in historical and personal narratives, set this work apart as something both layered and counter-hegemonic, a haunted vessel perhaps, a representation of narrative eruption, and thereby an eruption itself.

Haunting and Veiled Staging: Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*.

The shamanic performance discussed in Chapter Two featured a reenactment of a Japanese soldier raping a Korean girl, wherein, in contrast to the explicit nature of the rest of the performance, the shamans formed a circle to “*hide* the painful scene from view of the audience” (D. Kim 740). Here, “[p]ossession and political performance converge[d]..., both veiling and unveiling one another. In this case, possession [was] masked by the larger message of colonial defilement by the Japanese, which only add[ed] to the reactive and activist folds of the ritual” (740). But this aspect of ritual was also performative, full of artistic techniques—quiet yet still enticing. Chang-rae Lee’s novel, *A Gesture Life*, is far less explicit than Keller’s work with respect to their narrators’ points of view, a quieter representation of the traumatic experience of a Japanese soldier during Japan’s war in the 1930s and 40s, and his experience with Korean “Comfort Women.”

The novel is the equivalent, perhaps, of encircling the violence with bodies to block the view, while at the same time inviting the audience to lean closer.

Chang-rae Lee, formerly the director of creative writing at Princeton, and now a professor at Stanford, was born in Korea, and, like Keller, immigrated with his parents to the United States as a child (Soh 55). Unlike Keller, however, Lee chooses a retired Japanese doctor living in Michigan as his novel's protagonist, a man who has adopted a Korean orphan, we suspect, to atone for his actions as a medic in the Japanese military during the occupation of the Korean peninsula. Rather than the outpouring of shamanic ecstasy we saw in Keller's novel, we are subjected to a slow reveal, to a *veiled* version of this trauma and haunting, which, nonetheless, emerges from the "gaps within narrative" and history (Kim 746).

Motuz notes that "[t]he structure of Lee's novel itself—fragmented and convoluted—performs the very trauma it depicts. In this way, the reader is positioned as witness to the experience and embodiment of trauma" (Motuz 413). But the novel also stages a haunting, replicating not just "history as the endless repetition of previous violence" (Caruth 63), but also acting as and representing a narrative eruption born from the "productive possibilities" of trauma (Cho, ch. 1). Lee's artistic rendering of both traumatic experience and haunting is distant enough from the trauma that we can read it critically, and yet simultaneously gives the appearance of being full of threat and unscripted, just as we saw in Keller's novel, and just as we saw in David Kim's recollections of shamanic performance.

Unlike Keller's novel, which immediately places us next to a fearful young girl watching her mother's possession by spirits, *A Gesture Life* opens with descriptions of the laconic Michigan town of Bedley Run, from which Doc Hata, a retired medical supply store owner, narrates from the fictive present in first person (C. Lee 3-5). Hata's confessional initially matches the town, "the simple tranquility" reminding him of the small city on the coast of Japan where he grew up (3). Bedley Run, we later learn, is a place where "the privying hills and vales and dead-end lanes make one feel this indeed is the good and decent living, a cloister for those... who are modest and unspecial" (130). However, Lee communicates a sense of threat and foreboding through hints that his narrator is less comfortable than perhaps even he believes, referring to the past as "a most unstable mirror" that is "never as truth-reflecting as people would like to believe" (5). Hata tells us, using only vague language, that he knows "from experience that those in extreme circumstances can sometimes be untoward and even shocking," and that such singularities are "better forgotten than considered time and time again, to little avail" (11). Further suggestion that all is not well is conveyed through flashbacks of Hata's relationship with his adopted daughter Sunny, a relationship categorized by its silences, the settings on their kitchen table like a "museum display" in a house in which the two "hardly acknowledged each other" (29-30). Hata recalls that Sunny never felt "at home" with him, "even after several years" (54), and Hata's partner, Mary Burns, describes Sunny as acting as if she were "serving her sentence," also noting that Hata treats Sunny "like a

grown woman,” telling him that he acts “almost guilty,” as if his daughter is someone he “hurt once, or betrayed” (60).

Certainly at least part of the point of creating a narrative taut with threat is to explore Hata’s issues of self-identity, race and class. However, like Keller, Lee uses flashbacks, and flashbacks from flashbacks, as well as repetition of images and symbols, to create a sense of the past invading the present, so that Hata’s narrative is “continuously undermined by intrusive flashbacks from the war and from his recent past with his adopted daughter, Sunny” (Motuz 412). Through these flashbacks, we learn that Doc Hata is an ethnic Korean who was adopted by a Japanese family, and who, in turn, as a bachelor, has adopted a Korean orphan—an unusual situation that requires him to bribe an adoption agent (C. Lee 72-73). It isn’t until page seventy-five, however, that we are given our first explicit piece of information about Hata’s hidden past. Here the aging Hata, who is hospitalized after accidentally setting a rug on fire, remembers the room number of an acquaintance he plans to visit in the hospital as 606, which he finds easy to recall “because it was also the name of an anti-bacterial treatment” he used during the war (75). It is a number, he tells us, that might “appear with inexplicable frequency in one’s life” (75). However, 606 also denoted the injected treatment of terramycin for venereal disease forced on Korean “Comfort Women” by Japanese medical officers, a treatment that reportedly left the women sick for days, and which has been at least partly blamed for cases of sterility (Hicks 65). This dark turn in the narrative only continues to disturb as Hata’s flashbacks become more

intrusive, “a narrative structure” writes Motuz, “that mirrors the symptoms of the traumatized psyche and challenges readers to bear witness” (412).

As we saw in Keller’s novel, Lee disrupts his own narrative timeline in order to mimic the chaos of the traumatized mind, and we see present events call forth memories, as when Hata visits the boy in room 606, who is awaiting a heart transplant, only to find himself thinking back on a wartime experience of a Japanese doctor cutting open a still-living convict’s chest to show his understudies how a heart could be stopped and restarted through manual massage (C. Lee 76-77). While this is a troubling connection, we soon see memories invoke memories, further interrupting an already interrupted narrative and creating a sense of the past resurfacing through layers of memory. Hata recalls trying to find Sunny as a teenager at a house party, a memory that itself is interrupted when “an image of another time suddenly appear[s]” to him, taking him back to his first encounter with Korean “Comfort Women” in Singapore, one of whom throws herself from a window rather than face systematic rape (108). Later, we see the opposite invasion of memory, when a swim at home leads to memories of swimming in the tropics of Singapore and Rangoon, which are in turn interrupted by a memory of a conversation with Sunny, in which Hata warns his daughter that it is dangerous for a woman to stray from “the security of their families” lest they “be forced to sell every part of themselves, in mind and flesh and spirit” (144), confessing that he “witnessed many things during the war” (145). This remembered conflict with Sunny then leads back to memories of the war, both

through image and symbol, embodied by a black cloth Sunny finds stored in a box in his closet, and through Hata's consciousness of his own mental shift when Sunny says she'd kill herself before allowing herself to be raped, provoking "a long-stored memory of another young woman who once spoke nearly the same words" (150). This other young woman turns out to be Kkutaeh (an unusual name for a Korean), who is called only K, a Korean victim of the "comfort station" system brought to the Japanese outpost in Burma where Hata served during the war, one of five teenagers or women meant to sexually service the "nearly two-hundred men in the encampment" (165). Hata, a medical officer, was "responsible for maintaining the readiness of the girls," treating "terribly swollen and bruised" privates, bleeding and venereal disease (183). Further memories of K invade Hata's mental chronologies with only the slightest provocation, such as when he sees a small girl place a black cloth over her head and thinks first of "the swath Sunny once found" in his closet, and then immediately of K and "those last months of the war" (222). Through these flashbacks, we learn that Hata formed a bond with K, with whom he speaks Korean, and though he promises to "take care of" and "protect" her (258), he ultimately not only rapes her—the language here is vague, but K does not "move or speak," and is a prisoner, so true consent is out of the question (260)—but also refuses to help her take her own life despite her pleas, instead standing aside as she is gang raped to death by "thirty" soldiers, who he witnesses returning from the murder "half dressed" and "flecked with blood," leaving behind only K's "remains" (304-05).

Despite the seeming eruption of such intense memories and the way they overlap, Hata insists throughout his narrative that he has put the past behind him, advice he shares with Mrs. Hickey, whose son needs a new heart. “After the difficulties,” he says, “you can begin again, but you must put behind you what has occurred” (C. Lee 126). And though his subject varies, Hata’s insistence on repressing the past is consistent when he tells longtime friend Renny that he has learned to “make whatever peace and solace” he can on his own (135). Hata seems oblivious to the precariousness of his own mental and emotional state, even when describing existence as being like “pulling [himself] blindly through a mysterious resistance whose properties are slowly revealing themselves beneath [him], in flame-like roils and tendrils, the black fires of the past” (152). And this is the paradox that Hata cannot free himself from, at once a “disinterested spectator” of his own past, which, by way of erupting and interrupting his life, becomes his present. “You, Lieutenant [Hata],” accuses Captain Ono, “too much depend on generous fate and gesture. There is no internal possession, no embodiment” (266).

Yet Hata’s trauma does find a body in Sunny, and his daughter in many ways mirrors K, becoming both a haunting and haunted herself. Hata’s relationship with Sunny, an adopted “girl from the city of Pusan” (C. Lee 74), who Hata wishes could “stay forever pristine, unsoiled” (114), just as he wished to “perserve” K (251), has become a gesture for a “penance” he knows will “likely never come” (309). During the war, as mentioned, Hata was responsible

for examining K and the other “Comfort Women” (181), and in one of the final flashbacks of the novel he arranges a late-term abortion for Sunny—to prevent “further trauma,” he tells the doctor—going so far as to stand-in as an assistant to the surgeon during the procedure, despite the obvious illegality and questionable ethics of such an act (343-44). After finally revealing what Hata calls these “traumas” that have “occurred and are occurring” (333), he confesses that he can “hardly bear to be a witness anymore” (332), a deeply ironic and sincere statement, as he is both a victim of, and complicit in, said traumas. It is also a deeply tragic revelation, as “Hata’s desire to protect these women stems from his own needs, whether sexual or psychological, and results in their desire to escape his presence, whatever the cost” (Motuz 417).

Hata’s house also acts as a haunted structure symbolic of his relationships with K and Sunny, a “darkened museum of a one-man civilization, whose latent history... would be left always unspoken, unsung” (C. Lee 289). And though the house remains “in showcase, immaculate, pristine” condition (119), just as he desired to keep both K and Sunny, it becomes a stage for Hata’s traumatic haunting. “K has finally come back” for him, he tells us, the woman walking “up and down the hallway in her bare feet,” and sitting on the end of his bed in the middle of the night (286). “I was almost sure she was a spectral body or a ghost,” he says, but though he hoped he was just being “duly haunted,” he “knew that she was absolute, unquestionably real, a once-personhood come wholly into being” (286). Though Hata insists this is not a traditional *haunting*, he is

obviously *haunted* nonetheless, by his traumatic past and, here, by the embodiment of K, who is present in place and time in a way he feels he is not, a man who claims to understand “being in a place, and not being there” (289-90), who feels he has “not really been living anywhere or anytime, not for the future and not in the past and not at all of-the-moment” (320).

While the trauma inflicted on K acts as a focal point for the novel, and while “recurring imagery and a series of intrusive fragmented flashbacks... collapse chronology and temporality” (Motuz 414), it is the embodiment of K that acts as a pivotal event in our understanding of Hata’s role as both oppressor and victim. Lee presents Hata as a spectre himself, who is so lost in the complexities of his own trauma that even a ghost appears more solid than he does to himself, and this in turn “complicates binaries of the colonizer and the colonized” (Motuz 421), and leaves us pondering just who is haunted here. Has Sunny inherited her father’s haunting? Or is she haunted by her father’s victims, all the while living out her own traumas inflicted by a man acting out his past without intention, just as we saw in Keller’s portrayal of Akiko and Beccah? And is Hata haunted by his own struggle with racial and social identities, by the horrors he witnessed, by his own actions, or all of these at once? It seems significant here that “the haunting effect is produced not so much by the original trauma as by the fact of its being kept hidden,” as it “is precisely within the gap in conscious knowledge about one’s family history that secrets turn into phantoms” (Cho, intro).

We see connections between the way Hata subconsciously attempts suicide and his past experiences, such as him setting his own living room on fire and K's story of her family's home burning down (C. Lee 34, 257). But K's embodiment in Hata's home in Michigan suggests that not only time and psyche have ruptured, but also the lines separating the living and the dead. If in contemporary fiction "the ghost story is reconfigured to explore the nature of trauma as psychological possession" (Whitehead 7), Lee also shows how this might be a two-way street in which the signs of psychological trauma are in turn reconfigured as the embodiment of haunting. While Hata insists that the spectre of K is not a spectre, he also tells us he believes "the physical body can take on an almost mystical presence, and whether living or not," it can act as a "marker of the world" (C. Lee 247). So the spectral becomes physical and the physical becomes spectral in a blurring of trauma and haunting—a complexity not unlike a Korean shamanic Ophelia calling forth the ghost of Hamlet's father, then perishing herself to haunt the one who both loved her and caused her death (H. Lee 107). Who is the medium here? Who is the ghost?

"The ghost," writes Cho, "is an assemblage, and at the same time it calls into existence new listening and speaking bodies that the ghost requires as witnesses to its own exorcism" (ch. 1). In partially recreating "the affective strength of trauma" (Motuz 419) and complicating this with issues of haunting, Lee's slow reveal of Hata's past becomes at once engaging and horrific, and we

lean closer to see what is being shielded by the shaman on stage, scared to bear witness and scared not to.

CONCLUSION

I approach a young couple on the street near the Japanese embassy in Seoul, point to the purple and yellow balloons, the crowd of people and TV cameras.

“Is this the Wednesday protest?” I ask, more to make conversation than for confirmation.

“No, not *protest*,” says the man.

I tilt my head. “Are you sure?”

Both he and his partner nod vigorously.

“Different,” she says.

“Demonstration?” I try.

“Yes!” she exclaims. “Do you know?”

“You tell me.”

“Very difficult,” says the man. “Do you know Japanese crimes of sexual slavery?”

I nod, ask where to find the statue.

The woman smiles, points to the gathered crowd lining the sidewalk and spilling into the road, the police in a loose ring around the perimeter, yellow tape and orange pylons already ignored, trampled on. “In the middle,” she says.

Music blares from a sound system, and I find the life-sized bronze girl sitting next to an empty chair, fists clenched in her lap, surrounded by scores of

high-school students, nuns, children, men and women of all ages, all of them seated on the asphalt around the statue, some holding megaphones and signs. There is anger here, certainly, if mostly beneath the surface, but the couple were right: it is a *demonstration*—of support, of communal memory, of hope for justice. All around me children laugh and sing and wave to the surviving victims present.

A university student asks if she can interview me for a class project and we speak for a few minutes before I ask if she's been to a demonstration before.

“Yes. Many times.” She tells me others come with tour groups, classes, groups of friends, that many come often.

“And will you come again?”

“Of course.”

A sign reads *1241*, the number of consecutive Wednesdays the demonstration has been staged. They are *here*, I think, even as the chair next to the statue remains empty.

As I came to the end of this project, I found myself wrapped in anxiety over the dangers of making oneself into a “surrogate victim,” or of appropriating a specific historical trauma into a generalized experience of suffering (Whitehead 14). Perhaps my empathy had led to an “unwitting over-identification” with the past as both a reader and writer of trauma narrative (15). Above all else, I wondered how my contribution to the “Comfort Women” discourse could possibly *matter*, or

ever feel like enough. Now, I wonder if such a view is ultimately paternalistic, if it is rooted in the question of what I “can do for the survivors, rather than what they have done, and what they can teach us” (Pilzer 11).

Ninety percent of Korean “Comfort Women” died before they could return to Korea, falling prey to “disease, miscarriage, drug use, torture, bombing or other attacks in the battlefield, and hardships encountered during travel back to the[ir] homeland” (Yang 102). The overwhelming majority of survivors have never come forward publicly, and seem destined to remain silent (Soh 93). What does this silence teach us? What might it suggest about the vast diversity of experience both represented and unrepresented?

This essay is a small exploration of narrative representations of the traumatic experiences of Korean “Comfort Women,” of history and silence, of shamanic performance as a seemingly eruptive and counter-hegemonic force enacting a communal memory, and of two authors’ novels that exemplify the unsettling power of writing at the intersection of trauma and haunting. I hope my work will expand the existing conversation surrounding Korean “Comfort Women” by offering a new way of reading literature on the subject, a criticism that focusses on the eruptive potential of subjugated histories and testimonies, rather than solely on the limits of literary representation.

Because I have been simultaneously writing my own novel, I continue to ask in what ways it might be possible to “narrate the unnarratable” (Whitehead 4), to “permit history to arise where immediate understanding may not” (Caruth 11),

all the while without “betray[ing] the past” (27). After all, “storytelling itself is an event, the result of a conversation” (Yang 87), not necessarily the result of a series of conclusions, and these are only a few questions among a possible myriad. As such, my novel is intended to extend the body of existing fiction about Korean “Comfort Woman” in English, as well as to further represent the less-reported complexity and diversity of the events and historical actors involved. Unlike existing novels on the subject, which feature no substantial historical context prior to the 1930s, I have attempted to contribute new knowledge to the field by situating the traumatic experiences of Korean “Comfort Women” both historically and geographically, linking these and the Korean War to Korea’s sixteenth and seventeenth-century wars with Japan and contact with Dutch East India Company shipwrecks. I hope this longer history, which includes a varied cast of characters, who at times subscribe to recognizable politics and at times undermine these tropes, creates an aesthetic experience that shows how such events echo through time. And I have chosen to process my own witnessing in the form of a novel in the hopes that my audience, some of whom will also be outsiders, might be brought to bear witness as well.

My research and personal experiences leave me hopeful that further questions and more “varied callings and responses” will continue to emerge from a variety of actors (D. Kim 746). Some of these productions may be uncomfortable and irreverent, some may arrive in utterly unexpected forms with as of yet unspoken content or unexpressed views, each new response attempting

to “render an impossible representation possible” (Yang 82), each adding something unique and valuable to the “Comfort Woman” discourse, and each satiating, and perhaps creating, *honbul*, those flickering ghost fires that both mesmerize and disturb.

I watch the *halmeoni* speak through her translator to a group of Japanese middle-school girls. She tells them of the horrors she experienced, shows them her scars, patiently answers their questions. My visit to the House of Sharing east of Seoul has been uncomfortable—because of the July heat and humidity, because of the museum and its contents, but also because I’m not sure how I feel about meeting the resident survivors. Should I tell them what I’m working on, ask for an interview, a photo? Should I have even come?

As the schoolgirls leave, the *halmeoni* scans the room and catches my eye. She smiles. I bow and she pats the cushion on the chair next to her. My introduction catches clumsily on my lips and I feel my face flush. I manage to mumble thanks—for sharing her story, for allowing me to listen.

She laughs and takes my hand, holds it tight, squeezes my fingers as she nods slowly and smiles. And we sit like this for a time, heartbeat after heartbeat, in silence.

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