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QUEER KOREAN DIASPORA: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF GEOPOLITICS

By

HARUKI EDA

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Written under the direction of

Zakia Salime

And approved by

DocuSigned by:
Zakia Salime
F45C7C7D2E544BB...

DocuSigned by:
Haruki EDA
37C1FF2C5DF1413...

DocuSigned by:
Arlene Stein
9A7739990D41484...

DocuSigned by:
Amy Szymanski
D55622FEA5CF44C...

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Queer Korean Diaspora: An Ethnography of Geopolitics

By HARUKI EDA

Dissertation Director:

Zakia Salime

Limited empirical research exists on social movements among overseas Koreans, whose divergent experiences of migration and identity complicate the dynamics of ethnic solidarity. Besides the prolonged Cold War ideological division, Korean communities in Japan and the United States face alienation rooted in racial subordination and heteropatriarchal norms. In major U.S. cities, diverse Korean subjects gravitate towards grassroots organizing, including transnational adoptees, Zainichi Koreans (Koreans in/from Japan), and queer-identified individuals. Existing sociological theory does not adequately explain the agency of such community organizers who negotiate differences and inequalities while seeking ethnic solidarity. I use the concept of queer diaspora to examine how geopolitical structures and discourses shape the embodied dimension of Korean ethnic community formation. I conduct ethnography of transnational Korean community organizing based on personal involvement since 2008 and five years

of observation from 2015 until 2020 in New York and San Francisco, including 25 in-depth interviews and archival research with five U.S.-based organizations. My analysis shows how the organizers cultivate queer diasporic kinship by centering their alternative sense of place, time, and belonging. Their embodied practices animate ethnic community solidarity through what I call *geopolitical healing*, a process of articulating the sacredness of life and land. As a counter-hegemonic mode of ethnic mobilization, the queer Korean diaspora challenges liberal interpretations of sovereignty and nationhood that underscore the dominant discourse of Korean unification. Engaging with the literature on nationalism, social movements, and queer migration, my research draws attention to the spiritual realm of social life that manifest in a cultural ecology of spaces, bodies, and meanings.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Dr. Jason B. Phillips. Thank you for guiding us always.

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Introduction

Queering *Tongil*

Neither Wartime Nor Peacetime

In 2017, the geopolitical tension surrounding North Korea reached a historic high since the Korean War armistice agreement in 1953. The socialist state carried out 15 missile tests between February and September and its sixth nuclear test in September, successfully demonstrating its theoretical capacity to attack the mainland United States with a miniaturized nuclear weapon. Two of these missiles in August and September flew over northern Japan, prompting the Japanese government to activate the emergency population warning system. Adding to intense media coverage, this "J-Alert" system broadcasted the immediacy of nuclear war into the palms of ordinary people in Japan. On August 8, President Donald Trump spoke while in New Jersey that North Korea "will be met with fire, fury, and frankly, power, the likes of which the world has never seen before" if they continued to escalate the situation (quoted in Wagner and Johnson 2017).

In his first speech at the United Nations General Assembly the following month, Trump showed no diplomatic nuances. "No one has shown more contempt for other nations and for the well-being of their own people than the deprived

regime in North Korea. It is responsible for the starvation deaths of millions of North Koreans. And for the imprisonment, torture, killing, and oppression of countless more” (quoted in Swanson 2017). This rhetoric of criminalization was, of course, nothing new since Bush Jr.’s “Axis of Evil” speech. Trump then made a direct military threat and insulted Kim Jong Un in front of the other world leaders. “The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea. Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime. The United States is ready, willing, and able, but hopefully this will not be necessary. That's what the United Nations is all about. That's what the United Nations is for. Let's see how they do” (quoted in Swanson 2017).

In two days, Kim offered a rebuttal in a speech aired through the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

A frightened dog barks louder. I'd like to advise Trump to exercise prudence in selecting words and to be considerate of whom he speaks to when making a speech in front of the world. The mentally deranged behavior of the U.S. president openly expressing on the UN arena the unethical will to "totally destroy" a sovereign state, beyond the boundary of threats of regime change or overturn of social system, makes even those with normal thinking faculty think about discretion and composure. . . After taking office Trump has rendered the world restless through threats and blackmail against all countries in the world. He is unfit to hold the prerogative of supreme command of a country, and he is surely a rogue and a gangster fond of playing with fire, rather than a politician. . . Now that Trump has denied the existence of and insulted me and my country in front of the eyes of the world and made the most ferocious declaration of a war in history that he would destroy [North Korea], we will consider with seriousness exercising of a corresponding, highest level of hardline countermeasure in history. . . I am now thinking hard about what response he could have expected when he allowed such eccentric words to trip off his tongue. Whatever Trump might have expected, he will face results beyond his expectation. I will surely and

definitely tame the mentally deranged US dotard with fire. (Quoted in Ward 2017)

Rather than contextualizing the political significance of the U.S. president's speech at the U.N. General Assembly, major media outlets quickly reported the most strongly worded parts of Kim's speech, such as "a rogue and a gangster fond of playing with fire," "highest level of hardline countermeasure," and "the mentally deranged US dotard."

In his New Year's speech for 2018, Kim affirmed that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) now had a nuclear weapon as a "powerful and reliable war deterrent." The message clearly addressed the U.S. "In no way would the United States dare to ignite a war against me and our country. The whole of its mainland is within the range of our nuclear strike, and the nuclear button is on my office desk all the time; the United States needs to be clearly aware that this is not merely a threat but a reality" (Kim 2018). Trump tweeted in response, "I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!" (quoted in Neuman 2018). Ten days later, on a Sunday morning in Hawai'i, a ballistic missile alert was issued over television, radio, and cellphones, urging people to seek immediate shelter. "THIS IS NOT A DRILL," the alert said, driving the archipelago into chaos with disruptions in telephone and wireless data services until the second alert 38 minutes later stated that the first was a false alarm. "How do you prevent a nuclear war?" Korean American activists struggled to answer.

While asserting his defiance against the most powerful nation in human history in his speech, Kim (2018) also spoke of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games as “a good occasion for demonstrating our nation’s prestige.” He called on the Republic of Korea to ease the military tension by working together. “As long as this unstable situation, which is neither wartime nor peacetime, persists, the north and the south cannot ensure the success of the scheduled events, nor can they sit face to face to have a sincere discussion over the issue of improving bilateral relations, nor will they advance straight ahead towards the goal of national reunification.” Indeed, the Olympics in February served as a diplomatic catalyst, through which high-ranking North Korean officials, including Kim Jong Un’s sister Kim Yo Jong, met with South Korean President Moon Jae In and invited him to visit Pyongyang. Moon assumed office in May 2017 after a democratic anti-corruption mobilization ousted the previous president Park Geun Hye, a daughter of the infamous military dictator Park Chung Hee. Backed by the progressive political climate, Moon, a human rights lawyer and the oldest son of a North Korean refugee couple, was in good standing to hold the third inter-Korean summit after an 11-year blank.

The meeting between Kim Jong Un and Moon Jae In on April 27 was widely celebrated in the Korean peninsula and the overseas Korean communities. The resultant Panmunjom Declaration affirmed the agreement between the DPRK and ROK to promote common prosperity, unification, and peace, including the complete denuclearization of the Peninsula. In practice, this meeting was a necessary step before the Kim-Trump summit in June; Korean peace has never

been up to the Korean people alone. The historic meeting between the U.S. President and DPRK Chairman finally took place in Singapore on June 12, after Trump's short-lived cancellation.

The summit drew mixed evaluations on Capitol Hill. While some Republicans expressed doubts about the tangible outcome towards the goal of "complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization," Democratic leaders openly criticized Trump for negotiating with an authoritarian dictator. In a news interview, Sen. Cory Booker stated,

I'm worried that he's given up a lot now. He's literally almost validated in [an interview], praising a dictator who's brutally assassinating people, murdering members of his family, suppressing, oppressing people in poverty, imprisoning political prisoners, who there's a consensus of the international community, that this is a rogue regime. . . Well, maybe he [Kim] was a great negotiator because he got us to commit, that we're gonna stop [military] exercises. . . which was a surprise for our critical allies in the region, at a time that China is expanding its influence in that region. . . This is troubling. (CBS News video clip June 13, 2018)

Sen. Elizabeth Warren echoed his sentiment, "Let us be clear, we know what the president gave up for the United States, we know that he blindsided our allies, but there's no evidence that North Korea's given up anything. They make promises to make more promises. And they have a long history of breaking their promises" (NBC News video clip June 13, 2018). Oblivious to the fact that it was the Clinton administration that reneged on its promise after the 1994 Agreed Framework, the liberal politicians sought to portray Trump as guilty by association, and by extension, to establish themselves as the rational voice. During eight years of the Obama administration's "strategic patience" approach to North Korea, U.S. foreign policy prioritized containing China with the "Pivot to

Asia” and monitoring the Middle East through the Arab Spring. Predictably, U.S. liberals came to accept that pressuring the socialist Korea through economic sanctions and annual war games was the best option until the regime would implode someday, somehow.

In the U.S., Korean activists were more cautious than optimistic about this diplomatic process, which was much preferable to direct hostility but insufficiently supported by the U.S. public. To radical Koreans, liberal politicians' criticism of the summit altogether suggested that U.S. geopolitical interests in Korea were fundamentally misaligned with the Korean people's century-old struggle for demilitarized peace, democratic unification, and collective self-determination. It does not matter who was in the White House, when the majority of the U.S. left are not exposed to even a basic understanding of North Korea. Eight months after the Singapore talks, the Hanoi summit in February 2019 failed miserably. The negotiation broke down on the matter of lifting the economic sanctions against the DPRK. After two years of such an intense drama, everything seemed back to square one.

In the meantime, experts estimate that at least 4,000 North Koreans, mostly children and pregnant women, died in 2018 due to funding shortfalls and delays in aid delivery—preventable deaths attributable to the direct humanitarian impact of U.S. and U.N. sanctions (Park et al. 2019). In this “neither wartime nor peacetime,” civilian lives are lost to the bureaucratic maneuvers of Executive Orders and Security Council Resolutions. Contrary to the claim that sanctions do

not intend to interfere with humanitarian activities, they hinder agricultural production by restricting access to fuel, machinery, and equipment parts in a country where “10.1 million people suffer from food insecurity and are in need of urgent food assistance;” “10.4 million people are in urgent need for nutritional assistance;” “8.4 million people lack access to safely-managed drinking water services;” and “more than 8.7 million people have limited access to quality health services” according to the U.N. 2020 Needs and Priorities report for the DPRK (U.N. Resident Coordinator 2020: 5). Far from being extraordinary or spectacular, geopolitics shape the minutiae of everyday survival in the Korean Peninsula.

A People on the Brink

I characterize Koreans as a postcolonial people on the brink of another nuclear war, caught in between multicultural empires in the era of the “Second Cold War.” They move through the phenomenological timespace of the brink, residing across confluent historical discourses of racialization and citizenship, particularly in Japan and the U.S. but also in the former Soviet Union and Latin America. The diaspora is deeply haunted by the collective trauma of militarized sex, transnational adoption, family separation, and patriarchal tradition – which cannot be dissolved by assimilating into the liquid modernity as a model minority. Transiting in and out of suburban churches, transnational Koreatowns, and university campuses, their bodies navigate the shifting density of belonging and non-belonging like atmospheric pressure. Beyond borders and languages, the

national division presents diasporic Koreans with the questions of territorial sovereignty, public memory, and ethnic solidarity.

What kind of power do overseas Koreans have in addressing such a global-scale problem? In popular and policy discourses, ordinary Koreans only figure as victims of repression, model minority immigrants, or potential communist agents. In this view, the authority to resolve the Korean conflict is reserved for the state, and the chief mechanism for intervention is economic and military. More nuanced accounts draw attention to the overseas and migrant Koreans to show how the two Korean states as well as transnational capital appropriate their symbolic and economic values to consolidate power (Choo 2016; Kim 2010; Kim 2016; Park 2019; Park 2015). In fact, overseas Koreans have played vital yet contradictory roles in addressing the political turmoil in the Peninsula since the colonial period through authoritarian dictatorship and nuclear development (Kim 2011; Lie 2001). In more subtle ways that are less systematically studied, overseas Koreans are forging a diasporic imaginary through their divergent experiences as postcolonial exiles, economic migrants, and transnational adoptees, all connected through the history of colonization and war (Yuh 2005). More and more Korean community organizers, specifically queer and nonbinary folks, are tackling the issue of ethnic identity as the key to unlocking the power of nationhood.

Such a modality of ethnic belonging compels a rethinking of nationalism beyond the structuralist and discursive paradigms of power. Crudely speaking, social

scientists' views on nationalism and ethnicity fall on a spectrum between two opposing emphases on social structure and cultural discourse. The structural viewpoint, in line with Marxist and Weberian thinking, prioritizes relations of production as well as the bureaucratic state as the primary mechanisms of dominance, under which cultural differences are subsumed. In contrast, the discursive viewpoint following Gramsci and Foucault contends that economic and military subordination is contingent on the cultural context because language prefigures cognition and conduct in everyday moments. The most sophisticated scholarship on nationalism integrates both structural and cultural factors to varying degrees (e.g. Anderson 1983; Calhoun 1997; Gellner 2008).

The issue with this structure-discourse spectrum, however, is that it downplays human agency in generating, sustaining, and reinventing ethnicity as an embodied process. Discursive research illustrates how patriarchal, binary, and ableist bodily norms undergird hegemonic nationalism, often discussed with the concept of biopolitics. This approach also sheds light on cultural practices that articulate marginalized social locations. Such nuances of geopolitical subjectivities do not figure centrally in the structural paradigm. Yet analyzing discourse also has its limitations; it cannot fully demonstrate how subaltern subjectivities, like queer diasporas, might shape the material contours of geopolitics through organized movements and communities.

My ethnography addresses these shortcomings of the structural and discursive paradigms by investigating the embodied dimension of power and agency in

Korean diasporic mobilizations. Drawing theoretical and methodological insights from queer of color theory, transnational feminism, and Indigenous studies, I explore how ethnic belonging emerges through embodied encounters among queer diasporic Koreans as they engage in *tongil*, or unification struggles. How do diasporic Koreans make sense of their lived experiences of Koreanness through each other? In what ways does their community engagement reinvent and reimagine nationhood? Their relationship to the divided ancestral homeland is ambivalent, to say the least. This research project grew out of this feeling of ambivalence that I experienced after visiting North Korea with other diasporic Koreans from the U.S. as part of a grassroots peace delegation.

“But What about Nationalism?”

I first became involved in the grassroots network of diasporic Korean community organizers while attending college in the San Francisco Bay Area. As an undergraduate student, I spent a lot of my time applying my classroom lessons in sociology and ethnic studies to political practice, starting with Asian American LGBTQ communities. I soon got connected to a group of Zainichi Korean women who were coming together to fundraise for a peace delegation to North Korea. Having historical roots in Japan as postcolonial exiles and refugees, Zainichi Koreans – literally, Koreans “residing in Japan” – do not fit neatly into the Korean American or Japanese American communities. The women called themselves Eclipse Rising, signifying the power of Zainichi Koreans to disrupt the dominance of the rising sun, the symbol of the Japanese empire. In December

2008, they held a report-back event at the Oakland Asian Cultural Center, showing photos of ordinary North Korean citizens they met and contextualizing their anti-capitalist struggle for national liberation. Their narrative challenged the dominant worldview on Korea that I had internalized while growing up in Japan. It was the first time I met another Zainichi person outside my family, let alone such a highly politicized group with whom I felt comfortable as a queer person. Eclipse Rising is the first Zainichi Korean community organization in the United States.

A year and a half later, I participated in the same Korean American grassroots peace delegation to North Korea. Our group consisted of students, writers, educators, researchers, and community organizers coming from Northern California, Minnesota, and New York/New Jersey. To fulfill our commitment, we led fundraising efforts and conducted eight intensive study sessions in our respective regions before meeting up in Beijing for the final preparation. Few of us were fluent in Korean, but we practiced introducing ourselves in Korean and singing North Korean songs. At the Pyongyang Sunan International Airport, the Overseas Korean Committee of the DPRK government welcomed us with an official guide and an accomplished interpreter, both women, along with a quiet bus driver and a jovial Youth League representative, both men. They accompanied our visits to hospitals, schools, factories, farms, and museums, as well as picnics and an excursion to the DMZ (demilitarized zone). We ate, drank, sang, played, and danced together while sharing our lived experiences, not to convince each other but to understand our divergent perspectives. Seven people

in twelve days could only accomplish so much, but I will never forget walking across the dimly lit Kim Il Sung Square along the Taedong River one warm evening with Ms. Lee, our diligent tour guide in her sixties, whom we affectionately called *omoni* (mother). She held my hand and said that we would always be together despite the division and distance.

This delegation program, the Korea Education and Exposure Program (KEEP), was created in 1994 by Korean activist women and men based in Los Angeles, New York, and Seoul to build solidarity with and learn from the struggles for peace, social justice, and unification taking place in Korea. The first delegation to South Korea, or the Republic of Korea, was in 1995; the first to North Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, happened in 2001. As a key site of political education for progressive Koreans in the U.S., this program attracts second- and later-generation Korean immigrants as well as transnational Korean adoptees who seek to make sense of their ethnic, national, and racial identities by learning about the political struggles of their ancestral homeland. Past participants are called alumni, and they help sustain the entirely volunteer-run program. Over the years, KEEP participants have diversified to include more mixed-race people, non-U.S. citizens, and queer-identified individuals, reflecting the 21st-century demographic profile of people with Korean ancestry in the United States. My 2011 delegation consisted of two coordinators and five participants, among whom I was the only man, Zainichi Korean, and Japanese citizen.

Back in Beijing, we found an air-conditioned and Wi-Fi-connected coffee shop to hold a final debriefing session and strategize for our next steps. I struggled to make sense of my delegate experience altogether, and I could not even verbalize precisely what I was struggling with. Participants on previous delegations have expressed such feelings of home and belonging, and I had been optimistic about such a moment of catharsis, a final resolution to my question about the Korean diaspora and homeland unification. My frustration stemmed from the missed opportunity to be seen as a queer person of the diaspora while visiting a part of the homeland that so fervently promoted the ideals of liberation and unification. Instead of arriving at an answer, our debrief session generated another question when one of us said, "But what about nationalism?"

We had just witnessed an actually existing socialist Korea, an entire society struggling for peaceful unification and self-determination of the Korean people. Their collective dreams and aspirations looked so much like ours, and they have been waging the revolutionary fight for seven decades. As overseas Koreans, we were indeed already part of their vision of a unified Korea, and they welcomed us not as guests but as comrades. Nevertheless, we felt ambivalent about identifying with a nation-state. Neither the Korean nation nor the Korean state(s) has fully centered our transgressive life experiences. It is one thing to foster a sense of pride in our ancestral land and culture in the face of white supremacy and neoliberal capital, whereas it seems to be another to get ourselves behind the nation-state. What about nationalism, indeed? Is it possible to mobilize ethnic solidarity for territorial sovereignty without perpetrating xenophobia? How

might we re-imagine and practice ethnicity to enable not only empowerment but also differences, accountability, and even healing? What would that look like?

In this study, I demonstrate how this is possible. Through ethnography and archival research with five Korean community organizations in the U.S., I show how overseas Korean organizers have cultivated what I call *queer diasporic kinship*. They practice this alternative mode of ethnic community mobilization to center their divergent experiences as Korean Americans, transnational Korean adoptees, and Zainichi Koreans. Such a political approach to Koreanness, I argue, constitutes an emergent social formation that challenges the existing scholarship on ethnicity, nationalism, and diaspora. These community organizers' bodies are at once sites and agents of geopolitics through which the alternative maps of *tongil* become possible.

Embodied Geopolitics

Korean nationalism emerged as an anti-colonial discourse, subsequently bifurcating through the Cold War division. Although its contours have shifted over time, the dominant form of Korean nationalism, on both sides of the division, has centered on a patrilineal blood-based notion of ethnic identity (Shin 2006). On the one hand, such a heteropatriarchal, essentialist definition of Koreanness has alienated overseas and mixed-ethnic Koreans, particularly women and gender non-conforming individuals (Henry 2019; Kim-Wachutka 2018; Kim and Choi 1998; Kim and Rhee 2018; Ryang 2008). On the other hand,

national unification no longer seems relevant when market capitalism has already integrated the Korean Peninsula (Park 2015). Nevertheless, KEEP participants and other community organizers in my ethnography devote their time and labor to the political project of *tongil*. This is because they perceive the Korean war and division as a matter of sovereignty struggle; Koreans in Japan and the U.S. experience different kinds of racism stemming from the intertwined geopolitical contexts of Japanese colonialism and U.S. hegemony across the Asia-Pacific (Eda 2018). Thus, *tongil* is fundamentally a process of decolonization to advance economic, racial, and gender justice. The purpose of this research is not to corroborate this perspective (e.g. Cumings 2010; Hart-Landsberg 1998; Liem 2003) but to examine how these organizers negotiate their ambivalent attachments to Koreanness in this transnational context of ethnic self-determination.

Researchers have debated the role of diasporas in mitigating and intensifying territorial conflicts (Koinova 2012, 2018; Shain 2002, 2007; Smith and Stares 2007). Meanwhile, despite the volume of research on women's role in peacebuilding, queer or non-normative subjects are missing in this literature. Diasporic Koreans' transnational community organizing provides an empirical case in which diaspora and queer politics converge to address the issue of territoriality. Interestingly, none of the five organizations I feature in this study identifies as queer or even feminist, even though their memberships are predominantly women and queer-identified Koreans who bring in feminist and queer politics. In other words, they are first and foremost ethnic organizations,

not gender- or sexuality-based groups. This does not mean that the members suppress their gender and sexual identities; rather, they emphasize ethnic solidarity without overriding their differences. How do the Korean community organizers mobilize their lived experiences of power as diasporic subjects – transnational adoptees, economic migrants, postcolonial exiles, quasi-refugees, *and* queer bodies, whose desires are rendered unimaginable? How do their embodied differences shape the modality of their ethnic community formation?

To explain the salience of ethnicity as a primary category of mobilization, a geopolitical analysis is necessary. In addition, integrating gender and sexuality requires methodological attention to embodiments. Hence, I analyze the dynamics of Korean diasporic mobilizations through the lens of *embodied geopolitics*. This materialist framework foregrounds bodies and spaces as the empirical moments in which power is enacted (Smith et al. 2016). Rejecting that geopolitics takes place primarily in institutions or in the realm of discourse, this approach presumes a non-linear relationality between the symbolic and the material. Signs, like “Koreanness” or “New Jersey,” become embodied to shape one’s sense of self and place. At the same time, humans produce signs and spaces through embodied action, including the sonic vibrations of speech acts. In this socio-spatial process, humans can also re-orient their own bodily sensibilities through intentional practices. This is how an imaginary becomes socially real. By extension, an alternative imagination can be practiced into existence.

By examining ethnic community mobilizations through this perspective, I draw attention to the role of embodied agency in conjuring ethnic belonging. Without accounting for the desires and intentions underlining a collective ethno-national identity, social scientists have tended to explain ethnic politics in terms of structure or discourse, emphasizing the social construction of group characteristics like language and religion (Brubaker 2009; Chandra 2012; Olzak 2006). Sociological research also focuses on quantitative analysis to delineate how co-ethnics would live and work in the same neighborhood, participate in the same organization, and advocate for the same cause (Kastoryano and Schader 2014). An extreme approach is to reduce ethnic formation to the cognitive processes of boundary-making, with little attention to historical contingencies (Wimmer 2012). Even when social scientists observe how an ethnic group may consist of different religions, social classes, and places of origin, few researchers examine the heterogeneity in the subjective experiences and meanings of ethnic belonging (exceptions include Kim 2019). Thus, ethnicity is ambiguously understood as not entirely essential but somehow less fluid than, say, gender and sexuality. But this crude perspective misses the empirical nuances of differences in ethnic community formation. In reality, shared ethnic ancestry is not a meaningful indicator of emotional bonds or political unity.

An underlying assumption here is that ethnicity prefigures and enables nationalism, which further engenders the nation-state. In this linear narrative, diaspora is a postmodern phenomenon of ethnic dispersal from the original homeland. My ethnography presents an opposing theory: it is the diaspora that

produces nationalism and even transforms ethnicity. This argument extends the previous insights that the nation is an imagined community (Anderson 1983), that nationalism engenders the nation (Gellner 2008), and that diaspora creates nationalism (Lie 2001). By attending to the embodied geopolitics through which ethnicity is felt and practiced, therefore empirically observable, my theoretical framework challenges the liberal notion of agency and subjectivity (Mahmood 2004). As a socio-spatial phenomenon, what it feels like to be Korean changes qualitatively in different contexts and moments, even within an individual body. Debating on the indeterminacy of multiple subjectivities may be theoretically valid but practically meaningless.

Diaspora, then, can transform ethnicity only when such a consciousness, subjectivity, or narrative materializes into a political community formation like in my ethnographic case (Calhoun 1999). The discourse of diaspora as a transnational and de-territorialized imaginary of ethnicity may help redefine Koreanness, but the mere existence of the Korean diaspora cannot address the material reality of the militarized homeland division. Besides, diasporic subjectivities take place in specific bodies and spaces, conjuring multiple, contradictory, and shifting intimacies between life and land. To the extent that Korean unification is a claim to territorial sovereignty, articulating alternative subjectivities will not automatically result in ethnic self-determination over the Korean Peninsula. Simply pointing to the myriad ways of being Korean, though necessary, is insufficient for mobilizing ethnicity to build a community against the perceived root cause of the Korean division: U.S. imperialism.

Embodied geopolitics further illuminates the vibrant presence of queer, trans, and non-binary Koreans that makes the community organizing spaces transformative. While researchers across disciplines have explored queer subjects' relationships to space, those accounts, particularly in the U.S., largely focused on specific cities, neighborhoods, and suburbs (Boyd 2005; Chauncy 1994; Ghaziani 2014; Hanhardt 2013; Tongson 2011). My research engages with this body of scholarship to examine queer Koreans' urban community organizing. Departing from the previous emphases, however, my inquiry encompasses a larger geographical scope of the Korean diaspora in the Trans-Pacific region, centering on the undervalued role of queer Koreans as agents of geopolitics. Their bodily sensibilities not only re-generate culture but also re-configure places, enacting ethnic kinship beyond the realm of identity categories. Through such a performative process, queer Koreans' mobilization of diasporic communities not only contests the dominant discourse of geopolitics but also challenges the liberal assumptions underlying dominant social theory. I will now briefly explain how *queer diasporic kinship* enables collective healing, pushing the debate on human agency beyond the secular-liberal paradigm of Western social science.

Queer Diasporic Kinship

The concept of queer diaspora has sparked an innovative way of thinking about alternative modes of belonging that disrupt the seemingly smooth connection between dominant nationalism and heteropatriarchy (Allen 2012; Cruz-Malave

and Manalansan 2002; Ellis 2015; Manalansan 2003; Patton and Sánchez-Eppler 2000). Gayatri Gopinath (2005) formulates that the potential of queer discourse to illuminate the desires, practices, and subjectivities that defy the normative gender binary can also challenge the dominant imaginary of diaspora and nation centered on biogenetic kinship. By “restoring the impure, inauthentic, nonreproductive potential of the notion of diaspora,” queer diaspora “productively exploits the analogous relation between nation and diaspora on the one hand, and between heterosexuality and queerness on the other: in other words, queerness is to heterosexuality as the diaspora is to the nation” (Gopinath 2005: 11). This framework helps illustrate how diasporic Koreans, whether or not they personally identify as queer, challenge the heteropatriarchal discourse of Korean unification through community building. As David Eng (2010: 14) puts it, queer diasporas “draw attention to other forms of family and kinship, to other accounts of subjects and subjectivities, and to other relations of affect and desire dissonant to traditional conceptions of diaspora, theories of the nation-state, and the practices and policies of neoliberal capitalism.” In animating the diasporic imaginary, queer sensibilities can lift the normative weight of blood (*jus sanguinis*) and soil (*jus soli*) that defines citizenship.

Despite the analytical purchase of queer diasporas, this concept has not gained as much attention in social science as in cultural studies. While queer diasporas allow for alternative readings of subjectivities at the discursive level, it remains unclear what they actually look like in embodied practice. Thus, I extend this discussion into empirical research by demonstrating how queer diaspora

materializes into social movements and community formations. I propose the notion of *queer diasporic kinship* to clarify how ethnicity, no matter how mythically conceived, produces a material, spatial, and spiritual mode of belonging. As survivors of colonial genocide, military dictatorship, and imperialist domination, diasporic Koreans inhabit an alternative sense of time, place, and self in this violent world. For queer diasporic subjects, whose experiences of their ethnicity often involve more alienation than connection, the affective kinship they (re)generate has political significance. With hardly any cultural and academic representations, queer diasporic Koreans only have each other to turn to. Such politicized kinship empowers them to cultivate a collective way of living that cannot yet exist within the bounds of capital and the state. Queer diasporic kinship orients them toward collective healing.

In both diaspora studies and queer theory, scholarship on trauma and collective memory has flourished. As Avery Gordon (1999) has urged, social scientists must account for silences, absences, and erasures that haunt social life as empirical phenomena. For instance, Grace Cho's (2008) autoethnographic work demonstrates how the ghostly figure of Korean war brides and military sex workers haunt the Korean diaspora. In fact, violence and trauma occupy the central position in the academic and popular discourses of the Korean diaspora, given the unresolved war and anti-Korean and anti-Asian racism (Kim 2012; Yuh 2005). These ruminations on collective grief can unravel the subjectivities of Korean ethnicity, but trauma cannot lead and sustain a social movement. Meanwhile, critical discussions on healing have pointed out its pitfalls, if not

impossibility, within the biopolitical regime of trauma and debility management. In short, normative logics of cure, care, and even community can reinscribe the capitalist-ableist notion of a full liberal subjectivity (Joseph 2002; Kim 2017; Million 2013; Puar 2017; Stevenson 2014). As disability justice theorists like Mia Mingus (2017) argue, structural change is essential to a society that is accessible to all. I want to talk about healing because the Korean organizers frequently invoke their time-bending desires to remember, imagine, and heal toward their communities. Their *tongil* struggles perform the healing work, not for individual self-actualization but collective self-determination starkly opposed to the existing social structure. This empirical nuance leads me to conceptualize the embodied geopolitics of healing as at once material and spiritual.

For an insight into how a sense of time, place, and self becomes collectivized to generate kinship, I return to classical sociology in analyzing how the sacred emerges as a felt phenomenon. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim ([1912] 1995) analyzed the essence of religious phenomena as beliefs and rites that demarcate the lifeworld into the sacred and profane domains. What defines the sacred is not crude superiority to the profane but its absoluteness, wherein crossing this boundary signifies “a true metamorphosis” due to “the fundamental duality of the two realms” (37). This duality, however, rests on a precarious distance that is produced and maintained by the very movement traveling across the demarcation.

The sacred thing is, par excellence, that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity. To be sure, this prohibition cannot go so far as to make all communication between the two worlds impossible, for if the profane could in no

way enter into relations with the sacred, the sacred would be of no use. This placing in relationship in itself is always a delicate operation that requires precautions and a more or less complex initiation. Yet such an operation is impossible if the profane does not lose its specific traits, and if it does not become sacred itself in some measure and to some degree. The two genera cannot, at the same time, both come close to one another and remain what they are. (38)

In this view, the absoluteness of the sacred is contingent and performative, rather than simply hierarchical. The dichotomy here, this “placing in relationship” indicates a dynamic construction of social life that is impermanent and ephemeral. Although Durkheim rejects animist and naturist perspectives by endorsing the mind-body dualism, he refutes the secular-scientist charge that the sacred is unreal.

Indeed, we can say that the faithful are not mistaken when they believe in the existence of a moral power to which they are subject and from which they receive what is best in themselves. That power exists, and it is society. When the Australian is carried above himself, feeling inside a life overflowing with an intensity that surprises him, he is not the dupe of an illusion. That exaltation is real and really is the product of forces outside of and superior to the individual. (226-227)

Thus, Durkheim explains the bodily sensations of ecstasy with the empirical concept of collective effervescence. His non-secular sociology of the absolute and the sacred provides a nuanced view of agency embodied by nonhuman figures (Barnwell 2017). The subjective experience of intensity is neither prior nor posterior to the objective reality of shared faith.

I draw further hints from feminist and queer theorists who challenge the binary conceptualization of the subject and the object in theorizing agency. Saba Mahmood (2004) demonstrates how agency does not only become legible through the liberal feminist lens of resistance against subordination. In her

analysis of ritual prayer in the women's piety movement in Cairo, Mahmood suggests that agency can take the form of consciously surrendering to ethics and virtues in fostering the level of self-discipline that makes consciousness redundant. Thus, the cultivation of a self is an outcome of mundane routine activities conducted with utmost attention and care. In a similar vein, José Muñoz (1999) proposes the notion of disidentification to illuminate the kind of embodied practice that cannot be reduced to the dichotomy of assimilation and opposition. For Muñoz, subject-formation is not only inescapable but also necessary for embodying an alternative space created out of it. To sing a song that one did not author, the singer "works on the song with fierce intensity and *the utmost precision*," which is "needed to rework that song, that story, that fiction, that mastering plot. . . [and] to make a self" (Muñoz 1999: 21, *emphases original*). Again, it takes enormous practice to animate a spirit, a vibe, or a space that we do not yet know exists. Nevertheless, Mel Chen indicates that animacies, or the qualities of agency, mobility, and sentience, reside within and beyond language at once. To the extent that matter and meaning exist as a relation rather than independent processes, social scientists must attend to human agency's dual residence in bodies and in between bodies. Finally, M. Jacqui Alexander (2005: 15) urges transnational feminists to recognize the need for spiritual labor and spiritual knowing as "pedagogies of the Sacred" in community transformation. With utmost care and precision, transgenerational memories can be invoked, performed, and felt to enact change.

These theoretical insights inform my methodological attention to embodied experiences and practices that constitute ethnic community organizing. Reading Durkheim in dialogue with these theorists, I seek to further implode the delicate relationship between the sacred and the profane. What if the ritual performance to sublimate the profane into the sacred, by traveling across the demarcation, were not only special but also mundane? In what ways do the Korean community organizers, as transgressive bodies of queer diaspora, engage in such traveling across boundaries on a daily basis? How can the social scientist cultivate the methodological sensibility to recognize the everyday workings of spirits that render a community sacred by default? Based on my ethnography of kinship and healing among queer diasporic Koreans, I argue that the opposite of the sacred is forgetting. Every encounter in their journeys of finding each other is a moment of remembering the sacred kinship, a new story to tell. I will now discuss my ethnographic process to show how this knowledge of queer diasporic kinship led me to this research.

Ethnographic Action

I grew into my queer and Korean political identities by developing relationships with my queer Korean American and queer Korean adoptee comrades in the Bay. They formed a leftist grassroots Korean organization, Hella Organized Bay Area Koreans (HOBAK) in 2011. When I went to the DPRK as a KEEP participant, I represented both Eclipse Rising and HOBAK. The name-giver of HOBAK, whom I call Eun Soo in this study, was inspired by the existence of radical anti-

imperialist Korean organizations in New York and Seattle. As a gender non-conforming Korean American, he was looking for other queer Koreans engaged in *tongil* struggles, but he did not find anyone in the LGBT nonprofit sector. When he got involved in the national gathering of progressive Korean activists held in Oakland in 2008, Eun Soo met such queer Koreans for the first time. Called Moim, this event is arguably the largest gathering of leftist Koreans in the United States, which to date has taken place six times since 2002 mostly on the West Coast. From New York was Nodutdol for Korean Community Development (Nodutdol), which has served as the organizer of KEEP delegations since its founding in 1999. Hailing from Seattle, Sahngnoksoo is a sister organization of Nodutdol that was formed in 2001 in the aftermath of the anti-World Trade Organization protests known as the Battle of Seattle in 1999. Initiated by English-speaking first- and second-generation Korean migrants who came of age in the democratic shift in South Korea, these organizations emerged in the context of the 1992 Los Angeles civil unrest, the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, aptly called the IMF Crisis in South Korea, and the growing anti-U.S. military movements in Asia-Pacific. Except for Nodutdol, none of these organizations has an office or a legal 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. Some specific programs are funded by government and foundation grants, like Nodutdol's oral history project and Eclipse Rising's Japan Multicultural Relief Fund, but the individual members do not make a living through these organizations. In the largely conservative political landscape of Korean America, students, artists, teachers, librarians, paralegals, therapists, retail workers, nonprofit workers, restaurant workers, and

filmmakers constitute the Korean Left. Queer Koreans play central roles in this sub-subcultural space, so to speak.

At the Moim, those queer Korean organizers were actively raising the question of *tongil* from their specific social and geographical locations as U.S.-based Koreans in their respective cities. In Eun Soo's view, their political strategy departed from the previous generation of Korean peace advocacy that sought to influence U.S. foreign policy through academic discourse. Such a civic approach hinged on the national identity of Korean Americans as U.S. citizens. In contrast, the organizers from Nodutdol and Sahngnoksoo, whom Eun Soo admiringly referred to as *nunas* (older sisters), were making explicit analytical connections between U.S. imperialism in Asia, their families and communities' migration to the U.S., and their diverse predicaments as diasporic Koreans. Empowered by this encounter, Eun Soo did the groundwork of bringing leftist, diasporic, and queer Koreans together in conjunction with study groups for KEEP delegates. *Hobak*, the Korean term for squashes and pumpkins, symbolizes the homeliness if not ugliness of those who do not belong to the mainstream ideals of Koreanness. The formation of HOBAK inspired their comrades in Southern California to establish another sister organization, So-Cal Organized Oppression-Breaking Anti-Imperialist Koreans (SOOBAK, initially So-Cal Outrageously Organized Bomb-Ass Koreans; *soobak* means watermelon) in 2013. Witnessing the growing momentum of these community organizations and the outstanding presence of queer, trans, and non-binary Koreans, I wanted to contribute this research to their work by imploding the prevailing distinction between practice and theory.

Moving to New Jersey for my doctoral training, I became a member of Nodutdol while belonging to Eclipse Rising remotely. I had already been participating in and organizing meetings, events, rallies, study groups, retreats, trips, and campaigns through these organizations before I started conducting the first round of interviews in 2015. Coming into academia as a community member and becoming more entrenched in its economy complicated my position as a researcher. Regardless of my intention, I was accumulating symbolic capital as a Ph.D. student in a prestigious university with two master's degrees. Rather than exploiting my research subjects in "collecting the data," I sought to enable my interview sessions to be moments of producing shared knowledge. All of my interview participants had already met me as an organizer (and a friend) before I invited them to my in-depth interviews. I was not willing to let my audio-recorded interview be my first encounter with anyone in my community. Having personal relationships with me, the participants also asked questions about my experiences as a Zainichi Korean and queer-identified organizer. My dual membership with Eclipse Rising and Nodutdol indicated my commitment and accountability to the community. Beyond New York City, I used research money from the university to travel to the Bay Area, Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, and Honolulu to conduct interviews in person in the participants' local cities.

In total, I conducted twenty-five in-depth interviews with former and current members of Eclipse Rising, HOBAK, Nodutdol, Sahngnoksoo, and SOOBAK between May 2015 and March 2018. My aim is not to provide a comprehensive

account of transnational Korean community organizing but to contextualize the emergent community formations with the organizers' lived experiences. To this end, I invited to my interviews key individuals with whom I sought to build further relationships. We talked about family backgrounds, politicization, community involvement, social and cultural identities, solidarity and movement building, and the future of Korean unification and the Korean diaspora. I nurtured my own questions around *tongil* as a queer Zainichi individual and cultivated the shared answers through my engagement with other diasporic Koreans in the United States. Foregrounding our subjectivities in the interviews was important for generating the kind of knowledge that could not otherwise materialize from within our embodied encounters.

Besides the interviews, my sociological "immersion" in my "field" as a member of Eclipse Rising since 2008 and Nodutdol since 2014 as a formal member constitutes the core of my analytical process. Conducting this research as an insider has enabled me to illuminate important nuances, contexts, and emotional bonds that outsiders would never have access to. I also examined websites, blog entries, statements, meeting notes, newsletters, news articles, emails, speeches, event photos, and ephemera related to these organizations, including materials I had created. My ongoing ethnography is so intertwined with my life as a Zainichi Korean community organizer that it was virtually impossible to impose a clear demarcation between my personal community life and my scientific observations. I did not always take meticulous field notes because I prioritized my authentic presence at events and meetings over my ethnographic gaze. Rather, I employed

my embodied memories of insightful moments as a community organizer, such as the episode above in Beijing. Indeed, what we remember anecdotally can speak volumes about the narrative effects of our subjectivities. Not only memories but also observations, interpretations, and theorizing are all “situated knowledges” with strong political implications (Haraway 1988; Harding 1991). Had I only conducted interviews as an outsider without participating in the two organizations and actively shaping their culture, this research would have lacked analytical depth. It was worth risking the “scientific objectivity” of my work by purposefully contributing to my community, thereby transforming it, as a central element of my ethnography. Instead of acting like a methodological filter, I use my body to struggle with my community as a praxis of building power and producing knowledge. Conceiving, conducting, writing, and publishing this research constitute the process of ethnographic action.

Ultimately, the extent to which this research perpetuates *and* dismantles power inequalities depends on how I live my life after I complete the research and publish the findings. As scholars of Indigenous epistemologies criticize (Jolivet 2015; Smith 1999; Wilson 2008), university-affiliated researchers come to the community with their agenda to advance their careers; no matter how “collaborative” or “community-based” the research purports to be, the resulting knowledge is rarely *owned* by the community that participated. In fact, the community has often already owned the knowledge before the researcher turns it into a more authoritative form of knowledge. I did my best to assume and respect the innate expertise of the interview participants and our community at large.

Because knowledge is relational and embodied, community ownership of social research is never determined solely by the readability of writing and the accessibility of the publications. My methodology is informed by the innovative framework of Research Justice, which “situate[s] community-driven research as a vehicle for the community to reclaim, own and wield *all* forms of knowledge and information as *political* ammunition in their own hands, in ways that are consistent with the community's unique cultural and spiritual identity, and values and traditions,” according to the Zainichi Korean scholar Miho Kim Lee (2015: xviii, emphases original). Thus, for the community organizers with whom I engage in this research, perhaps nothing I write is really new that they did not know before. More hopefully, they may gain a new perspective through my thoughtful interpretation, arriving at a renewed sense of ownership of our collective experiences and struggles.

I wrote this dissertation to contribute to movement building first and foremost, by scientifically analyzing the embodied agency of queer diasporic Koreans that shapes the geopolitics of *tongil*. The front-row audience of this research is thus all Koreans in the diaspora who are in search of community. Beyond the Korean context, activists and researchers concerned with the issues of war and peace, territorial sovereignty, social movements, and ethnic, national, and diasporic identities will also find this research practical and informative. The centrality of gender and sexuality in these issues is not adequately recognized beyond the essentialist view of identity, which naturalizes the gendered labor of peacemaking and community building as women's responsibility. Building on Black,

Indigenous, postcolonial, and transnational feminisms, I animate the spirit of the anti-fascist warrior as the agent of queering. For social scientists and queer theorists, this study offers *queer diasporic kinship* as an empirically grounded explanation of ethnicity that challenges the structural, discursive, and cognitive paradigms of social theory.

How the Chapters Flow

The chapters flow chronologically as well as thematically. Beginning with the historical context in the first chapter, I focus on diasporic formations and queer organizing in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively. After finding each other and holding their bodies and spaces together, the Korean organizers make an international impact in Chapter 4 through their involvement in city politics. Thematically, the empirical chapters narrate the alternative sense of self (Ch 2), place (Ch 3), and time (Ch 4) that constitute *queer diasporic kinship*.

The first chapter, “Geopolitics of Koreanness,” provides a backstory without which my ethnography makes limited sense. I construct a *longue durée* analysis of Koreanness as a transnational historical phenomenon. To unravel the racialization and alienation of Koreanness in the geopolitical relations of Northeast Asia, I examine how the ethnic Yamato of the Japanese Archipelago have conceived their territoriality and those who have not yet been conquered and assimilated. Without understanding how the Yamato geographic imaginary evolved into the Japanese empire’s colonial operations, the plight of Zainichi

Koreans today would remain obscure and disconnected from the struggles of other racialized minorities like the Ainu, Okinawans, and Burakumin. In this context, I briefly explain the birth of the Korean diaspora and divergent trajectories of Korean out-migration to Japan and the U.S. through colonization, war, dictatorship, and economic crises. Interrogating how U.S. military involvement in Korea has sedimented into the layers of Asian American racial discourse, the chapter ends with a rumination on gender and sexual norms in homeland and diasporic Korean cultures during the global War on Terror.

The second chapter, “Diasporic Conjuring,” illuminates the moments in which diasporic Korean communities, the object of my inquiry, become an empirical reality. Spotlighting the encounters and relationships among Zainichi Koreans, transnational Korean adoptees, and Korean Americans, this chapter demonstrates how the Korean community organizers create a politicized sense of belonging. While they feel at home with each other for knowing how to value their shared biographies as diasporic Koreans, they also foreground the politics of difference and non-belonging. Their prior experiences of alienation and “not feeling Korean enough” inform their interpretations of what it means and feels to find one another to cultivate a community seemingly out of nowhere. I discuss such moments of arrivals at home as *diasporic conjuring*, arguing that a relational mode of ethnic belonging emerges through the Korean organizers' embodied practices of transcorporeality. The sacredness of diasporic conjuring, however, requires an ongoing engagement that prevents forgetting from happening.

The third chapter, "Queer Korean Tenacity," explains how queer Koreans hold the diaspora together through their bodies. Exploring the overrepresentation of queer individuals in leftist Korean spaces, I illustrate how queer diasporic Koreans' sensibilities shape the collective sense of place, including churches, college campuses, Koreatowns, cities, and their own bodies. Inhabiting the tension between queerness and Koreanness, they seek to complicate the dominant meanings of both as they contest the landscapes of the diaspora. The ongoing process of such mobilities through and toward the community is what I call *queer Korean tenacity*, or the practice of loving, desiring, hoping, and showing up for each other, in order to substantiate the very relationship that allows them to recognize themselves as each other. They grapple with the difficult questions of holding one another accountable while sustaining the movement, the answer to which sheds light on the interconnectedness between macro-scale geopolitics of war and militarism and micro-scale geopolitics of gender violence within the family and kinship.

The fourth chapter, "Sovereign Offerings," dramatizes the process of establishing the public memorial for the victims and survivors of the Japanese Imperial Army's sexual slavery system. The so-called "Comfort Women" memorial in San Francisco, the first of its kind in a major U.S. city, irked various Japanese politicians including the Mayor of Osaka, who unilaterally terminated the sister-city relationship with the Golden Gate City. As a member organization of the multi-ethnic grassroots "Comfort Women" Justice Coalition, Eclipse Rising has

played a key role in mobilizing its transnational network and intimate knowledge of Japanese nationalism. Through a performative reading of the memorial as a gift to the public, I analyze the politics of diasporic memory in the transnational urban geopolitics of San Francisco and Osaka. Engaging with Indigenous scholarship on sovereignty and temporality, I argue that the memorial offers a sovereign sense of time to the generations to come.

Ultimately, this research proposes a theory of ethnicity, nationalism, and diaspora that moves beyond the previous structuralist and discursive approaches. By foregrounding embodied geopolitics, I analyze the spiritual dimension of ethnicity in social movements and community formations among diasporic Koreans. In the concluding chapter, I argue that their agency animates a process of geopolitical healing, through which alternative temporalities of belonging, accountability, and sovereignty become tangible in material bodies and spaces of the diaspora. Envisioning a cultural ecology of human agency, my ethnography of queer diasporic kinship bridges the gap between sociology and queer theory to disrupt the dominant discourse of geopolitics.

Chapter One

Geopolitics of Alienation

Spaces and Meanings of Diaspora

Words like *race* and *nation* carry varying connotations in different geopolitical contexts. *Race* in U.S. social sciences has conventionally centered on black/white differences resulting from anti-black racism as well as settler colonialism, genocide, war, and immigration (Omi and Winant 1986). Similar dynamics of colonial racism pervade Northeast Asian societies, shaping the genealogies of ethnic identity and racialization in Korea-Japan relations. Examining the geographical specificity of anti-Korean racism helps us understand the emergence of diasporic Korean identities in the United States. To provide a full picture of my ethnography of community and healing in the Korean diaspora, I explain how Northeast Asian ethnic relations have shifted from the feudal era to industrialization and nuclear power. I draw attention to the pairing of ideology with mythology to interrogate racism in Japan. For instance, despite sharing liberal capitalism as a dominant ideology, Japanese nationalism differs from European and U.S. nationalisms at the fundamental level of symbolism attached to the imperial family. Because the mythological hegemony of the emperor remains intact, the economic and cultural survival of Koreans in Japan, or Zainichi Koreans, demands a system beyond the secular-liberal discourse of

rights and citizenship. Without this geopolitical context beyond U.S. racial landscapes, I suspect that a wide range of my audience—those who are more familiar with the European, North American, and Caribbean racial discourses—would end up with a limited understanding of Zainichi Koreans' struggles. Because my ethnography centers on the embodied differences among Korean Americans, Zainichi Koreans, and transnational Korean adoptees, I emphasize that diasporic Korean identities consist of multiple locations and paths of migration shaped by competing colonial discourses.

My goal here is to contextualize the divergent ways in which diasporic Koreans have come to regard themselves in relation to their ancestors' experiences in Korea as well as Japan and the United States. Through wars, colonization, authoritarian dictatorship, and globalization, meanings of Koreanness have evolved in Korea (Shin 2006). Meanwhile, Koreanness also transmuted through colonial racialization and postwar nation-building in Japan, a continuous process embedded in even broader dynamics of U.S. hegemony in and after the Cold War. Thus, rather than providing a rigorous historical account of Korea or Koreans, this chapter explicates how racist ideologies have emerged over centuries to shape the lives of Koreans in Japanese and U.S. societies. Instead of seeking to establish fixed definitions, I illustrate how discourses of nation and ethnicity have shifted along with the spatial relations of territoriality and mobility. In analyzing such a political relationship between Korean and Japanese peoplehoods, I stress the material spaces and movements across the archipelagos of the Western

Pacific. This genealogical accounting demonstrates not simply a binary opposition but the dialectical process between diaspora and indigeneity.

Illuminating the geopolitics of alienation faced by the Korean diaspora, this chapter consists of three parts highlighting the feudal, industrializing, and nuclear periods. In the first part, I trace the production of ethnic differences and proto-national discourse in the geopolitical formations in East Asia. Key factors include feudal conquests and European encroachment. By illustrating how the ethnic Yamato consolidated power and unified the Japanese Archipelago, I emphasize that the colonization of Korea relates to regional ethnic contentions as well as transnational imperialist competitions. The second part focuses on the emergence of overseas Korean communities in Japan and the continental United States. Although these communities arose from different historical events, namely colonialism and the Korean War, their experiences of dispossession are entangled in the larger context of Cold War conflicts. In the final part, I turn to the transnational impact of the War on Terror on the racial discourse around North Korean subjects. While economic sanctions kill women and children, anti-Korean hate speech became normalized in Japan. I contrast these gender dynamics of militarization and racism with the emergent queer politics in the era of neoliberal reform in South Korea. By taking a *longue durée* approach to the shifting Trans-Pacific geopolitics of Koreanness, I suggest how diasporic mobilizations by overseas Koreans harness the ambiguities of such concepts as nation-states and sovereignty. I argue that the political project of unification has

a radical potential for articulating a critique of state violence and a methodology for alternative community formation.

My discussion synthesizes materialist and discursive approaches to explaining ethnic relations. Whereas most researchers would agree that nationalism is a modern discourse (Anderson 1983; Calhoun 1997; Gellner 2008; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), I draw attention to the mythological terrain on which the ideological institutions are constructed. Elements of modern national identities in the region derive from premodern territorial imaginaries that were forged through conquest, exchange, and convergence between ethnic groups across the Japanese Archipelago and Korean Peninsula. In other words, not everything about the imagined community is entirely a modern invention enabled by industrial and print capital, particularly in the seas and mountains marked by ancient tombs, kilns, shrines, temples, feudal castles, and streets named after diplomatic convoys from across the region. We go way back.

I. FEUDAL CONQUESTS AND EUROPEAN ENCROACHMENT

The Yamato Empire and Geo-Ethnic Formations in East Asia

Japan's colonization of Korea in 1910 is an outcome of a political ideology whose elements trace back to the feudal era of the Japanese archipelago. Historical accounts often explain the colonization of the Korean peninsula as a process of Japan's modernization marked by the 1867 restoration of imperial sovereignty.

Undoubtedly, the revival of Emperor Meiji as the sovereign after nearly 700 years of shogunate military rule paved the way for the expansionist policy of the Empire of Japan, ultimately leading to the Pearl Harbor attack. However, the racial ideology underpinning Japanese imperialism derives from a mode of peoplehood and territorial imaginary preceding the return of the emperor. The authority of the Yamato imperial family and aristocrats was eclipsed when the feudal warlords' shogunate rule was established in the 12th century. Despite occasional conflicts, the shoguns often maintained close relations with the imperial family to leverage their symbolic power. As the shogunate rule gradually expanded its territory throughout the Japanese archipelago, the ethnic Yamato social order clashed with other (proto-)ethnic groups. Here, I highlight key moments of interethnic or intercultural processes while emphasizing that unified ethnic *identity* did not become prevalent in Japan until the Meiji era (Lie 2001).

Besides the Yamato, the cluster of islands forming the territory of the modern Japanese state have been inhabited by ethnic groups like the Ainu in Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands, settlers from the Korean peninsula, and Ryukyans in today's Okinawa. The shogunate's primary aim was to unify the Yamato nation and expand its territory by conquering ethnic groups in peripheral regions that did not worship the emperor, whom Shinto myths designate as the direct descendant of the sun god. The Yamato territorial discourse, derived from the Confucianist Sinocentric paradigm, consisted of the civilization led by the emperor in western Honshu (the main island in the archipelago) and somewhat enigmatic *Emishi* or "barbarians" who lived in the northeast. By the first

shogunate era in the 12th century, Emishi was replaced by *Ezo* in the islands further north, and Ezochi, the land of the Ezo (today's Hokkaido), was often depicted as a foreign and fearful place of demons and performed the role of a penal colony (Siddle 1996; Walker 2001). Yet trades between Honshu and Ezochi gradually enriched some Ainu leaders and spawned Yamato settlements in the southernmost tip of Ezochi. As a maritime people, the Ainu formed an economic and cultural archipelago involving Hokkaido, Sakhalin, the Kuril Islands, and coastal Siberia; Ainu culture thus flourished primarily through commercial trade encompassing Northeast Asia (Walker 2001). Tension also grew between the indigenous Ainu and the Yamato settlers in southwestern Hokkaido, sparking an unsuccessful uprising led by Ainu chief Koshamain in 1457. Skirmishes that followed throughout the 16th century further endorsed the Yamato perception of the Ainu as barbaric yet fearless warriors. Meanwhile, the Ryukyu Kingdom emerged in the 15th century after Shō Hashi unified the main island in 1429, continuing the tributary relationship with the Ming that had begun in the previous century. The Kingdom flourished through maritime trade spanning from Northeast to Southeast Asia.

Major geopolitical shifts took place in East Asia between the late 16th and 17th centuries, fundamentally shaping the course of ethno-national relations in the region. During the 1590s, shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi unified the Yamato and invaded Chosŏn Korea in the Imjin War, wreaking havoc across the peninsula over six years from 1592 until 1598 until his death. Merely a generation after the Japanese invasion, Hong Taiji led the Manchus from the north to conquer Korea

in 1627 and again in 1636, humiliating Korea's King Injo as he surrendered. The Manchus, considered "barbarians," then defeated the ethnic Han Chinese rule of the Ming dynasty and established the Qing in 1644, further shifting the ethno-national landscape of East Asia. JaHyun Kim Haboush (2016) argues that these successive catastrophic invasions by the neighboring empires gave rise to the discourse of the Korean national identity entangled with collective trauma and shame. After the Manchus took over China, the Qing authority sought to define the exact border with Chosŏn, and the entire length of the China-Korea demarcation was drawn for the first time in 1712 (Park 2019).

Toyotomi did not accomplish his goal of conquering the Ming dynasty or even Korea, but his expansionism signaled the emergence of Yamato Japan as an imperialist power. The subsequent Tokugawa Shogunate maintained diplomatic relations with Chosŏn after taking over the Yamato territory in 1603. Tokugawa strengthened its control over the Ryukyu Kingdom instead of Korea by turning it into a vassal state in 1609. The Kingdom, however, established its tributary relationship with the Qing as well. The shogunate controlled trade through its regional domains: Matsumae domain with the Ainu, Satsuma domain with Ryukyu, Tsushima domain with Chosŏn. With Ming China and the Dutch East India Company, the shogunate traded directly by appointing the governor of Nagasaki, the only port designated for the purpose. The Portuguese had already begun trading with Ming China and the Yamato in the mid-16th century, acquiring Macau in 1557 as its mercantilist base for influencing East Asia at large. The Portuguese and other European mercantilism thus began to undermine the

Ryukyuan trades. Tokugawa banned Christianity that the Portuguese had brought, and restricted the entrance of foreign ships (except for the ones from Ming) to the single port in Nagasaki. When Catholic peasants backed by the Portuguese prompted the Shimabara Rebellion in 1637, the shogunate suppressed them with help from the Protestant Dutch, thereafter rejecting all European ships save for the Dutch for the next two hundred years.

Meanwhile, the Yamato expanded its control of the Ainu territory by suppressing the pan-Ainu uprisings across Hokkaido led by the chief Shakushain in 1669. Siddle (1996) rejects a simplistic interpretation of these conflicts as the Ainu versus the Yamato (*Wajin*). Walker (2001) argues that Shakushain's War was at once an ecological conflict between Ainu groups and an Ainu political resistance against the Matsumae domain's abusive economic policy, which had monopolized Ainu trading activities. The Matsumae family's monopoly of Ainu trades lasted until the Shogunate took over in 1802. In contrast to the Matsumae's ethnic differentiation approach, the shogunate's centralized government adopted an assimilationist policy under the discourse of *buiku*, or “benevolent care,” for the Ainu population that had come to suffer from foreign diseases and starvations (Walker 2001). The popular portrayals of the Ainu as fearless barbarians have shifted to those of docile, ignorant, and dirty subhuman natives, connected in part to the Tokugawa-era construction of untouchable Burakumin caste as ritually polluted and dangerous sub-humans (Siddle 1996).

Colonial Modernity and State-Building in the Asia-Pacific

By the mid-19th century, European imperialist powers began encroaching on East Asia. Russians had already reached Hokkaido and attempted to negotiate with Tokugawa in 1792. The major shockwave came from the two Opium Wars (First: 1840-1842, Second: 1856-1860), in which the Qing dynasty's defeat by the British and French forces made the entire region vulnerable to Western interests. In addition to the military subjugation, Qing China thus became firmly incorporated into the European legal discourse of sovereign statehood and territory that had emerged from the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. Alarmed by the British victory, the Tokugawa shogunate managed to avoid warring directly with the European powers. In fact, European empires were too busy fighting the Crimean War between 1853 and 1856 to focus on maritime East Asia. However, after Matthew Perry's gunboat diplomacy that opened the ports in Shimoda and Hakodate in 1854, the shogunate signed unequal diplomatic and commercial treaties with the U.S., Great Britain, the Netherlands, Russia, and France during the 1850s, followed by other European nations. During the same period, the Ryukyu Kingdom also signed similar treaties with the U.S., France, and the Netherlands as a sovereign nation even though it was under dual subordination by the Qing dynasty and Tokugawa shogunate.

These radical developments in foreign relations throughout East Asia complicated the political dynamics among ethnic groups in the region. In the north, the Yamato and Russians agreed to share the sovereignty of Sakhalin while splitting the Kuril Islands between Urup and Iturup islands in the 1855 Treaty of

Shimoda. Lacking any political system to conduct diplomacy as a sovereign nation, the Ainu was unable to claim their territory in the international order. Russia took advantage of the Manchu Qing's defeat in the Second Opium War, acquiring territorial control over the north bank of Amur River and the east bank of Ussuri River, including the Manchurian coast across Sakhalin in 1860. Russian forces sought to establish a year-round anchoring base in Tsushima, leading to a skirmish in 1861 that invited a British intervention. In the Korean Peninsula, the increasingly vulnerable Chosŏn dynasty strengthened its defensive isolationism. The Chosŏn court repressed Catholicism, which had taken root in the peninsula despite its long isolationism, executing half a dozen French Catholic missionaries. In 1866, France waged a punitive campaign on Korea in retaliation, losing not only the battle but also its opportunity to extend its influence in East Asia altogether. In the same year, a U.S. merchant ship *General Sherman* sailing up the Taedong River to Pyongyang caused a violent response from the local Koreans that destroyed the ship. U.S. Navy then led the first expedition to Korea in 1871 to investigate the incident. In the south, the *de facto* status of the Ryukyu Kingdom was ambiguous under the limited Tokugawa control, but the existence of the indigenous political system if not a widespread Ryukyuan national identity is evident prior to the colonization by the Meiji regime. Having the Kingdom as a vassal state empowered the Satsuma domain, which played a central role in defeating the Tokugawa shogunate.

European encroachment ultimately pressured the rapid political transformation among the Yamato elites, who fought civil wars between the pro-shogunate and

pro-emperor camps. In fact, the unequal treaties that the shogunate signed in 1858 were not approved by Emperor Komei until 1865. Within fifteen years of the U.S. arrival, in 1868, Emperor Meiji became the sovereign of the Empire of Japan, inaugurating the era of Japanese modernization and colonization. The imperial regime took no time to define its borders by colonizing Ainu lands and the Ryukyu Kingdom. Ezochi became the administrative territory of Hokkaido (which also became the island name), and the Hokkaido Colonization Agency sent Yamato settlers to "develop" the island while the Ainu became imperial subjects to be civilized through forced relocation, agricultural labor, modern medicine, and Japanizing education (Siddle 1996). Japan relinquished its authority over Sakhalin while gaining all the Kuril Islands in the 1875 treaty with Russia. Meanwhile, the Yamato regime took over the Ryukyu Kingdom and designated its former territories as Okinawa Prefecture in 1872. Yamato elites considered Ryukyuan ethnically much closer than the Ainu, thus legitimizing Japan's colonial assimilation of Okinawans as a mere subgroup of the Yamato ethnicity. Among the series of modern institutions like national education and the police force was the family registry, which documented each household's kin and class backgrounds. This *koseki* system formed the basis for citizenship, voting rights, and legal family relations that continue to complicate the lives of Zainichi Koreans and other former colonial subjects of the Empire. These state-formation processes proliferated the discourse of Ainu, Ryukyuan, Burakumin, Korean, and Chinese racial inferiority, which legitimized the cultural genocide of these non-Yamato ethnic groups.

As Japan emerged as an imperialist power, the isolationist Chosŏn Korea became rapidly entangled in the geopolitical drama. With the 1876 Kanghwa Island Treaty, Japan successfully imposed unequal provisions on Korea and opened its ports in Busan, Incheon, and Wonsan, much like how the U.S. did to Japan a couple of decades ago. This treaty, Article 1 in particular, specified that Korea is an independent nation, implying that the Chosŏn dynasty was a full-fledged sovereign state and no longer under Chinese suzerainty. By recognizing Korea's sovereignty, the Meiji regime dislodged East Asia from the Sino-centric Confucian paradigm of international political order into the modern, Western-origin discourse of international law (Nho n.d.). Subsequently, the Chosŏn court signed a series of unequal treaties with European powers during the 1880s, including the U.S., Germany, Russia, Italy, and France. Alyssa Park (2019) demonstrates how such negotiations prompted Chosŏn Korea, Qing China, and tsarist Russia to exert authority over their contested borders and mobile subjects, gradually shaping the discourse of sovereignty and citizenship in the modern East Asia.

The declining authority of the Chosŏn court was further challenged by two successive coups in 1882 and 1884, as well as a widespread mass uprising in 1894. Such turmoil spiked the tension between the Qing and Japan over their control over the peninsula, resulting in the First Sino-Japanese War. In the concluding Treaty of Shimonoseki, Qing China was forced to renounce its authority over Korea by recognizing its autonomy for the first time. Japan thus gained Taiwan and territorial access to the continent through the Liaodong

Peninsula, along with a greater influence over Korea. However, the triple intervention by Russia, France, and Germany forced Japan to give up the Liaodong Peninsula, and Russia's subsequent advance into Manchuria through the Boxer Rebellion in 1899 ignited the Russo-Japanese War. As the victor, Japan established itself as the first non-Western imperialist power and consolidated its influence on the Korean Peninsula. During this period, Queen Min of Chosŏn, who sought Russian support to deter Japanese imperialism, was assassinated, while Korean reformists abolished the aristocratic class system. In 1897, King Gojong founded the Empire of Korea, which was another symbolic blow to the Chinese dynasty. However, the short-lived Korean state became Japan's protectorate in 1905 after Japanese Prime Minister Taro Katsura made a pact with U.S. Secretary of War William Howard Taft. They agreed that Japan should govern Korea and the U.S. should rule the Philippines. Notably, the U.S. was expanding its archipelagic territories by acquiring Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines after the Spanish-American War in 1898 while annexing the Republic of Hawaii, which was established after Queen Lili'uokalani was overthrown in 1893. Today, some Korean American, Filipino American, and Native Hawaiian activists have built anti-imperialist coalitions based on these historical events that continue to undermine their self-determination.

II. COLONIAL AND COLD WAR DISPOSSESSION

Japanese Colonialism and the Birth of Zainichi Koreans

Japan's formal annexation of Korea in 1910 ushered in the era of mass migration and diasporic mobilization. On February 8, 1919, a few hundred Korean students gathered at the Korean YMCA in Tokyo and unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence signed by eleven core activists. They had been inspired by the Russian Revolution as well as Woodrow Wilson's principle of self-determination at the conclusion of the First World War. This Declaration then reached Seoul and ignited the March First Independence Movement, the first anti-colonial popular uprising in Korea. This movement spread throughout the Korean peninsula and lasted for weeks, resulting in the founding of the Korean government in exile in Shanghai. A decade into a post-feudal Korea under Japanese colonialism, the March First Movement marked the emergence of ethno-national consciousness among Koreans across social classes. The Japanese imperial government responded brutally to this first sign of mass resistance, killing thousands and torturing the survivors in prison. Japanese newspapers portrayed these protests as riots by unruly Koreans, *Futei Senjin*. The derogatory discursive figure of *Futei Senjin* resurfaced in the wake of the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 when fast-spreading rumors alleged that Koreans were taking advantage of the catastrophe as an opportunity for an uprising and further chaos (Eda 2015). The imperial government declared a state of emergency by enacting martial law immediately, which incited the military and civilian vigilante groups to massacre anyone they deemed as Korean—over six thousand of them including Okinawans and Chinese. To be called “Korean,” *chosenjin*, had already come to signify a racial slur in Japanese.

After suppressing the March First uprising by force, the colonial operation focused on cultural assimilation policy by asserting that the Yamato Japanese and Koreans shared the same ancestry as the Emperor's children. To prevent another anti-colonial uprising, the empire sang the song of unity and harmony. As John Lie (2008) carefully notes, not all Koreans fiercely resisted Japanization as a powerful discourse of modernity, nor did all Koreans arrive in Japan by enforced migration, at least until wartime mobilization in the 1940s. "That the modern came to Korea via Japan would prove to be a repressed undercurrent of post-Liberation Korea. The very language and thought of modern Korea was deeply inflected by the brush with Japan; it would be equally blinkered, to be sure, to see modern Japan without its deep and extensive colonial entanglement" (Lie 2008: 12). In this entanglement, the social boundaries between the Japanese and Koreans became a blur. Koreans learned to speak Japanese, adopted Japanese names, and propelled Japan's industrialization. While it would be incorrect to portray these processes entirely as stories of brutal coercion versus heroic resistance, forced Japanization was increasingly coupled with forced labor in the coal mines throughout Japan as well as wartime sexual slavery system across the Asia-Pacific.

After Japan's defeat, the occupying U.S. forces and Japanese authorities stripped Koreans of their legal status in Japan, starting with their voting rights. The Alien Registration Law of 1947, issued as the final imperial ordinance on the day before the postwar Constitution came into effect, relegated Koreans and Taiwanese as foreigners. The 1950 nationality law further limited the basis of Japanese

citizenship to patrilineality, a patriarchal policy that lasted until 1985 to disqualify mixed children with Japanese mothers from obtaining citizenship by birth. Through the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1952, Koreans in Japan lost citizenship and became special permanent resident aliens—*Zainichi* Koreans, or Koreans residing in Japan. Meanwhile, some Koreans in the Japanese Imperial Army were arrested and executed as Japanese war criminals through the Tokyo Trial, and Korean communities' efforts to establish ethnic schools were crushed by the newly established Japanese police in the violent incident known as the 1948 Hanshin Struggle. In all of these processes, the U.S. projected its anti-communist agenda on the treatment of Koreans in Japan, paralleling its involvement in the Korean peninsula that led to the Korean War. In contrast to Koreans' loss of sovereignty through the postcolonial division and war, Okinawa became occupied by the U.S. and has continued to lack sovereignty since reverting to Japanese rule in 1972 (Shimabuku 2018).

The majority of Koreans in Japan returned to the Korean peninsula after its liberation, but the political volatility in the homeland kept some 600,000 in exile. Under the supervision of the occupying U.S. forces, the Japanese government severely restricted the traffic of people and property across the Korea Strait and policed its borders. Except for the mass exodus of Jeju islanders to Osaka and Hyogo in the wake of the April Third Massacre in 1948, Korean migration in either direction became both illegal and occasional. The homeland division and war deepened the ideological fractions in the newborn *Zainichi* Korean community into pro-North Chongryun and pro-South Mindan. Chongryun

maintained close ties with the North Korean Workers Party and effectively acted as the Zainichi Korean national and local government, establishing a financial network and ethnic schools throughout Japan. In contrast, Mindan's anti-communist homeland orientation was not reciprocated by the South Korean government. Neither of these communities identified as "Zainichi," for the temporariness of their subjectivity, literally "residing in Japan," was assumed by both the Japanese authorities and Zainichi Koreans. One was either Korean or Japanese, never both.

For the postwar Zainichi Koreans, the majority of whom were at least second generation in Japan, their ideological orientations intertwined with geographical ones between repatriation and assimilation. Living under the legal apartheid and ethnic cleansing policy, North Korea's utopian ideals of national liberation and unification appealed to many, while others sought to shed their Koreanness entirely. From the late 1950s, Chongryun led a repatriation project backed by the North Korean and Japanese governments as well as the International Red Cross (Morris-Suzuki 2007). Some 80,000 Zainichi "returned" to North Korea, even though their ancestral land was in the southern parts of the peninsula. For they would not be allowed back into Japan, the repatriation project was not pragmatic enough for most Zainichi. Meanwhile, the 1965 Normalization Treaty between Japan and South Korea became a turning point for Zainichi livelihoods, providing access to South Korean nationality, international travel, and welfare benefits in Japan. Thus, although virtually all Zainichi Koreans had been considered Zainichi North Koreans (*zainichi chosonjin*) without actual

citizenship of any country, a more secure legal category emerged for Zainichi South Koreans (*zainichi kankokujin*). The 1965 treaty was signed during the Vietnam War under the political expediency of U.S. interests, and it dissipated the possibility of postcolonial legal retribution for a unified Korea by Japan. In other words, the diasporic dream of homeland reunification grew paler while Zainichi Koreans' residence in Japan became less temporary than originally expected.

Beyond repatriation and assimilation, a diasporic Zainichi identification began to form among the second and third generations. On the one hand, repatriation did not prove to be glorious in North or South Korea in the 1970s and 80s under a Cold War paranoia mixed with anti-Japanese nationalism. On the other hand, assimilation seemed almost impossible because the narrow path to naturalization did not always protect ethnic Koreans from discrimination. Naturalization actually symbolized the rejection of the Zainichi experience and even ethnic betrayal, when Zainichi Koreans faced discrimination in virtually all aspects of life from education to employment, marriage, and housing. For instance, in 1970, Hitachi retracted its job offer to Pak Chonsok after he submitted his alien registration card as a form of identification. Hitachi claimed that Pak had falsified his resume by using his Japanese alias, but Pak won a lawsuit against the conglomerate four years later. The Zainichi youth's legal battle for the right to use an alias, however, was criticized by the senior Chongryun leadership for emphasizing assimilation. John Lie (2008) analyzes such a Zainichi predicament

as *disrecognition* in Japanese society. "Passing . . . was a default condition," as Lie captures:

Yet "coming out" was difficult not only because of Japanese xenophobia but also because of the generalized Japanese dislike for difference. . . [Passing] was tantamount to living a lie; ethnic pride and individual dignity militated against the inauthentic life of passing. The disclosure of Korean ancestry, moreover, could jeopardize a personal or employment relationship. The omnipresent threat of outing invalidated the ostensibly sensible solution. (80)

Lie argues that the Zainichi identity came out of the desire to resolve the essentialist binaries between North and South Korea, as well as between Korea and Japan. These dilemmas of ethnic identity, legal exclusion, and cultural assimilation gave rise to the Zainichi Korean political mobilizations in the 1980s. Their central target was the mandatory fingerprinting imposed on permanent resident aliens over the age of sixteen as part of the alien registration process. As a biometric technology of surveillance, this policy perpetuated the assumed criminality of Zainichi Koreans and instilled a deep sense of shame for many. Zainichi Koreans were required to carry the alien registration card at all times, and a failure to produce the certificate upon request by the police would result in a criminal charge. To reclaim ethnic pride, Zainichi Koreans began refusing to be fingerprinted, and their civil disobedience drew support from Mindan and Chongryun as one of the first causes that aligned them. Another strand of Zainichi mobilizations focused on the everyday public use of Korean names rather than Japanese aliases. Young Zainichi Koreans would declare their "ethnic names" as "real" names upon graduating from high school or college to mark their ethnic coming out and coming of age. These mobilizations also drew support from Japanese educators, who encouraged their students to assert their

ethnic identity—sometimes without full awareness of the cost of such acts of defiance (Kim 1978).

These ethnic civil rights movements helped articulate a new *Zainichi* identity over the *Korean* identity of the previous generation. While homeland (re)unification and return remained parts of the overarching utopian vision, the *Zainichi* identity shifted the temporality of residence and belonging in Japan as more or less permanent. By this time, the second and third generations constituted the main demographics, and their need for legal rights without naturalization represented a practical concern for livelihoods. The *Zainichi* identity, however, was already fragmented at the moment of its inception. Lie (2008) explains that this discourse relied on an essentialist model of collective identity for which most ethnic Koreans in Japan would not qualify. Lived experiences of *Zainichi* Koreans are simply too diverse to stabilize the meaning of *the Zainichi* Korean community. Eclipse Rising members, who reside in the U.S. with historical ties to *Zainichi* Korean struggles, are often dismissed for their *Zainichi* identification because they are no longer literally ethnic Korean residents of Japan. They are multiracial, multinational, and multilingual. Their mobilization of a *Zainichi* identity beyond essentialist checklists, however, signals the emergence of a methodological deployment of identity as critique. As the following chapters illustrate, Eclipse Rising interrogates their personal and collective memories of social justice struggles to construct a commitment to flexible, even inauthentic, ethnic imaginaries.

Cold War U.S. Hegemony and Korean Immigrant Racialization

Koreans are differently racialized in Japan and the U.S. due to structural and discursive factors. Including Koreans, Asian Americans are broadly represented as a "model minority," "perpetual foreigners," and the "yellow peril" in the white supremacist discourse of black/white racial formation. Claire Jean Kim (1999) argues that such positioning indicates the "racial triangulation" of Asian Americans. Iyko Day (2016) further suggests that this genealogy of racialization stems from the historical process of settler colonial capitalism in North America, which entails the genocide of indigenous peoples, Trans-Atlantic chattel slavery of Africans, and racialized Asian migrant labor. While Korean migration to Hawai'i and the continental U.S. began during Japanese colonization, and the so-called "war brides" from the Korean War paved the way for family-sponsored immigration, the Korean American population grew exponentially between the 1970s and 2000s. Homeland turmoil like military dictatorship and the IMF Crisis pushed out South Koreans to join the post-1965 immigration wave in the U.S. Ethnic enclaves and Korean churches played important roles in facilitating their settlement, providing ethnic ties for economic and cultural survival, and often promoting religious conservatism and racial liberalism in alignment with the mainstream white American ideology.

Korean immigration reached a saturation point in 2010 when approximately 1.7 million Koreans resided in the U.S. according to the Pew Research Center (Budiman 2019). In 2019, the median age of all Korean population in the U.S.

was 36 years old; among them, U.S.-born Koreans had a median age of 20 years old and constituted 41 percent, compared to 48 years old for foreign-born Koreans, who represented 59 percent. In other words, while 83 percent of the first-generation Korean Americans were at least 30 years old in 2019, 70 percent of the second generation were 29 years old or younger. As these descriptive data illustrate, a large portion of the U.S.-born children of the post-1965 immigrants from South Korea grew up in the 1990s and came of age in the 2000s.

Notably, about 1 in 10 Koreans in the U.S. are transnational adoptees from South Korea. Systemic overseas adoption of children from South Korea began in the aftermath of the Korean War. The genocidal war left orphans as well as mixed-race children between U.S. soldiers and Korean women, but the rise of the adoption agencies owes to the Cold War geopolitics. These children became the objects of humanitarian rescue, and the U.S. sought to project its benevolence by promoting transnational adoption as a charity (Park Nelson 2016). Those who played key roles in establishing adoption agencies were evangelical Christians who did not doubt that providing poor Korean war orphans with American childhood was their religious calling (Oh 2015). Adoption policy then converged with the discourse of social work and child welfare as a scientific practice. After war orphans and mixed-race children, adoption agencies went after lower-class unwed mothers, encouraging them to relinquish their children due to poverty and social stigma. North Korea criticized the South's policy as capitalist commodification of children; indeed, the South Korean military regime essentially outsourced the social welfare responsibility for these children by

delegating the caretaking task to private adoption agencies (Kim 2010). These agencies were eager to fulfill the demands for adoptable babies by couples in North America, northern Europe, and Australia, and the demands remained so high through the 1970s and 1980s that they overrode the recurrent domestic debates about discontinuing overseas adoption.

In the post-1965 wave, some of the first generation left South Korea to escape from the authoritarian regimes of Park Chung Hee (in presidency 1963-79) and Chun Doo Hwan (in presidency 1980-88). The transition between Park and Chun was marked by the infamous Kwangju Uprising, which began on May 18, 1980, and resulted in a brutal massacre of some 600 civilians by the South Korean army and police under U.S. military orders. This historical event shaped not only South Korean but also Korean American politics, politicizing young Koreans across the Pacific and weakening the authority of the ROK's Consul General in the U.S. The post-Kwangju political and intellectual framework that united students and workers gave rise to the anti-imperialist and re/unification movements among Korean Americans (Chung 2007). After the June Democracy Movement of 1987 that achieved the first democratic election in the Republic of Korea, however, the 1997 Asian financial crisis engulfed the country when the government made a bailout deal with the IMF. Government restructuring and trade liberalization ultimately led to a diminished average household income nationwide and a threefold spike in unemployment. While the neoliberal restructuring profoundly shaped labor organizing in South Korea (Chun 2008), it also prompted more Koreans from lower- and working-class backgrounds to

relocate to the U.S. via family ties for better economic opportunities (Chung 2007).

Using pre-existing social ties, Koreans settled in major metropolitan areas like Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C., Seattle, Chicago, and San Francisco. As immigrants, they were often emplaced into inner-city lower-class neighborhoods in the *de facto* racial segregation system, and ethnic financial networks encouraged Korean-owned small businesses in various Black neighborhoods across the country. Entangled in a myriad of sociohistorical factors centered on anti-black violence, the 1992 Los Angeles uprising/riot erupted, drawing much-sensationalized mass media coverage and virtually no state intervention or relief (Abelmann and Lie 1995). Nadia Kim (2008) illustrates competing interpretations of the LA uprising/riot by the mass media and among Korean Americans. Coupled with the circulated images of Rodney King and LaTasha Harlins, whose violated bodies and undervalued lives incited the uprising, Korean shopkeepers were at once portrayed as a hard-working model minority who deserved sympathy, gun-toting perpetual foreigners, and even the ultimate anti-Black racists. In contrast, many of Kim's Korean informants, particularly old-timers, emphasized the White supremacist state's indifference toward Korean Americans. She suggests that "most Korean Americans' belief that the unrest was not simply senseless Black criminality pointed to their understanding of the accretion of the histories, injustices, and self-perpetuated ills that were the American story" (Kim 2008: 185). For many Koreans in the U.S., beyond LA Koreatown, the violent unrest thus marked a

turning point in their collective consciousness as invisible Asian immigrants in the White-Black domestic racial order.

The LA uprising/riot also raised the question of intergenerational conflict between the first generation and the 1.5/second generation. As Angie Chung (2007: 20) suggests, the first generation Korean American community organizations had closer ties to the "ethnic elite" including business owners, religious leaders, and organizations linked to the South Korean government, "who control access to critical community resources and wield significant political influence over the immigrant-dominated population." Meanwhile, despite having more political expertise and cultural capital beyond the enclave, the 1.5/second generation organizations remain constrained by the "hierarchical structure of the immigrant community and their relations with first generation powerholders," which create intergenerational dependency and engagement (Chung 2007: 21). Thus, what Chung terms bridging organizations emerged to build broader and stronger networks within and beyond the Korean ethnic community in Los Angeles.

Indeed, the post-1992 Korean American civic engagement led by the 1.5/second generation has focused on wider issues surrounding the diaspora and homeland communities. Some activists had already been involved in anti-war protests during the Gulf War, while others articulated cross-racial coalitional politics between Korean American, Black, and Latinx communities. These efforts actively made connections between racial oppression in the U.S. and the ongoing war and

division in the Korean peninsula, as well as neoliberal globalization. Drawing from the legacy of pro-democracy movements in South Korea, Nodutdol for Korean Community Development (2019) was formed in New York City in 1999 as an organization that promotes “the self-determination and unity of the Korean people through grassroots organizing and community development.” Meanwhile in Seattle, the anti-globalization protests in 2000 planted seeds of Korean political organizing, which sprouted in 2006 when the Free Trade Agreement negotiations between South Korea and the U.S. took place in the city. Transnational collaboration between South Korean and Korean American activists in anti-FTA protests ultimately led to the birth of Sahngnoksoo in 2007, inspired in part by Nodutdol.

III. SANCTIONS, HATE SPEECH, AND NEOLIBERAL CAPITAL

The Korean Diaspora and the Global War on Terror

The 2000s began with the historic Joint Statement between North and South Korea on June 15, when Kim Jong Il welcomed Kim Dae Jung to Pyongyang. Shattering the mutual non-recognition that characterized Cold War Korea, the Joint Statement affirmed reunification as a shared goal, invigorating the grassroots momentum among Koreans from Seoul to New York for officially ending the Korean War. As Pyongyang's attempts to negotiate with Washington had stalled after the 1994 Agreed Framework due to neglect by the U.S., the June 15 Statement signaled a significant step forward in achieving the peace treaty.

Adding to the celebratory mood was the selection of South Korea and Japan as co-hosts of the 2002 FIFA World Cup. Relations between the ROK and Japan do get rocky sometimes, but the diplomatic alliance had been solid since the 1965 treaty, pushed for by U.S. hegemony. The increasing popularity of Korean dramas in Japan appeared to be working in favor, too.

However, it did not take a long time for reunification efforts to become overshadowed by the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent U.S. military aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, North Korea emerged as a threatening figure to Western democracies in the post-Soviet world order.

George W. Bush officially designated North Korea as among the infamous "Axis of Evil" countries along with Iran and Iraq in his 2002 State of the Union Address. In response, North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2003 and conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006 after the UN Security Council imposed limited sanctions in July. As Jodi Kim (2015) observes, North Korea began to eclipse Russia and China as the quintessential foreign enemy in popular cultural products like Hollywood films (e.g. *Die Another Day*, *Team America: World Police*, *Olympus Has Fallen*, *The Interview*) and video games (e.g. *Homefront*). Reinforced through this popular discourse, North Korea achieved the status among the most internationally condemned human rights violators during the 2000s. In addition to the general portrayals of authoritarian control and nuclear threat, the North Korean abduction of Japanese citizens emerged as a prime example of international human rights violation. On September 17, 2002, the then Prime Minister of Japan Koizumi Junichiro visited

King Jong Il in Pyongyang and issued a joint statement, in which Kim admitted that North Korean agents had abducted thirteen Japanese citizens.

Following these events, international condemnations and economic sanctions against the DPRK became normative diplomatic practices once again, after the short-lived impacts of the Agreed Framework with Bill Clinton and the Sunshine Policy by Kim Dae Jung. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights (2003) adopted a resolution in 2003 expressing “its deep concern about reports of systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights” in North Korea, before establishing the Special Rapporteur in 2004. Following suit, U.S. Congress passed the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, promoting “the human rights of North Koreans” and protecting “North Korean refugees and defectors” (Leach 2004). This encourages monitoring of international humanitarian assistance to North Korea while authorizing grants to private NGOs to promote “human rights, democracy, rule of law, and the development of a market economy” (Sec. 102) in the country. Section 202 of the Act references the abduction issue: “U.S. nonhumanitarian assistance to North Korea shall be contingent upon North Korean progress toward human rights protection, family reunification, prison reform, decriminalization of political activity, and disclosure of information respecting the abduction of citizens of Japan and the Republic of Korea.” In 2006, an abduction victims' support group from Japan testified in a House of Representatives subcommittee and met with Bush Jr. in the White House, drawing international media attention. When the North Korean Refugee Adoption Act was introduced to the Senate in 2011, Korean American activists

and scholars, including transnational adoptees, fiercely criticized the bill for promoting the myth of “North Korean refugee orphans” to propose transnational adoption as the solution to an exaggerated problem surrounding Korean children in the Chinese borderland. Despite the pushback, the North Korean Child Welfare Act was passed by the House in 2012.

Geopolitical processes are interlinked with shifting discourses of racialization under global white supremacy. In contrast to the widespread Islamophobia that targeted Muslims, Arabs, and Sikhs in the post-9/11 U.S., anti-North Korean hatred has not directly victimized Korean Americans. The economic success of South Korea as a liberal democracy had already reinforced the racial construction of Koreans as part of the East Asian American model minority, while North Korea was understood as a prison-like society in which people were starving to death, unable to escape. Furthermore, the dominant discourse of North Korea tends to distinguish the innocent citizens in need of liberation from the evil dictator who deserves punishment, whereas the racialized figure of the Muslim terrorist is supposedly indistinguishable and therefore omnipresent. Many Korean Americans also actively distance themselves from North Korea and reward one another for doing so. In the racial discourse of the Global War on Terror, the geopolitical contexts of the homeland, as well as assumptions about skin colors, have shaped the difference in treatment between Korean Americans, whose homeland has long been divided, and Muslim, Arab, and Sikh Americans, who are lumped together as terrorist look-alikes (Puar 2007).

Anti-North Korean hatred and racialization in the age of the Global War on Terror impacted Zainichi Koreans more drastically than Korean Americans. Kim Jong Il's admission of abduction surrounding the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration was a slap in the face of pro-North Zainichi Koreans, who had long denied such allegations of systematic abductions as a conspiracy theory. Japanese right-wingers took the opportunity to fuel anti-Korean hatred among the general public. Zainichi Koreans affiliated with pro-DPRK Chongryun became instant scapegoats, and right-wing terrorists targeted vulnerable Chongryun school children as the most visible embodiments of North Korea. The best-known incidence of anti-Korean terrorism is the aggressive demonstrations led by the Yamato-Japanese supremacist Zaitokukai in front of the Kyoto Korean Elementary School No. 1, which took place on December 4, 2009. Compared to the relatively limited material damage done by Zaitokukai members, the cultural and affective impacts of the attack inaugurated the era of hate speech in Japan. This and other incidents of right-wing demonstrations directly threatening Koreans with mass murder and deportation, in which the police appears to protect the demo participants, created a visual economy of hate speech through social media websites. Anti-Korean discourse in Japanese had flourished on the Internet since the 1990s, but the abduction issue gave further legitimacy to anti-Korean publications as journalistic or academic discourse. Increasingly, Japanese women lead such public demonstrations to propagate anti-Korean and anti-Chinese hate speech (Kim-Wachutka 2019). In the 2010s, Japanese conservative nationalism under the Abe administration began to take a transnational turn. Japanese women, including civilians and government officials, participate in a

transnational mobilization of “Comfort Women” denialism in the name of justice and peace. Such a discourse has begun to take root in the U.S., as I analyze in Chapter 4.

Transnational Korea and Queer Political Discourses

Political mobilizations for gay rights emerged in the 1990s in South Korea (Bong 2008; Kwon Kim and Cho 2011; Park-Kim et al. 2008; Seo 2001). Military dictatorship under Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan circumscribed any public discussions on liberal or human rights, while the conscription-based military system reinforced the Confucianist ideology of rigid gender roles embedded in patriarchal family relations (Moon 2005). After democratization in 1987, students and activists began to form gay and lesbian rights organizations in Seoul, employing the discourse of human rights to advocate for sexual minority rights (Bong 2008; Kwon Kim and Cho 2011). Women's and feminist movements also gained some momentum during this period, although they largely failed to incorporate lesbians, who also faced sexism from gay activists (Park-Kim et al. 2008). Rapid technological growth spurred bulletin board systems and chat rooms on the Internet, enabling these activists to exchange information that was previously unavailable (Kwon Kim and Cho 2011). Exchanges also entailed a transnational character from early on; Korean Americans in Seoul and South Koreans in New York City, many of whom were university students, directly inspired the early queer Korean community organizing in both of these urban spaces. Foreign English teachers and U.S. military service members in Seoul have

also driven the LGBTQ political momentum as well as the nightlife subculture in urban South Korea (Kwon Kim and Cho 2011). In these processes, both English and Korean terms circulated to refer to various non-normative desires, identities, and practices that cannot fall into neat classifications. Seo (2001: 69) documents how Korean slang words like *iban* signaled “a new consciousness of the homosexual community as a social group only vaguely differentiated from heterosexuals,” while the connotation of *gay* has shifted over time from transgender-like subjectivity to a political identity. Indeed, the construction of collective identities as gays and lesbians, as well as cultural symbols like rainbow flags, accelerated the political mobilizations of non-normative gender and sexuality (Kwon Kim and Cho 2011). In 1998, the first Seoul Queer Film and Video Festival was successfully carried out after the government had shut it down in the previous year. The annual Korean Queer Festival, including the Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade, was inaugurated in 1999 and later renamed as Queer Culture Festival.

South Korean sexual minority rights movements have confronted domestic social issues embedded in the state-building, such as military conscription, family registry, legal protection, and homophobic representations in education and the mass media. The military classifies homosexual orientation as a mental disorder, and consensual same-sex sexual acts are prohibited and punished by the military criminal law (Bong 2008). The Constitution also defines family and marriage in binary terms of sex, and activists have sought to address the legal implications of a rigid gender binary, including the criminalization of sexual violence and

prostitution that only applied to hetero- and cisnormative contexts (Bong 2008; Na et al. 2014). In 1997, gay and lesbian activists held some of the earliest public gatherings and protested against school textbooks that depicted homosexuality as a cause of social problems like the AIDS epidemic. In the same year, the Youth Protection Act defined homosexuality as harmful to youth; when the Committee for Ethics of Information and Communication under the Ministry of Information and Communication began censoring gay and lesbian websites as obscene and inappropriate for minors, activists responded by waging a legal battle (Bong 2008; Kwon Kim and Cho 2011). Meanwhile, feminist activists criticized the family headship system (*hojuje*) for producing the proper national subject (*kungmin*) based on heteropatriarchal family relations that legally determined one's social status based on gender and seniority. In 2004, the Healthy Family Act of 2004 was passed to substitute this system. Against the background of the declining fertility rates and aging population, this law sought to reinforce heteronormative marriage and reproduction as foundations of the family and nation, a dual discourse eroded by neoliberalism (Kwon Kim and Cho 2011). In 2008, the Family Relations Register became the main system of legal identification. Although the new system does not rely on the gendered classification of one's status and citizenship, LGBTI activists lament the fundamental logic of heterosexual marriage and family as a basis for legal identification (Na et al. 2014). Public opinion research indicates that South Koreans' attitudes have slowly shifted toward greater acceptance of homosexuality, but Christian religious conservatism by Protestants continues to drive anti-queer politics (Rich 2017; Youn 2018).

In fact, the global political economy after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis has in no small part shaped the struggles surrounding queer and non-binary Koreans. Known as the IMF crisis in South Korea, the bailout and structural adjustment wreaked havoc across the country with mass layoffs. While the crisis paved a way for Kim Dae Jung's neoliberal administration, a new discourse of "family breakdown" alleged that traditional family values centered on the breadwinning father and homemaking mother had been eroded (Song 2009). Thus, in South Korea, the individualistic logic of neoliberal entrepreneurship emerged alongside collectivistic narratives of the heteronormative nuclear family as coping mechanisms for the socioeconomic crisis (Cho 2017). The precarious labor market and intensified conservatism around family, marriage, and gender undermined the LGBT individuals' livelihoods, let alone political mobilizations. Whereas younger queer women and transgender people have often been at the forefront of LGBT activism, older middle-class gay men have tended to retreat into securing their livelihoods or remain hidden until their parents' passing (Bong 2008; Cho 2017).

The IMF crisis not only weakened the momentum of the emergent LGBTQ political discourse but also invited the quick resurgence of conservatism in South Korea. When the Korean business community helped elect Lee Myung Bak in 2008, his ultra-right administration emboldened conservative Christians and intensified their anti-queer backlash as well as anti-North Korean sentiment. Due to such pressure, the Ministry of Justice revised the Anti-Discrimination Bill

(introduced by the previous Roh Moo Hyun administration) to exclude "sexual orientation" from the categories protected by the law. This sparked a series of public protests and direct actions organized by the Emergency Coalition of South Korea LGBT Rights Groups Against Homophobia and the Distorted Anti-Discrimination Bill (later renamed the Rainbow Coalition). Kwon Kim and Cho (2011) document that these protests created a rare opportunity for gay, lesbian, and transgender activists across generations to work with each other. In addition, gay and lesbian youth "identified the Korean state as an entity that they needed protection *from*, not to be protected *by* (Kwon Kim and Cho 2011: 219). Yet virulent religious homophobia characterized the struggles of queer Korean activists for much of the 2010s, as counter-protesters began to show up in mass at the Queer Culture Festival and Pride Parade. Meanwhile, these were also the years of extreme anti-North hostility, characterized by the artillery exchange between the North and South that took place in western Yeonpyong Island in 2010. One of the major causes of the inter-Korean tension around this time was the massive annual joint military exercises that the South Korean and U.S. armed forces conducted around the Korean Peninsula, which Pyongyang viewed as invasion rehearsals. When the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy of the U.S. military was repealed in 2010—for which a Korean American Iraq War Army veteran Dan Choi was among the most vocal advocate—some conservative Christian mothers waged a protest, saying that their (supposedly straight) sons should not have to serve in the military along with gay U.S. soldiers. Although some Christian churches are open to LGBT individuals, neither religious, business, nor government sectors support queer causes at the institutional level.

Such a queerphobic culture in the ancestral homeland often thwarts Korean American families' acceptance of queer-identified children. Korean American communities heavily center on the Korean church, and immigration tends to reinforce Confucian values of filial piety and rigid gender roles. Although the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act in 2013 and the mainstreaming of LGBTQ individuals in mass media have fostered widespread social acceptance, scholars have observed that U.S. queer politics has taken an assimilationist turn. In stark contrast to the radical visions of the gay liberation movement and queer activism in the wake of the AIDS epidemic, gay identity has become reduced to a homonormative lifestyle centered on consumption, ownership, and privacy (Duggan 2003). Worse yet, the LGBT mainstreaming has converged with the liberal feminist narrative of linear progress, in turn constructing the non-white cultures and societies as inherently homophobic and thus deserving of rescue/punishment (Puar 2007). Thus, the LGBT movements' ostensible civil rights victory in the Obama era has eclipsed the preceding struggles, rendering racism and other intersecting axes of oppression a done deal (Eng 2010). The generation of queer and trans Koreans who grew up through these sociocultural changes are addressing the discrepancy between the liberal acceptance of LGBT rights and the conservative Korean families and churches while challenging the mainstream LGBT community's general historical amnesia. Some of the landmark efforts include the Dari Project's bilingual publication of a collection of personal stories by LGBTQ Koreans (2013), the founding of the Korean American Rainbow Parents (2016), and the first national Korean Queer and Trans

Conference (2018). These grassroots endeavors primarily focus on family acceptance and individual well-being; in contrast, the following chapters illustrate how queer and trans Koreans are coming together to shape the discourse of ethnicity, belonging, and (re)unification in the broader geopolitical context of homeland division and diasporic mobilization.

Toward Queer Korean Diaspora

An in-depth examination of diasporic and queer Koreans' political engagement warrants a *longue durée* approach to the genealogies of ethnic relations, racialization, and nationalism in East Asia, migration processes embedded in colonialism and Cold War imperialisms, and the neoliberal political economy of gender and sexual norms. As I have shown, geographically specific *and* transnational processes have shaped the experiences of Korean migrants in Japan and the U.S., while the volatile yet consistently dire political situations in the Korean Peninsula have led to divergent collective identities in the diaspora. Meanwhile, Todd Henry (2018) argues that the ongoing systemic exclusion of queer subjects in Korea points to a productive critique of Queer and Transgender Studies.

This critique does not assume legal inclusion or neoliberal consumption as the only or primary modes of engaging with the current predicament of marginalized subjects. Nor does it suggest homonormative forms of cultural assimilation or homonationalist articulations of one-upmanship will, in teleological fashion, define the complex and unpredictable agency of LGBTI-identified Koreans. (Henry 2018: 16)

Thus, the emergence of Queer Korean Studies opens up a space for interrogating the analytical privileging of liberalism in U.S.-centric queer discourse. My focus on queer diasporic Koreans articulates a simultaneous critique of heteronormative imaginaries of national unification on the one hand and the interconnected discourse of racialization and militarization across the Pacific on the other. The geopolitical impact of queer diasporic formations among overseas Korean communities remains to be seen. While their influence on foreign relations among North and South Korea, Japan, and the U.S. might be limited yet, the remaining chapters demonstrate how their impact can be evaluated beyond the conventional concerns of remittances, electoral politics, and professional lobbying.

Chapter Two

Diasporic Conjuring

All our members are it's like family . . . we don't have just our meetings to do our things, you know? I think it's people that we trust, that we can count on, who kind of understand our experiences, who never question or challenge any of it, but just like embrace as a whole, however we are, whoever we are, you know? So yeah, it's a great group, and I think, even though we're teeny-teeny-tiny, I think we're very strong, in that sense.

—Kathy, an Eclipse Rising member

Three Transient Nights of Home-in-Action

In April 2017, six core members of Eclipse Rising flew into Portland, Oregon from California, New York City, and Tokyo to attend the annual conference of the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS). Our purpose was to promote a “Comfort Women” solidarity resolution among the members of the AAAS and achieve an institutional endorsement. Eclipse Rising members, including myself, had been working on the resolution since the previous year’s conference in Miami, urging the AAAS community to take a position against the increasing historical denialism of the Japanese government. Because some of the members now live far away from the San Francisco Bay Area, the original geographical center of Eclipse Rising, we had been holding monthly meetings virtually on

Google Hangout in preparation for this conference, organizing panel discussions and a section meeting on “Comfort Women” issues in the context of Asian American communities. This trip was one of the few occasions, perhaps once or twice a year, in which all six of us would meet in person.

As soon as we started arriving and settling into our hotel rooms, both of the cozy double rooms we had booked became adorned with things: candies, potato and tortilla chips, rice crackers, chocolates, bananas, oranges, muffins, green tea bags, freeze-dried coffee and tea drinks, hydrating facial masks, and souvenir items, of U.S., Korean, and Japanese brands and origins. This assortment of mostly edible things, spread out all over the beds and tables and desks, brought in with the intention of sharing, contributed to the instant homefulness of the otherwise generic Marriott rooms. We playfully called our hotel rooms “the headquarters,” putting up flyers of our panels and meetings on the inside of the door to the hallway. We also prepared handouts of the resolution proposal and small stickers of a logo for the resolution efforts, which feature a yellow butterfly, the symbol of the “Comfort Women” solidarity movement. It was the first time all of us were even in the same space together, let alone in action, since the election of President Trump. Our ultimate goal was to propose the resolution at the general business meeting on the last day of the conference and have the Board approve it for consideration by the entire general membership. To do so, we had gained support from ten sponsors and collected more than a hundred endorsement signatures. We were in high spirits.

As a grassroots community organization, Eclipse Rising does not have a 501(c)(3) status, any substantial funding, or paid staff. Everything we do is on a volunteer basis. As a U.S.-based Zainichi Korean community organization, its core membership has never exceeded eight individuals since its founding in 2008. As of 2018, all the core members have at least a Master's degree, but all of us are precariously employed as adjuncts and graduate students. Some grew up in Japan while others in the U.S., or both; all are fluent in English, but some have more Korean and Japanese language skills than others. As third-generation Zainichi Koreans—diasporic Koreans whose ancestry traces back to colonial migration and postcolonial exile from the Korean peninsula to the Japanese archipelago—we do not feel full belonging in Japan, Korea, or the U.S., including Korean or Japanese American communities. And in many instances, we feel marginalized even in Zainichi Korean communities for our views on gender and sexuality issues. Those three nights at Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront, expensed partially by university funds, typified how Eclipse Rising conjures up, almost magically, a small but powerful mobile space of belonging while in political action, traveling and sharing space, food, and power.

In this chapter, I examine how a sense of ethnic belonging emerges among diasporic Koreans when they find each other to create a community together. As descendants of refugees and migrants, and as people who share basic feminist and queer political values, their stories diverge and converge like tidal waves. I focus on some of the emblematic moments in which the encounters and engagements in the Korean diaspora animate alternative stories of Koreanness.

In the context of U.S.-style racialization and neoliberal assimilation, layered upon the ongoing effects of Japanese colonialism, Koreanness can be a source of empowerment as much as disempowerment. For diasporic Koreans, particularly those who are women, queer, and non-binary folks, hegemonic Korean nationalism that hinges on rigid, essentialist, and heteropatriarchal ideas of Koreanness can evoke an enormous sense of alienation (Eda 2018; Kim and Choi 1998; Kim 2010; Kim-Wachutka 2018; Kim and Rhee 2018; Lie 2008; Ryang 2008). Yet they are not victims in need of help. Shifting the lens toward how community organizers collectively overcome the shared sense of alienation, I illustrate the moments in which embodied experiences of diaspora activates a politicized mode of belonging. In these moments, which I call *diasporic conjuring*, the power of Koreanness is unmoored from hegemonic nationalism and transformed into something *beside itself*. Embodied and conjured by these Korean community organizers, the diaspora is a spiritual force to recuperate sacred relationships between identity and place, subjectivity and territoriality, and life and land.

Embodied Agency in Ethnic Belonging

Ethnicity, nationalism, and diaspora have little to do with biogenetic or even linguistic similarities. Researchers suggest that these place-based collective identities are socially and historically constructed (Brubaker 2009; Butler 2001; Calhoun 1993; Clifford 1994; Gilroy 1993; Hall and gay 1996; Shin 2006; Vertovec 1997). Feminist and queer scholars further criticize the

heteropatriarchal discourse underlining the nation-state (Kim-Puri 2005; Nagel 1998; Peterson 1994; Yuval-Davis 1997). However, few researchers provide an in-depth analysis of how a sense of community belonging emerges despite numerous embodied differences in gender, sexuality, class, location, and so on (Ahmed et al. 2003; Brah 1996; Fortier 2001). Discussing queer diasporas, cultural analysts propose the possibility of alternative ethnic belonging that does not perpetuate exclusionary narratives of the nation (Ellis 2015; Eng 2010; Gopinath 2005; Velasco 2020). Nevertheless, little empirical research exists to support such a possibility, particularly for overseas Koreans coming together with endlessly divergent experiences. For instance, the ideological division between communism and capitalism runs deep in the Korean diaspora, making ethnic belonging elusive. Racism rooted in U.S. and Japanese geopolitical dominance does not help, either. For some liberal social scientists, ethnicity may almost seem like a relic of the past, a source of conflict, or an outdated model for organizing and understanding society.

I assert otherwise; ethnic belonging matters to overseas Koreans in a way that non-Koreans might not immediately grasp. For those of us who are alienated from both the mainstream society and our own ethnic minority communities, cultivating a healthy sense of self, if not explicit pride in our ancestral culture, proves difficult. On the one hand, the colonized subject is destined to contend with the double consciousness that makes their psyche “torn asunder” (Du Bois 1903; Fanon 2004). On the other hand, the dominant model for ethnic pride depends on heteropatriarchal reproduction that conflates culture and genetics.

Therefore, queer-identified, mixed-race, and disabled diasporic Koreans often experience such a compound struggle while approaching other Koreans.

Examining the intentional and coincidental ways in which the Korean community organizers come together to conjure a sense of belonging, I re-think human agency as a transcorporeal relation between bodies longing to belong. When those queer diasporic Koreans commit to organizing themselves, or even encounter one another, they respond to the ongoing impacts of war, genocide, and colonization on their community spirit. I propose that the diaspora, as an embodied, narrative, and spiritual phenomenon, is a process of *conjuring*. Such moments do not occur in a linear succession or do not always happen for all diasporic Koreans; rather, I suggest that these felt moments of collective subjectivity evince a non-linear process of activating ethnicity. Attending to these embodied processes, I assert that both identity and place are socially constructed at the intersection of materiality involving objects, bodies, and environments and discourse spanning across symbols, languages, and narratives.

Sociologists have sought to develop a sophisticated analysis of ethnicity that does not center on essentialism while avoiding an ahistorical view of culture. Among such attempts is the cognitive approach focused on the emergence and maintenance of ethnic boundaries (Brubaker 2009). Wimmer (2012), for instance, argues that internal differences among co-ethnics are made irrelevant in the face of mutually constructed differences between ethnic groups. I like this cognitive approach to the extent that it confronts the question of differences.

However, I am dissatisfied with this view when it does not account for embodied

agency, specifically how ethnic subjects enable the very socialization process to construct cognitive differences as such. In other words, the methodological focus on the cultural development of cognitive schemas often leads to insufficient analysis of how re-interpretation may intervene with the simple internalization of norms. Scholarship on narrative sociology, however, draws attention to the aspect of social life structured by stories involving multiple interpretations. Framing is key to contemporary social movements in the age of digital media, much like myths anchor virtually all ethnic communities (Abbott 2007; Bell 2003; Maines 2016; Polletta 2009; Smith 1999; Somers 1994; Zussman 2012). Narratives evoke, manage, and animate emotional and affective experiences of collective trauma as well as community belonging.

Research on the Korean diaspora has revealed the affective dynamics of genocidal violence, sexual slavery, displacement, and urban ethnic conflicts. Zainichi Koreans have struggled to reclaim their unique position as descendants of (quasi-)refugees and postcolonial exiles, not as immigrants but as migrant subjects specific to the history of Korea, Japan, and the United States (Chapman 2004, 2007; Lie 2008; Robillard-Martel and Laurent 2020; Ryang 2013; Ryang and Lie 2009; Weiner 2009). Thus, to call themselves Zainichi is a political act rather than a simple choice of a descriptor. That most Koreans in Japan go by their Japanese aliases complicates, and even enriches, their relationship to the multiple names they often have. Transnational Korean adoptees also have uniquely complex experiences of migration, racialization, and identity construction while growing up in white households. Studies have examined the

kinship networks that the adoptees have developed through the Internet and in person (Kim 2010; Oh 2015; Park Nelson 2016). To have such unique backgrounds, however, often means that others in the Korean community do not fully understand the political sensibilities cultivated by years of distrust and self-doubt. My research builds on these findings by illustrating how Zainichi Koreans and transnational Korean adoptees find each other despite the lack of representation in the mainstream Korean American community. Their divergent life stories of the Korean diaspora generate a politicized sense of ethnic belonging that challenge the institutional dominance of the nation-state.

When it comes to understanding ethnic solidarity, debates on emotions and affects still render embodied agency elusive. In contrast to the volume of social research on violence and trauma, limited empirical studies exist on hope, agency, and healing that underscore ethnic survival (Ginwright 2011). Indigenous Studies and other Ethnic Studies practices grapple with such a deeper question of cultural reclamation that the mainstream social sciences have not fully acknowledged (Brown and Strega 2005; Jolivette 2016; Million 2009; Morgensen 2011; Smith 1999; Wilson 2008). This realm of social analysis cannot adequately be explained without an emphasis on spiritual practices involving stories, places, and specific people living their specific lives. As sociologists like Patricia Clough (1992), Avery Gordon (1997), and Grace Cho (2008) suggest, rigorous social research should develop an imaginative capacity for interpreting social forces that are felt, beyond what can be measured or observed. For ethnic groups whose ancestral homeland either does not exist or is under foreign occupation, the

meaning of place and culture resides not only in memories and dreams but also in the here and now of survival. I examine such moments of embodied practices to interrogate how collective identities like ethnicity, nation, and diaspora take on an ontological character. In theorizing the subjectivities and agencies of transnational Korean community organizers like Eclipse Rising members, I rely on the term *conjuring* for its connotations of awakening a spirit, calling an image to mind, evoking feelings, and materializing out of nowhere, through magical, ritualistic performance that facilitates a collective consciousness. Diasporic conjuring indicates “swearing together,” making a collective commitment to building a transnational community and sustaining a sense of belonging explicitly as a modality of political engagement and a critique of nation-state borders. To the extent that the Korean diaspora is a postcolonial formation continually shaped by the geopolitics of Cold War division, I situate ethnic belonging in the convergence of political engagement and spiritual-affective connectivities.

In the following, I feature three thematic moments of diasporic conjuring that interweave narratives, bodies, and emotions of alienation into those of belonging. First, I suggest that *knowing how to value each other’s stories*, not sharing the same story, is key to community formation. Adoptees and Zainichis alike discussed in their interviews that they feel at home when they do not have to explain themselves. Second, I discuss how the organizers *foreground differences and non-belonging* even while seeking solidarity among diasporic Koreans. Refusing assimilation into the mainstream Korean American community, they carve out a specifically *diasporic* Korean space in the Trans-Pacific. Finally, I

demonstrate how the organizers *situate their encounters and engagements* in the historical context of homeland division. By locating themselves in the midst of a nuclear war, they develop a sense of sacredness even when they struggle to remain involved. I analyze these embodied dynamics of diaspora through the feminist and queer literature on human agency. This chapter suggests that queer diasporas are not simply discursive subjectivities but a transcorporeal—that is, both spatial and spiritual—practice of community formation.

Knowing How to Value Each Other's Stories

While social movement researchers point out that collective identity and storytelling can strengthen mobilization efforts (Polletta 2009), my findings indicate that shared biographical aesthetics, or knowing how to value each other's stories, matters in queer diasporic Korean communities. On the one hand, the nuances in their diasporic experiences cannot easily be explained by logic alone; on the other hand, the uniqueness of their biographical trajectories can readily get reduced to its melodramatics. Neither rationalism nor sensationalism can create the kind of affective force to engender a community. Thus, a sense of belonging can emerge in a space where they do not have to explain themselves because they share the interpretive aesthetics of life stories, not just shared identities or experiences. This embodied knowledge activates an imagination of interconnected struggles, opening a pathway to a shared vision of social change as well as mutual trust.

For instance, even social gatherings that are not explicitly political are important community spaces for transnational Korean adoptees. Caroline, a transnational transracial adoptee who grew up in rural Minnesota, discussed the comfort of cultivating an adoptee-only space: “We don’t have to explain things, and stuff is just easier, like we all pronounce the [Korean] food wrong and we don’t care, um, kind of where we don’t feel ashamed of it.” In between non-adoptee Koreans with more knowledge of Korean culture and white Americans with little respect for it, Korean adoptees are often made to feel ashamed of their Koreanness that is at once insufficient and excessive. Adoptee-only spaces can affirm the seeming contradictions of their experiences and make them feel at ease and at home, perhaps even proud. Not having to explain is important because storytelling can be politically tricky for transnational adoptees, whose humanity often gets reduced to the sensational plot of their lives. Melissa, a Seattle-based Korean adoptee who belongs to Sahngnoksoo, explains:

Korean adoptees . . . we all know that your parents are your adoptive parents, and your biological parents are in Korea, so it’s the very melodramatic plot, storyline . . . that’s our baseline, right, that’s all adoptees, like, oh it is kind of tragic, but we just gotta move up a level to kind of like have a normal conversation. But with everyday people you meet, people tend to grasp onto like, “Oh you’re adopted?” or like, “Oh you had this struggle so early in your life? What was that like for you?” Yeah, so it’s, it’s having that immediate kinship bond that I have, that when I meet Korean adoptees, that automatically makes me feel excited about establishing more connections.

Whereas non-adoptees often exoticize the adoption story, adoptees can understand and appreciate each other's story for what it is, and they can have a conversation without overly emphasizing or ignoring the fact of adoption. They recognize such a shared experience as a kinship connection. Melissa feels such

connections immediately and automatically, indicating the spiritual aspect of sociality that emerges when transnational Korean adoptees meet each other.

Shared experience, however, does not always mean shared interpretations and values that can lead to a vision of change. After all, only a small number of overseas Koreans participate in community organizing. In addition to individual aspirations, the differences in migration routes, waves, and generations factor into their political participation. For Zainichi Koreans living in the U.S., neither Korean American nor Japanese American communities can easily provide a politicized sense of ethnic belonging. Rina's experience illustrates the difficulty of sharing the biographical aesthetics as a third-generation Zainichi Korean having lived in Japan, South Korea, and the United States. Rina was born into the Zainichi Christian church community in Shimonoseki in the 1970s. She grew up surviving constant anti-Korean violence inflicted by neighborhood Japanese kids and adults, which eventually drove her out of Japan to pursue parts of secondary education in Massachusetts. Right before she was sent to Massachusetts, Rina met a group of other Zainichi Korean youths at a Zainichi Christian summer program at Nojiriko, Nagano, when she was fifteen years old. It was the first time in her life that Rina was able to embrace her Korean identity. "I couldn't stop my tears," she said, when she saw other Zainichi kids playing Korean drums:

because they seemed so naturally being who they were, and I didn't know who I was and I didn't know how to be who I was. And, they were Korean. And I'd never seen anything like that, you know? Koreans were always angry or indignant or embarrassed or ashamed or struggling or showing off or closeted or guarded or, like something, you know, but just being like, I'll never forget that in my life, like that was the first time.

Attending this summer program, though reluctantly at first, turned out to be a watershed moment in her Korean identity process because she had not known how to be comfortable in her own skin. The Zainichi youths would intentionally address Rina by the Korean pronunciation of her Japanese given name, encouraging her to see herself as Korean. Nobody else until then had shown her so vividly and joyously who she was and how to be who she was as a Korean. This was the first time Rina felt a sense of belonging to her Koreanness. She was able to endure racism in Japan and the U.S. because of this affirmative experience.

With the idea of Korea as her homeland, she moved to South Korea after finishing college in Georgia. In Seoul, Rina enrolled in a Korean language school and started working multiple jobs as a Japanese and English teacher and an employee at a textbook publisher. Betraying Rina's expectations, however, Koreans began to take advantage of her. Her landlady, employers, and co-workers discriminated against Rina all because she was not a "real Korean" with full rights. She was judged for not speaking fluent Korean and compared with Korean Americans, who tend to be more recent economic migrants than the quasi-refugee Zainichi Koreans. Feeling disillusioned by the people who were supposed to embrace her, Rina solidified her identity as *Zainichi* Korean. Rina eventually returned to the U.S. on a tourist visa, on which she overstayed before she obtained a work visa and got involved in the nonprofit sector in the San Francisco Bay Area.

As she sought to get involved politically, she struggled to explain her Zainichi Korean identity while living and organizing in the United States. Even though she “always wanted to show up as Zainichi” since the summer camp, Rina was “giving in and saying ‘Korean-Japanese’ or ‘Japanese-Korean’ or something like that.” She said, “Or I would say Zainichi, but explaining was so much, you know, just so much effort.” It is not easy to translate the predicament of Zainichi Koreans into the discourses of racial and ethnic relations in the U.S. context, not least because people generally do not know about East Asian history and geopolitics. Immigrants and ethnic minorities in Japan do not automatically obtain citizenship by birth, while naturalization is a tenuous process. In many cases, Zainichi Koreans are neither juridically nor ethnically Japanese at all, and conveying these nuances would require a lot of explaining which Rina was not always prepared to do. Even when she met other Zainichi Koreans, she did not immediately connect with them just because of their ethnic background unless their political values aligned with hers as a social justice community organizer. Meeting Kathy, with whom Rina later formed Eclipse Rising, was another watershed moment for Rina. Kathy is of mixed Zainichi Korean and Russian Jewish background, and she had believed she was Japanese until the age of thirteen. Rina met Kathy through a Korean American community delegation to visit North Korea.

[Kathy] . . . understood community organizing, and she understood social justice. And, I felt like she and I swam in the same waters. . . And um, I felt for the first time, I might actually have a chance at creating a Zainichi organization ‘cause that was one thing I never was able to do. . . I thought, finally, I’ve been waiting for this moment all my life, you know. [sigh] [[Yeah, I guess I never had the courage to do it by myself. . .]] There’s only a very small handful of people that really, I felt, understood me for who I was. And I just felt so misunderstood, it

was just so much, and I was so tired, you know? So tired. I didn't know how they were seeing me, and I felt so self-conscious, and I blamed myself for not explaining myself very well. [[double parentheses translated from Japanese]]

Having to explain, feeling misunderstood, and blaming herself for not explaining herself well—this cycle had exhausted Rina and kept her from organizing around her Zainichi identity, even with the few other Zainichi Koreans she had known. Sharing an identity category was not sufficient for Rina to entrust her soul to organizing a community together, because so much would be at stake. Meeting Kathy, another Zainichi woman who was familiar with the radical history and culture of community organizing in the Bay Area, gave Rina the hope for a Zainichi Korean social justice organization based in the United States. Thus, founding Eclipse Rising was a dream come true for Rina.

Swimming in the same waters, as Rina puts it, indicates not so much shared experience as embodied knowledge of navigating particular social contexts to their advantage as U.S.-based Zainichi Koreans and as community organizers. Sharing such biographical and political aesthetics unburdened the Eclipse Rising members from having to make their complex subjectivities barely intelligible to an audience entirely unfamiliar with the history of Zainichi Koreans. For Rina, this was a moment when she finally felt her Zainichi Koreanness would turn into a collective social force, not for any tangible connection to the homeland or Koreanness but for their very desire to reclaim their positionality of diasporic inauthenticity. She would not have embodied such a possibility without this encounter with Kathy, who also knew what it feels like to live with an unexplainable story despite a divergent life trajectory. Knowing how to value each

other's stories, even with all the complexities, is fundamental to the dynamics of conjuring a sense of diasporic belonging.

Foregrounding Difference and Non-Belonging

While belonging is optional, difference is inevitable. Living in alienation, diasporic Koreans' intense desire for belonging can easily result in distrust, self-doubt, and disillusionment like Rina experienced. The formation of Eclipse Rising as a U.S.-based Zainichi Korean community organization not only allowed the members to trust each other but also helped them develop the courage to reclaim difference and non-belonging in relation to other Korean community spaces. Although not explicitly an organization for Zainichi women or queers, they have represented the majority of Eclipse Rising membership (between five to eight core members) since its founding in 2008, influencing the overarching political analysis of the organization. Nadia Ellis (2015) explains that when queer diasporic belonging opens up a space for differences, even failed affinity can produce an alternative mode of belonging beyond a requirement of sameness. Thus, when diasporic Koreans conjure up this alternative mode of collectivity, its effects can entail so-called "negative" interactions like disagreements and conflicts. I argue, however, such abrasive encounters do not have to signify political defeat but can provide a political-spiritual resource, namely a temporal suspension that complicates intimacy as a fluctuating process of dissonance and resonance.

Zainichi Koreans in the U.S. do not neatly belong to Korean American or Japanese American communities because of their unique historical emergence, but few resources are available for contextualizing their uniqueness and recognizing it as such. Yuna reflects on her experience of recognizing her feelings as legitimate after joining Eclipse Rising. As a third-generation Zainichi Korean who has used four different names between her Korean name and Japanese aliases, Yuna experienced her own Koreanness as an intangible feeling of negativity.

I was always conscious of being Korean because of my mom. But she never explained to us [Yuna and her siblings] what it meant, and I think it's because she grew up in the Korean community. Like she *knew*, you know, it was like air for her. It's like you breathe and you're Korean, you know? But for us, it was not so apparent, we needed to see something tangible to make us believe that we're different. . . . But I was never bullied, or anything like that, you know? There were no hate crimes at the time, so, the negativity was kind of an intangible feeling.

Between Yuna and her mother, the generational difference in the political climate accentuates the dissonance that Yuna felt in her mother's narrative of Korean identity. When her parents would repeatedly tell her siblings and her that they had to excel and do better than their Japanese counterparts, Yuna felt annoyed to be categorized into this collective identity as Koreans. She sought to have a "cosmopolitan identity," which she thought would be "a solution to [her] alienation." When she came to the U.S. as a high school exchange student in Ohio, however, having a cosmopolitan identity did not protect her from white Americans throwing French fries at her in a shopping mall. She realized: "I have to confront, you know, rather than running away, because you'd never be able to run away from racism wherever you go." While Koreanness felt rather intangible in Japan, racialization manifested viscerally in the U.S., where Yuna came to

embody the inevitability of her Koreanness. In comparison to her mother and Rina, Yuna had not lived her Koreanness through explicit interpersonal violence until this encounter with global white supremacy. She decided to study sociology in college in Japan and later Ethnic Studies in the U.S. on a student visa, joining Eclipse Rising remotely from Southern California.

In February 2012, Yuna drove to Los Angeles to participate in her first Moim, a recurrent community gathering of leftist Koreans from across the United States. The organizers invited Korean activists virtually from Jeju Island in South Korea, where they were fighting fiercely against the construction of a naval base. Yuna was the only Zainichi Korean participant at this Moim, and the discussion focused on pressuring the U.S. government as citizens. Yuna questioned this strategy, but the other participants did not understand her question. As a Zainichi Korean subject who does not have secure juridical, political, or cultural citizenship in any existing nation-state entity, Yuna's political strategy cannot operate according to clear national demarcations. In fact, she had been legally stateless until she obtained a South Korean passport to study in Ohio, abandoning the defunct nationality of Chosun, or pre-division Korea. This is the default nationality that was assigned to Koreans who remained in Japan after liberation but lost Japanese citizenship through the 1953 San Francisco Peace Treaty. It was after Japan and South Korea normalized their relations in 1965 under the U.S. strategic encouragement that obtaining South Korean nationality became pragmatic for Zainichi Koreans. Even with South Korean nationality, Yuna still does not have full citizenship of any country. Such a subject position of

statelessness is vastly different from the majority of Korean American activists, who often mobilize their U.S. citizenship for pressuring the government. Yuna did not feel that she had room in the discussion to fully explain how she saw the geopolitical relations around Korea beyond the nation-state framework. “I wasn’t able to say anything at the meeting, but I felt the gap,” she said. This was a moment of realization for Yuna, that different communities have different strategies and tactics that they readily deploy.

The Moim made me feel really uncomfortable, or maybe just made me realize that, our position is very precarious, and we [Zainichi Koreans] don’t belong in any solid entity, and that’s our strength. I think we have to make that our strength, rather than trying to fit in whatever location or space. . . . But I think, this feeling is legitimately felt in me because of the existence of Eclipse Rising. Otherwise, I think I would just tell myself, oh, I must be thinking the wrong way, like that, you know? But with the organization, with the support, you know, for each other, I feel like the way I feel is legitimized. And I don’t suppress my own feeling or thinking, you know.

From this experience, Yuna came to emphasize the ambivalent subjectivities of Zainichi Koreans as a strength that Korean Americans do not usually possess. Instead of seeing such ambivalence as an inadequacy, Yuna argues, Eclipse Rising must articulate the unintelligibility of Zainichi subjectivities as a terrain from which they can critique the violence of national boundaries. Being part of a community organization that represented her Zainichi subjectivity gave Yuna a sense of legitimacy for the questions, discomfort, and gap that she was feeling in the Korean American community space. Instead of doubting or suppressing such feelings that she might have previously negated for fear of alienation, Yuna now had the power to recognize those feelings as a legitimate embodiment of geopolitically structured differences rather than a personal idiosyncrasy. Foregrounding difference and non-belonging instead of mandatory sameness

requires courage, and the formation of Eclipse Rising facilitated the cultivation of such a spiritual force.

As dominated by Korean Americans as this 2012 Moim was, the gathering also inspired another moment of foregrounding difference and non-belonging for Caroline. Caroline's mentor, another Korean adoptee activist in Minnesota, encouraged her to attend the Moim with a forewarning that the other attendees might not be sensitive to adoptees' cultural and linguistic differences. The Moim organizers tended to be fluent in Korean as first- and second-generation Korean Americans working with activists in Korea, and they did not have the habit of fully translating Korean. Caroline was “so excited . . . and terrified at the same time,” but this Moim turned out to be a key encounter.

So that was the first time I met Yuna, and I, first time, realized that, kind of came in contact with the idea of Zainichi. And I was like, we have so much in common! This multinational or transnational identity, and not belonging anywhere, like, when I was younger I used to talk about how I wish could create our own country of adopted Koreans, because we don't fit in with Koreans and we don't fit in with white people we were supposed to hang out with, and you know, neither group wants us, we don't fully belong to any group, and I was like whatever, ahh! I just wanna create my own place.

Here, Caroline builds a connection between her experience as an adoptee and the experiences of Zainichi Koreans in terms of non-belonging. Not fully belonging to the mainstream Korean community, let alone the racial majority in the Japanese and U.S. societies, can compel diasporic Koreans to create their own space. Learning about Zainichi Koreans provided Caroline with further contexts to understand her own diasporic subjectivity. Of course, transnational Korean adoptees have unique experiences that Zainichi Koreans do not share; however,

comparing the two communities can highlight the geopolitical and historical contexts of their diasporic emergence. Caroline points to the linguistic diversity of the Korean diaspora: “There’s another group of people out there that learned another language, you know? Blew my mind! I had no idea.” Caroline’s journey of encountering non-adoptee Koreans and Zainichi Koreans as she continued to make sense of her subjectivity illustrates how diasporic Koreans create knowledge about their own communities by locating themselves in relation to one another, moving further away from their places of alienation. Such a triangulation within the diaspora would be difficult in a binary relationship between the Korean American majority and the adoptee or Zainichi minorities. By foreground differences and non-belonging, these diasporic encounters redistribute the power dynamics among overseas Koreans. By connecting the minorities within the Korean ethnic minority community in the U.S., organizers like Caroline and Yuna carve out uniquely diasporic spaces that challenge the existing boundaries of the nation.

Situating Their Encounters and Engagements

Relationships taken for granted cannot survive conflicts. For diasporic Koreans, finding each other after years of alienation can catalyze enormous social transformation. By situating their encounters in the broader geopolitical contexts and dramatizing their engagements as fabulous, miraculous emergences, the Korean community organizers conjure up feelings of gratitude and pride for one another. What I highlight here is not so much intersubjectivity as

transcorporeality, because the sensations that constitute the feeling of fullness as a subject transpire between and beyond the flesh. Infusing phenomenology with queer theory, Sara Ahmed (2006) contends that social forces orient bodies toward or away from objects and one another while bodies take shape through space and time. In other words, for Ahmed, queerness calls for disorientations in social life that place other objects within reach. For diasporic Koreans to situate their encounters and engagements, then, they re-orient themselves toward those who did not tend toward, such as each other or even their own bodies, by directing themselves to the ways in which they have arrived, as if by magic. Situating is a spatiotemporal practice that enmeshes the collective biography and visceral experiences of the diaspora into existence.

For instance, I was interviewing Caroline and Eun Soo together in their living room. Eun Soo is a trans-identified Korean American from Southern California, and he was a founding member of HOBAK in the Bay Area. It was an emblematic moment of diasporic conjuring between Caroline, a transnational Korean adoptee, Eun Soo, a Korean American child of a Korean adoptee, and me, a Zainichi Korean, talking about our experiences, our community work, and our visions for unification, as queer Koreans. Eun Soo expressed his intense feelings at that moment:

I'm feeling so emotional right now . . . I don't know, like, we found each other. There's so many ways that we were not supposed to find each other . . . there's so many systemic things that try to prevent us from finding each other . . . like being stolen from your homeland. . . There are so many things against us, we have an entire Cold War in between each and every one of us. And we still found each other. Like that's, if that's not resilience I don't know what is. If that's not like overcoming something, I don't know what is, 'cause we've got nuclear warheads

in between us, we've got, like you know what I mean? . . . And, of course we're going to do it because we're amazing . . . But, we had to like really overcome so much, to make that happen, you know? So I feel really grateful.

Historical forces of colonization, war, division, and displacement orient these different subgroups of overseas Koreans away from each other. Forces like heteropatriarchy and racism orient queer Koreans away from their own bodies. Eun Soo's poetics reveals the extent of power that diasporic Koreans can build when we find each other and cultivate a sense of belonging based on shared political orientations. Switching between the foreground and background, between our embodied presence in the living room and the trajectories of our arrivals, Eun Soo endows our engagements with so much meaning. This enriched meaning of our interview conversation on the one hand, and the emotional intensity of togetherness that we felt in that moment on the other, illuminate how we perform diasporic conjuring as a transcorporeal phenomenon. In this instance, we situated ourselves through each other, we felt each other's presence, and we felt our bodies. We had arrived.

Diasporic conjuring is not simply a fleeting moment of happenstance but an embodied practice of building a community. Along with Eun Soo, Julia is a founding member of HOBAK. Coming from a mixed Korean and Chinese family in Southern California, Julia did not have a space to fully explore her diasporic Koreanness as a political identity until she got involved in HOBAK. Most of the organizers in my ethnography share this experience of finally arriving at a space where they can make political sense of their Korean identity. Julia thus

understands HOBAK to be a space for not only doing campaigns and rallies but also finding each other and figuring out.

[. . .] part of our primary work is finding each other, and just being together . . . like being Korean in diaspora, and trying to be political with that, is really confusing sometimes, and complex, especially for our generation with hella adoptees and hella mixed-race kids, and we're super queer. . . We're not just organizing together . . . we're also figuring out identity together, and then figuring out community together. So we're taking care of each other, we're trying to be part of each other's lives, and we're supporting each other in our personal family lives, you know? So it feels really full and solid and healthy in a way that other organizing spaces feel a little thin, when it's just about the work.

Julia's feelings of fullness derive from the collective work of figuring out different ways of inhabiting the Korean diaspora together. Named by Eun Soo, HOBAK refers to the Korean word *hobak*, or squash, which culturally implies earthiness, unsophisticatedness, and imperfection. The organization names the inauthenticity of queer and diasporic Koreans into its collective identity, grounding their work in the very struggle to question what it means to be Korean. Their community engagement demonstrates how the meaning of Koreanness extends beyond logic and language to encompass the spiritual realm of togetherness bound by the shared question. A deferred definition of collective identity does not contradict Julia's full, solid, and healthy sense of community, which I read as the potential feeling of *homefulness*. While I do not seek to define and finalize "community," Julia's account at least points to the convergence of the "public" and "private" lives through the convergence of each other's lives.

Of course, diasporic encounters do not always result in affinity and empowerment, even among these dedicated community organizers. Ill feelings, contentions, conflicts, and fallouts are prevalent, exacerbating the pre-existing

conditions for burnouts. Issues of accountability and boundaries tend to generate tension, resulting in what I would call *abrasive intimacies*. As Julia addresses, taking care of each other and building mutual support are strategies to sustain the intimacy among the community members. As the Sahngnoksoo member Melissa discusses, though, maintaining a consistent level of involvement is difficult.

I kind of ebb and flow in and out of activism, where I can put my energy, and so passionate and devoted, but then it just zaps me. So I gotta retreat, hibernate, and kind of find that person that got lost in all of the work, right? ‘Cause I think . . . you can kind of get lost in the work of activism because . . . it encompasses you when you’re passionate about something, it just grabs onto your soul. But then, a little part of you kind of has to take a side step. So you know, it’s not the easiest thing, and I miss community and I miss working with folks sometimes, so you just have to find what works.

Melissa suggests that the spiritual intensity of community work can both empower and exhaust the worker, as “it just grabs onto your soul.” Thus, situating our engagements can also mean “find[ing] what works” while finding each other. For Melissa, this balance is like the “ebb and flow” of tidal waves, indicating the gradual and cyclical rhythm of energy that is essential to the political mobilization process. Indeed, the organizers commonly have discussions on burnouts and self-care. Although the idea of self-care can lead us back to the individual self-management that neoliberalism demands us to conduct, the self and the collective do not have to stand in binary opposition. Here, I interpret Melissa’s wisdom as a practice of listening to one’s bodily needs. Situating our encounters and engagements is to recognize, enact, and uphold the sacredness of our community work.

Furthermore, negative affects do not conclusively have to mean political defeat. Nadia Ellis (2015) illuminates the elusiveness of affinity in queered diasporic belonging, drawing attention to longing, non-fulfillment, and suspension that arise from complex intimacies of disagreement and nonreciprocity. Examining the contentious poetics of African and Caribbean diasporic writers, Ellis (2015: 4) formulates a utopian reading of failed affinity by drawing on José Muñoz's (2009) concept of queerness as a drive toward utopian futurity:

Rather, a mode of collectivity constituted around “negative” affect emerges as a compelling alternative to compulsory sameness. The intersubjective modes and aesthetic forms I study, therefore, are powerful in the potential to which they give rise, a potential that suspends rather than resolves at the arrival at some new and satisfying space of exile. In retaining striking traces of the gap between here and there—between the possibilities spied on the horizon and territory currently occupied—these modes produce urgent feelings of loss, desire, and zeal that mark them, like Muñoz's utopian horizon, as queer.

Thus, I am drawn to this reading of disagreement as “a compelling alternative to compulsory sameness,” “a potential that suspends rather than resolves,” and “the possibilities spied on the horizon and territory currently occupied.” If such a formulation can emerge only after the initial encounter, then even abrasive relations can be a resource for complicating intimacy. Diasporic conjuring, therefore, is not limited to positive and happy moments, but its social-spiritual force opens more nuanced understandings of politicized belonging.

Conjuring a Community, Animating a Movement

For diasporic Korean community organizers in my research, what they feel when they engage with each other is a transmutation of Koreanness as power. Fortified

through colonialism, imperialism, and nationalism, this power is more frequently embodied as alienation, loss, and trauma—what Grace Cho (2008) illustrates as hauntings. This is commonly understood through the cultural psychic narrative of *han*, a collective affect of unresolved resentment and grief (Kim 2017). This narrative might inform, but does not fully capture, the impetus of transnational community organizing work done by diasporic Koreans whose embodied experiences challenge the haunting power of Koreanness. Fictive as it may be, ethnicity is inherently relational as a collective identity, memory, and practice with the Other and each other in mind. For these community organizers, ethnic belonging is tethered to each other's bodily presence and oriented toward the possibility of a Koreanness beside itself. The fact that they are still here, finding each other and organizing themselves, means something—their struggles mean *something*. There must be *something else* besides what is thought to be known as Koreanness, residing in the gulf between thinking, feeling, and imagining; there must be *more* to Korean lives and Korean spaces than what is thought to be Korean bodies and Korean territories. Therefore, the historical emergence of Koreanness is not reducible to the traumatic past that haunts Koreans or the abstract cognitive category. It takes place in the spatial and spiritual dynamics of social life.

I offer *diasporic conjuring* to name the Korean organizers' embodied practice toward the unimaginable fullness of life. Diasporic conjuring neither unravels the resentment nor discharges the ghosts, but it animates a moment, however fleeting or sustained, in which an affective force is called into being as if by magic

to orient bodies and objects toward one another, unsettling rigid imaginations of life and space. In this instance, neither subjectivity nor agency is knowable in advance, but the visceral experience of togetherness, perhaps like what Doreen Massey (2005) calls “throwntogetherness,” or finding each other *out of place*, emerges from the desire for a body that does not yet feel itself. What binds our bodies may very well include a shared sense of loss, but we can never know in advance the entirety of our loss until we feel our bodies healing from it. To what extent we can heal is also unknowable, but it partially depends on how we move through this world to shape our bodies. What if we could heal more than we would ever know? What if there were more to our existence than we could possibly imagine?

Proponents of queer diaspora (Ellis 2015; Eng 2010; Gopinath 2005; Manalansan 2003; Patton and Sánchez-Eppler 2000) assert that queer studies and diaspora studies must draw on each other’s insights to critique borders and nationalisms effectively. This chapter demonstrates how queer diasporic subjectivities may translate to agency and capacity for geopolitical change-making and peace-building. Through diasporic conjuring, diasporic Koreans’ practices of community organizing activate a transformative imaginary of politicized belonging by centering their embodied experiences as ethnic minority women and queer/trans people of color. Feminist scholars have established that the false dichotomy between the public and the private spheres undergirds heteropatriarchal social structures including the realms of the national and border imaginaries (Kaplan et al 1999; Anzaldúa 1987; Nagel 2003; Yuval-Davis

2004) and international politics (Enloe 1990; Sylvester 2013; Tickner 1992). Proponents of critical geopolitics also argue that knowledge practices around space and place are embedded in unequal power relations (Agnew 2004; Tuathail 1996; Tuathail and Dalby 1998). Indeed, as Katherine McKittrick (2006: xv) points out, “Practices of domination, sustained by a unitary vantage point, naturalize both identity and place, repetitively spatializing where nondominant groups ‘naturally’ belong.” I apply this insight to the ways in which the dominant epistemology of the Korean division naturalizes the identities and places of diasporic Koreanness. The spatial and spiritual discrepancy in belonging, between what is seemingly naturalized by material conditions and discursive maneuvers and what is viscerally felt and longed for by living bodies and souls, is destined to be bridged, however transient the bridge may objectively appear, like the Marriott hotel rooms filled with foods to share.

Diasporic conjuring as a concept contributes to the debates on diaspora, nationalism, and ethnicity by clarifying the role of human agency in the construction of these place-based cultural identities. Postmodern theorists have complicated the notion of agency, shifting the conversation toward ontological dimensions like materiality, affect, and sensation. Science and technology studies have revealed that knowledge is produced through assemblages of various “actants” including objects and matters (Latour 2005). Meanwhile, feminist and queer theorists have invested in theorizing affect and sensation, in search of more rigorous analyses of power that flows through material matters, discursive fields, and embodied experiences (Ahmed 2004; Bennett 2009; Campbell et al. 2009;

Chen 2012; Clough and Halley 2007; Musser 2014). Moreover, scholars of religious studies have begun to articulate affect to spirituality at the level of embodied experiences (Chan-Malik 2018; Crawley 2016; Schaefer 2015). These bodies of scholarship altogether provide a view of agency as distributed, localized, and temporary capacity for transformation. Agency does not reside in the discrete body of the autonomous subject, but it is always relational and temporally embedded (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

In my ethnography, the embodied, felt, and spiritual modalities of knowing and imagining capacitate the conduct of life that is destined to transform power into something beside itself. Importantly, such a transformation does not exclusively mean political subversion or resistance. As Saba Mahmood (2004) points out, secular-liberal notions of the human subject cannot capture the modality of agency delivered through pious spiritual surrender. Emphasizing breaths, sounds, and enfleshment, Ashon Crawley (2017) calls such conduct "otherwise possibility." As a process of history and geopolitics, therefore, agency is simultaneously internal and external to the individual's body and subjectivity, to the extent that things like structure, discourse, and assemblage are simultaneously externalized from and internalized into the individual. Diasporic Koreans are constantly becoming the subject, yet at the same time, they have always been more than their subjectivities. This is a sacred knowledge that cannot be erased through assimilation, language loss, and forgetting. If we are haunted by the weight of Koreanness, we will also be conjuring spirits that help us find each other. To ask what agency is, therefore, is also to question what

counts as social change, beyond the conventional view of large-scale events. I respond to such critical questions around agency and embodiment, and even spirits, by highlighting how diasporic Koreans experience Koreanness through alienation, encounters, engagements, and connectivities.

To be sure, *diasporic conjuring* does not transcend but emerges *into* material relations. Miranda Joseph (2002) cautions against the idealized fantasy of community, demonstrating how community is complicit with capitalism in so far as the production and consumption of community is a performative process. Indeed, a key limitation of my ethnography as an empirical counterpoint to neoliberal capital is that it is unpaid grassroots community organizing, mostly outside of institutions (nonprofit sector, university, etc.) but entirely inside the political economy of social life. The current capitalist modality impels socioeconomically ambivalent women and queer migrants of color, neither impoverished nor wealthy, to volunteer passionately in grassroots activism alongside underpaid labor as servers, adjuncts, or nonprofit workers. The issue of sustainability that Melissa raises above is actually a matter of work-life-volunteer balance, and the issue of community exclusivity is, as Julia gives a hint, a question of which realms of *life* (e.g. domestic work, emotional labor), rather than which specific *bodies*, can meaningfully enter the community imaginary. In other words, we may ask: to what extent can this alternative mode of ethnic belonging become impactfully institutionalized or at least sustained, without getting folded into capital's performance of diversity and inclusion? In the following chapter, I continue building the discussion on agency and queer

diasporic subjectivities by examining how queerness further informs the modality of diasporic Korean community organizing. Even though none of the organizations in my research explicitly foregrounds an LGBTQ collective identity, their community work is infused with what I analyze as queer-of-color values. Exploring this dynamic, I will show how the community organizers' sensibilities and aesthetics around contentious political engagement, particularly as women and queer/trans people of color in the U.S., may invigorate the analysis of queerness and geopolitics.

Chapter Three

Queer Korean Tenacity

How do we hold each other accountable, *and* how do we hold each other?

—Regina, a SOOBAK member

“That Can’t Be an Accident”: Bodies and Spaces of Koreanness and Queerness

On Friday, May 26, 2017, I flew into Los Angeles to participate in the Moim, a gathering of leftist Koreans based in the United States, for the first time. Unlike the previous five Moims since 2008, this was the first one organized by SOOBAK (SoCal Organized Oppression-Breaking Anti-imperialist Koreans), in collaboration with KIWA (Koreatown Immigrant Workers Association), which offered its beautiful office space, including the kitchen, for the two-day gathering. This was also the first time in four years that all five of the Korean community organizations I focus on in my research convened in one location, from Seattle to Oakland to New York City. Six months after the election of President Trump, we were eager to strategize and organize together. At the opening ceremony, Regina posed the questions above to underscore the theme of "Sustaining a Movement." My glance at the room counted more than fifty individuals, about half of whom I had already known personally. I also knew, just from that glance, that this was

the first Moim in which the queer and trans Koreans showed up more strongly than ever and took up this important space as organizers, workshop facilitators, and participants. I represented Eclipse Rising and Nodutdol as a participant, and I facilitated a break-out session on Zainichi Koreans as the sole Zainichi at this gathering.

Nothing about this Moim was specifically about queer and trans Koreans. Our discussions centered on the history of war and division, ongoing community organizing efforts by U.S.-based Koreans, diasporic Korean identities, and sexual harassment in organizing spaces. Yet queerness permeated the entire space for the entire time, from the way we clarified our intentions at the opening ceremony, to the way we met and greeted each other with our names and pronouns, to the way we ate, drank, sang, and danced together on Saturday night, and to the way we took care of each other. Regina's questions acknowledged the difficult balance between community accountability and movement sustainability, with which many queer diasporic Koreans have constantly wrestled in their organizing work. In fact, queerness shines through all the Korean organizations in my research, even though none of them is explicitly a queer Korean group. How do queerness and Koreanness shape these organizers' sensibilities for power, bodies, and spaces? A long-standing member of Nodutdol in New York, Jae, shared the following reflection on the queerness of radical Korean organizing spaces:

A lot of members are queer, in terms of composition. It's not explicitly part of the work, but the values and practices reflect queerness. It's not part of our identity when we lead, but we don't hide it either, we don't always try to make explicit

connections. It's not conscious decision but a product of the mission. . . When I look around, a lot of the activists with radical politics in the Korean community are queer [laughing], right?! So what is that about, that can't be an accident. It's probably because the marginalized positions we're in, within Korean community or mainstream society, we're exposed to non-dominant politics, so we bring that political outlook, that'd be my guess.

For Jae, the convergence of queer Koreans in radical Korean spaces is not accidental but structural, indicating a pattern of mobility that fuels their mobilizations. Yet queerness seems to remain an undertone while Koreanness comes to the foreground of their organizing work. I argue that this is what happens when queer politics becomes spatialized and mobilized into geopolitics in the context of homeland division, post/colonial migration, and racialization. Fostered by the legacies of the Civil Rights Movement, Third World Liberation Front, women of color feminism, and radical HIV/AIDS activism, the queer Korean organizers address a wide range of issues besides coming out and same-sex marriage. Moreover, their political values and practices as queer and trans people of color have reshaped the landscape of Korean communities in the U.S., which often neglected queerphobia and transphobia while advocating for unification. Of course, family dynamics continue to confront queer and trans Koreans, and organizers come together to create cultural change within the Korean communities. My ethnography demonstrates how some of those queer organizers play a central role in developing the movement culture in the *tongil* struggle, a project seemingly disconnected from queer politics.

All too often, attempts to affirm queerness and national identity end up reinforcing territorial and symbolic borders as the framework of rights (Parker et

al. 1992; Puar 2007; Reddy 2011). Indeed, the only discursive room readily available for Koreanness and queerness to coexist is the exceptional subject deemed manageable by neoliberal logics (Duggan 2003; Ong 2006). No inherent relationship seems to bind queerness and Koreanness together (or any ethnicity, for that matter). Yet queer Korean bodies experience this symbolic dissociation as alienation from their own bodies, desires, and identities. In the hegemonic imaginary of the heteropatriarchal Korean nation, and in neoliberal, white-washed renditions of LGBT community belonging, queer and trans Koreans face a spiritual struggle. Jae's "guess" above is key to my theory of *queer Korean tenacity*, the practice of loving, desiring, hoping, and showing up for each other, in order to substantiate the very relationship that allows us to recognize ourselves as each other. Queer Korean tenacity thus seeks to reconcile Koreanness and queerness within the bodies and spaces that these organizers inhabit. It signifies the cultivation of alternative kinship rooted in geopolitical sensibilities to confront the historical sedimentations of gender violence.

Queer Korean community organizers articulate that simply being queer and Korean together is not enough. The previous chapter highlighted how *diasporic conjuring* enables politicized belonging and transforms Koreanness by mobilizing a spiritual force that resides in the dynamic social processes linking land and life, space and identity, and territoriality and subjectivity. Finding each other and recognizing their own complex geopolitical subjectivities as diasporic Koreans are crucial; as queer diasporic Koreans, existing and surviving indeed count as resistance. However, to facilitate the ongoing process of reconciliation

between queerness and Koreanness, the organizers activate queerness specifically as a *geopolitical* power. In so doing, they critically interrogate their embodied experiences of violence at the levels of the individual, local community, and translocal processes, in their specific locations in the diaspora in New York City, Oakland, or Los Angeles. In what follows, I clarify the theoretical basis for the concept of queer Korean tenacity, namely the debates on mobilities and queerness.

Queer Korean Tenacity and Geopolitical Mobilities

I explore the queer geopolitics of diasporic Korean communities through the theoretical framework of mobilities. Sociologists like John Urry (2016) and Mimi Sheller (2017; 2018) have proposed mobilities as a rigorous paradigm for understanding dynamic social relations accounting for both structure and agency. Thinking through mobilities emphasizes the materiality of power and the relationality of knowledge. This framework is useful for studying migration and social movements because it attends to the powerlessness of humans entrenched geographical structures, as well as the powerfulness of subjects navigating their displacement and emplacement. Notably, attending to mobilities is also to notice immobilities, including dispossessions, lack of access, and attachments. In my research, I draw attention to geopolitical mobilities that emerge from, on the one hand, geosocial structures like imperial and colonial operations, political opportunities, access to resources, border regimes, and migration patterns (Carter 2005; Kastoryano and Schader 2014), and on the other, political

momentum involving embodied and affective engagements (Gould 2009). Queer diasporic Koreans are propelled as much by the ongoing war and transnational capital as by their desire for safety, community, and knowledge.

Although scholars of transnational social movements grapple with such questions of geopolitics and mobilities, few of them have examined the relevance of queerness to the scope of political sensibilities held by movement participants. Queer theory, meanwhile, has not fully articulated its salience for the studies of conflicts and peace-building. While some researchers have tended to study LGBT politics in terms of rights and representations of a clearly definable minority group, others have emphasized the historical contingencies of queer discourse and subjectivities (e.g., Cohen 1997; Foucault 1990; Gamson 1995). Addressing the entanglements of queerness, racialization, and disability, others discuss queerness as affect and materiality (Chen 2012; Musser 2014; Puar 2017). Queer desires also propel migration as well as practices of dwelling (Carrillo 2018; Manalansan 2003; Gopinath 2005). Furthermore, researchers of globalization, transnationalism, and diaspora point out that queerness is a central factor in contemporary discourses of security, citizenship, and national identity (Amar 2013; El-Tayeb 2011; Puar 2007). Building on these debates, I focus on embodied experiences as a key to understanding how gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and race shape the modalities of political mobilization in specific geographical contexts (Anthias 2012). I assert that the case of community organizing among queer diasporic Koreans offers a nuanced understanding of the connections between

geopolitical conflicts rooted in imperialism and the issues of heteropatriarchal nationalism.

Shifting the lens from diaspora and displacement out of Korea in the previous chapter, I now turn to immigration and emplacement in the U.S. (via Japan for some) to investigate how Koreanness and queerness become embodied and felt as confluent dynamics in the geography of racial relations. My aim here is to delineate how Koreanness and queerness together constitute a key factor in the geopolitical mobilities of the U.S.-based Korean community organizers. I argue that an analysis of racialized queerness provides crucial insight for peace-building by inspiring transformative imaginations and practices of community building. As I illustrate below, the organizers' shared experiences as queer and trans people of color draw attention to translocal issues of immigration, poverty, state violence, and intimate partner violence. Such political sensibilities bridge the gap between the micro- and macro-processes of queer geopolitics, namely the more individual "queer" issues like coming out and family acceptance on the one hand, and the more national "Korean" issues like peace treaty and reunification on the other. For the queer Korean organizers, focusing on either of these levels is not sufficient for reconciling the alienation they feel between Koreanness and queerness. In my analysis of the community organizers' emotional experiences and their sense of body and space, queer Korean tenacity plays a central role in how they cultivate their political sensibilities. By "tenacity," I emphasize its etymological essence of "holding firmly," to invoke the practice of touching and embracing, as well as holding each other accountable, while capturing the

spiritual thrust of their commitment to social change and community organizing. Tenacity entails not only the fierceness of radical queer struggles but also the tenderness of diasporic Korean interdependence.

Extending my analysis on agency and spirituality from the previous chapter, I offer my concept of queer Korean tenacity in conversation with the discussions of temporalities and mobilities in recent queer theory. José Muñoz (2009) conceptualizes queerness as utopian futurity that is worth striving for beyond the banality of the here and now. Meanwhile, Dai Kojima (2014) discusses the concept of mobilities-in-difference, arguing that queer diasporic Asians employ spatial tactics of sociality and belonging that artfully negotiate the tension between polarizing conceptualizations of mobilities as either agency or displacement. Drawing on their work, I seek to theorize the confluence of queerness and Koreanness in the diaspora as simultaneously a geopolitical structure and an embodied performance that enable the here and now of what this world feels like and how we could move together. Queer Korean tenacity thus centers on the geopolitical mobilities that arise from specific bodies in specific places desiring one another for a community yet to exist.

As racialized queer immigrants, queer Koreans in the U.S. navigate multiple spatial configurations including family dwellings, Koreatowns, Korean churches, urban and suburban neighborhoods and schools, queer campus spaces, restaurants and nightclubs, and community gatherings, as well as the white supremacist, heteropatriarchal, and neoliberal society at large. Laboring, playing,

struggling, and living through these spaces and places, they inhabit a particular sense of time and space in which psychic matters like trauma and alienation (as well as hope and love) are inherently connected to planetary matters like wars, climate change, and structural oppression. In what follows, I illustrate how queer Koreans' politicization is a spatial process embedded in the affective geography of immigrant lives in the U.S. Moreover, while they negotiate their visibility and safety in urban Korean neighborhoods through organizing, their sense of belonging, community, and service has shifted along with the city landscape. Ultimately, queer Koreans connect queerness and Koreanness by examining their embodied locations and developing translocal analyses of a power structure that manifests in violence and alienation. Resonating with the idea of diasporic conjuring that transforms Koreanness beside itself, queer Korean tenacity suggests a creative movement toward issues that are not yet queer enough, not yet Korean enough, to cultivate connections between queer Korean lives and the world around them. Below I begin by illustrating the individual level of such reconciliatory processes.

“There Has to Be More of Us Out There”: Geography of Queer Korean American Politicization from Church to College to Community

How queer Koreans question and nurture their identities within the racial, gender, and class contexts of their lives highlights the salience of the embodied sense of space in fostering particular political sensibilities. For Minhae, a former member of SOOBAK and a current member of HOBAK, such a journey of

politicization began with her gender identity as a ciswoman before she started questioning her politics and desires further. She grew up in a middle-class neighborhood in Orange County, California, while her single mother-headed household was lower income; like many Korean Americans, Minhae was heavily involved in the Korean church community. “When I was young, I didn’t even know that queer people existed,” she said. “When you’re in a really straight place, where there isn’t that much diversity around like sexuality or gender expression, then it’s hard to even know, who you could be attracted to.” This heteronormativity of a place led Minhae to deeper questions of identity:

The only gay kids that I knew were like the weirdo white kids, who were like, punky and like, looked really different, and not like in my circles at all. . . I couldn’t even really register what that meant. And I was also in a very conservative community, um, Korean church community as well. But yeah, I had a really big crush on this person but I felt like I wasn’t sure, you know, if I was actually queer enough, ‘cause I was also going through a big man-hating phase, where I think I was becoming more politicized around gender, you know? And that actually probably came before, like my politicization around race and sexuality. Um, so I was kind of like, am I just, um, like is it just because I hate men, hahaha, do I actually like women, like am I actually queer, or am I just trying to escape, then that would be kinda fucked up, you know? . . . I thought that, to identify as queer you had to have known since you were like five years old, that, you know, like some people just knew all along, and I kinda came out later to myself, so I think those narratives around like, oh, you’re born this way, or it’s not a choice, like, those things didn’t feel like, you know, if I am choosing to explore my sexuality, if I’m choosing to be queer, does that mean I’m actually not queer, you know?

In this account, Minhae’s process of questioning is geographically located in the white-dominant, middle-class school and community spaces of Southern California, in which the only visible references of queerness were white queer youths, in contrast to the heteronormative Korean immigrant church spaces. Her cognitive dissonance led to intense questioning of what queerness means to her—

because she actively chose to explore her sexuality through non-heteronormative intimacy, her process seemed to contradict the dominant pseudoscientific narrative of “homosexuality” as a predetermined trait. While her “big man-hating phase” is somewhat reminiscent of lesbian feminism, Minhae’s questioning was embedded in its geographical context, wherein the representations of queerness available to her remained entirely non-Korean, specifically white. As Karen Tongson (2011) suggests, the American suburbs are built to perpetuate the national discourse of heteronormative white middle-class homogeneity; relocating the flows and vibes of queer migrants of color in the suburbs can challenge such a spatial imaginary as well as the dominant narrative of gay cosmopolitanism predicated on the urban/rural binary. Although queer Korean American youths often struggle to find representations in their suburban upbringings, their intense and intelligent questions begin to activate and mobilize their alternative sense of space.

Attaining higher education can play an important role in enhancing the socioeconomic and geopolitical mobilities of queer Asian American youths. Indeed, Minhae’s questioning intensified when she went to college, away from her family and church community. While her involvement in the Korean church was connected to her lower-income upbringing, attending college enabled her to pursue spaces of belonging outside the church.

When I was in college, I was very much looking for a place to belong, because . . . I changed schools around seven, eight times . . . because after my parents split, and then trying to be in an affordable place that had access [to good schools], I had changed friends groups so much . . . but my church stayed the same. So . . . I was very involved in the church. And it was kind of like this structured place for

me, where I could get away from my family. . . . But then . . . the church friends that I had stayed very consistent with, um, were so conservative. And, as I started to question, just society, I was really starting my questioning with the church. Like why is it that we believe this, why is it that abortion is wrong, how come, like, gay people are gonna, like, are sinful, like why? And, people couldn't give me satisfactory answers, you know? Um, so then I was like, okay, I wanna go somewhere where I can learn and like, have different values and beliefs, you know?

During her turbulent childhood and adolescent years, Minhae's church friends provided a solid foundation for her social life; however, as she was becoming more politicized, their conservative values and beliefs were no longer tolerable. Tired of having arguments after California's Proposition 8 passed, she cut ties with her church friends and sought out a political space on the college campus where she could be surrounded by other queer people of color. In contrast to the conservative upbringing, the diversity in gender expressions and ethnic identities on campus created a safer space for Minhae. She and I chuckled when she shared with me that “For a while I bounced around thinking that I was like an ally, and then I realized I was actually gay.”

I think really coming into my identity as a queer person was really, um, I don't know, like pivotal to my politicization because in this weird way, I feel like it opened up space for me to think about my experiences, um, not just as a queer person, but as like a “minority” in general, you know? So, I think the roots of my politicization probably actually really began with, you know, what I saw in the family and what I experienced in the family, and you know the, really reverberating impacts of gender violence and violence against women, and domestic violence in their home. So, um, so I think like, you know, that was first what gave me the sense that something was wrong, and that society was not just.

While Minhae's sense of social injustices was initially rooted in her family upbringing, where gender violence impacted her intimate life through and through, it was also her coming to terms with her queerness that enabled Minhae to critically analyze her complex identities as a young queer woman of color.

When she attended a University of California campus, the UC system was forcing exorbitant tuition fee raises that impacted students of color disproportionately. Like many queer and trans people of color experience when they participate in existing political formations, Minhae found herself in the students of color organizer community that “felt really straight,” while the LGBT campus community was really white. Working at the campus cross-cultural center, as well as taking classes in ethnic studies, gender studies, and sociology helped her achieve a stronger sense of belonging. With other queer students of color in such classes, “This is for us,” she felt.

Nevertheless, Minhae struggled to position her Koreanness as a political identity in relation to her queerness and a general categorization of people of color. She explained that not knowing what it meant to be Korean accelerated her process of politicization, as her questioning became further intensified.

[There was] a missing piece around being Asian American, and specifically Korean American, you know? I mean, I think ethnic studies too, um, tends to be very black and brown focused, and, I think that’s fine, you know? And then at the same time . . . where do I position myself, you know? . . . I knew I was a person of color, but then . . . what does it mean to be, like a Korean person, who’s a person of color and doesn’t necessarily have these kinds of shared experiences around race that, you know, a lot of my black and brown friends do, you know? Which has to do with like, race, class, where you live, geography, you know? Even though I had been pretty low-income, like in my childhood, um, I still lived in the suburbs . . . places that were not like, even if I was poor, the area around me wasn’t like economically devastated, you know, that makes a difference. So, I think that’s probably where Korean stuff started to, like, fit in, you know? . . . When we talk about generalized “people of color,” who I think of is kind of me, but it’s also not, and there’s a lot of distinct experiences within that, and, just feeling like, don’t we have like our own political history? Like are we all just like church *ajummas* [older ladies], like [laughing] is this really, it?

For Minhae, being politicized as a queer person of color was not sufficient because she felt that her combined experiences of Korean American racialization, lower-income yet upward socioeconomic mobility, and suburban geographical emplacement altogether differentiated her from the central tenets of urban Black and Latinx disenfranchisement. But when she turned to her Koreanness, all she had known was the church community that she had already left behind. To find this “missing piece” of what it means to be queer Korean American, she began to seek knowledge and connections with professors, graduate students, and community organizers who would mentor and support her process. Minhae observes that her politicization around Koreanness happened after she questioned gender, sexuality, and racialization.

I think [Koreanness] came last too, because I just didn't like being Korean. You know. Which is probably something that you hear, you've probably heard a lot in your interviews, but, um...once I had started becoming politicized and started drifting from the church, I was like fuck Koreans, like they're so conservative, like, really judgy, and like, they don't care about social justice issues, um, and they're really homophobic, you know? So, when I thought of Koreans I thought of what I had left at home, and what I really wanted to escape, you know? So, I just really had no idea even at, that a critical mass of leftist or progressive or radical Koreans even existed.

As Minhae observes here, many of my interview participants, queer-identified or otherwise, expressed that they had never liked being Korean while growing up in the U.S. or Japan. When they went to South Korea, they were still treated as outsiders. Even those who have had access to ethnic studies education like Minhae struggled to make sense of their Korean American identity because Korean-related topics remain sparse even in Asian American studies. When it comes to specifically queer diasporic Korean experiences, virtually no academic knowledge exists besides my present research. With her first queer Korean friend

Will, Minhae started to look for other queer Koreans by organizing a student support group, publishing a zine, and writing articles on social media. In the interaction with me below, she reflects on her intentions:

Minhae: I think I just hoped that there was something out there . . . otherwise it felt like, what is the legacy that is there for me to draw on, is it just other people's legacies? And you know, feminists like Audre Lorde, June Jordan, et cetera, were really important for my politicization too, and I also kind of consider them to be, what is it, like people who I'm in the lineage of, you know, like people who paved the way. And people whose work I still, who I'm still very much informed and influenced by, in my work and in my identity. But I think in terms of Koreanness, it was like, who?

Haruki: Yeah, like are we the first?

Minhae: Yeah, like it's kind of like me and [Will] were like, are we the only queer Koreans in the world? You know?

Haruki: Awwww.

Minhae: [laughing] Not like the only, but you know, are there more of us out there? There has to be. And like, yeah, there has to be, so.

Haruki: We're coming a long way.

Minhae: I couldn't have even imagined so many of queer Koreans, the community that I have now.

While she “hoped” that there would be something queer and Korean “out there,” her words also indicate a stronger belief, conviction, or even knowledge already of queer Korean lives in this world. Minhae's experience demonstrates how Koreanness and queerness shape each other in a specific geographical (and historical) context of the embodied subject. Her earlier sense of alienation, of being the only queer Korean in the world (of Christian Koreans in Orange County), in turn, orients Minhae to a wider sense of space in which other queer Koreans must be found. There must be other queer Koreans, and she must find

them. This spatial sensibility that constitutes queer Korean geopolitical mobilities is different from the sociocultural gravity of what Halberstam (2005) calls “metronormativity,” which draws and collapses queer desires into urban life. Especially for queer Asian American women, U.S. urban spaces do not offer any promise of liberation or community just by virtue of their urbanness. Even after getting involved in more women and queer of color spaces in college, Minhae still did not know how her Koreanness could constitute a political identity, especially in conjunction with her queerness. This urge to contextualize and politicize her gender, sexual, ethnic, and racial identities impelled Minhae to grassroots-level community organizing, leading her to become one of the founding members of SOOBAK in 2011. Notably, Minhae and Will were not just searching for other queer Koreans but seeking a movement community in which Koreanness and queerness could enhance each other as political forces. Such political mobility, driven by the spiritual need for an embodied space to reconcile queerness and Koreanness, emblemizes my idea of queer Korean tenacity. Tracing the geography of queer Korean American politicization through Minhae’s journey thus far, I have focused on reconciliation at the individual level in this section. The next section will examine how queer Korean tenacity engenders the political mobility for reconciliation at the level of the local community, such as in New York Koreatown in the 1990s.

**“We’re All Over K-Town”: Negotiating Safety, Visibility, and
Community as Queer Korean Migrants in the City**

About a decade before Minhae's politicization, on the other side of the continent, queer Korean community organizers like Jae were conducting some of the earliest collective actions to address homophobia in the Korean American communities. Contentious debates that queer Koreans were having among themselves, more so than with non-queer Koreans, reveal the complexities surrounding queer Korean lives in an urban neighborhood they considered as a home community as immigrants in New York City. In particular, it proved difficult to negotiate between safety from anti-queer violence on the one hand, and the visibility of queer Koreans on the other. This difficulty constitutes a key tension between individual and community approaches to addressing issues among queer Korean Americans. While some community members have needs and priorities centered on their own individual circumstances around family relationships, immigration status, and emotional well-being, others like Jae see these issues as structural issues that need to be tackled as a community.

Jae was born in Seoul in the 1970s and came to the U.S. in her childhood because her father got caught up in political turmoil under the military dictatorship of Chun Doo Hwan, who ruled South Korea for most of the 1980s. She grew up "not poor but not wealthy," and she lived as an undocumented immigrant after entering the U.S. with a tourist visa and overstaying it. While she has lived most of her life in New York including her college years, she had initially lived in suburban Indiana and rural Florida, where she and her family struggled with the sudden downward shift in class status, language and cultural differences, and racial discrimination. They lacked social support that other Korean immigrant

families would rely on because they were isolated as a nuclear family unit. Jae's activist career began as a college student involved in anti-war protests during the Gulf War. Jae has been a longtime friend and member of Nodutdol since its founding.

When asked if she had been involved in a queer organization, Jae said, "Very briefly," adding that all her friends were Korean queers and she would go to parties and social gatherings with all Korean gay men because there weren't a lot of out lesbians at that time, in the late 1990s. She told me about the short but intense couple of years of her explicitly queer organizing. One day, a gay-bashing incident occurred in Koreatown; four Korean gay men were targeted by a group of young Korean men as they were exiting a nightclub on 32nd Street. One of the survivors was an activist who was deeply involved in the gay Korean community in New York City, and he proposed a public forum on homophobia in the Korean community. They held this event, the first of its kind, at Haninhoe, the Korean American Association of Greater New York, a prominent Korean American community space located on 24th Street.

Organizing that event . . . highlighted for me all the issues that we go through as queer people in the community, that are struggling with issues of, you know, being out in the community, or not. And there were so many debates internally, among the people who were organizing the event, and our friends, like, why do it at K-town? Nobody wants to go to a queer event in K-town, that is so close to home, right? Why invite the Korean media, you know, why not have a private conversation, just among queers? Why do we have to make this a public thing within the community? You know, what is the benefit of doing that? Um, there were so many discussions like that. . . Very difficult questions. Right. And it was, you know, people were all sides of the question, and it wasn't, nobody was right or wrong, right? Um, but in the end, we decided to have this public forum, you know? . . . That was an important moment that brought together a lot of queer

Koreans . . . around . . . an event that was a political statement for us, right? So it felt really important. Um, and even though there were very very heated discussions, it really did bring everyone together.

These internal debates around the forum highlight the complexity of outness as a political strategy, particularly for an immigrant community. The main organizers felt it was important to make the event public in order to begin addressing the anti-queer street violence as a community issue rather than an individual one. Meanwhile, some community members expressed concerns over potentially getting exposed or labeled as queer if they attended the event. This debate sheds light on the ambiguous relationship between the individual acts of coming out and the collective work of addressing heterosexism. Although the latter does not necessarily indicate the first, and the public forum did not actively encourage anyone to come out, those who discriminate against queers do not care to draw such a distinction. When it comes to creating community change, the question of outness for queer Koreans involves more than an individual decision of disclosing one's identity to their family members. For queer immigrants of color whose livelihoods depend on the so-called ethnic enclaves, safety and visibility do not necessarily enhance one another, and the difference between the individual and collective coming out is a risky terrain. As Carlos Decena (2011: 3) points out, what enables and sustains a community, like Dominican immigrants in New York, are not loud and clear declarations of individual subjectivity but "forms of connection that cannot be fully articulated but can be shared, intuited, and known." Organizers like Jae understood how those "tacit subjects" moved through spaces, and they sought to do the work of community organizing by recognizing such nuances that exceed what is visible.

While the fact of such internal debates among queer Koreans alone demonstrates how queerness can contest the private/public boundaries, the anxieties expressed by many queer Koreans also indicate that Koreatown once did provide a sense of home. While more and more Koreans now live and work in other Korean neighborhoods in the greater New York area like Woodside and Flushing in Queens or Fort Lee and Palisades Park in New Jersey, Jae associates Koreatown with overpriced food and drunk people.

But, you know when we were doing our queer activist work, it [Koreatown] symbolized something, you know? Because we felt alienated from the community, and we were trying to make a statement to, what we identified as the mainstream Korean community, that's what K-town symbolized, right? And so, we would go there every night to put up flyers. . . We made paper flyers, and we posted them up, like in bathrooms of restaurants and *noraebangs* [karaoke bars]. . . And then, um, in the morning we would go back and somebody had taken them all down. And then, the next night we would go and put them all back up. We did that every day, for like three weeks, leading up to the event. And, a lot of people actually did comment to us, when they came to the event, they came because of those, those posters. . . And then it was only after that experience, you know, as I became more familiar with the queer community, I realized, ohh, we're all over K-town. You know, like a lot of wait staff at the restaurants are gay [laughing], I'll go to the restaurant and I'll be like, "Oh hi!!" [laughing]. But, you know, we were very invisible, um, and not out, but, like that was, that was community, that's where people worked. Um, which is another reason why this whole debate about like, why have a public forum so close to home in K-town? Where people have employments? You know like, that was a whole reason, for those debates.

In this account, alienation from the mainstream Korean American community did not necessarily result in an exile of queer Koreans altogether. In fact, Jae and her friends reached deeper into the community spaces and found out that, while invisible, queer Koreans had always been all over Koreatown. They might not have been "out and proud" like the Euro-American model of gay liberation, and

their employment statuses might have been precarious, but they had been part of the community. While Koreatown symbolized the mainstream Korean American community, queer Koreans did inhabit the material space. Here, queer Korean migrants' notions of home or community disrupt the seeming demarcation between the public and the private realms of life. As Gopinath (2005) explains, diasporic queerness does not require the figurative outside of the closet or the private home. In fact, she writes, "This queer transformation of the diasporic 'home' constitutes a remarkably powerful challenge to dominant ideologies of community and nation in ways that may very well escape intelligibility within a logic of visibility and 'coming out'" (Gopinath 2005: 79). Instead of the inside/outside of the closet, whose spatiality Marlon Ross (2005) critiques as a racialized discourse of sexual modernity, the affective boundaries of the Koreatown community fall along the lines of racial and socioeconomic stratification that keep queer Korean migrants from accessing white spaces and resources. Because of this particular spatialization of power, it was all the more important to hold the public forum in the Korean American community space.

The increase in queer Korean visibility, at least among queer Koreans, generated more political momentum as well as further tensions around what a queer Korean community organization should focus on. The organizers of the public forum created a community organization for queer Koreans, named Ibahn. Jae recalls this moment in the late 1990s as an exciting time when a lot of social and political exchanges were starting to take place among queer Koreans traveling or migrating between Seoul and New York. Many issues were also coming to light.

There was clearly a need for people who were looking for a safe space. At that time, we had internet, but like the online kind of queer community hadn't really like, flourished yet. . . And also, people were struggling with lots of issues like, you know, coming out issues definitely, issue of violence, either in their relationships or their family. Um, also just a lot of like self-abuse, alcohol, drug, all sorts of things like that, HIV issues, immigration issues, all sorts of things. And, you know, there weren't that many services available, period, but also, in like language-specific, for Korean speakers. Um, a lot of people were undocumented. So, there was like a huge need for service provision, which none of us were trained or equipped to provide, but you know, that was like an expectation, you know, oh this is a queer group, and they all come with their problems, right? . . . For many of us, the real reason why we wanted to be part of this group was to continue to do the kind of work, like the public forum, challenging heterosexism and homophobia in our own community, right? But then, a lot of the people who were coming to the group were [for] these kinds of individual needs, not really ready or interested in being part of any of that, right, so that was like a big tension in the group.

While Ibahn was intended for political action at the level of the Korean American community, the very community members had divergent expectations for the organization based on their dire individual needs as queer Korean migrants. This difference in expectations generated tension within the organization: on the one hand, the organizers lacked the capacity and resources for culturally specific service provision for such diverse needs, and on the other hand, the community members did not come with a motivation for getting involved and addressing these problems as collective structural issues. This tension highlights the difficulty of negotiating individual needs and collective action for social groups that experience multiple layers of marginalization, even if more members are coming together in a physical space.

Jae's story of queer Korean organizing highlights not so much a practice of carving out a safer space specifically for queer bodies as a struggle to negotiate

the safety and visibility of queer Koreans, who make their living in a heteronormative immigrant neighborhood within a racist society. I do not situate this story as the historic moment of queer awakening for Korean Americans; rather, I am drawn to the multi-dimensional tensions that emerged from the serious efforts to confront homophobia in the mainstream Korean American community. Jae and her comrades' work sheds light on the shifting opacity of Korean queerness, whose contours become more or less visible but neither self-evident nor nonexistent altogether. When queer Koreans become visible to each other, it accentuates their *everywhereness*, but it also reveals the underlying tension of individual needs versus community change. In principle, these divergent priorities are not mutually exclusive, unless capacities and resources are scarce (which is almost all the time). I think of these as urgent and long-term community care, both of which are necessary for restoring individual and collective wellness. These struggles are real and difficult but important for clarifying intentions and expectations of working together in the process of reconciliation between Koreanness and queerness at the local community level.

What complicates this tension between individual and community approaches to queer Korean struggles is the emotional energy demanded by the process of coming out. The western discourse of queerness centers on the progressive narrative of coming out of the closet, which does not capture the intricate techniques that queer and trans people of color must deploy to negotiate for their daily survival. Of course, family acceptance is fundamental to the well-being of queer Koreans, while coming out has been a key strategy for radical lesbian and

gay activism. But folks like Jae and Eun Soo recognize that coming out alone cannot end oppression rooted in hemispheric geopolitical structures and intergenerational trauma of war and division. Eun Soo recalls the national conference for queer people of color in which he made connections with other queer Korean activists for the first time.

I had searched for queer Koreans for so long. And then I had found them . . . and I kinda got in touch with some queer Koreans, and I was like, [pausing for a moment] “Is this it?” [laughing] Are we just queer and Korean and not talking about other things? That’s it? Like, all we have is to talk about our coming out struggles and, you know, like family stuff, which is important, so important, I get it, ‘cause I’m living it. And at the same time, I’m like, I have other things that I’m concerned about, you know? We’re talking about undocumented students on campus, we’re talking about all these other things, like, I got other stuff, that I’m connecting to all the stuff, and this is not enough. You know? So I was kinda let down, when I finally found other queer Koreans and I was like, oh okay. Maybe this isn’t what I’m looking for, actually. ‘Cause I always felt like, this, longing.

Whereas the general category of “queer people of color” could not fulfill Minhae’s hunger for queer Korean belonging, even the category of “queer Koreans” similarly could not promise Eun Soo a full sense of a political community. For Eun Soo, organizing a queer Korean community meant more than talking about coming out as an issue of individual families that happen to have a queer child. Eun Soo’s frustration and disappointment, “this is not enough,” resonates with Muñoz’s (2009) articulation of queer utopian futurity. For many queer Koreans, family acceptance cannot cure them of other issues like poverty, immigration, violence and abuse, and mental health. The difference here is the dominant neoliberal narrative of coming out as self-actualization, in contrast to the intersectional analysis of queer of color liberation. In Minhae’s analysis, all of these issues are rooted in the violent history of Japanese colonialism and U.S. imperialism that exacerbated the pre-existing class hierarchy in Korea while

destroying kinship and community support systems that Koreans had relied on. Such destruction happened at the psychological and spiritual levels as much as material and geopolitical levels. Eun Soo's longing was a desire for political and spiritual empowerment that could emerge from confronting all these interconnected issues as a community in formation. Fighting for individual cases of social and economic inequalities through family acceptance would not be enough to empower queer Koreans who live the complex reality encompassing Koreanness and queerness. By pressing for the community approach, the organizers facilitate the reconciliation process to connect Koreanness and queerness as structural issues.

“That’s Not Why They’re Here”: Articulating the Translocal Geopolitics of Queer Korean Emplacement

Another tension that arises when queer Korean Americans come together in progressive organizing spaces lies in the difference between international and translocal approaches to Korean community mobilization. This tension illuminates the contested meanings of the Korean diaspora and Korean Americans, especially the extent to which these subjectivities are sustained by the Korean homeland as well as the U.S. empire. Before queer and trans Koreans took over the 8th Moim in 2017, the previous gatherings of progressive Korean Americans tended to focus on inter-Korean relations, U.S. foreign policy analysis, lobbying congress members, and advocating for the peace treaty to end the Korean War. Like the struggles of coming out, these issues are of course crucial to

achieving a peaceful unification of Korea, and the discussions were very much grounded in grassroots community mobilization. Nonetheless, the queer Korean organizers have preferred a more holistic approach that foregrounds their embodied experiences of violence rather than centering actors and institutions of the state through the subject positions of voters and taxpayers. When Eun Soo attended his first Moim in 2008 as someone new to Korean community organizing, he got introduced to such a tension that emerged mainly between Korean American academics and queer Koreans.

. . . [T]hey had that break-out [session], where they have been, the peace treaty, oh, the peace treaty break-out! That's right, some people went to do peace treaty, and other people did local work. And, the majority, I'd say most, all the people who weren't academic stayed in local work. And all the people who were peace treaty went into the other room. And of course all the people who were doing local work were all queer. So then I was like, I'm gonna stay here, I don't know where you're going, I'm gonna stay here! [laughing]. So that's I think the first time I kinda heard of the, there seemed to be some sort of, dissonance between, reunification work and work that Korean Americans were doing here.

While the Moim participants who were academics and policy analysts emphasized the international work around the peace treaty and Korean reunification, queer Korean Americans had already been engaged in local community organizing in their respective cities like New York and Seattle. They were eager to make translocal connections to address community issues such as immigration, police violence, and workers' rights. Many of those academic and professional Koreans were experts in the field, legitimized by their institutional affiliations, class status, and Korean language ability. In contrast, the queer Koreans' embodied knowledge as grassroots community organizers engaged in the local work did not easily register as expertise relevant to the homeland division. The tension came up not because of anti-queer hostility per se, but

because non-queer Moim participants did not quite see the translocal connections that queer Koreans were trying to make between the homeland geopolitics and the politics of their own emplacement in the U.S. as racialized queer migrants. Because the Korean war armistice agreement was signed by North Korea, China, and the U.S. (with the United Nations flag), Korean American voices would play a key role in bringing these parties back to the negotiation table for the peace treaty. For queer diasporic Koreans, however, international legal reconciliation cannot substitute for their safety and livelihood.

Eun Soo was even excited to learn about such tension. After years of searching for queer Koreans with whom he could organize together beyond talking about coming out, he finally found them at this gathering. This Moim also illustrated how so many previous efforts to organize a radical Korean community in Oakland have failed to develop a sustainable movement. He later started an informal Korean history study group, out of which HOBAK (Hella Organized Bay Area Koreans) came about in 2011. Eun Soo discussed the inspiration he received from other radical Korean American organizations that brought together queer Koreans from different cities across the U.S.

. . . [T]he reason why I [started HOBAK], or I was inspired to do it, was because people from Sahngnoksoo, people from Nodutdol, they brought so many queer Koreans. And the thing is, the thing that didn't bind them together was "Damn, we're gay," you know? Like it was like we're doing this work, and the way that they talked about their work, in their local context, that was so relevant to them and who they were as Korean Americans, meaning Korean *Americans*, not just Koreans in diaspora, but what that meant in terms of how they interacted with their community there. And, for me, that was, yeah. That really changed for me. That was like a moment. That will always be my seminal moment. Yeah. Was that Moim. I think I got there late too, and I think I sat down and looked around and I

was like, damn, the gay Koreans are here, but that's not why they are here, that's so awesome, you know?

Both Nodutdol and Sahngnoksoo emphasize working in solidarity across ethnic and racial differences with other organizations in their local contexts, namely New York and Seattle, to build a movement against imperialism. This means addressing a wide range of issues from military occupation and neoliberal trade policy to policing, immigrant detention, and mass incarceration. Queer Koreans came to this Moim as a progressive Korean community space, not primarily to talk about their personal struggles of being queer, but to engage in a movement that anchors their Koreanness in such a translocal context. For Eun Soo, therefore, meeting these radical queer Koreans was a seminal moment when he was finally presented with a model and a vision for mobilizing the full complexity of queerness and Koreanness into an embodied political engagement in this diasporic location. At this moment, queerness was not so much a sexual or political identity as a practice of being present in a place while contextualizing their emplacement through a translocal analysis of power. Without denying the importance of coming out, peace treaty, or mere survival, queer diasporic Koreans articulate that tackling these issues separately or individually is not enough to actualize systemic transformation. In the struggle for peace, unification, and liberation, they connect the embodied issues of queer diasporic lives with the geopolitical issues of imperialism, war, and division. In so doing, they conduct the work of reconciling Koreanness and queerness.

One of the key community issues that queer Korean tenacity highlights is Korean Americans' embodied relationship to the power of the white supremacist state. As racialized migrants, Korean Americans experience racial profiling and police harassment, although not as severely as Black, Latinx, and South Asian Americans do. Yet the racialization of Koreans is deeply intertwined with the history of U.S. involvement in Korea, as well as Asia/Pacific at large, which continues to fuel the Korean division (Kim 2000; Kim 2008). Meanwhile, in the neoliberal myth of equal opportunities, Asian Americans are represented as a model minority in contrast to African Americans and other ethnic minorities, who are constructed as too reliant on the welfare state. Even though Asian American social movements have mobilized a pan-ethnic framework to consolidate their power against racial inequalities (Espiritu 1993), the simplistic grouping of the Asian American model minority myth only alienates communities of color and maintains white supremacy by designating certain kinds of Asians as honorary whites (Kim 1999). Many Korean Americans are complicit in this system when they fail to recognize structural inequalities and neglect to confront their own anti-Black racism. Koreans have a shameful history of discriminating against Black people in both Korea and the U.S. For instance, Korean business owners and sex workers at U.S. military camptowns discriminated against Black servicemembers, fueling a series of race riots that happened in South Korea in the early 1970s (Moon 1997). Fresher in the Korean American collective memories is the Black-Korean racial tension across the country that culminated in the 1992 Los Angeles uprising/riot (Ablemann and Lie 1997; Kim 2000). In these moments, Koreans often occupy complex positions as victims of destruction and

perpetrators of discrimination, simultaneously mobilized and immobilized by the geopolitical structures of U.S. imperialism, transnational capital, and *de facto* racial segregation.

These historical contexts resist any easy answers to the question of community solidarity across class and racial boundaries, but queer diasporic Koreans have shown up publicly, particularly in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement. In 2014-15, HOBAK members participated in a series of anti-police rallies and protests in the San Francisco Bay Area conducted by a multi-ethnic coalition of Asian American community activists, Asians 4 Black Lives. Responding to the call for solidarity put forth by the Black Lives Matter movement, they coordinated a non-violent direct action to shut down the Oakland Police Department. Similarly, Nodutdol members took part in the campaign to hold Peter Liang, a Chinese American NYPD officer, accountable for killing Akai Gurley in November 2014. In this case, some Chinese Americans expressed that it would be unfair to indict Liang when white police officers across the country were walking free after killing other Black people (Liu 2018). For Nodutdol members, however, it was more important to hold the state power accountable regardless of the ethnicity of the individual officers. Furthermore, queer Koreans have also shown up in support of Black trans people and trans migrants of color at the annual Trans Day of Action (TDOA) organized by the Audre Lorde Project in New York. Began in 2005, the TDOA confronts the structure of violence and discrimination that trans and gender non-conforming people of color experience on a daily basis, while celebrating the legacy of their community struggles. Compared to the NYC Pride

that happens two days later, the TDOA continues to remember and honor the radical legacy of Black and Brown gender non-conforming people's fight against the police and state violence, including the 1969 Stonewall Riot (Armstrong and Crago 2006). In recent years, queer Korean *poongmul* drummers have become key participants of the TDOA as chant and march leaders. These solidarity efforts are not for the sake of appearing radical but grounded in their critical analysis of U.S. imperialism, white supremacy, and border control that impact their lives as queer diasporic Koreans.

While these embodied practices of showing up in solidarity characterize what I conceptualize as queer Korean tenacity, not all queer Koreans share such political values and practices. Seol, a queer-identified transnational adoptee Korean, talked about a contentious moment in a queer Korean drumming group that was rehearsing for the Pride march one summer.

When I was told by one of our drummers, *poongmul* drummers, um, recently, who's a student or whatever from Korea, um, when we wanted to wear like Black Lives Matter T-shirts in the Manhattan Pride parade, um, we were having like a small group discussion about it, and he's like "Well, you know, like *poongmul* is very Korean, and I'm more Korean than any of you here, um, and so like I feel like it reflects badly on me." And, not all of our drummers are Korean-identified, like we have some like, Chinese-, Filipino-identified folks. And um, I was like, actually let me just like, pause you on that point, because we all have different ways in which we arrived to be, you know, not just here in this space doing *poongmul*, but, in the United States, in New York City, um, supporting like queer trans API [Asian/Pacific Islander], and ally, like identity building and stuff like that. So, um, I actually respectfully, like very much disagree with your point that someone can be, that a Korean-identified person can be more or less Korean than anyone else. It means that you have more, maybe you're talking about the fact that you have more access to the language, you know, to the cultural knowledge, to K-pop culture, um, but as you know, to the food, to whatever, it doesn't make you any more or less than anyone.

In this interaction, Seol and others proposed Black Lives Matter T-shirts as the group's outfit in the parade, and another member, who regarded himself as more Korean than any other members because he had grown up in Korea, saw that such a political gesture would reflect negatively on him personally. In this utterance, Koreanness is simultaneously reduced to the rigid notion of cultural authenticity that a single individual is supposedly able to embody, while being positioned as somehow antithetical to police and prison abolition, cross-racial solidarity, and Blackness itself. Seol then swiftly intervened by pointing to the divergent pathways that all the members had taken to arrive in the space in New York as part of the larger Asian diasporas. In so doing, she also mobilized an expansive and dynamic understanding of Koreanness that centers on building relationships rather than reproducing hierarchy. These embodied practices of queer diasporic Koreans like Seol illuminate the ongoing process of reconciliation between queerness and Koreanness, within the particular geopolitical contexts of the translocal community spaces and the emplacement of migrant queer bodies.

Sacred Tenacity of Queer Korean Desires

What if accountability wasn't scary? It will never be easy or comfortable, but what if it wasn't scary? What if our own accountability wasn't something we ran from, but something we ran towards and desired, appreciated, held as sacred? What if we cherished opportunities to take accountability as precious opportunities to practice liberation? To practice love?

—Mia Mingus (2019, emphasis original)

In contrast to the neoliberal narrative of coming out or the state-centered processes of peace and reunification, queer Korean tenacity emphasizes embodied experiences and practices of queer diaspora to cultivate geopolitical mobilities for grassroots Korean communities. Such geopolitical mobilities have the potential to find missing links and draw connections among many other issues. Minhae discussed some key issues that impact queer Koreans in the U.S. but do not receive enough attention: violence and trauma, mental health, poverty, and immigration. Intimate partner violence among queer Koreans, for instance, is entangled in the recurrent behavioral patterns of family violence and intergenerational trauma of colonialism, war, dictatorship, and displacement. Such violent history has shaped cultural norms around family, kinship, and intimacy that may fuel abusive behaviors and a sense of powerlessness. Korean cultural expectations of mental health may further deter survivors of violence from seeking social and institutional support, while poverty and marginal immigration status can easily exacerbate all of these dynamics by limiting access to housing, employment, health care, and community.

Yet community is the most elusive of all. “We belong everywhere and nowhere at once.” Mia Mingus, a disability justice activist who identifies as a queer disabled Korean transnational transracial adoptee, offered the opening keynote speech at the Korean Queer and Trans Conference (KQTCon), the first national LGBTQ Korean conference in the U.S., on April 7, 2018, at the New School. She addressed the difficulty and complexity of “community” by naming the fear and desire for belonging as queer diasporic Koreans, to whom isolation is the

unmistakable norm. At the end of the talk that brought so many of the attendees to tears, she encouraged us:

I think about what it means for those of us who continue to show up for this thing that we call “queer Korean community.” Even through our heartbreak and disappointments, even through our hesitations and fear. *This* is the kind of love and desire that I want us to continue to practice. *This* is the kind of hope that I want us to live into and pass on to the next generation of queer and trans Koreans who will struggle to find their place and wonder if they belong. Let us be able to meet their longing and fears with our longing and *love*, so that we may be able to embrace them and all of who they are with all of who we are, whispering, “Yes. Yes, you belong.” (Mingus 2018, emphases original)

Queer Korean tenacity is the practice of loving, desiring, hoping, and showing up for each other, in order to substantiate the very relationship that allows us to recognize ourselves as each other. It centers on the embodied experiences, rather than collective identities, of queer diasporic Koreans located in the specific contexts of their geopolitical mobilities at the individual, local, and translocal levels. As a practice, queer Korean tenacity is intentional, acquired, and processual, and it is rooted in the political desire for a kind of belonging that transforms and heals queer Korean bodies, as much as in believing in such a desire. It is a practice that is at once geopolitical and spiritual, a practice of reminding ourselves that our connections, even accountability, are sacred.

This chapter demonstrated how queerness and Koreanness in the diaspora constitute geopolitical mobilities when queer Koreans rely on their desires for reconciliation between Koreanness and queerness. Sociological and queer theoretical debates on mobilities call for a methodological emphasis on material, spatial, and embodied dimensions of power that discursive approaches cannot fully unpack. I incorporate these insights around geographical and political

mobilities into the utopian futurity of queer migrant imaginations, to offer an understanding of queer diasporic Korean community organizing. What emerges from these organizers' sense of their bodies and spaces is the geopolitical force of queer Korean tenacity that impels them to find, and even turn themselves into, the missing link between the individual struggles of queerness and the geopolitical contentions surrounding Koreanness. As this chapter illustrates, queerness is a geopolitical phenomenon that never exists separately from the articulations of ethnic, national, diasporic, and translocal belonging. Queer politics does not shift from its original, universal form into a racialized, localized variation; rather, queerness is innately shaped by the spatialized dynamics of power that implicates macro- and micro-geopolitics of displacement and emplacement. How queer migrants of color locate each other and mobilize themselves, like the Korean community organizers have done, may indicate just how much sociologists and queer theorists alike tend to underestimate the power of desire, intuition, and faith for transformation. In the next chapter, I continue to explore the relationship between geopolitics and embodiments, turning to the ideas of time and temporality, including memories, futures, and immediacies of Korean division/unification to advance a theory of geopolitical healing.

Chapter Four

Sovereign Offerings

Eclipse Rising will not relent in seeking justice for all “Comfort Women” through education and memorialization so that we can one day create a world in which the fundamental rights of all girls and women take primacy over political expediency, national interests and regional “security” — and eliminate the use of rape and violence against women as a central strategy of war.

—Eclipse Rising, “Do Not Silence Their Voices”

Methodology of the Forgotten: Abject Memories and Unsovereign

Bodies

On December 28, 2015, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and Japan jointly announced that they have reached a “final and irreversible” settlement agreement on the “Comfort Women” issue. Out of the blue, the news shocked the survivors of the Japanese colonial and wartime sexual slavery system and the global community of their supporters. The survivor Lee Yong Soo *halmoni* (grandma) confronted the South Korean Vice Foreign Minister, articulating her indignation in front of the press: “Why are you trying to kill us twice?” Indeed, the South Korean government had not only neglected the victims and survivors for decades but also allowed for the sexual slavery system to mutate into a privatized system of segregated prostitution for the U.S. military and sex tourism (Moon 1997; Yuh 2002). The United States welcomed the accord, with its then-President Obama congratulating then South Korean President Park Geun Hye and Japanese Prime

Minister Abe Shinzo at the end of phone calls regarding a North Korean nuclear test a few days later. Without any official and ratified document codifying its terms, the "agreement" coming from Park, the daughter of a colonial-collaborator-turned-military-dictator of South Korea, in collusion with Abe, the grandson of a suspected-war-criminal-turned-prime-minister of Japan, under the strategic encouragement by U.S. hegemony, was a spectacular reminder of the continued coloniality of postwar East Asia. In contrast to the international demand for Japan's official apology expressed by human rights treaty bodies like the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the role played by the U.S. is ambiguous at best, or complicit at worst. Time and time again, the liberal nation-state system has failed to honor the wish of the most brutally violated of wartime.

Zainichi Koreans and transnational Korean adoptees discern that state sovereignty does not bode well for their self-determination. After the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, Koreans in Japan lost Japanese citizenship and became special permanent residents, effectively falling under legal apartheid (Lie 2008). The South Korean government and public regarded Zainichi Koreans as traitors at best, spies for North Korea at worst. The socialist Korea actively recruited Zainichi Koreans for mass repatriation while supporting Korean schools throughout Japan (Morris-Suzuki 2007), but homeland life did not live up to the promise, to say the least. Meanwhile, the two-pronged U.S. intervention in Korea through military occupation and religious indoctrination birthed a massive

operation of the transnational adoption industry (Oh 2005). Aside from the issues of cultural access among transracial adoptees, adoption agencies' lackluster administration has resulted in the deportation of adoptees whose naturalization processes were incomplete. Rejection after rejection, dislocation after dislocation, diasporic Koreans' experiences expose the culpability of the network of sovereign states in failing to uphold what Hannah Arendt called the "right to have rights" (Arendt 1951; DeGooyer et al. 2018; Somers 2008).

Decades-long silencing of the survivors of the Japanese Imperial Army's sexual slavery system further illuminates the ambiguity of citizenship as a socio-legal construct for victims of military sexual violence. Perhaps the very notion of sovereignty, aptly defined as the power to determine the state of exception to the rule of law, will never suffice for rendering the former "Comfort Women" or diasporic Koreans anything other than *abjection* (Agamben 1998; Kristeva 2002; Mbembe 2003; Schmitt 2005).

The previous chapters focused on how diasporic Koreans cultivate a transcorporeal sense of belonging as well as reconcile between queerness and Koreanness through the translocal community imaginary. In this chapter, I shift toward the implications of Korean diasporic community organizing for macro-geopolitical processes involving the nation-state, international law, and transnational capital. Keeping my methodological emphasis on embodiments and spatiality, this chapter explores another layer of embodied geopolitics, namely temporality, to discuss how diasporic Koreans perform collective memory and imagined futurity into material space. Eleven days after the 2015 "agreement,"

Eclipse Rising issued a statement titled “Do Not Silence Their Voices: Fight Denialism, Erect the Comfort Women Memorial in Light of Korea-Japan ‘Comfort Women Agreement,’” denouncing the state leaders’ announcement. As a member of the “Comfort Women” Justice Coalition (CWJC or the Coalition hereafter), Eclipse Rising framed this “agreement” as renewing the urgency for building a public memorial in San Francisco as the first city in the world to adopt an ordinance in 1998 reflecting the principles of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):

...we must urgently take collective action to resist and condemn this historical erasure and denialism masquerading as a just, permanent, solution. As the first city in the country to ratify CEDAW, and as people of conscience, we call upon all San Franciscans to stand with the grandmothers, and build upon the unanimously passed Comfort Women Memorial Resolution here in San Francisco — and urgently support the building of the Comfort Women Memorial.

As quoted in the epigraph above, Eclipse Rising’s vision for justice centers on “education and memorialization” to uphold “the fundamental rights of all girls and women,” which must “take primacy over political expediency, national interests and regional ‘security.’” I examine how Eclipse Rising has sought to realize this vision, exploring the relationships between collective memory, material space, and embodied performance in conjuring a transformative mode of sovereignty through the city as a localized and racialized site of geopolitics. Despite its international character, the “Comfort Women” controversy has involved local, county, and state governments in the United States (Ward and Lay 2016). Shifting the lens from the nation-state to the metropolis is not necessarily to reinforce hegemonic spatio-temporality that relegates the rural to the backward hinterland. On the contrary, an investigation of transnational urban

geopolitics reveals how some racialized immigrant women and queers elevate their political impact by producing symbolic and material spaces. Perhaps inevitably, the geopolitics of the Trans-Pacific as embodied processes take place in California, specifically the San Francisco Bay Area, as a historical epicenter of Asian immigration to the U.S. and radical social justice community organizing in the context of the afterlives of the Cold War.

Illuminating what she terms a “transborder redress culture” that emerged at the end of the Cold War, Lisa Yoneyama (2016) observes how Japanese right-wing historical revisionism is embedded in the geopolitics of U.S. hegemony. In short, U.S. military superpower enabled Japanese cultural nationalism to flourish by exculpating Emperor Hirohito from war crimes, instituting Article 9 of Japan’s so-called Peace Constitution, and subordinating Japan as a “client state,” indeed the “model minority nation” under the U.S. nuclear umbrella (McCormack 2007; Sakai 2000; Yoneyama 2016: 137). Here, Yoneyama situates the peace clause of Article 9 as an *aberrant* mode of modern sovereignty opening up the potential for amplifying the transborder redress culture. Drawing on Derrida's (2001) discussion on forgiveness, she interprets the Japanese former POW's guilt reckoning as a radical possibility of unredressability and unforgiveness that transcends the disciplinary moral economy of apology.

The sovereign right to pardon is an exception within the juridico-political order that places the one who pardons...as legally above the law, hence absolute. It requires that the object of pardoning be postulated as unforgivable, except by the exceptional power of the sovereign. (Yoneyama 2016: 132-33)

In contrast to this “secular economy of reconciliation” (135), the “Comfort Women” justice movement relies on the politics of memory for collective perpetual healing.

Building public memorials as a civic organizing strategy seems to overlap with early Korean American immigrants’ national independence movement documented by Richard Kim (2011), which ultimately endorsed U.S. sovereignty in order to legitimize Korean sovereignty. Certainly, a quick reading of the “Comfort Women” memorials might result in a simplistic conclusion that both the discursive act of passing resolutions and the material act of installing artworks would indicate a wholesale endorsement of U.S. sovereignty. I do not dismiss the questions of territorial ownership and what it means to build a memorial for women’s human rights on stolen land. In fact, Eclipse Rising members have been most intentional about land acknowledgment and resisting settler colonialism. Coalition building has been central in the San Francisco case, reflecting the core strength of the “Comfort Women” memorial movements in the U.S. and the historical legacy of effective advocacy by pan-ethnic Asian American movements (McCarthy and Hasunuma 2018). As I illustrate below, the memorial has sparked further grassroots solidarity beyond the CWJC to connect with Indigenous, migrant, and trans women of color. To analyze what the memorial *does*, I focus on the process of its emplacement within the geo-historical context of postwar sovereignties in the Trans-Pacific.

Scholars have theorized sovereignty as not so much territorial control as embodied enactment of governmentality, or a social force that defines life as such (Agamben 1998; Foucault 1978; Mbembe 2003). I draw a connection to the discussion on temporality in explicating how sovereignty relies on an articulated frame of reference to time. According to Mark Rifkin (2017), settler colonialism imposes a mode of temporality on Native subjects to render them pre-modern, thereby eliminating them from the dominant discourse of the historical present. Some Indigenous scholars have resisted such a rendition by asserting that Native subjectivities co-exist with, and co-participate in, modernity (often marked by liberal state formation and technological advancement). However, Rifkin argues that these Indigenous claims to modernity inherently limit the possibility of Indigenous sovereignty by emplotting Native people into the present that is already marked by the settler frame of reference to time. Here, Rifkin relies on Henri Bergson's notion of duration, as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of perception, to disrupt the assumption of the universal, abstract, measurable time. Instead, he illuminates "Indigenous narrations and sensations of time [that] may not accord with dominant settler accounts or models," such as:

mode of periodization; the felt presence of ancestors; affectively consequential memories of prior dispossessions; the ongoing material legacies of such dispossessions; knowledges arising from enduring occupancy in a particular homeland. . .; [and] knowledges arising from present or prior forms of mobility. . . (Rifkin 2017: 19)

Rifkin's notion of temporal sovereignty thus enables textuality of peoplehood that centers on both continuities and dynamic transformations, which can only form binary oppositions between hybrid modernity vs. primitive authenticity in the settler temporal frame.

Building on these debates, I analyze the San Francisco “Comfort Women” memorial as an *offering* that reconfigures sovereignty through an alternative temporality. The memorial is in fact a gift from the CWJC to the City and County of San Francisco as public property. As sociologists and anthropologists have revealed, gift-giving and rituals generate social bonds (Durkheim 1912; Sherry 1983). What does it mean for the Comfort Women justice movement to gift a public memorial dedicated to colonial and wartime atrocities that violated hundreds of thousands of girls and women? For the unsovereign, stateless, queered bodies, exceptional forgiveness can never catalyze true reconciliation; instead, what might orient us toward collective healing is an unexceptionable temporality of abject memories. I argue that the San Francisco memorial exemplifies a relational mode of sovereignty, which I conceptualize as affective offerings that hold together and orient public space, collective memory, and bodily sensations toward a futurity of healing. The memorial, therefore, enables a performative instantiation of a mnemonic community bound for nonviolent futures (Izumi 2011; Son 2013), inviting the public to the previously privatized trauma by offering a sovereign temporality in which all can participate. In contrast to the Eurocentric mode of state sovereignty entrenched in the legal discourse and material forces of capital, people like queer diasporic Koreans have a lot to offer to shape the collective sense of time through their memories, bodies, desires, and hopes. Eclipse Rising members have played central roles in the effort to build the statue in San Francisco from the earliest moments. They contributed to the effort by mobilizing their unique subjectivity as U.S.-based Zainichi

Koreans, their Japanese language skills, their intimate knowledge of historical and contemporary Japanese imperialism, and their translocal social ties with grassroots community organizations in Japan and the United States. Below I illustrate the strategic work of Eclipse Rising within the CWJC, not to divert attention from other coalition members but to analyze how Eclipse Rising's involvement in the Coalition disrupts the normative modality of citizenship and sovereignty centered on the state.

Shifting Fault Lines of Public Memory: Campaigning for the Resolution

The San Francisco Memorial, although the first of its kind in a major U.S. city, is among the ten “Comfort Women” memorials installed on public land in the U.S. as of 2019. Korean American communities have played the most active roles in creating these public memorials in regions with high or fastest-growing percentages of ethnic Korean population such as California, New Jersey, New York, Virginia, and Georgia (Matsumoto 2017; Shepherd 2019). The first one was built in Palisades Park, NJ in 2010, when Korean American Civic Empowerment (KACE) drew a hint from the existing monuments in front of the Bergen County Courthouse commemorating the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, the Atlantic slave trade, and the Irish famine (McCarthy and Hasunuma 2018). This was three years after the passing of U.S. House Resolution 121 in 2007, for which the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues (WCCW), comprising mostly first-generation Korean American women, had built a coalition and lobbied for

fifteen years. House Resolution 121 clarifies the “sense” of the House of Representatives that the Japanese government

should formally acknowledge, apologize, and accept historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner for its Imperial Armed Forces’ coercion of young women into sexual slavery . . . during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asia and the Pacific Islands. . . (Honda 2007)

Researching the movements behind these memorials, McCarthy and Hasunuma (2018) point out that the increasing Korean American population is but one of the key factors that led to the successes of these local mobilizations. Contrasting with the failed cases of similar efforts, they argue that the strength of supporting the coalition with non-Korean local communities, such as other Asian Americans, African Americans, Armenian Americans, and Jewish Americans was a crucial factor. In addition, they analyze that the successful framing of the memorials centered on universal messaging around human rights violations, crime against humanity, and sex trafficking.

The first major opposition to this movement emerged around the Glendale memorial in Southern California. This statue was erected in 2013 through the work of the Korean American Forum of California (KAFC), as a gift from Glendale’s Korean sister cities Goseong and Gimpo. Claiming that the monument would incite bullying against ethnic Japanese children, the denialist group Global Alliance for Historical Truth (GAHT) along with two Japanese Americans sued the city of Glendale in 2014 (Rooney 2018). The Japanese government intervened by formally supporting the lawsuit, drawing large attention from the national and international media. Ultimately, the Supreme Court chose not to hear the case in

March 2017, enabling the movement to build more statues on public land across the United States. (McCarthy and Hasunuma 2018). The SF memorial movement emerged out of this context to take the center stage in a geopolitical drama involving Japan, South Korea, and the United States. From the beginning, CWJC was a multi-ethnic coalition of Asian American, feminist, peace, and human rights organizations, led by two retired Chinese American judges Lilian Sing and Julie Tang. Before co-chairing the CWJC, Sing and Tang had led the Rape of Nanking Redress Coalition (RNRC), whose work traces back to the lobbying behind the 1988 Civil Liberties Act—the first and only U.S. legislation performing historical reparation for an ethnic group injured by the racist state.

At the San Francisco Board of Supervisors meeting on July 21, 2015, a CWJC member and then-Supervisor Eric Mar introduced Resolution 72, calling for the building of a "Comfort Women" statue. The public comments at the meeting included supporting voices including an Eclipse Rising member, as well as historical revisionist opinions of extreme right-wing Japanese who had been coordinating actions to spread their views in the United States. A key opposition to the Resolution was Nadeshiko Action: Japanese Women for Justice and Peace, a denialist group founded by a former secretary-general and vice president of the anti-Korean hate group Zaitokukai. Nadeshiko Action mobilizes a grassroots network of women volunteers to lobby politicians and government officials in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and other countries against the "Comfort Women" movements. My research participants suspected that the Japanese consular staff in San Francisco were actively supporting Nadeshiko Action. To educate

Supervisors on this issue and pass the Resolution, Eclipse Rising coordinated with the Japan Multicultural Relief Fund (JMRF) and the Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights to bring a Portland, Oregon-based researcher from the Japan-U.S. Feminist Network for Decolonization (FeND), in collaboration with anti-militarist groups like Women for Genuine Security and Veterans for Peace SF. JMRF is a philanthropic organization co-founded by Eclipse Rising and Japan-Pacific Resource Network (JPRN) in the wake of earthquakes, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown that hit eastern Japan on March 11, 2011, with the mission to support marginalized communities in the disaster-struck areas. Through fundraising efforts in the U.S., JMRF selected several local organizations working for single mothers, disabled people, older adults, migrant workers, and Zainichi Korean schools as the recipients of relief funds (Eda 2015). One of the recipients was a support group for late Song Sin Do *halmoni*, a Zainichi Korean survivor of the sexual slavery system who fought and lost a legal battle against the Japanese government between 1993 and 2008. Thus, Eclipse Rising joined the CWJC with the previous experience of transnational community organizing between minority and racialized groups in the U.S. and Japan.

Discussion of the Resolution resumed at a Board of Supervisors meeting two months later. The CWJC mobilized supporters from diverse communities including Japanese Americans, African Americans, and Jewish Americans to speak at the meeting on September 15. These supporters outnumbered the denialists who sought to block the Resolution primarily by galvanizing Japanese and Japanese Americans. Backed by the ideological export of the Abe

administration, such oppositional efforts discouraged individuals from supporting the memorial. A few local Japanese American community leaders including women had refused to work with the CWJC. Emphasizing the diverse ethnic and national composition of the Coalition, Eclipse Rising made sure that youth from Japan spoke in support of the memorial. Shiori Horikawa, a Japanese exchange student studying at San Francisco State University (where Eric Mar has held teaching positions and most Eclipse Rising members have taught or studied), testified:

. . . as a granddaughter of Hibakusha, survivor of the Nagasaki Hydrogen Bomb, and as a Japanese citizen . . . my grandfather and I won't ever forget about "Comfort Women" as well as all the Hibakusha. . . [I]f you don't establish the memorial in this diverse city, San Francisco, I feel that you support hiding the past in the name of Japanese nationalism.

Her speech partially invokes the narrative of victimhood that is often used for equalizing Japan and its subjects as yet another victim of the seemingly uncontrollable war. *Hibakusha* originally referred to those who were victimized by the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; however, the usage of the term has expanded to include those who have been exposed to nuclear radiation more generally, in part to reflect the global dynamics of nuclear production that exploits and reinforces racial, gender, and economic inequalities (Takemine 2016). Thus, included in the historical connection Horikawa draws between "Comfort Women" and "*all* the Hibakusha" are Korean victims and survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as other victims of nuclear radiation beyond the Japan-centric narratives. Her dual self-interpellation as a descendant of Hibakusha and a "Japanese citizen" is a complex act of reflection, solidarity, and determination. After hundreds of testimonies over four hours, Resolution No.

342-15 was unanimously adopted by the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco on September 22, 2015, marking the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.

The Resolution clarifies that the Japanese Imperial Army is responsible for the sexual slavery system as well as other colonial and wartime aggression, adding that many Japanese convicted war criminals escaped prosecution. It then refers to relevant previous resolutions passed by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors to urge the Japanese government to apologize and compensate the survivors (No. 842-01 in 2001) and to condemn Japan's historical denialism (No. 218-13 in 2013), as well as House Resolution 121. The following several clauses connect to the local and global issues of human and sex trafficking and violence against women and girls, while acknowledging the Asian and Pacific Islander immigrant communities' historical relationships to Japanese imperialism. It also acknowledges the Japanese American community leaders' solidarity work with other Asian and Pacific Islander communities based on their experiences of WWII concentration camps. At the end of the document, the final clause reads as follows:

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco during the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II expresses its strong support of creating a public memorial in memory of those girls and women who suffered immeasurable pain and humiliation as sex slaves and as a sacred place for remembrance, reflection, remorsefulness, and atonement for generations to come.

Here, this legislative text invokes sacredness as an aim of the public memorial it endorses. As a legal text, embedded within the secular liberal discourse, this

resolution cannot itself endow the resulting memorial with any more sacredness than it authorizes its promise. I read this as an invitation to perform the memorial “for generations to come.” Three months later, the infamous 2015 “agreement” between Abe and Park was issued out of the blue. It is unclear whether the redress movement in San Francisco prompted this hasty and aggressive “agreement,” but the timeline is noteworthy.

Unsettling Liberal Feminism and Japaneseness: Contentions over the Inscription

The CWJC and the San Francisco Art Commission worked closely to coordinate the public competition for the design of the memorial and determine its specific configurations, including the inscription. On January 9, 2017, the Commission approved the design that the Coalition selected among more than 30 other submissions in a double-blind process; on January 18, the Visual Arts Committee of the Art Commission unanimously approved the inscription after taking public comments. While the denialists continued their attempt to influence the process by submitting more than 200 letters to the Commission, Osaka Mayor Yoshimura also wrote to SF Mayor Ed Lee on February 1, asserting that the memorial would be “adverse to the spirit of the [2015] agreement.” Lee wrote back two days later in support of the decision: “Ultimately, the commissioners felt that the text was factual and conveyed the true purpose of the memorial, which is to honor these women and to educate the public about the persistent issue of human trafficking, a problem which affects every country around the globe.” After the approval by



Figure 1: The inscription accompanying the San Francisco "Comfort Women" Memorial. Photo by Haruki Eda.

the Visual Arts Committee, the Commission made the final decision unanimously in February 2017 for the inscription to read, in English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Pilipino:

“Our worst fear is that our painful history during World War II will be forgotten.”
—former “Comfort Woman”

This monument bears witness to the suffering of hundreds of thousands of women and girls, euphemistically called “Comfort Women,” who were sexually enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Armed Forces in thirteen Asia-Pacific countries from 1931 to 1945. Most of these women died during their wartime captivity. This dark history was largely hidden for decades until the 1990s when the survivors courageously broke their silence. They helped move the world to declare that sexual violence as a strategy of war is a crime against humanity for which governments must be held accountable.

This memorial is dedicated to the memory of these women, and to eradicating sexual violence and sex trafficking throughout the world.

Whereas the sculptures alone do not necessarily present any objective information, the inscription performs the work of contextualizing the statue and attesting to the historical facts. Not only the right-wing Japanese civil society but also the Japanese government contest this inscription as inaccurate. Two successive consul generals of Japan in San Francisco since the unveiling of the memorial in 2017, Jun Yamada (in office 2015-18) and Tomochika Uyama (2018-2020), have pressured the SF Board of Supervisors to dissociate from the movement and remove the memorial, claiming that the inscription presents misinformation. While the Supervisors' degrees of support has varied, none of them across election terms to date has explicitly sided with the Japanese government.

Aside from this high-profile controversy, I illuminate another aspect of this inscription that has generated a critical debate among the Coalition members. Eclipse Rising members discussed the implications of the last two sentences, particularly the reference to “crime against humanity.” What the inscription says is neither counterfactual nor insignificant, but what it does not include has a potentially deeper impact. Without naming racism and colonialism that fueled the imperialist sexual aggression, this inscription falls short of addressing Japan’s accountability to the full extent. In other words, framing the “Comfort Women” issue only in terms of “crime against humanity” and “women’s human rights,” as Eclipse Rising members argued, would circumscribe the full potential of the

memorial to develop an intersectional analysis of the sexual slavery system as fundamentally a colonial project rooted in a racist ideology. Obscuring this ideological element and relying solely on the concept of "crime against humanity" can inadvertently lead to a liberal interpretation of what happened and which persons were involved. This is among the very points that the Japanese denialists appropriate in claiming that Japan is not the only country that committed wartime sexual violence; they also assert that Korean men actively facilitated the trafficking of Korean girls and women while Japanese women were also mobilized for the same system (Min 2003; Soh 2008). Moreover, while individuals like state leaders can be convicted of a criminal act against humanity, this concept cannot charge against a government's ideology. To hold the Japanese government fully accountable, therefore, the discursive resources of "crime against humanity" and "women's human rights" must be deployed in explicit connection to the historical and ongoing ideological dehumanization of Korean, Chinese, Filipina, and other Asian women by conservative Japanese women and men.

These intersectional nuances of the coloniality of sexual slavery unsettle the meaning of Japaneseness in relation to its fascist genealogies. The Empire of Japan justified its colonial assimilation policy in the Korean Peninsula by claiming that the Japanese and Koreans descended from shared ancestry, while ensuring the ideological, administrative, and spatial segregation against Koreans to reinforce the Japanese racial purity myth. The Empire even assumed, wrongly, that the sexual slavery system would not violate the international law prohibiting

the trafficking of women and children so long as it mobilized its own colonial subjects (Min 2003). As scholars have argued, the intersecting dynamics of colonialism, racism, sexism, and class exploitation are central to understanding this issue (Min 2003; Soh 2008).

For Japanese Americans, the collective trauma of WWII concentration camps further complicates the matter of ethnicity, racialization, and nationality in the ambiguous space between U.S. and Japanese imperialisms. After Eric Mar submitted the proposed resolution in 2015, the San Francisco Chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) sent a letter to the Board of Supervisors on September 2, expressing their view that "Historical lessons must be taught, but memorials should not be designed to pass on anger to current and future generations. . . We are opposed to anything that promotes hate based on race or nationality." In contrast, a former JACL National Director John Tateishi had published a column in JACL's national newspaper *Pacific Citizen* in the previous year, recalling the first time he became aware of the issue through former JACL National President Clifford Uyeda's article in the *Pacific Citizen* in the 1980s. Responding to the Glendale lawsuit, Tateishi (2014) maintains that

Unlike some of the events that occurred during the war, this particular issue is not open to interpretation, nor the facts arguable. . . The existence of those military brothels was not the action of some renegade commander in the field: They were part of the morale-building effort of the army, an approved policy.

However, aside from Tateishi's column and the SF Chapter's open letter, neither JACL nor *Pacific Citizen* has published and archived anything related to this issue on their websites. Meanwhile, Janice Mirikitani, former poet laureate of San

Francisco, also expressed reservations about the memorial before its unveiling, citing the blurred distinction between Japanese Americans and Japanese citizens as a factor behind the internment camps. According to Rafu Shimpo, she remarked,

The only objection I had was that . . . it singled out Japan and there would again be ill feelings arising about the Japanese. My concern was to universalize this more. Can't we say that we elevate the comfort women's movement as a symbol to speak out against atrocities of war against all women who have been victims of rape and indescribable torture? (Yamamoto 2017)

Indeed, the SF memorial's inscription seeks to do exactly what Mirikitani says it should do. According to McCarthy and Hasunuma's (2018) comparative analysis, this universalist framing is in fact a major factor that led to the successful cases of "Comfort Women" memorials across the United States. While the state-sanctioned conflation of ethnicity (Japanese) with political alliance (Japan rather than the U.S.) speaks to the racialized construction of citizenship (Americanness) at large, citing the blurring of the boundaries does not constitute a compelling reason for rejecting the memorial altogether. If anything, such a critical insight into the racialized nature of citizenship resonates more closely with the intersectional analysis of the sexual slavery issue. Blaming the memorial dedicated to hundreds of thousands of victims rather than white supremacy for the possible but unlikely anti-Japanese racism is a common denialist rhetorical tactic resembling the fantasy of so-called reverse racism.

For the memorial to perform the task of holding Japan accountable, it must unsettle both the liberal feminist framing of the issue and the state-sanctioned meaning of Japaneseness through a Trans-Pacific postcolonial feminist

framework. Takashi Fujitani (2011) explicates how both U.S. and Japanese empires mobilized their minority populations, Japanese Americans and Koreans respectively, by rewiring the circuits of racial discourse from an exclusionary mode of racism to an assimilationist one. Japaneseness, as an ethno-national fiction, cannot take an ahistorical pure form outside the discourse of U.S.-Japan relations, which inherently implicates Japan's colonial domination over Korea and other regions of Asia. As Yoneyama (2016) argues further, Japan's post-defeat incorporation into liberal U.S. hegemony has required a psychic and epistemological suppression of particular stories from the nationalized history, which carefully programmed Japanese cultural nationalism to bloom under the "peaceful" imperial reign all over again without threatening the U.S. security interests in East Asia. For Japaneseness to be somehow absolved of its colonial violence and re-signify itself as a pro-peace identity, therefore, white supremacy needed to maintain its superior position as the arbiter of justice. Universalizing rhetoric exemplified by Mirikitani's stance against the memorial thus endorses a classic Japanese *and* American liberal feminist framing that continues to obscure the living memory of Japanese colonialism through complicity in white supremacy.

This unequal dynamic between Japan and the U.S. is illustrated by House Resolution 121 calling for Japan's official apology. This legislation, passed in the Bush Jr.-era of imperial feminism, relied for its legitimacy on the neoliberal discourse of U.S. multiculturalism, and vice versa. It is far easier to accuse Japan than the U.S. of imperialist aggression, precisely because of the prevailing WWII

narrative of fascism vs. liberalism. Meanwhile, even the Japanese historical revisionists, who call for constitutional reform to enable Japan's sovereign right to wage a war, cannot dare to hold the U.S. accountable for its genocidal acts including the atomic bombing (Yoneyama 2016). The right-wing imaginary of Japaneseness, hopelessly tied to its national identity as the loser, cannot ever redeem its “honor and pride” without U.S. approval.

In contrast, *Eclipse Rising's* decolonial critique of what the inscription fails to name opens up a more radical potential for holding both Japanese and U.S. empires accountable. Centering the victim does not necessarily preclude nation-based framing, so long as it foregrounds these historical contingencies of Trans-Pacific colonial racism. In asserting that the "Comfort Women" issue is not about Korea or Japan, supporters and even some survivors can invoke universalism, the very discourse that the denialists invoke to consolidate their claims of possible victimhood by the existence of these memorials. While this framing has enabled various resolutions and statues for state approval, this discursive opening does not circumscribe or substitute for what activists continue to do with the memorials as material objects. Situated in the history of the Asia-Pacific War and the Cold War, the sexual slavery system and what Yoneyama (2016) calls a “transborder redress culture” more generally points out the limit of state sovereignty in achieving postwar transitional justice.

I explore this issue from a materialist perspective to illuminate the possibility of geopolitical healing as a spatial and embodied process. E. Tammy Kim (2006)

delineates how reparations demanded by the survivors require dialogic performances centered on remembrance. Involving more than an official apology and material compensations, such *social reparations* necessitate a recognition of collective responsibility, a process only partially achieved by the building of the memorial. For the San Francisco memorial to fulfill its promise of enabling the sacred performance of public memory, its geopolitical background needs highlighting, especially in relation to the sister-city controversy between San Francisco and Osaka.

Urban Geopolitics and the Political Economy of Racial Diversity in San Francisco and Osaka

Within a remarkably short turnaround of mere two years since the 2015 Resolution, the memorial was unveiled in St. Mary's Square in Chinatown on September 22, 2017, in a ceremony attended by more than 500 people including elected politicians, governmental officials, and community leaders. Lee Yong Soo *halmoni* flew in from South Korea, and Mike Honda sat next to her during the ceremony. The program featured speeches, Korean drumming, Okinawan lion dance, and other performances, and the reception followed that evening at a nearby Hilton. Speakers included Japanese American community leaders such as the late Jeff Adachi, then San Francisco Public Defender, who spoke of his work with the Korean American community in defense of Chol Soo Lee, who was wrongfully convicted of murder in SF Chinatown in 1974. Another figure was Karen Korematsu, daughter of the late civil rights activist Fred Korematsu—

whose landmark Supreme Court case against the U.S. government in 1944 upheld the Japanese American internment. In 2018, the Supreme Court overturned this case while rejecting Donald Trump's infamous anti-Muslim travel ban in *Trump v. Hawaii*.

Named “Comfort Women’ Column of Strength,” the memorial consists of two parts. One is a statue of three girls on top of a column, dressed in clothes that mark each of them as Chinese, Korean, and Filipina, holding one another’s hands and facing outward with solemn and resolute expressions on their faces. The other is a statue of an elderly woman dressed in traditional Korean clothes, facing the girls from a few feet away, with her own hands clasped together and carrying a complex, meaningful look—perhaps hopefulness, determination, and compassion. She represents Kim Hak Soon *halmoni*, who was the first to speak publicly about her traumatic experience. Whereas Kim Hak Soon *halmoni* chose to come out to sue the Japanese government in 1991, Bae Bong Gi *halmoni* in Okinawa was forced to reveal her past as a former “Comfort Woman” in 1971, when Okinawa’s sovereignty was being turned over from the U.S. to Japan. Recognizing the immense suffering of the survivors in Okinawa caught between sovereign powers, I would view both Kim *halmoni* and Bae *halmoni* as courageous, whether they willingly testified or not. Sculptor Whyte has received more than 1,200 emails and calls by the unveiling ceremony pressuring him to drop the project. The “Comfort Women’ Columns of Strength” creates a place of queer diasporic remembrance, a collective commitment to shaping the future free of gendered, sexualized, racialized, and bordered violence. The tightly held hands



Figure 2: The San Francisco "Comfort Women" Memorial, "Women's Column of Strength." Photo by Haruki Eda.

of the women across nations and generations help imagine, remember, and embody a methodology of transnational solidarity and desire for radical intimacy. The intense gaze of the grandmother helps imagine, remember, and embody an epistemology of protective and affectionate faith in the future rooted in memory. And the outward-facing circle of the girls helps imagine, remember, and embody an ontological relationship to the world, defiant and loving and open. The space between the girls and the grandmother is a space of fleeting but explosive desire

for collective healing, diasporic belonging, and bodily, cultural, and spiritual self-determination. Across time and space, the spirits of the former sex slaves inhabit this memorial as it actively shapes the place and memory.

Surrounded by high-rise buildings of the Financial District, the memorial stands in the crossfire of bright California sunlight, shadows cast by the towering architecture, and glimmering reflections from the building windows—unless the famous San Francisco fog visits the city. In contrast to the slabs of concrete and shards of glass in the background, the rustic colors of the sculptures and the traditional clothes of the characters almost seem out of place. The plaza space hears a mixture of the peacefulness of the Square and the bustling city noises coming from the streets five stories below. Compared to other "Comfort Women" memorials in the U.S., which tend to be in more suburban neighborhoods, the highly urban locale of the San Francisco monument presents a somewhat strange, calm, and somber atmosphere amidst the city noises. Unlike the haunting absences and silences of the victims and survivors in the past, the memorial is characterized by its marked presence, enabled by historical and geographical entanglements of the Trans-Pacific from the 19th into the 21st century.

Indeed, the location of the memorial is imbued with historical and social contexts. San Francisco Chinatown boasts itself as the largest Chinatown outside of Asia and the oldest in North America. At the corner of Grant Avenue and California Street sits Old St. Mary's Church, the first Asian church in North

America erected in 1853. Across California Street, one block south of the church is St. Mary's Square, one of the few open public spaces in densely structured Chinatown. This park sits atop a parking garage—a practice promoted by real estate developers around the time of its design in 1957. At the time of the unveiling, however, the statue and its surrounding plaza were part of private property adjacent to the Square. The portion of the Square that includes the memorial is an expansion of the park that was approved by the San Francisco Planning Department in exchange for the development of the properties at 500 Pine Street, the building directly underneath the memorial, and 350 Bush Street, a high-rise building on a block diagonally southeast of the park, currently under construction as of the summer of 2018. This conditional approval was due to Proposition K in 1984, so-called the "Sunlight Ordinance," which prohibits construction of any building over 40 feet that throws a shade on Recreation and Park property.

Contrasted against the extreme gentrification of San Francisco and the Bay Area at large through the 2010s, the building of the memorial paints a complicated picture of historical trauma, geopolitical contentions, and neoliberal configuration of race, capital, and citymaking. Compounding factors of the 2008 Financial Crisis and the saturation of the rental and real estate market caused by tech wealth have resulted in an eviction epidemic, not only among San Francisco's Black and Latinx residents but also in the Filipino communities in the Bay Area suburbs (Mirabal 2009; Schafran 2012). While San Francisco had already gone through multiple waves of gentrification, including the "dot-com

boom” in the 1990s, Opillard (2015) shows how this "hyper-gentrification" owes to policy factors. For example, real estate developers abuse Ellis Act, a California state law that allows landlords to have the unconditional right to evict tenants to take the property off the rental market. To convert rental units into condominiums, some speculators bully tenants into taking a buyout option, which enables the re-rental price to skyrocket. In addition, leaders in City Hall, not least mayors of color, have tended to favor big businesses; Willie Brown, the first African American mayor (1996-2004), Ed Lee, the first Chinese American mayor (2011-2017), and London Breed (2018-), the first African American woman to hold this office, have all garnered enormous support from local corporations including the tech industry. Maharawal (2017) argues that region-wide gentrification and policing of brown bodies intertwine in the production of the urban security regime designed to uphold racial capitalism.

In fact, this rapid gentrification of San Francisco parallels the redevelopment of Osaka involving major train terminals and landmark buildings. Osaka's twin commercial neighborhoods in the north and south, commonly called *Kita* (north) and *Minami* (south), have undergone spectacular redevelopment centered around Osaka Station City and Abeno Harukas, mega shopping complexes with transformative skylines integrated into the public transit terminals, opened in 2011 and 2014 respectively. Meanwhile, foreign tourists to Japan have begun to flock to the Kansai region including major historical destinations like Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe, seeking more than what Tokyo can offer. The 2011 founding of Peach Aviation, a successful low-cost carrier operating out of its hub at the

Kansai International Airport with a distinct Kansai regional corporate identity, has fueled a tourist boom. The number of foreign lodgers in the Kansai region rose fivefold between 2011 and 2017, compared with the 3.5 times increase in the Kanto area during the same period (Japan National Tourism Organization 2019).

While the extent of eviction and displacement in Osaka is nowhere near that of San Francisco, the symbolic erasure of ethnic minority residents in Osaka contrasts with its strategic branding as an LGBT tourist destination. Osaka has been home to ethnic minorities like Zainichi Koreans and Okinawans as well as the untouchable caste of Burakumin. In the 1920s, Osaka emerged as the capital of overseas Korean communities when the industrialized city, nicknamed "the Manchester of the Orient," drew cheap colonial migrant labor (Kashani 2006: 175). While the majority of Korean men in Japan worked in the manufacturing and construction industries, Korean women found employment in the textile industry, often joining their male family members who had relocated from the southern parts of the Korean Peninsula and Jeju Island. In fact, the exodus of Jeju islanders in the wake of the April 3rd Uprising/Massacre in 1948 has established Osaka as a postcolonial home to the largest population of Zainichi Koreans of Jeju origin (Ryang 2013). While Korean migrants concentrated in Ikuno and Higashinari Wards, Okinawans created their community in Taisho Ward, similarly drawn to the textile industry as well as by the labor shortages during the Asia-Pacific War (Rabson 2012). After the neighboring Hyogo Prefecture, Osaka also has among the largest populations of Burakumin, whose untouchable caste designation traces back to the feudal Tokugawa era and haunts

them even after the 1968 legislation abolishing the Meiji-era family registry (Shimahara 1984).

These minority communities that have historically resided in and literally built Osaka do not figure in the dominant narrative of the city beyond depoliticized celebrations of its multiculturalism. Although Osaka Convention & Tourism Bureau's website, OSAKA-INFO (osaka-info.jp) includes a page on "the largest Korea town in Japan" and cites the history of settlers from the Korean peninsula since the 5th century, there is no mention of the colonial history. Meanwhile, the Bureau created an entire website, Visit Gay Osaka (visitgayosaka.com) to

The screenshot shows the website interface for OSAKA-INFO. At the top, there is a navigation menu with 'MENU' and 'MICE' options, the OSAKA-INFO logo (Osaka Convention & Tourism Bureau), and a language selector. The main heading is 'Miyuki-dori Shopping Street (Korea town)' with a notification icon. Below the heading is a short description: 'Japan's largest Korea town, with a line-up of about 150 Korean food stores, restaurants and clothing stores.' There are two tags: 'Korean Cuisine' and 'Shopping District/Shopping Mall'. A large photograph shows the entrance to Miyuki-dori Shopping Street, featuring a traditional Korean gate (Jangjuk) with a sign that reads '百濟門' (Baekje Gate) and 'MIYUKI-DORI'. To the right of the main content, there are three promotional tiles for 'DEEP Experience' services: 'Book Activities', 'Book Hotels, Inns', and 'Osaka Call Center'.

Figure 3: Screenshot of the webpage by the Osaka Convention and Tourism Bureau about a Koreatown in Osaka (osaka-info.jp).



Osaka welcomes all the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer people.
Please enjoy lively atmosphere and diversity of Osaka. We look forward to meet you.



Figure 4: Screenshot of the webpage "Visit Gay Osaka" created by the Osaka Convention and Tourism Bureau.

mark(et) itself as a "Proud Member" of the International LGBTQ+ Travel Association (IGLTA) since October 2018. The home page presents a large banner slideshow with rotating photos of a Shinto shrine and a vermilion gate, a neon-studded canal street, another shrine decorated with paper lanterns, and a blue sky with colorful balloons floating above a Pride festival. Below this slideshow reads: "Osaka welcomes all the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer people. / Please enjoy lively atmosphere [sic] and diversity of Osaka. We look forward to meet [sic] you" (Osaka Convention & Tourism Bureau 2019). In terms of its contents, this official website pales in comparison to other online sources for gay tourists. In any case, the official endorsement of gay culture and places as a marker of diversity contrasts with the invisibility of ethnic minorities, especially

since the majority of foreign travelers to Japan come from China, Taiwan, and Korea. It might not be so premature to interpret this discursive process as a possible emergence of homoregionalism, which operates in concert with what Puar (2007) has termed homonationalism, yet with a distinct local-urban identity.

In this context of the political economy of diversity, the contention between San Francisco and Osaka that the “Comfort Women” memorial has incited points to a complex interplay between urban and transnational geopolitics of racialization, ethnic differences, and sexual freedom. Even before the memorial was erected, elected officials in Osaka had already been sparking controversy for their denialist views. Toru Hashimoto, who served as Mayor of Osaka (in office November 2011 - February 2014; March 2014 - December 2015) after prematurely switching from the position of the Osaka prefectural governor, drew international criticism in 2013 with his infamous remark that the wartime sexual slavery system was necessary for providing relief for the soldiers (Johnston 2013; Tabuchi 2013). His successor, Hirofumi Yoshimura (December 2015 - March 2019) joined Hashimoto in expressing his denialist view and sending multiple letters to the Mayor of San Francisco to protest the memorial before and after its installment. On the day of the unveiling ceremony, Jun Yamada, consul general of Japan in San Francisco (2015-18) issued a statement titled “On the Comfort Women [*sic*] Memorial in San Francisco,” which was featured in *The San Francisco Chronicle* a day before:

. . . The 2015 Agreement between Japan and the Republic of Korea is currently being implemented. . .

The difficulty of this issue lies in the fact that there are wildly conflicting views, even today, as to what actually happened. Unfortunately, the aim of current comfort women [*sic*] memorial movements seems to perpetuate and fixate on certain one-sided interpretations, without presenting credible evidence, in the form of physical statues.

This is unwarranted and hardly conducive to objective fact-finding and mutual agreement, let alone a final reconciliation. Rather, they are rapidly alienating the entire Japanese public, who could otherwise be sympathetic to the wartime plight of these women, by unduly exacerbating emotional antagonism. . .

What we urgently need now is more unity and solidarity — among all Asian Americans domestically, and between Japan, the Republic of Korea and the United States on the global stage. (Yamada 2017)

Notably, Yamada's comment carefully constructs Japan as sincere, remorseful, and sympathetic while labeling the "Comfort Women" justice movement as divisive. In calling for "more unity and solidarity — among all Asian Americans" and between Japan, South Korea, and the U.S., this statement also illustrates how deeply Asian Americans are implicated in the security alliance between these states. Even though the SF memorial features Korean, Chinese, and Filipina girls symbolizing the multi-ethnic coalition of the redress movement, Japan's relationships with China and the Philippines thus figure secondary, if at all, to the concerns of the Cold War-style security alliance. Yamada's ambiguous interpellation of "Asian Americans" is both strategic and essentialist, far from the radical legacy of the pan-ethnic Asian American Movement (Espiritu 1993).

On November 22, 2017, the late Ed Lee, then-Mayor of San Francisco, signed the resolution to accept the transfer of the memorial to the city property as part of St.

Mary's Square, making San Francisco the first major U.S. city to hold a "Comfort Women" monument. With the artwork valued at \$190,000 and the maintenance funds of \$208,000 for at least twenty years, the CWJC gifted a total of \$398,000 to the city. This was in defiance of the Japanese government's pressure on Lee to exercise his veto power to overturn the Board of Supervisors' acceptance of the memorial. From the 2015 resolution until this public acceptance, Hashimoto and Yoshimura as Mayors of Osaka had sent letters to the Board of Supervisors and Lee seven times, threatening to terminate the 60-year-long sister city relationship. However, letters to Lee did not come from only Mayors but also from residents and grassroots organizations of Osaka. Alarmed by Abe's direct pressure, the Kansai Network to Address the "Comfort Women" Issue (hereafter Kansai Network) organized a petition to urge Lee to accept the memorial. Supported by over forty organizations and a hundred individuals, the letter called Yoshimura's tactic "aggressive and single-minded," pointing out that a proposed resolution Yoshimura had submitted twice to the Osaka City Council was defeated by the "overwhelming majority of opposing votes on both occasions."

Meanwhile, CWJC stated on December 7 in response to the letters opposing the statue, holding that "Yoshimura's attempt to bully San Francisco backfired." It continues,

This embarrassing and poorly timed political grandstanding by Mayor Yoshimura provides an unintended lesson to the people of Osaka and the world—and to all the denialists: They must listen to and learn from the surviving grandmothers, rather than degrade their dignity, in accordance with recommendations by various United Nations bodies. ("Comfort Women" Justice Coalition 2017)

In this statement and elsewhere, CWJC refers to concrete UN recommendations and international conventions like CEDAW. The statement also brings up the upcoming Osaka Expo to critique Yoshimura:

CWJC questions Mayor Yoshimura's qualification to lead the City of Osaka to host the World Expo 2025, whose goal includes "promoting progress and fostering cooperation . . . to facilitate the understanding that citizens have about other nations and about future opportunities in a spirit of cooperation and optimism." We see no evidence that Mayor Yoshimura can do any of those things. ("Comfort Women" Justice Coalition 2017)

Furthermore, in contrast to the consul general Yamada's empty invocation of Asian American solidarity, CWJC focuses on the pluralistic subjectivities of Asian American communities, particularly their collective memories and trauma.

Many Asian-American [*sic*] communities have family members who were victims of the sexual slavery system and other atrocities during Japan's imperial wars of aggression, and those family members carry the burden of collective trauma to this day. By invoking the "two sides" narrative and repressing grassroots efforts to commemorate "Comfort Women" victims, the Japanese Government in effect denies the birthright of our communities to remember history and to demand justice. ("Comfort Women" Justice Coalition 2017)

By centering collective remembrance as a "birthright of our communities," the Coalition effectively counters the Japanese government's narrative that "there are two sides to the history of its wars of imperial aggression. There are not." Finally, the statement refers to the solidarity among pro-peace communities in Japan and elsewhere:

We urge Mayor Yoshimura to join our struggle and to learn not only from the "Comfort Women" Justice Movement, but also from a long legacy of enlightened human rights movements in Japan led by peoples colonized by Imperial Japan, including the Hisabetsu Buraku ("Untouchables"), Zainichi Korean, Taiwanese, Okinawan, and Ainu communities. . . Furthermore, we request that he learn from how those human rights movements have evolved through their close ties to the disability justice, feminist, and LGBTQIA movements. . . ("Comfort Women" Justice Coalition 2017)

These explicit references to the marginalized communities in Japan come from Eclipse Rising members, who have extensive knowledge and experience in working with these minority groups from transnational perspectives. While the mobilization led by CWJC foregrounds the victims and survivors, the Coalition members also contribute to the shared knowledge of the ongoing legacies of Japanese imperialism and the grassroots struggles against it, informing the overall analysis in clarifying its position in defense of the memorial. This intersectional and transnational approach differs from other “Comfort Women” memorials in the United States.

Because of Lee's passing three weeks later, Yoshimura did not immediately take the actual step until October 2, 2018, when he notified the official termination of the sister city relationship in an open letter to London Breed, who has shown her support for the memorial at the first anniversary ceremony of the unveiling in September 2017, although she did not attend the event herself. In response, on October 4, 2018, Breed issued a statement:

One Mayor cannot unilaterally end a relationship that exists between the people of our two cities, especially one that has existed for over sixty years. In our eyes, the Sister City relationship between San Francisco and Osaka continues today through the connection of our people, and San Francisco looks forward to strengthening the bonds that tie our two great cities together.

Japan and Japanese-Americans [*sic*] have a unique and rich history in San Francisco that has left a lasting and beneficial impact on our City. We are one of three cities in the nation with a Japantown neighborhood, which is an important part of what makes San Francisco a great, diverse city. . .

As a previous Supervisor of District 5, which includes Japantown, Breed seems to maintain a careful distance by emphasizing the civic relationship between the two

cities. While elevating civil society, her statement successfully exploits the ambiguous juridical meaning of a sister city relationship. As a practice of public diplomacy, sister cities or town twinning became popular in the aftermath of World War II, and its termination has only recently become a symbolic venue for expressing political disputes since the 2010s. In the case of Osaka and San Francisco, Meredith Oda (2016: 461) points to the Cold War origin of the sister city program, which "offered connections and cultural frameworks that redefined Japan and San Francisco in alignment with the goals of a cohort of Pacific-oriented businessmen." As part of President Eisenhower's People-to-People program, the affiliation had a discursive role to "represent Japan as a mature, capable, and equal partner in contrast to popular feminized and childlike portrayals" while "narrat[ing] San Francisco's celebrated and extensive ties to Japan in contrast to the city's long-established Chinese connections and anti-Japanese activism" (Oda 2016: 461-62). Ultimately, the coupling with Osaka "was harnessed to San Francisco's desired position as the preeminent 'gateway' between the United States and Asia" (Oda 2016: 462). In this context, Breed's response was successful in reiterating the supposed independence of sister city programs from government control as well as re-establishing the City as a gateway to Asia by standing behind the multi-ethnic Asian American coalition, in the light of rising China and South Korea.

The Japanese government, meanwhile, did not give up on San Francisco at all. Immediately after the SF-Osaka breakup, in October 2018, California-Japan Sister Cities Network (CJSCN) was inaugurated in San Francisco in "partnership"

with the Japanese Consulate, explicitly supported by consul general Yamada's successor, Uyama. Other "partners" include the nonprofit Sister City International, its Northern California chapter, and the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), while the "supporters" include a law firm, tech venture capital firm, and travel agency. As Oda (2016) notes, the founder of JETRO, Sugi Michisuke, was also president of the Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry and played a key role in the birth of the SF-Osaka affiliation. In other words, Yoshimura's unilateral termination was carefully coordinated with the Japanese Consulate to offset the potential cost by inaugurating CJSCN. By founding a new entity for sister city programs, the Japanese government can not only ensure its continued business operations in the Bay Area but also possibly monitor other sister city programs throughout California in anticipation of future redress activities.

Importantly, then, the substate contention between Osaka and San Francisco points to a more epistemological tension involving the public/private dichotomy. Lee's and Breed's defiance against Hashimoto and Yoshimura can implicitly underwrite a Cold War narrative of American liberty and Japanese/Asian state control, against which Yoneyama (2017) warns us. The municipality of this conflict raises further questions about the degree to which a city government is signified as the collective will of its residents. Breed's careful response, by rendering the sister city program beyond mayoral jurisdiction, also achieves a re-privatization of the memorial dispute and the redress movement more generally, while consolidating the seeming justice of liberal democracy. Once again, the

universalist framing of the memorial as a symbol of the fight against sex trafficking overshadows the decolonial vision of the mobilizations for redress. As Japanese corporations and politicians gear up for international events like the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the 2025 Osaka Expo, the buzzword of *daibāshiti* appears as a copy and paste of the neoliberal U.S. discourse of diversity. Displacement and forgetting of minority communities in San Francisco and Osaka point to the further responsibility of the "Comfort Women" redress movement for critically examining the politics of space, race, and capital to fulfill its radical potential. In the next section, I illustrate how Eclipse Rising and the CWJC have used the memorial as a material space for building translocal community solidarity.

Performing the City: Affective Convergence of Place, Memory, and Community Identity

Since its unveiling, the memorial has provided a space for multiple public events and sparked further conversations around gender-based violence, cross-ethnic and transnational solidarity, and academic freedom. While the city resolutions and the public memorial can increase the legitimacy of collective memory embodied and narrated by the grandmothers, they are only parts of the redress efforts led by diasporic Koreans and other Asian/American communities. Along with the effort to install the public memorial, CWJC members have campaigned successfully in 2015 and 2016 to include the "Comfort Women" issue in the public high school curriculum in San Francisco and California. They often emphasize

the importance of historical education by saying that "What threatens the Japanese government the most is not the statue, but it's our remembrance." Indeed, when the publisher McGraw-Hill incorporated the "Comfort Women" issue in their history textbook, Japanese government officials pressured the company to remove the content, asserting that it was historically inaccurate. Activists and scholars decried a breach of academic freedom.

Observing the encroachment of Japanese ultranationalism in the U.S., Eclipse Rising began pursuing a tactic that mobilized researchers and educators through academic associations. At the 2016 Association for Asian American Studies conference in Miami, we started our advocacy campaign to urge the AAAS to adopt a resolution in support of the former "Comfort Women" and defend academic freedom against Japan's historical denialism. We drafted the resolution to solicit endorsements from key figures and other participants, organizing a section meeting as well as panels and roundtables. The resolution needed ten co-sponsors and a hundred endorsements to be presented at the general business meeting during the annual conference. Procedures for proposing a resolution entailed multiple hurdles officially put in place after the AAAS adopted a Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction resolution in support of Palestinians. These hurdles prevented many endorsements from counting toward the required number, and the campaign continued for the 2017 conference held in Portland, Oregon. The conference atmosphere was different from the previous year because not so much the location as its timing as the first AAAS conference after the election of President Trump. At least Eclipse Rising members, getting together for the first

time since the election, were feeling anxious and excited to present the petition for the resolution. Because all the co-sponsors had to be present at the general business meeting held toward the end of the conference, we connected a few of them via phone calls as they were waiting to board their plane at the Portland airport terminal. After our successful second attempt to propose the resolution, it was approved by the Board and motioned for voting by the general membership within a few weeks of the conference. However, not enough members participated in the voting, partly because it was notified by email and administered within merely a week during the summer. Ultimately, the Board “endorsed” the resolution while the AAAS as a whole did not adopt it. During the following conference held in San Francisco, however, Eclipse Rising and the CWJC co-hosted a tour of the memorial in Chinatown, freshly unveiled six months earlier, inviting community activists and college students. This tactic of engaging with academic associations and organizing local tours has proven effective in both connecting out-of-town researchers and educators and bridging the divide between academia and the community, and Eclipse Rising co-hosted a similar place-based program at the National Women's Studies Association conference in 2019.

Meanwhile, the CWJC also held an event at the memorial site to observe International Women's Day in 2018, inviting various Bay Area community organizations to confront violence against women. In the plaza surrounding the memorial, these organizations set up altars decorated with photographs, paintings, posters, flowers, candles, food items, garments, crafts, and signs to

remember and honor "the experiences of women fighting violence in all its forms" ("Comfort Women" Justice Coalition 2018: 6). These altars recognized the "many missing and murdered indigenous women across Turtle Island and Canada;" "women . . . who are facing the hard reality of forced migration;" "Palestinian women living under Israeli occupation;" "Korean women affected by military violence;" and "trans women . . . who have been killed [and] disappeared from public awareness. . ." Activists, students, and community members gave speeches calling for solidarity between the "Comfort Women" and women across the world impacted by settler colonialism, imperialism, and militarism. While the statue and the inscription as material objects explicitly refer to the former sex slaves and other victims of sex trafficking, these rituals have the performative capacity to expand the symbolic value of the memorial in the ongoing dynamics of the affective economy.

In fact, Eclipse Rising has played a central role in performing these rituals involving the memorial because of its organizational ties with progressive social movement organizations in Japan. To counteract Osaka Mayors' hegemonic views, Eclipse Rising invited and hosted two activist groups from Osaka at the first anniversary event of the unveiling of the statue. The 2018 celebration also coincided with public exhibitions on the "Comfort Women" issue at the Federal Building as well as the Chinatown Campus of City College of San Francisco, which had passed a resolution in support of the grandmothers. In an expression of the continued support, the City Council declared September 22 as "Comfort Women" Day. Like the unveiling event, the ceremony featured cultural performances and

speeches, followed by a reception. Grassroots representatives from Osaka included the Kansai Network to Address the "Comfort Women" Issue (Kansai Network), whose members had been hosting the monthly Wednesday Rally in Osaka in solidarity with the grandmothers in Seoul. Another group was the Forum for Improvement of Osaka, which is affiliated with U.S.-based peace organizations like Code Pink and Veterans for Peace and represents a wide range of leftist political formations such as labor unions, teacher's unions, women's groups, business associations, and Japan Communist Party. Supervisors welcomed these delegations and presented them with certificates of honor, defying the pressure from the Japanese consular staff, who had somehow learned of these activists' planned visit. For the second anniversary ceremony in 2019, Eclipse Rising hosted an Osaka-based Zainichi Korean activist who founded the Korea NGO Center, and two college students representing the Youth Forum Fukuoka. In both years, these guests spoke of their ongoing struggles against ultranationalism in Japan, the lack of education and public awareness, and their renewed determination to remember and honor the former "Comfort Women." Eclipse Rising members interpreted for them, coordinated their tour schedules, transported them, and facilitated their hotel check-ins.

Whereas the 2018 delegates from Osaka were mostly seasoned activists in their forties through sixties, the college students from Fukuoka embodied the younger generation of the civil society in Japan, coming of age in the new imperial era of normative nationalism. During the lunch reception at a nearby Chinese restaurant, these youths from Fukuoka, the son of the Zainichi Korean activist

(who performed Okinawan lion dance during the ceremony with a local college student of Japanese and Mexican ancestry), and young members of Nikkei Resisters, a progressive Japanese American community organization in San Francisco, gravitated toward one another and formed the "kids' table" away from the other adults. Their cheerful exchanges, involving teaching each other swear words in English and Japanese, continued at a bubble tea shop after the luncheon. This encounter between progressive youths with diverse Japanese cultural backgrounds (including me, although I am hardly a youth anymore) was a deeply emotional experience that exemplified how the memorial has incited performative practices of remembrance centered on affective ties. Between the banality of bubble teas and the extraordinariness of the short but unforgettable afternoon hangout, the new friendship across multiple differences signaled the emergence of redefined Japaneseness, much like my observations of diasporic conjuring among the Korean community organizers in Chapter 2. Indeed, diasporic Koreanness and Nikkeiness co-constitute one another, precisely in the sovereign temporality offered by and through the San Francisco memorial.

I emphasize these embodied and performative aspects of the memorial, including what community members do with it to actually reinforce remembrance, to propose a processual view of the public memorial as an affective offering. Analyzing place as the embodied experience of dynamically intersecting processes occurring at multiple scales, geographer Amy Mills (2012: 785) discusses the complex relationship between place and memory:

The creation of memorial places such as monuments and cemeteries is an important part of [identity politics as a dynamic and evolving] process; memorial places shape public understandings in ongoing ways, as people perform ceremonies there, visit, hold protests, or engage in other activities that produce everyday social reality through reference to the past. Memorialization, in turn, transforms the urban material landscape.

Thus, collective memory and place-making are interlinked through the politics of community formation. Places like the “Comfort Women” memorials offer a spatiality and temporality that resist hegemonic imperialist forces that seek to erase historical trauma. However, for the material artwork and inscription to animate its meaning and fulfill its radical potential, people must perform ceremonies, visit the site, or hold events to invoke the spirits of those who did and did not survive the sexual enslavement. The members of CWJC and Eclipse Rising continue to engage in this work by holding tours, sharing stories, and building relationships with visitors from across the world. Here, the memory work and place-making converge into the gift of sovereign imaginations.

Sovereignty is at once spatial and temporal. Rather than a concept for territorial integrity, scholars have theorized sovereignty as a temporal frame enacted on human bodies to normalize the suspension of legal order as the state of exception and emergency (Agamben 1998; Foucault 1978; Mbembe 2003; Schmitt 2005).

Sovereign power, in other words, is the extralegal capacity to enable life and death based on the premise of discrete subjectivity and objectification.

Reinforcement of borders thus does not take place along the material demarcation of territories but occurs to deviant bodies, including colonized, feminized, violated, prostituted, and queered bodies of the dead and dying

"Comfort Women." These abject bodies cannot constitute subjectivity in the dominant mode of sovereignty. For the former sex slaves of the Japanese Imperial Army to figure as subjects, they must always be constituted as victims whose victimhood can only represent the heteropatriarchal nation or the abstract liberal individual. Yet their material bodies and imagined spirits continue to generate affective forces beyond discourse. The embodied performances of the memorial I have discussed can be seen as a spatializing practice of multiple temporalities including the shared commitment to the sacred causality between remembrance and healing. In opposition to the hegemonic temporality of denialism, amnesia, and (impending) repetition, the San Francisco "Comfort Women" memorial, and the work of Eclipse Rising in particular, materialize an affective shift from silence and trauma toward collective conjuring of memory, place, and community. Far from a stabilizing project, the public memorial incites a more dynamic engagement of bodies and spaces that can disrupt the sovereign biopower of the state by mobilizing a spiritual force.

In this chapter, I have argued for a re-imagination of sovereignty as something that can be offered rather than be defended, stabilized, and territorialized. My analysis of the San Francisco "Comfort Women" memorial illustrates how diasporic Koreans like Eclipse Rising members engage in sovereign offerings by imagining, remembering, and embodying alternative temporalities connecting the traumatic past and a tender futurity. Seventy years after the fateful end of World War II, their tenacious work of conjuring a community through

remembrance holds a key to a radical possibility of self-determination that does not presuppose the intelligible and namable subject.

Conclusion

Geopolitical Healing

Storming Up

For diasporic Koreans with limited Korean language access and ability, Korean drumming provides a venue for deepening cultural connections with other Koreans. For queer Koreans with limited access to Korean community spaces, Korean drumming helps create an alternative mode of identity practices in which the cultural is not divorced from the political. Emma told me about her experience of Korean drumming as an adoptee:

I joined Chamaesori [a queer women's Korean drumming group in Oakland], and that was finally some people that I could relate to. . . I wasn't gonna feel marginalized for not having college education . . . they were all English-speaking and second-gen, so they were not gonna judge me for not speaking Korean and stuff, so. And you know, then we had the same political values, so. That was finally when I started to see myself as Korean and . . . you know, the drumming really helps, the music really helps, because, you know, it just transcends language, it's like you have this mutual goal in mind, and you, through the music, you, I got acquainted with Korean culture, like, on a vibration level.

The first thing I was taught, when I started learning *poongmul*, a type of Korean drumming often practiced at protests and rallies, was breathing, *hoheup*.

Growing up swimming and singing, I was accustomed to intentional breathing practices. What was rather new and exciting was breathing *together*. With its origin in the lifeworld of Korean rice farming, *poongmul* consists of four

instruments representing four elements of a storm. *Janggu*, a double-sided, hourglass-shaped drum, symbolizes the rain; *buk*, a drum with a deeper and heavier sound than *janggu*, represents the thunder; *jing*, a large gong that articulates a low-tone booming sound, embodies the gust; and *kkwenggari*, a small gong with a high-pitch, far-ringing, unignorable sound, plays the role of the lightning. The togetherness of these four elements arises through breathing together, sharing the tempo and rhythm, moving together, sharing the space.

DONG – DONG – goong – ta – goong

DONG – DONG – goong – ta – goong

DONG – DONG – goong – ta – goong

DONG – DONG – goong – ta – goong

Although also performed while sitting on the floor, *poongmul*'s affective force is strongest when mobile, with the instruments strapped up onto the drummers' bodies or carried in their hands, drummers moving in a snake-like formation. Lines shifting into circles bursting with energy, a sonic landscape. The drummers smile and make eye contact with each other, inviting, engaging, and flirting with the onlookers. An event sphere unfolds, rife with new relationalities, dramatic shifts in timespace, and a sense of togetherness. The spirit is high; the spirit is here and now.

In the landscape of Korean community organizing in the U.S., *poongmul* often takes the center stage or the sonic backdrop for a wide range of political actions. I have witnessed or participated in Korean drumming at a protest against the South Korea-U.S. free trade agreement in downtown San Francisco in 2010;

Trans Day of Action and Pride March in New York City in 2015, 2017, and 2018; May Day action in NYC in 2017; and numerous anti-militarism rallies in NYC since 2014. These drumming squads usually consist exclusively of women and queer, trans, or non-binary people of Korean descent, even in those actions that are not explicitly about gender and sexuality issues. I began learning *poongmul* in 2017, invited to a small drumming group in NYC by Seol Mee, a queer adoptee friend with whom I had known for a few years; they were intentional about forming a queer-identified, politicized Koreans-only *poongmul* team. It quickly became a source of tremendous joy. *Poongmul* cannot be performed alone, and my *janggu* sits in my living room, alone, when I don't have regular drumming sessions, yearning to build up another storm, together.

In his meditation on Blackpentecostalism, Ashon Crawley (2017) dismantles the normative, dematerialized theology and philosophy by locating a choreosonic aesthetics of “otherwise possibility” in the flesh that breathes, shouts, vibrates, and speaks in tongues.

The aesthetic practices cannot be owned but only collectively produced, cannot be property but must be given away in order to constitute community. Blackpentecostalism—and those that would come to describe themselves as such—is *sent* into the world; it is an aesthetic practice that was sent and is about being sent: “to be sent, to be transported out of yourself, it’s an ecstatic experience, it’s not an experience of interiority, it’s an experience of *exteriority*, it’s an *exteriorization*. . . [W]e’re sent by one another to one another until one and another don’t signify anymore.” Being beside oneself, beside oneself in the service of the other, in the service of constituting and being part of an unbroken circle, a critical sociality of intense feeling: this is Blackpentecostalism. Focusing on this particular religious group brings into view, brings into hearing, the way such performances produce otherwise possibilities for thought, for action, for being and becoming. (5, emphases original)

What materializes a community from a belief and faith into bodily experience is the aesthetic practice of “being beside oneself.” The “intense feeling” of constituting the community, the Durkheimian collective effervescence, can only emerge from the practice of *offering*. I am drawn to *poongmul* as practice and theory, as praxis, because of its immediacy, instantaneity, embodiedness, and presentness. The togetherness of *poongmul* as cultural and political praxis lies not in choreosonic coherence or monorhythmic repetition, but its ephemerality and openness. To be able to drum with these specific people and instruments and drinks and snacks, in this specific moment in history and space in a diaspora, through these specific breaths that we take together, is miraculous, precious, and sacred. I propose to view, hear, and feel *poongmul* as a moment that evinces the ongoing process of Korean unification. It is a moment in which the already interconnected vibrations of the natural and forces of the social converge more intimately to become enfleshed as a complex sensory, emotional, and spiritual experience.

The two Koreas will not become one just because queer Koreans are drumming in the diaspora, but I hold that embodied practices like *poongmul* invite us to a different conception of geopolitics. Whereas the conventional view of ethnicity and nationhood centers on political-economic structures as well as cultural identity discourses, diasporic community formation would never happen without human agency. Researchers suggest that diaspora as a social phenomenon entails both objective factors like displacement and subjective processes such as memories, narratives, and imaginations. Thus, I conceptualize queer diasporic

forms of community formation in terms of the embodied linguistic practice of geopolitics, or what I have called *diasporic conjuring*. The Korean organizers engage with, mobilize, and transform the existing meanings of Koreanness by trusting how they feel with each other.

Narrating and Performing Kinship

Virtually everyone I interviewed expressed that, earlier in their lives, they had not liked being Korean or known what it meant. Alienated by the dominant construction of Korean American identity, those who do not fit into the typecasts of neoliberal entrepreneurs and conservative Christians often struggle to make sense of their lives. As I highlight in Chapter 1, diasporic Koreans' racialized subjectivities must be contextualized in the *longue durée* of Yamato Japanese empire-building as well as U.S. white supremacist hegemony. Many Korean community organizers embody migration stories ranging across generations from Pyongyang to Manchuria, from Jeju Island to Osaka, from Busan to Minnesota. Navigating through the tidal waves of geopolitical mobilities structured by economic and military subordination, their diasporic subjectivities include adoptees, refugees, military wives, stateless individuals, and economic migrants. Beyond the 11 hours and 45 minutes of air travel between Seoul and Los Angeles, such diverse routes and roots of the Korean diaspora present alternatives to the mainstream Korean American subject, which is entrenched in the myth of upwardly mobile and culturally assimilated model minority. Indeed, even transracial adoptees and multiracial Koreans, often constructed as not Korean

enough, can be recruited as symbols of benevolent US intervention in Korea, as long as they are white enough. Born into a heteropatriarchal and traumatized mode of kinship, queer and non-binary Koreans in the diaspora further struggle to embrace their non-normative desires. The quality of healing needed by queer diasporic Koreans cannot be achieved through homonational assimilation into U.S. hegemony.

Through their participation in community organizing, however, they have affirmed each other's divergent Koreanness as diasporic and queer subjects. In Chapter 2, I analyze such a transcorporeal emergence of ethnic belonging among adoptee, mixed, and Zainichi Koreans as *diasporic conjuring*. In these embodied and narrative forms of belonging, diaspora takes shape as a material phenomenon in the bodily sensation of feeling full, being connected, and arriving at home. Such moments only happen when they share space, like a hotel room, public memorial, dance floor, car ride, dinner table, or sidewalk. Crudely quotidian, those moments of community are sacred nonetheless for undoing a lifetime of alienation. Queer diasporic Koreans know at the spiritual level that these timespaces of belonging must exist somewhere somehow, and this knowledge propels them toward one another. Chapter 3 examines such a sense of place inhabited by queer diasporic Koreans to think of their community practices in terms of *tenacity*, to hold each other. Their bodies, and the feeling of home in between, are the community they seek to build. *Tongil* is in the here and now.

Such a sacred knowledge of Korean unification underlines diasporic Koreans' struggle for sovereign nationhood as an embodied process of identity and space. Their efforts to publicly commemorate the colonial sexual slavery by Japanese imperialism indicate the spiritual dimension of sovereignty, exceeding the territorial and linguistic boundaries of the Korean nation. In Chapter 4, I discuss the affective dynamics around the San Francisco "Comfort Women" public memorial through the concept of *offerings*, showing how the coalition built for remembrance enables an ethnic imaginary articulated to healing rather than haunting. The statue of Chinese, Filipina, and Korean girls and the survivor who broke the silence is now public property, accompanied by a plaque clearly naming Japan's responsibility. In the transnational urban geopolitics of Osaka and San Francisco as metropolises inhabited by colonial migrant subjects, the statue generates a social force for radical solidarity in opposition to heteropatriarchal nationalism and liberal cosmopolitanism.

Scattered across islands and continents, the survivors of colonialism, genocide, and militarized division have given birth to a new generation of unruly bodies with tenacious spirits. By foregrounding their sense of time, place, and self/other, the Korean community organizers cultivate kinship beyond patriarchal blood ties. Such a non-blood alternative indicates an ambivalent form of nationalism arising from the tension between ethnic solidarity and nation-state formations. As Gi-Wook Shin (2006) notes, the dominant Korean national identity emerged as a fundamentally contested discourse, through specific historical contexts and social structures of colonization, national division, authoritarianism, and

democratization. John Lie (2001, 2008) further illustrates how the Korean diaspora, born out of colonial displacement, is the discursive origin of Korean nationalism as a sovereignty claim. Whereas liberal scholarship on nationalism tends to conflate ethnic nationalism with conservative authoritarianism, various historical examples of revolutionary struggles for national liberation indicate that ethnic state formation can challenge global capitalism (Cabral 1979; Fanon 2004; Kim 2002). Feminist and gender analyses of the modern nation-state interrogate the central role of heteropatriarchy in the state structures as well as nationalist discourses (Nagel 2003; Peterson 2010; Yuval-Davis 1997). Thus, hegemonic nationalism consolidated by the capitalist mode of production is contingent on normative bodies that can populate the cities and secure the borders. By contrast, queer diasporic Koreans' survival relies on a non-liberal modality of embodied agency to generate community life out of the genocidal temporality of U.S. hegemony.

These embodied dynamics—conjuring, tenacity, and offerings—are at the core of diasporic community organizing led by queer and non-binary Koreans in the United States. I conceptualize this transformative mode of ethnic mobilization as *queer diasporic kinship*, a social ecology of belonging that disrupts heteropatriarchal and bourgeois Korean nationalism. My ethnography demonstrates how queer diasporas as counter-hegemonic subjectivities materialize into a social movement field, extending the previous scholarship's focus on literary, media, and cultural productions (Ellis 2015; Eng 2010; Gopinath 2005; Manalansan 2003; Velasco 2020). For queer diasporic Koreans,

who continue to lack cultural representations, each other's body is perhaps the most important source and site of identity construction. By animating bodies, spaces, and meanings into an interplay of identity and place, the organizers articulate Koreanness to something beside itself, rather than dissolving it altogether. Koreanness thus becomes a relationality of the subject and object, synthesizing the discursive and structural paradigms of social life.

To challenge the duality of the subject and object is not to obscure human agency but to sharpen the analysis of its process. Although social constructionism provides a key undertone in both queer theory and diaspora studies, ethnicity, just like any other myths and symbols, requires the human body as a material basis. I rely on queer of color scholarship for insights into the politics of embodied performances. In his work on Afro-fabulation in black queer life, Tavia Nyong'o (2019) mobilizes the concept of fabulation to elevate "[t]he persistent reappearance of that which was never meant to appear, but was instead meant to be kept outside or below representation" (3). Here, those black queer lives animate aesthetics that dance between true and false. As a fiction, their life/performance signifies, by way of producing itself, that this anti-black world is already false. Nyong'o addresses "the classic paradox of fiction: the matter of why and how it is that a story we know to be untrue can nonetheless inspire belief, emotion, and attachment," suggesting that fictions "arise out of the indeterminacy and flux of living and dying, with life being perhaps the greatest fiction of all" (7). Thus, fiction and performance cannot be categorized neatly along disciplinary boundaries. For queer diasporic Koreans, ethnic belonging can

be as far-fetched as the unification of Korea. Yet they narrate and perform such a community that is phenomenologically more real than the hegemonic nation-state in the division. If ethnography like mine documents (and even produces) the performance of fiction, then perhaps it is feasible for science to animate and honor spirits, in a violent reality that is entirely falsifiable.

Queer diasporic kinship, as a narrative and performative practice, is not simply an enactment of ethnic belonging but an ethical pathway to sovereignty. In short, there is a right way to do ethnicity toward a specific political goal. Because the dominant national identity does not lead to a futurity of *tongil*, Koreanness must be reworked, not repudiated. Building on historical materialism and discourse analysis, José Muñoz (1999) advances the concept of disidentification, “a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance” (11-12). He explains that disidentification is both a reading practice and a performance, avoiding a binary conception between discourse and materiality. In Muñoz’s reading of James Baldwin’s *Just Above My Head*, fiction and song emerge as disidentificatory modes of self-production.

The singer is the subject who stands inside—and, in the most important ways, outside—of fiction, ideology, “the real.” He is not its author and never has been. He hears a call and we remember not only the “hey, you” of Althusser’s ideology cop but also the little white girl in Fanon who cries out “Look, a Negro.” But something also *hears* this singer who is not the author of the song. He is heard by something that is a shared impulse, a drive toward justice, retribution, emancipation—which permits him to disidentify with the song. He works on the song with fierce intensity and *the utmost precision*. This utmost precision is

needed to rework that song, that story, that fiction, that mastering plot. It is needed to make a self—to disidentify despite the ear-splitting hostility that the song first proposed for the singer. Another vibe is cultivated. Thus, we hear and sing disidentification. The relations between the two are so interlaced and crisscrossed—reception and performance, interpretation and praxis—that it seems foolish to straighten out this knot. (Muñoz 1999: 21, emphases original)

Here, the singer piously seeks to cultivate and transform a self by singing a song that he did not write. Although this song subjects the singer to a process that enables him to exist as a singer, his performance is also heard by the “shared impulse” of liberation, when staged with the utmost precision. In this reading, discursive and material power relations are the very source of performative agency. I draw analytical inspirations from Nyong’o’s and Muñoz’s readings of the power of queer of color performance that complicates the distinctions between literary, visual, media, and performing arts. These thinkers compel my sociological approach across the textual, ethnographic, and archival modes of inquiry to analyze the queering practices of the Korean diaspora. The community organizers interrogate the meaning of Koreanness with the utmost precision, not merely to rejoice in the shared ancestry but to conjure the very spirit of it. Juxtaposed with the violence, trauma, and alienation that haunts Koreanness, their collective labor on kinship and remembrance helps orient the *tongil* struggle toward geopolitical healing.

Geopolitical Healing

Scholarship on the Korean diaspora in Japan and the U.S. has addressed collective memories surrounding the Korean War, Japanese colonialism,

massacres in Jeju and Kwangju, military sexual slavery, and Los Angeles civil unrest (Ablelmann and Lie 1997; Cho 2008; Hong 2020; Kim 2019; Kim 2012; Liem 2003; Ryang 2013; Son 2018). Crystal Mun-hye Baik (2019) approaches diasporic memory work on the Korean War, framing the sensorial, performative, and ceremonial practices of memory as “reencounters” as opposed to previous notions like intergenerational trauma and postmemory. In dialogue with Baik’s attention to aesthetic mediations facilitated by diasporic excess, my research confronts the issue of ethnicity, nationalism, and sovereignty by tuning into the spiritual work of community organizing.

I argue that the cultivation of queer diasporic kinship inaugurates the process of geopolitical healing, through which alternative temporalities of belonging, accountability, and sovereignty become tangible in material bodies and spaces of the diaspora. Indeed, feminist and queer theorists have stressed the materiality of racialized, queer, disabled, virtual, and nonhuman bodies and flesh, as well as inanimate objects and matter, as a part of what exceeds problematic social relations. Whereas Foucault constructed his theory of biopower in primary terms of the discursive production of the subject as a species-being, scholars like Mel Chen (2012) and Jasbir Puar (2017) further explicate neoliberal governmentality as corporeal (dis)figurations of normative capacity. In other words, biopolitics predetermines what material assemblage counts as a fully constituted living body with optimal agency in the first place, let alone which bodies figure as deserving of life or death, as demonstrated by Giorgio Agamben (2005) and Achille Mbembe (2003). As Eunjung Kim (2017) observes in the politics of gender,

disability, and sexuality in modern Korea, normative investments in cure and correction of the disabled body, rather than in access and care as structural change, can perpetuate power inequalities and reproduce hegemonic nationalism. Given this insight, geopolitical healing cannot arise from a simplistic imagination of reconciliation or a romanticized notion of community (Joseph 2002). While it is a spiritual process of honoring what haunts us, it must also enact concrete changes in the material conditions underlying the lack of healing.

Geopolitical healing involves multiple dimensions of social relations such as material environment, embodied experience, and symbolic construction. As researchers of critical and feminist geopolitics have asserted, geopolitical knowledge production is always already embedded in gendered power relations that privilege elite, white, male bodies as the embodiment of statehood while equating the racialized and feminized body with the naturalized territoriality and environment (Agnew 2004; Dixon 2016; Dowler and Sharpe 2001; Enloe 1990, 1993; Hyndman 2004; Massaro and Williams 2013; Tuathail and Dalby 1998; Weber 2016). As Avery Gordon (1997) urges, social scientists need to account for silences, absences, and erasures that haunt social life as empirical phenomena. Spatializing such ghostly matters, Katherine McKittrick (2006) draws on Sylvia Wynter's ideas of the "demonic grounds" to connect geographic knowledge with the supernatural.

While demon, devils, and deities, and the behavioral energies they pass on to others, are unquestionably wrapped up in religious hierarchies and the supernatural, the demonic has also been understood in terms that are less ecclesiastical. In mathematics, physics, and computer science, the demonic

connotes a working system that cannot have a determined, or knowable, outcome. The demonic, then, is a non-deterministic schema; it is a process that is hinged on uncertainty and non-linearity because the organizing principle cannot predict the future. . . With this in mind, the demonic invites a slightly different conceptual pathway—while retaining its supernatural etymology—and acts to identify a system (social, geographic, technological) that can only unfold and produce an outcome if uncertainty, or (dis)organization, or something supernaturally demonic, is integral to the methodology. (McKittrick 2006: xxiv)

For McKittrick, the spatial production of racial, sexual, and socioeconomic differences also engenders the unknowable. Thus, McKittrick does not only locate the Black body as the site of struggle but also challenges the entire epistemic terrain of geography beyond the center/margin dichotomy.

The supernatural dimension of spatial production further maps onto the realm of temporality, invoking an alternative sense of time that is imagined, remembered, and felt. In contrast to the genocidal erasure through colonial modernity, asserting one's existence through an entirely different frame of reference to time is key to decolonial sovereignty (Rifkin 2017). Jacqui Alexander (2005) illuminates how transgenerational memory animates the very vehicle toward the sacred dimension of self.

It is a paradox that a feminism that has insisted on a politics of a historicized self has rendered that self so secularized, that it has paid very little attention to the ways in which spiritual labor and spiritual knowing is primarily a project of self-knowing and transformation that constantly invokes community simply because it requires it. . . I argue that a transnational feminism needs these pedagogies of the Sacred . . . because it remains the case that the majority of people in the world—that is, the majority of women in the world—cannot make sense of themselves without it. (15)

Memory is a fundamentally spiritual practice that extends well beyond the cognitive, psychic, and affective registers because rituals practices, conducted

with *the utmost care and precision*, can make memories accessible by rendering what is forgotten, felt. As Baik (2020) suggests for diasporic Koreans, the past is not simply handed down but actively reencountered in ways that weave together a futurity of healing and a recognition of survival today. Whether in a public memorial or quotidian conversation, the ritual remembrance works as a spatial incantation of the sacredness of life.

Sacredness resides not only in memory but also in futurity. Muñoz (2009) has emphasized the utopian potentiality of queerness, proclaiming that queerness is "not yet here." Drawing on Ernst Bloch's work on hope and Giorgio Agamben's notion of potentiality, Muñoz illuminates the ephemeral quality of queer utopian performativity that instantiates a critique of the present before turning into traces, ghosts, and memories, which will continue to perform. Postulating that "performance is the kernel of a potentiality that is transmitted to audiences and witnesses" rather than an ontology of disappearance, he articulates that "the real force of performance is its ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging." (Muñoz 2009: 98-99). The offering of the public memorial, and the everyday labor of showing up, constitute such performances that tell a story of how we belong. This queer futurity is central to the utopian imaginary of Korean unification articulated in queer diasporic Korean community organizing. As my interlocutor Eun Soo clarified, such futurity resides in the difference between the restorative *re-unification* and the transformative *unification*, often elided in translations of *tongil*. Insofar as the

division of Koreanness is ongoing, unification is not yet here, and for queer diasporic Koreans, *tongil* never has been. Yet they come together, almost out of nowhere, to embody the very communities they seek to engender and transform at once.

To explicate the relationality between the spiritual and material realms of social life, I return to Durkheim's religious sociology. Durkheim (1995 [1912]) illustrated how collective consciousness emerges from ritual performances that at once demarcate and travel between the sacred and profane. While cultural sociologists like Jeffrey Alexander (1988) use Durkheimian social theory to examine issues like collective trauma, they rarely explain how symbols and narratives become embodied. According to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, through ritual practices, the bodily sensation of belonging to a social force becomes feelable.

Indeed, we can say that the faithful are not mistaken when they believe in the existence of a moral power to which they are subject and from which they receive what is best in themselves. That power exists, and it is society. When the Australian is carried above himself, feeling inside a life overflowing with an intensity that surprises him, he is not the dupe of an illusion. That exaltation is real and really is the product of forces outside of and superior to the individual. (226-227)

Challenging the overly positivistic appropriation of Durkheim by structural functionalism, Stjepan Meštrović (1988) suggests that the classical sociologist, in his effort to generalize solidarity, developed a framework for a moral science. The passage above shows a mechanism by which a social imaginary, or the "moral power," incites a physiological change in the faithful body. Diasporic Koreans'

faith in and desire for political ethnic community belonging undergird their kinship practices toward collective healing.

I extend Emile Durkheim's analysis of solidarity and collective consciousness to argue that sacredness emerges from remembrance. The symbolic distinction between the sacred and profane is traveled by bodies engaged in rituals to transcend the here and now. This is not a simple binary distinction but an embodied timespace; to transpose our bodies onto a higher dimension of social life is to cultivate our senses of time, space, and belonging toward the not-now, not-here, and not-us. Since Durkheim argues that anything can become sacred, I propose that the absoluteness of the profane lies in the *forgetting of the sacred*. The sacred and the forgetting of it, in the performances of such temporal aesthetics, "cannot, at the same time, both come close to one another and remain what they are" (Durkheim 1995: 38). This critical intimacy of sacredness is far from the hierarchical imposition of "unity" and "harmony." For the sacred to remain as such, participation in the ritual is required. This transformative practice presupposes the other in a way that the self, in becoming the other, is thoroughly reliant on the other. The subject and object are thoroughly interdependent. The space and moment of a ritual are where social solidarity comes from, through a transcorporeal process of collective effervescence.

I do not, however, suggest that an alternative imagination would simply enable an altered material reality. Nor do I locate desire, consciousness, and intuition as something interior and prior to bodily practices. Rather, as Saba Mahmood

(2004) illustrates, the cultivation of a self is an outcome of mundane routine activities conducted with utmost attention and care. Linking ethics, embodiment, and politics in her analysis of ritual prayer in the women's piety movement in Cairo, Mahmood de-centers the secular-liberal feminist modality of agency that presupposes a dualistic logic of subordination and subversion. Here, Mahmood contrasts Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus* with the Aristotelian genealogy of the term; briefly, she problematizes Bourdieu's dismissal of the "pedagogical process by which a habitus is learned" (Mahmood 2004: 139). Whereas Bourdieu attributes acquired bodily dispositions of class differences to unconscious dynamics, he leaves unclear the role of intentional practices of self-discipline such as religious rituals, martial arts, and, as I demonstrate here, community organizing. Mahmood (2004: 139) explains,

Consistent with the Aristotelian conception of habitus, conscious training in the habituation of virtues itself was undertaken, paradoxically, with the goal of making consciousness redundant to the practice of these virtues. . . . Since the point is not simply *that* one acts virtuously but also *how* one enacts a virtue (with what intent, emotion, commitment, and so forth), constant vigilance and monitoring of one's practices is a critical element in this tradition of ethical formation. This economy of self-discipline therefore draws attention to the role self-directed action plays in the learning of an embodied disposition and its relationship to "unconscious" ways of being. [emphasis original]

What I read here is the salience of prayer as a self-reflexive and intentional mode of self-transformation wherein agency is simultaneously embodied and trans-corporeal. There is always more than us here now, and we can feel it when we trust our rituals. Breathing together. When we subject our bodies to such discipline to be able to tune into our sensations, the here and now become sacred. There is nothing in this universe that is not sacred, unless we forget to practice

the religion, the community, or the relationship between life and land that engenders sacredness. There is a futurity that needs us to remember; the ghosts that haunt us want to be remembered, not reconciled, so we can remember to offer ourselves to the healing of the future.

My analysis accounts for the sociological significance of what is unknowable, what we do not yet know, and what we hope, pray, and believe will happen. Sovereignty is not a temporality of exception but a spiritual offering amid the queerness and wilderness of this planet; it is a prayer for cosmic belonging. Healing must recognize the violence, wounds, and trauma, but it cannot erase these realities as if nothing ever happened. Healing is not reversion or restoration, let alone linear progress. Rather, healing endows our memories, imaginations, and faiths with enormous power to expand our being beyond what we already know about ourselves. No fixed imagination of our existence can keep us from healing our relations, as long as we remember who we are; more precisely, we are being led to hold our memories in our bodies even if we cannot sense it just yet. The ghosts that haunt us also impel us to imagine otherwise, or imagine at all. There is a way for differences to live together, and this is a path, not just a place, that leads to endless healing. We can heal more than we would ever know, and queer diasporic Koreans embody the geopolitical possibility of it. As migrant inhabitants of the Trans-Pacific, we embody such geopolitical healing for an entire region of this world. *Tongil* is an ecological imaginary.

Ecology of Belonging

I conclude my discussion by advancing, preliminarily, a cultural ecology of human agency as observed in my ethnography. I situate human agency in relationships with bodies, space, other species, matter, and energy, and I refer to culture in the sense of life and death; cultural genocide is genocide, and cultural survival is survival. Extending, while also departing from, the perspectives that nationalism is structurally determined (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) or a discursive formation (Calhoun 1997), this approach allows me to theorize ethnicity in materialist terms as an ecological if not cosmological process. Cultural ecology as a broad scientific discipline focuses on human adaptation to changing environmental conditions (Sutton and Anderson 2020). I conceptualize Korean ethnic mobilization as a mode of engagement, not simply to adapt but transform both symbolic and material underpinnings of geopolitics. Against the static imagination of the nation, and alongside their traumatic experience of it, the community organizers enact alternative configurations of bodies, spaces, and meanings in their struggle for self-determination through the narratives and locations of diaspora. Queer diasporic kinship thus illuminates an ecology of ethnic belonging that centers on the interplay of time, place, and identities to activate geopolitical healing. Historicizing the queer life of kinship in the Korean diaspora, I argue that geopolitical healing is a 21st-century articulation of revolutionary nationalism.

I situate my theory explicitly in the geological context of human warfare. Jaius Grove (2019) argues for the concept of Eurocene to name the historical

contingency of today's ecological annihilation on European colonialism. For Grove, geopolitics collides with ecology to the extent that war has become a form of life centered on homogenization. His ecological analysis challenges the social and political theory that depends on discrete entities, causal relationships, and human agency. It encompasses "all things that make a difference in the vast landscape of global security" in "the geopolitical considerations of contemporary life" (43). From this perspective, International Relations (IR) has failed as a field, for U.S. hegemony is forever stuck in necropolitical innovations with no more objects left to destroy. The genre of what Grove calls savage ecology is not tragedy but horror, since there is no redemption even in the form of centralized conduct. "The problem is the habits and routines that inure us to the provocations all around to think differently or otherwise than we do," he declares in advocating for speculative realism against the "violence of common sense" (16-17). Grove's pessimistic reading of the world at the end confronts my own speculation on the futurity of *tongil*. Surely, pessimism encourages a commitment to truth rather than what Lauren Berlant (2011) calls cruel optimism. I agree that the ecological truth is far more liberating in contrast to the ever-deferred postmodern subjectivities. But then what do we do with this truth? What is the geopolitical-ecological potential of ethnic belonging at the end of the world?

I center embodied agency in my analysis because it explains the salience as well as dynamics of cultural identity. As postcolonial thinkers like Frantz Fanon (2004), Gayatri Spivak (1988), and Edward Said (1978) emphasize, poststructuralism is meant to displace the European sovereign subject in

particular, not to render all subjectivities homogeneous and irrelevant. However, the liberal tendency to violently equalize the difference between the colonized and colonizer subjects remains prevalent in the so-called nonhuman turn. Despite the productive debates on de-centered and nonhuman agency in recent decades, some arguments for materiality and affect ignore the geohistorical contingencies like colonization and imperialist domination, upon which liberal agency is enshrined in the first place. For instance, Martin Müller (2015) points out that both assemblage thinking (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) and actor-network theory (Latour 2007) obscure power inequalities and human agency, even though social scientists, political geographers in particular, have adopted such relational views of social-material processes. Meanwhile, Brian Massumi (2002) points to the political potency of the affective realm of the event, which follows a different logic than the subjective, personalized experience of phenomenological emotion as structured by language. However, Ruth Leys (2011) shows how theorists like Massumi fall into the false dichotomy between mind and matter when they conceptualize affect as independent from language. Leys also challenges the tendency to deny the relevance of intentionality in human and nonhuman animals.

This tendency against vitality underwrites the misconception that national identity is inherently reactionary in contradistinction to transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalization. Even in the academic efforts to shift from the linguistic to the affective and material in search of the true location of power, the very oscillation in thought is anchored in the denial of racialized and

sexualized agency embodied by the descendants of slaves, survivors of genocide, and witnesses of conquest. The idealist celebration of the nonhuman does not liberate the humans who have been relegated to the Other. For instance, Jasbir Puar (2017) addresses the geopolitics of debility, arguing that the neoliberal state enacts population control by producing disability and debt through the medical-industrial complex and finance capital while disguising them as private matters of capacity. Privileged bodies are thus invested with a progressive futurity while debilitated bodies generate profits while living slow deaths. Therefore, materialist analysis of power is most useful when it illuminates, not obscures, embodied differences. Simply acknowledging the embeddedness of agency in the material environment, without actually motivating ourselves for action, is ultimately liberal consumerism. De-centering the meaning or valence of human agency does not equate to abandoning an analysis of how human agency works.

Geopolitical healing indicates that the body-space connections are mediated by meanings, symbols, and stories that underscore human agency. We do not only consume symbols and narratives but also produce them, endlessly, and often intentionally, with utmost care and precision. Following Donna Haraway's (1990) "cyborg feminism," feminist and queer critiques of science and technology studies emphasize trans-corporeality, the enmeshment of human bodies with the more-than-human world (Alaimo 2010; Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Barad 2015; Bennet 2010; Neimanis 2017). In particular, Nancy Tuana (2008) proposes the concept of "viscous porosity" to analyze the flesh in interaction with the world between solidity and fluidity. These researchers provide materialist critiques of

dichotomous social boundaries, challenging the notion of the body as a discrete entity. Sara Ahmed (2004) conceptualizes such affectivities between bodies in terms of an economic structure with historical contingency. Connecting affect to trauma and information technology, Patricia Ticineto Clough (2018) draws further attention to the unconscious as the psychic force field that transcends the boundaries of the individual organic body.

These perspectives on the materialities and meanings of human agency raise a question of ontological difference. If matter is virtually indeterminate at all scales as Barad (2015) suggests, what actually prompts its dance at the edge of existence and non-existence? Mel Chen (2012) turns to cognitive linguistics to illustrate how the imagined hierarchy between the human and the inanimate object arises from racialized and gendered notions of sentience, mobility, or what is called animacy. Chen defines animacy as “a specific kind of affective and material construct that is not only nonneutral in relation to animals, humans, and living and dead things, but is shaped by race and sexuality” (5). Language, therefore, does not merely represent affect but is a fundamental part of it. Such an extra-linguistic framework illuminates how the political economy of life and death receives momentum from the murky undercurrents of matter and meaning. Considering this hierarchy of presumed sentience, Chen identifies the verb form *queer* as a moment of not just reclamation but animation, to endow an object with liveliness. Whereas nonhumans and even concepts can *queer* each other, I locate this *queering* in the ways in which queer diasporic kinship *animates* the spatial-spiritual process of geopolitical healing. Community organizing as

embodied practice *conjures* the spirit of belonging. Even through the mass extinctions, life goes on; for humans to survive, we need culture. We have evolved to generate meaning out of our bodily belonging, so that we won't forget how we belong.

With a more pronounced postcolonial inflection, my invocation of trans-corporeality shifts the center of gravity toward the spiritual realm of social-material life. In Korean and Japanese cultures, where Buddhist, shamanistic, and folk cosmologies have infinite crossovers in everyday life/death, ancestral souls and nonhuman spirits such as sea and mountain gods directly mediate community relations. Re-reading Durkheim, Ashley Barnwell (2018) further challenges the idea rooted in Massumi's formulation that affect is presocial. Instead of separating affect and social structure, Barnwell interprets Durkheim's theory of emotional structure as "requir[ing] the participation of an ecology of persons, things, elements, specific environmental features and animals within a complex totemic system that ensures the sustainability of all life forms" (29). In this analysis of the ritual, "the agency of other participants" (29) becomes intelligible to the social scientist. To the extent that agency/animacy resides in nonbinary affective relations of matter and meaning, I conceptualize spirits as the agent of sociality.

Extending Fanon's defiance against the biocentric conception of human beings, Sylvia Wynter (in McKittrick 2015) foregrounds the sociogenic principle, arguing

that humans, or *homo narrans*, have configured our sociality through the mythmaking functions of our brains to recognize kinship beyond blood ties.

We shall therefore need, though, if my wager is right, to relativize the West's hitherto secular liberal monohumanist conception of our being human, its overrepresentation as the being of being human itself. We need to speak instead of our *genres of being human*. Once you redefine being human in hybrid *mythoi* ad *bios* terms, and therefore in terms that draw attention to the relativity and original multiplicity of our *genres* of being human, all of a sudden what you begin to recognize is the central role that our discursive *formations*, aesthetic fields, and systems of knowledge must play in the performative enactment of all such genres of being hybridly human. . . . These genre-specific orders of truth then serve to motivate, *semantically-neurochemically*, in positive/negative *symbolic life/symbolic death* terms, the ensemble of individual and collective behaviors needed to dynamically enact and stably replicate each such fictively made eusocial human order *as an autopoietic, autonomously functioning, languaging, living system*. (31-32, emphases original)

To say that humans are biologically wired is to subjugate spiritually-mediated kinships to the European colonial paradigm. In reality, there are as many genres of what it means and feels to be human as the stories of the origin of the universe. Wynter urges us to practice such mythmaking.

. . . given that as an already *postnuclear* cum post-cracking-the-code-of-our-genome species, we are now faced with an additional climate crisis situation in which it becomes even more imperative that these laws, for the first time in our species' history, be no longer allowed to function *outside our conscious awareness*. (28)

My methodological attention to embodied geopolitics bridges the ostensible gap between the discourse on the one hand and material bodies and spaces on the other.

To the extent that queer diasporic kinship is a regenerative ethnic community formation in response to imperialist domination of the ancestral homeland, I

argue for an ecology of belonging that integrates ethnicity as a primary mechanism for collective healing. Ethnicity, through this lens, emplots and emplaces a relationship between spirits and the universe. Proposing this cultural-ecological perspective on ethnic belonging, I stress the material relations between queer desires and diasporic storytelling. This emphasis on materiality helps avoid a liberal interpretation of postmodern subjectivity; that identity is fluid does not mean it is not real enough to generate a polity. Ethnicity, nationalism, and diaspora are certainly dynamic processes, but the divergent meanings of Korean identity arise directly from the geopolitical reality of militarized division. And yet, we embody those meanings, for the narratives we perform have a material impact. We need to make sense of human belonging on this planet without simply overriding cultural differences. When we recognize kinship beyond consciousness, we are being led by the spirits of our ancestors and descendants, and of ourselves, to cultivate our community and healing. Korean diasporic community organizing does not commit so much to truth than questions. Truth does not naturally come equipped with questions; we have to do the labor of thinking and asking. Truth can be liberating, but it eventually becomes stale to human curiosity faced with the wonders of life/death. In foregrounding embodied geopolitics, I insist that culture matters as much as the environment, because sharing questions and imaginations can incite action.

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