

**ON DECOLONIZING THE MIND:  
COLONIAL HISTORY AND POSTCOLONIAL REPRESENTATION  
IN INDIA, KOREA, AND IRELAND**

**By  
YOO-HYEOK LEE, B.A., M.A.**

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TITLE: On Decolonizing the Mind:  
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AUTHOR: Yoo-Hyeok Lee, B.A., M.A. (Dongguk University, Korea),  
M.A. (University of Montreal)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Imre Szeman

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## Abstract

“On Decolonizing the Mind” is generated at the juncture of postcolonial studies, Asian/American studies, and globalization and transnational studies. Exploring literary imagination as an essential part of the social imaginary—one that not only reflects social realities but also fosters decolonizing imagination—I examine literary texts dealing with postcolonial issues in India, Ireland, and Korea in order to demonstrate how literary texts that revisit and rewrite colonial histories contribute to the on-going project of decolonizing the mind: representing and imagining otherwise. I argue that literary representations of colonial histories serve as an alternative historiography against the established discourses of colonial histories.

I offer critical readings of literary texts such as *Imaginary Maps*, *Comfort Woman*, *A Gesture Life*, *Translations*, and *Dictee*. Mahasweta Devi’s *Imaginary Maps* represents the postcolonial condition of indigenous peoples (particularly women) in India. Devi’s text highlights her activism on behalf of indigenous peoples in India and leads us to think about the possibilities and limits of literary representation and imagination in engaging with oppressive social realities and creating viable solutions. The ordeals of “comfort women” during the Pacific War, which have begun to receive global recognition since the early 1990s, is an unresolved postcolonial issue in Korea and in many parts of East and South East Asian regions. Among the growing literature on this controversy, the literary representation of comfort women by North American writers demonstrates that the legacy of comfort women is a transnational issue that demands global justice. Focusing on Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Woman* and Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life*, I analyze how literary representations of comfort women can be an effective medium through which to witness their cultural trauma. My study of Brian Friel’s *Translations* and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee* tackles the colonial encounter in Irish and Korean histories, focusing on the colonial policies of imposing colonizers’ languages on the colonized. Friel and Cha show different ways in which to find voices of difference, resistance, and subversion in a language not their own.

My comparative study aims to make sense of the complicated ways in which national issues (indigenous peoples in India, the comfort women issue in Korea (and East and South East Asia), the postcolonial turmoil in Northern Ireland, and the postcolonial context of the United States) are closely related to global issues (colonialism, imperialism, global capitalism, and globalization). I claim that postcolonialism in the Western academy has focused too much on European colonization, especially British colonialism; we need to take into account the fact that Japan was a powerful colonial power and then

to compare the effects of that colonization—and postcolonization—on places like Korea with British colonialism in India, as well as closer to home in Ireland. I hope that my study contributes to the elaboration of a transnational literacy that can offer a responsible form of cultural explanation through which to explore the interrelations between the national and the postcolonial (or the global).

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My precious co-workers in Hamilton UBF made my stay in Hamilton comfortable. I will never forget my family's moving to Hamilton in the midst of a rainy and foggy day with the help of Hamilton co-workers. Their prayers and support for my family helped us to go through many ups and downs well. I will also never forget missionaries Paul and Pauline Chang's love and support for my Ph.D. studies and for my spiritual growth in Jesus Christ. I also want to express my thanks to shepherd Daniel Rhee and shepherdess Miso Rhee's spiritual support for my Ph.D. studies and for my family. My stay in Montreal during my M.A. studies and my precious co-workers in Montreal UBF will always remain in my heart.

I dedicate this doctoral thesis to my wife Pauline Eun-Jung Lee. Without her love, patience, and sacrifice, it could never have been made possible for me to complete my Ph.D. studies. She was always beside me encouraging and supporting me even in the midst of difficult moments. I want to express my innermost thanks to her. My children—Pauline, Helen, and Joseph—were the source of joy and happiness in this long period of my graduate studies in Canada.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Colonial History and Postcolonial Representation in India, Korea, and Ireland**

#### **Literary Representations of Colonial Histories: An Alternative Postcolonial Historiography**

My thesis examines the ways in which colonial histories are represented in literary texts in the postcolonial period in India, Korea, and Ireland. I give particular attention to the ways in which creative writers engage with the task of revisiting and rewriting colonial histories in their literary works. I am concerned with the role of literary texts as products of “the creative or interpretive imagination” (Said 1994: xxii) in the postcolonial histories of societies in which writers and their works are embedded. In particular, I want to explore the ways in which literary works not only reflect social realities but also foster a decolonization of the imagination which can lead to a critical engagement with postcolonialities in India, Korea, and Ireland. I analyze the possibilities and limits of literary texts as a way of thinking or imagining otherwise (against the established discourses of colonial histories). I also explore the ways in which literary texts can contribute to the production of a political language—a language of postcolonial resistance that can bring about what Ngugi calls a “decolonization of the mind,” a project I outline



in more detail in what follows.

In the course of obtaining their formal political freedom from the strong grips of colonization by empires, the first and the most imperative project colonized peoples undertook was achieving political independence through military operations. This mode of decolonization has a clear ending point—certain dates and years when colonized peoples finally achieved political independence from the empire that ruled over them: August 15, 1947 in India; August 15, 1945 in Korea; the Irish Free State on December 6, 1922 and the Republic of Ireland on April 18, 1949. These dates and years are officially acknowledged, recorded, and remembered in history as the moments of decolonization and the beginnings of a new era. However, these moments of decolonization did not resolve the problem of colonialism once and for all, but generated further problems in the postcolonial period because decolonization did not necessarily mean decolonization for all. In the course of new nation building in the postcolonial period, certain groups continued to be exploited and marginalized (e.g., the tribals in India and former “comfort women” in Korea), which meant in effect that for these people the period of decolonization turned into another form of colonization. Decolonization in India, Korea, and Ireland was also followed by the partition of the national space: Pakistan and Bangladesh for political and religious reasons from India; South and North Korea for

political and ideological reasons; while Northern Ireland has remained a part of its former empire and separate from the Republic of Ireland. This postcolonial politics of partition caused bloody conflicts in these regions for several decades even after political independence. This postcolonial turmoil demonstrates that political decolonization in these regions remains an incomplete project. Overcoming colonial influences upon all aspects of formerly colonized people's lives—decolonization as a cultural project—is another, more difficult yet absolutely necessary project of decolonization which requires persistent struggle and which can ultimately lead to a genuine postcolonial transformation.

With regard to decolonization as a cultural project, I focus on the theme of rewriting colonial histories by formerly colonized peoples. In particular, I am interested in literary representations of colonial histories as an alternative postcolonial historiography which can deconstruct the official narratives offered of colonial histories. I use the term history in its plural form to mark diverse histories of colonialism and multiple possibilities of postcolonial resistance against colonialism and its legacies in the postcolonial world, and to resist the idea of history as a universal concept that continues to put former empires at the centre of the world not only physically and politically but also epistemologically; my thesis follows the trajectory of the critical process Dipesh Chakrabarty has described as “provincializing Europe.” I hope to “further the lines of

inquiry and arguments about the [global] historical experience of imperialism” (Said 1994: xxii) by adopting a methodology of a comparative postcolonial studies, in a similar way to the ones employed by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* and Diana Brydon and Helen Tiffin in *Decolonising Fictions*, focusing in particular on colonial histories and postcolonial resistance within and among postcolonial “peripheries” rather than undertaking a study of direct relationships between “centres” and “peripheries.” What makes my study distinct from these studies is that while Said analyzes canonical literary works in the West and Brydon and Tiffin focus on literatures produced in former British colonies such as the West Indies, Australia, and Canada, I cover India, Korea, and Ireland in my study, interconnecting postcolonialities in these seemingly unrelated regions. Why this approach? As Said argues, “I think politics has much more to do with connecting things that are normally disconnected” (2001: 67). This thesis engages in such a connection of disconnected elements. I claim that postcolonialism in the Western academy has focused too much on European colonization, especially British colonialism; we need to take into account the fact that Japan was a powerful colonial power and then to compare the effects of that colonization—and postcolonization—on places like Korea with British colonialism in India, as well as closer to home in Ireland.

In his article “Borders and Bridges: Seeking Connections between Things,” Ngugi

wa Thiong'o relates this politics of connection (or comparison) to a decolonization of the mind. According to him, under the influence of Western education that emphasizes "putting things in compartments," "we are trained not to see connections between phenomena" (120). In particular, he points out that "literature ... is often taught as if it had nothing to do with these 'other' realms of our being" such as politics, economics, the environment, psychology, and so on (120). He thus poses several questions:

What has aesthetics to do with the environment? With questions of wealth, power, and values in a society? What does it have to do with the question of poverty in a society? What does it have to do with the question of poverty in Africa, or of wealth in the West, or of Africa in the sixteenth century, or of the Africa of A.D. 2000, of the relations between Africa and the West in the year 2000? (120)

Throughout my thesis, I explore "connections between literature and that wholeness that we call *society*, a wholeness constituted by all that comes under economics, politics, and the environment" (124-125, emphasis in original). How postcolonial texts are generated from the tension between the aesthetic and the political will also be addressed in my study.

## **Representing the Colonized**

By using the term “the colonized” I follow that which Said signifies in his article “Representing the Colonized.” According to him, the concept of the colonized has changed: “Before World War II the colonized were the inhabitants of the non-Western and non-European world that had been controlled and often settled forcibly by Europeans. ... By the time Alfred Sauvy’s ideas about Three Worlds had been institutionalized in theory and praxis, the colonized had become synonymous with the Third World” (294). However, political decolonization of the colonized around World War II does not necessarily result in a complete overcoming of the influence of the former colonizers. The postcolonial period overlaps with neo-colonial imperatives and the divisive politics of the Cold War era, which meant that formerly colonized peoples were hurriedly forced into the global competition of survival in addition to the domestic struggle of nation building. “Thus,” Said adds,

“the colonized” was not a historical group that had won national sovereignty and was therefore disbanded, but a category that included the inhabitants of newly independent states as well as subject peoples in adjacent territories still settled by Europeans. ... The experience of being colonized therefore signified a great deal to regions and peoples of the world whose experience as dependents, subalterns,

and subjects of the West did not end—to paraphrase from Fanon—when the last white policemen left and the last European flag came down. To have been colonized was a fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results, especially after national independence had been achieved. Poverty, dependency, underdevelopment, various pathologies of power and corruption, plus of course notable achievements in war, economic development: this mix of characteristics designated the colonized people who had freed themselves on one level but who remained victims of their past on another. And far from being a category that signified supplication and self-pity, “the colonized” has since expanded considerably to include women, subjugated and oppressed classes, national minorities, and even marginalized or incorporated academic subspecialties. (294-295)

In chapters two and three I discuss literary representations of the Indian tribals (particularly women) and former comfort women in Korea. The main theme of these two chapters can be summarized as the politics and dynamics of “representing the colonized.” I analyze how women as the colonized are represented in the postcolonial period. I also use the term “subaltern” interchangeably with the term “colonized” in this chapter because I find these two terms more similar than different. Spivak defines the term the

subaltern as follows: “The ‘subaltern’ describes ‘the bottom layers of society constituted by specific modes of exclusion from markets, political-legal representation, and the possibility of full membership in dominant social strata” (2000: xx).

The colonial experiences of the tribal women in India and former comfort women in Korea did not end with political decolonization. Instead, they remain in the state of colonization even during the postcolonial period. They have to endure poverty, marginalization, subjugation, and exploitation within the new independent national spaces, which were supposed to have provided all people within the boundary of the nations with freedom and equal opportunities. This is because “independence from colonial powers meant the establishment of nation-states closely modelled upon the very states that undertook imperialism” (Duara 2). Arif Dirlik provides a detailed assessment of this situation:

Aside from the hegemonic relationships produced by Euro-American power, it seems to me that the most important instrument of colonialism in the modern age was the nation-state, which ... itself was a colonizing force as an agent of modernization. The colonialism of the nation-state is even more starkly evident in third world situations, where the nation-state has claimed for itself a civilizing mission in bringing modernity to the population it claims as its own. Whether we

view the nation in class, gender and ethnic, or urban-rural and regional terms, nation building—representing the demands of those who view themselves to be the most modernized elements in society—has served as the most thoroughgoing instrument of the colonization of the world in the name of modernity. It is both extensive and intensive: the colonization of physical space as well as the spaces of everyday life and the interior spaces of individuals. (116)

In the process of postcolonial nation building, the tribals (particularly women) in India and former comfort women in Korea endured this colonization of interior and exterior space. In the postcolonial period the new nation-states were “faced with two tasks which were often in tension with each other: to fulfill the promise of ... [the] humanistic ideals and modern citizenship [of the decolonization movement] and to create the conditions for international competitiveness” (Duara 5). These two goals, however, could not be achieved in a harmonious way. Instead, the postcolonial reality was that the project of nation-building and economic development to create the conditions for international competitiveness was undertaken at the cost of the promise of the humanistic ideals and modern citizenship the decolonization movement pursued.

I am particularly interested in the ways in which certain women’s voices were completely silenced under the influence of such gendered and colonizing nationalism.



The colonized histories of the Indian tribal women and former comfort women in Korea remained completely marginalized, and furthermore their (neo)colonial histories and voices of resistance in the postcolonial period were put under erasure in the record of official historiography. Indian and Korean/American writers hope to represent these silenced histories of the colonized in their literary works. I am going to explore the possibilities and limitations of such literary representations of the colonized, particularly tackling the issue of the agency of the colonized.

Gayatri Spivak engages with the theme of the agency of the colonized in her writing. Especially, her article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” offers me important points with which to think about and analyze the ways in which the silenced voices of the Indian tribal women and former Korean comfort women can somehow be uttered and heard. The article addresses two main issues “from a critique of current Western efforts to problematize the subject to the question of how the third-world subject is represented within Western discourse” (1988: 271). Her “alternative analysis of the relations between the discourses of the West and the possibility of speaking of (or for) the subaltern woman” (1988: 271) is based on her analysis of widow sacrifice in India.

Spivak uses the phrase “epistemic violence” in order to describe how the Other is constituted as the Self’s shadow (1988: 280-281). This means that the constitution of the

Other's subjectivity completely depends on the extent to which the Self grasps the Other: there is no room for the voice of the Other to be considered in that process of constituting Subjectivity. In this process of objectifying the Other, the Self commits "epistemic violence" not only by silencing the voice of the Other but also by adding the voice of the Self in place of that of the Other. Spivak thus adds the following questions: "How can we touch the consciousness of the people [as the subaltern], even as we investigate their politics? With what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak?" (1988: 285). Here Spivak suggests that we need to consider the consciousness of the Other or the subaltern instead of judging them and articulating what they want to say from our own perspective that can merely lead to "epistemic violence." How can we grasp the voice-consciousness of the subaltern? Is it an achievable goal? These are the two questions Spivak engages throughout her article. Furthermore, "the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" because "the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant" (1988: 287). How to measure the silences of women as the subaltern is a difficult task. This is more so in the case of widow sacrifice because the dying woman speaks not through a physical voice but through her dead (or silenced) body.

In her analysis of widow sacrifice (or sati), Spivak explores two opposing perspectives on the practice in colonial India. For the colonizers, "the abolition of this rite

by the British has been generally understood as a case of ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’ (1988: 297). “Against this,” Spivak argues, “is the Indian nativist argument, a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: ‘The women actually wanted to die’” (1988: 297). The limit of both perspectives is that “one never encounters the testimony of the women’s voice-consciousness” (1988: 297). As Spivak writes, “there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak” (1988: 307), as both positions highlight how “epistemic violence” precludes any possibilities of their voices to be uttered and heard.

Spivak further argues with another example, the suicide of Bhuvanewari Bhaduri, through which to clarify her point of how the voice of the subaltern as female can be uttered and properly heard (or interpreted). In particular, she calls attention to the unique and interesting way in which the subaltern as female tries to mark her voice of difference and resistance, and also emphasizes the importance of how we make sense of such voice. She pays particular attention to Bhuvanewari’s act of waiting for the onset of menstruation before committing suicide. This is something not uttered in a literal sense but marked on her dead body, from which Spivak tries to interpret what Bhuvanewari really intended to “speak” to us. Spivak explains her act of suicide in detail:

Bhuvanewari had known that her death would be diagnosed as the outcome of

illegitimate passion. She had therefore waited for the onset of menstruation. While waiting, Bhuvanewari, the *brahmacarini* who was no doubt looking forward to good wifedom, perhaps rewrote the social text of *sati*-suicide in an interventionist way. (One tentative explanation of her inexplicable act had been a possible melancholia brought on by her brother-in-law's repeated taunts that she was too old to be not-yet-a-wife.) She generalized the sanctioned motive for female suicide by taking immense trouble to displace (not merely deny), in the physiological inscription of her body, its imprisonment within legitimate passion by a single male. In the immediate context, her act became absurd, a case of delirium rather than sanity. The displacing gesture—waiting for menstruation—is at first a reversal of the interdict against a menstruating widow's right to immolate herself; the unclean widow must wait, publicly, until the cleansing bath of the fourth day, when she is no longer menstruating, in order to claim her dubious privilege. In this reading, Bhuvanewari Bhaduri's suicide is an unemphatic, ad hoc, subaltern rewriting of the social text of *sati*-suicide as much as the hegemonic account of the blazing, fighting, familial Durga. The emergent dissenting possibilities of that hegemonic account of the fighting mother are well documented and popularly well remembered through the discourse of the male

leaders and participants in the independence movement. The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read. (1988: 307-308, original emphases)

Spivak leads us to pay particular attention to the way in which Bhuvanewari tries to mark a text of resistance and difference on her body within a given situation. As Spivak summarizes, “Bhubaneswari attempted to ‘speak’ by turning her body into a text of woman/writing” (1999: 308). Her way of speaking, however, is not heard or read properly as Spivak notes: “the subaltern as female cannot be heard or read.” At the end of her article, she even declares that “the subaltern cannot speak” (1988: 308). This does not mean that the subaltern as female does not have any agency to speak, although many have criticized Spivak on this basis since the publication of her article. In a later article, Spivak clarifies her point:

The actual fact of giving utterance is not what I was concerned about. What I was concerned about was that even when one uttered, one was constructed by a certain kind of psychobiography, so that the utterance itself—this is another side of the argument—would have to be interpreted in the way in which we historically interpret anything. ... The effort required for the subaltern to enter into organic intellectuality<sup>1</sup> is ignored by our desire to have our cake and eat it too: that we can

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<sup>1</sup> Spivak explains the meaning of becoming an organic intellectual: “When the subaltern ‘speaks’

continue to be as we are, and yet be in touch with the speaking subaltern. ... So, ‘the subaltern cannot speak,’ means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act. That’s what it had meant, and anguish marked the spot. (1996: 291-292)

Hence, how the subaltern’s speaking is deciphered is equally important because speaking should be engaged in a reciprocal way and the subaltern’s speaking—bodily language in Spivak’s case study—demands a very careful decipherment. However, according to Spivak, “a distanced decipherment by another ... is, at best, an interception” (1999: 309). So the thinking that “I am able to read Bhubaneswari’s case, and therefore she *has* spoken in some way ... must not be too quickly identified with the ‘speaking’ of the subaltern” (1999: 309, original emphasis). That is why Spivak suggests at the end of her article that “the subaltern cannot speak. ... Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish” (1988: 308).

Here Spivak puts emphasis on the role of the female intellectual so that the voice of the subaltern as female may not be silenced and put under erasure or misconstrued and

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in order to be heard and gets into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance, he or she is on the way to becoming an organic intellectual” (1995: xxvi).

misrepresented. However, as Spivak suggests, the female intellectual needs to acknowledge her limitation because her task is fundamentally circumscribed. Spivak thus emphasizes establishing a line of communication between these two groups as the first and foremost step which can ultimately help the subaltern to be “inserted into the long road to hegemony [or organic intellectuality]” (Spivak 1999: 310).

Spivak’s explanation of how the subaltern as female somehow tries to make her voice heard in order to overcome her subalternity in an extremely unfavourable situation, and how through this struggle feminist intellectuals can aid the subaltern, provides me with a theoretical frame through which to make sense of the ways in which female Indian tribals and former comfort women in Korea also struggle to mark texts of resistance and difference in an effort of overcoming their subalternity under extremely oppressive social and political situations. They are represented with the help of feminist intellectuals, yet in the process of being represented the subaltern make the effort required for them to enter into organic intellectuality by getting into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance. Their agency as the subaltern is being constituted in the process of struggle.

Spivak’s statement that the role of the intellectual for the sake of the subaltern is limited reminds us of the possibilities and limitations of our role as the intellectuals. In

dealing with the Indian tribals (particularly women) and former Korean comfort women in their literary texts, Mahasweta Devi, Chang-Rae Lee and Nora Okja Keller struggle with the feeling that while they think they should do something for the sake of the colonized, they at the same time must acknowledge that what they can do is very limited. Their struggle also leads us to (re)think what we can and cannot do for the sake of the subaltern. Remembering this possibility and limitation, according to Spivak, will “allow ... us to take pride in our work [as postcolonial critics] without making missionary claims” (1999: 310) in dealing with the issue of representing the colonized.

### **Language and Decolonizing Imagination**

The fourth chapter of my thesis deals with postcolonial representations of colonial histories in Ireland and Korea, focusing on the theme of language and its potential as a means to foster the decolonization of the imagination. Studies on Anglo-Irish literature from a postcolonial perspective have already generated a multitude of interesting and significant critical writings.<sup>2</sup> My study is focused on Brian Friel’s *Translations*, in which Friel revisits and rewrites a crucial colonizing moment in Irish history. My particular

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<sup>2</sup> One of the recent studies on Irish studies in relation to postcolonial theory is published in *Postcolonial Text* 3.3 (2007), which can be accessed at <http://journals.sfu.ca/pocol/index.php/pct/issue/view/18>



interest is in the way in which Friel engages with the theme of “writing back” in the postcolonial condition of Northern Ireland and explores the possibility of transforming the language of colonization into a language of difference and resistance which might lead to a decolonization of the mind.

I place the situation of Ireland in *Translations* in dialogue with the circumstances of Korean postcoloniality represented in *Dictee* by Korean American writer Theresa Hak-Kyung Cha. Cha’s book is also about language and its potential to serve as a tool (or strategy) of difference and resistance. Cha relates the history of being forced to use the colonizers’ language in Korea to the similar experience of immigrants being forced to use a new language. In this way, Korean and Korean American histories are overlapped in *Dictee*. In terms of its style and textual formation, *Dictee* is quite distinct from *Translations*. Cha’s experimental style and textual formation is efficiently used to represent an alternative, suppressed colonial history in Korea so as to bring about alternative imagining on the part of readers.

Although the fourth chapter of my thesis touches upon postcolonial representations of colonial histories as in chapters two and three, I give special attention to the issue of language in relation to decolonization in order to explore the question of the influence and significance of language on culture and writing. In particular, I analyze

the ways in which Friel and Cha pursue the decolonization of the imagination through their textual engagements and thus produce texts which “take us from the monocentric into the polyphonic, from the dominance of a single culture into convergent cultures, from pure ancestry into hybridisation, from the novel of persuasion to the novel of carnival” (Brydon and Tiffin 33).

Frantz Fanon tackles the issue of language and decolonization in “The Negro and Language.” He analyzes the obsessive desire of the Negro of the Antilles to acquire the colonizers’ language, French. It is because the Negro of the Antilles believes he “will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language” (18). Acquiring French is closely related to becoming more like white colonizers. Language acquisition is more than just learning a language: it is a means to acquire the power colonizers’ language possesses. What is problematic with this attitude toward colonizers’ language is that it is based on the Negro’s inferiority complex toward (former) colonizers. This inferiority complex leads the Negro to renounce his blackness in order to become whiter (18) and furthermore to decorate himself with European ways of life style (25).

Fanon’s analysis of the Negro of the Antilles’ deeply embedded colonial mentality toward former French colonizers and their culture illustrates how hard it can be for

formerly colonized people to reach the state of a decolonization of the mind in their relationship with former colonizers in the postcolonial period. Although his analysis is based on the case study of the Negro of the Antilles, this issue, as he suggests, can be extended to everyone or every race that has experienced colonization (18, 25). In chapter four, I tackle the issue of overcoming the colonization of the mind, which is a project that “requires ... an imaginative creation of a new form of consciousness and way of life” (Pieterse and Parekh 3). This is why decolonization in the postcolonial period needs to be engaged persistently and in all aspects of societies. Mine is a limited project in the sense that it is focused on a decolonization of the imagination in two literary texts: Friel’s *Translations* and Cha’s *Dictée*, tackling in particular the issue of the appropriation of (former) colonizers’ language and its transformative potential for rewriting colonial history and marking postcolonial resistance.

Through this postcolonial comparative study on colonial histories and postcolonial representations in India, Korea, and Ireland, I hope to think about the ways in which “we are ... encouraged to think and to feel differently than before and to make connections which might otherwise have escaped us” (Darby 43). This is, I believe, a way of decolonizing the (colonized) mind. I put special focus on literary representations of colonial histories in my study because “it is in literary texts that some of the most

disruptive and evocative potentialities of historical interpolation may occur” (Ashcroft 103). By historical interpolation I follow Ashcroft’s sense of “not simply the insertion of a contestatory voice, a different version, or a radical perspective, ... but an entry into the discourse which disrupts its discursive features and reveals the limitations of the discourse itself” (103). “How [colonial] history might be ‘re-written, how it might be interpolated” (15) is a major question I tackle throughout my thesis in order to analyze the possibilities and limits of literary representations of colonial histories as an alternative postcolonial historiography which can generate a decolonization of the mind.

## Chapter Two

### Mapping Another India:

#### Mahasweta Devi's Cognitive Mapping of Postcolonial India

##### Introduction: An Aesthetic of Cognitive Mapping in *Imaginary Maps*

In this chapter, I undertake an examination of the issue of breaking from colonialism in postcolonial India, largely by offering a critical reading of Mahasweta Devi's *Imaginary Maps*. Breaking from colonialism, according to Radhakrishnan, is a task that needs to be pursued both politically and epistemologically (85). The political break from colonialism, i.e. achieving political independence from colonizers, does not automatically result in the epistemological (psychological and cultural) state of decolonization, i.e. a new history and a new subject severed and emancipated from past colonial history and its effects. The national space in the post-independence period rather turns out to be the one where confusion, conflicts, and turmoil continue to exist and often grow worse. For in the course of nation building many of the newly independent countries have to deal with both internal and external challenges. Internally, those countries face unremitting challenges caused by legacies of the colonial past while dealing at the same time with the competition and struggle caused by different (and

opposing) ideas and visions of nation building. Externally, they also deal with challenges caused by ongoing colonialism (and imperialism) exercised by (former) colonizers. Radhakrishnan thus argues that “it is of vital importance that nationalist thought coordinate a new and different space that it can call *its* own: a space that is not complicit with the universal Subject of Eurocentric Enlightenment, a space where nationalist politics could fashion its own epistemological, cognitive, and representational modalities” (85, original emphasis). Not only should this new independent national space be different from the colonized one, particularly by “not [being] complicit with the universal Subject of Eurocentric Enlightenment,” but it should also be the one that “achieve[s] full and inclusive representational legitimacy with its own people—the many sub-spaces and the many other forms and thresholds of collective identity (such as the ethnic, the religious, the communal)—and fashion[s] its own indigenous modes of cultural, social and political production in response” (Radhakrishnan 85-6). This is a difficult but necessary task, given that nation building in the so-called Third World is drawn into merciless global competition and struggle while already heavily burdened with internal struggles.

In *Imaginary Maps*, Bengali-Indian activist and writer Mahasweta Devi demonstrates how those two aforementioned challenges are dealt with in postcolonial India and argues that nationalism (or nation building in general) failed, because the new

national space is not at all different from but rather similar to the past colonized one: she provides a representation of how the tribals<sup>3</sup> (particularly women) in India are systematically excluded and exploited in the course of nation building and development and are doubly colonized in the process of so-called decolonization. This is largely because in the course of nation building nationalists adopted policies opposed to what Radhakrishnan suggests above. The independent national space cannot achieve full and inclusive representational legitimacy with its own people by excluding and marginalizing—as opposed to including and embracing—some groups of people largely on the basis of their ethnic and religious differences. And it turns out to be one in which another form of the Eurocentric Enlightenment project called “development” is widely applied: in the process, certain groups of people are exploited in the extreme. Devi problematizes and deconstructs nation building, development, and decolonization in post-independence India by trying to map out another India that can serve as a counter-discourse against the dominant (and official) discourse on nation building. Devi’s mapping of another India, I would argue, constitutes her attempt to engage and mark the epistemological break from (ongoing) colonialism in postcolonial India. It is through her

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<sup>3</sup> I am following Devi’s way of using the term “tribal” instead of using “indigenous people” or “aborigine” (more familiar term to people in North America) “because [according to Devi] it is appropriate to the Indian context” (Devi 2003: ix).

engagement with the epistemological break from colonialism that Devi's aesthetic of mapping—which is very similar to what Fredric Jameson calls an “aesthetic of cognitive mapping”—is articulated.

Jameson explains his idea of cognitive mapping as follows:

The question is how to think those local struggles, involving specific and often different groups, within some common project that is called, for want of a better word, socialism. Why must these two things go together? Because without some notion of a *total* transformation of society and without the sense that the immediate project is a figure for that total transformation, so that everyone has a stake in that particular struggle, the success of any local struggle is doomed, limited to reform. ... I am trying to suggest a way in which these things always take place at two levels: as an embattled struggle of a group, but also as a figure for an entire systemic transformation. And I don't see how anything substantial can be achieved without that kind of dual thinking at every moment in all those struggles. (1999: 171, original emphasis)

This kind of “dual thinking” (i.e. the *modus operandi* of cognitive mapping) that takes the dynamics of the local and the global into consideration in pursuit of a total



transformation of society (particularly postcolonial transformation) is necessary, Jameson adds, because

The new and enormous global realities are inaccessible to any individual subject or consciousness ... which is to say that those fundamental realities are somehow ultimately unrepresentable or, to use the Althusserian phrase, are something like an absent cause, one that can never emerge into the presence of perception. Yet this absent cause can find figures through which to express itself in distorted and symbolic ways: indeed, one of our basic tasks as critics of literature is to track down and make conceptually available the ultimate realities and experiences designated by those figures, which the reading mind inevitably tends to reify and to read as primary contents in their own right. (1999: 158-9)

Jameson thus suggests that “artists today have to respond to the new globally defined concrete situation of late capitalism” (1999: 170).

*Imaginary Maps* is Devi’s response to the postcolonial situation in India; it is her attempt to draw a “cognitive map” of the Indian situation (the local) under the devastating influence of the globalization of capitalism (the global), by producing a “cartography of resisting bodies and minds and their struggles against multilayered oppressive forces operating at local and global levels” (Anwar 84). Devi not only tries to map the local

situation in relation to the global situation but also seeks some kind of bigger project—a total transformation of society toward a more egalitarian future one. She writes: “Our double task is to resist ‘development’ actively and to learn to love” (*Imaginary Maps*, xxii).

My contention is that Devi’s attempt to engage in a cognitive mapping of postcolonial India does not just offer a vigorous critique and representation of the failed process of nation building and decolonization in postcolonial India, but is also an attempt to mark the epistemological break from ongoing colonialism in postcolonial India by suggesting (and leading us to think of) another way of imagining the future, in a strikingly similar way to Jameson’s suggestions of our need (or desire) for pursuing utopia through the process of cognitive mapping. In other words, by narrating difficulties and challenges of postcolonial transformation in *Imaginary Maps*, Devi leads us to (re)think of “a postcolonial politics” that “turn[s] away from cheap cynicisms and easy answers to enter instead into what Bonnie Honig calls, creating an adjective from the noun ‘dilemma,’ the ‘dilemmatic spaces’ of difficult engagements” (Brydon).

**Mapping the Third World, Drawing Cartographies of Struggle: Development as (Imperial) Project and Discourse**

[Development is] much more than just a socio-economic endeavour; it is a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions.

-- Wolfgang Sachs 1992, 1

It is necessary, prior to examining *Imaginary Maps*, to briefly survey the project of “development,” which served, in the post World War Two period both as a socio-economic project that almost all the “underdeveloped” countries were destined to follow and as a powerful discourse that contributed enormously to shaping the so-called Third World and people’s lives there. According to Harry Harootunian, during the period of decolonization and nation building in the former colonized world after World War Two (i.e. during the Cold War era in general), two emerging empires—the United States and the Soviet Union—“engaged in a titanic contest to win the allegiance of new nation states to their respective models of modernity and development” (1). Such developmental programs “aimed to persuade new nations to commit their political economies to marketization and democratization with often *disastrous* results” (Harootunian 2, my emphasis). Democratization often turned out to be single party rule; in the name of political stability, the United States often supported military regimes and violent dictatorships, and marketization “invariably swelled the wealth of a minority” (Harootunian 3). Despite these devastating outcomes that are now widely known to us,

development was effective enough to serve as a “sophisticated system of plunder” (Pilger 2) so that Euro-American empires could regain and keep their hegemonic power over the Third World in the era of decolonization and nation building after World War Two.

My concern with regard to development is how powerfully as a discourse it contributed to colonizing the social imaginary in the Third World, particularly in terms of the idea of *how* to build *what* kind of nation-states. Wolfgang Sachs argues that development “does possess one function: it allows any intervention to be sanctified in the name of a higher goal [such as modernization]. Therefore even enemies feel united under the same banner. The term creates a common ground, a ground on which right and left, elites and grassroots fight battles” (1992: 4). Development is neither “technical performance” nor “class conflict”; it is “much more than just a socio-economic endeavour; it is a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions” (Sachs 1992: 1). In this respect, setting up a sophisticated system of exploitation in a changed political environment after World War Two is made possible not only by force, but also by the “willing” acceptance of the development project by people in the Third World. This demonstrates how effectively “development had achieved the status of a certainty in the social imaginary,” even to the extent that “it seemed impossible to conceptualize social reality in other terms” (Escobar

5). Development, thus, “has achieved a virtual hegemony and so is presented with an air of inevitability that disarms the imagination and prevents thought of and action towards a systemic alternative—towards another, more just social and economic order” (Petras and Veltmeyer 8).

In his book *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Arturo Escobar discusses how development as a discourse contributes significantly to shaping the idea of the Third World (see 3-12 in particular). He argues that just as the West produces the East as a discourse, so does the First World with the formerly colonized world: “Representations of Asia, Africa, and Latin Americas as Third World *and* underdeveloped are the heirs of an illustrious genealogy of Western conceptions about those parts of the world” (7, my emphasis). The Third World, covering such large areas of the globe as Asia, Africa, and Latin America, is easily categorized as “underdeveloped,” at the same time pointing to the First World as “developed.” U.S. President Truman’s inaugural address on January 20, 1949 marks the historical junction of (re)mapping of the postcolonial world according to development discourse: “We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. The old imperialism—exploitation for foreign profit—has no place in our plans. What we

envisage is a program of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing” (qtd. in Esteva 6). Sachs comments on this speech: “That Truman coined a new term was not a matter of accident but the precise expression of a *worldview*: For him, all the peoples of the world were moving along the same track—some faster, some slower, but all in the same direction” (1996: 239-40, my emphasis). This hierarchical ordering in terms of countries’ economic development has contributed tremendously to mapping the “imaginative geography” (Said 1979: 49-73) of the Third World. As Escobar argues:

[The discourse of development] has created an extremely efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about, and the exercise of power over, the Third World. This apparatus came into existence roughly in the period 1945 to 1955. ... In sum, it has successfully deployed a regime of government over the Third World, a “space for ‘subject peoples’ ” that ensures certain control over it. (9)

This mapping of the imaginative geography of the globe as First/Third Worlds, North/South, and center/periphery has successfully resulted in establishing a hierarchical, global (imperial) order in the post-World War Two period. The establishment of such a system of plunder is made possible by seemingly “lawful” means in order to be more politically acceptable, and with the aim of creating more effective methods in a changed global political environment. As Edward Goldsmith points out, “formal colonialism came

to an end not because the colonial powers had decided to forego the economic advantages it provided but because, in the new conditions, these could now be obtained by more politically acceptable and more effective methods” (255). The fact that development as colonialism is rather widely and even “willingly” accepted by former colonized countries in the post-World War Two period demonstrates, according to Escobar, how successfully the development discourse has “deployed a regime of government over the Third World ... or control over it” not only economically but also culturally and politically. How, then, can we try to deconstruct the development discourse that produces the powerful knowledge of the Third World as underdeveloped and lagging behind? Escobar engages this question:

Even today most people in the West (and many parts of the Third World) have great difficulty thinking about Third World situations and people in terms other than those provided by the development discourse. These terms—such as overpopulation, the permanent threat of famine, poverty, illiteracy, and the like—operate as the most common signifiers, already stereotyped and burdened with development signifieds. Media images of the Third World are the clearest example of developmentalist representations. These images just do not seem to go

away. This is why it is necessary to examine development in relation to the modern experiences of knowing, seeing, counting, economizing, and the like. (12)

Here Escobar discusses how development as a discourse takes a strong grip on our minds by colonizing what and how we should think with respect to the Third World and “how certain representations become dominant and shape indelibly the ways in which reality is imagined and acted upon” (Escobar 5). Escobar calls this type of colonizing of the mind the “colonization of reality” (Escobar 5). His suggestion that “it is necessary to examine development in relation to the modern experiences of knowing, seeing, counting, economizing, and the like” implies both how development is constructed as a discourse and where (and how) a counter-discourse against development can be generated. Escobar clarifies this point:

Charting regimes of representation of the Third World brought about by the development discourse represents an attempt to draw the “cartographies” or maps of the configurations of knowledge and power that define the post-World War II period. These are also cartographies of struggle ... Although they are geared toward an understanding of the conceptual maps that are used to locate and chart Third World people’s experience, they also reveal—even if indirectly at times—the categories with which people have to struggle. (10)



The global mapping of the post-World War Two Period as First/Third Worlds, North/South or center/periphery serves not only as a hierarchical (and plundering) order but also names cartographies of struggle. By cartographies of struggle I mean both the oppression (from above) and resistance (from below) that people in the Third world go through in the post-independence period and in the process of nation building in particular. In the remainder of the chapter, I will thus examine the ways in which Devi in *Imaginary Maps* attempts to draw cartographies of struggle—i.e. grids of oppression and resistance—that the tribals in India live through in the post-independence period.

### **Cartographies of Resisting Bodies and Minds: Rewriting Postcolonial India and Marking Resistance in *Imaginary Maps***

In the previous section, I have argued how effectively development served as a discourse in the post-World War Two period. Vandana Shiva, in “Development, Ecology and Women,” unmasks development as colonization and explains what effects it brings about: “Development was ... reduced to a continuation of the process of colonisation; it became an extension of the project of wealth creation in modern western patriarchy’s economic vision, which was based on the exploitation or exclusion of *women* (of the west and non-west), on the exploitation and degradation of *nature*, and on the exploitation and

erosion of *other cultures* (2, my emphases).” Shiva’s critique of development is very similar to that of Devi in *Imaginary Maps*. Devi narrates and demonstrates how development ends up as the exploitation or exclusion of women (particularly tribal women), the exploitation and degradation of nature, and the exploitation and erosion of other cultures (particularly tribal cultures) in postcolonial India.<sup>4</sup> In an interview with Gayatri Spivak, she says that “the system hunts them. And wants to brand them [as criminal tribes]. The system which hunts them and uses them as a target is the criminal” (IM xvii). By the system, not only does Devi refer to the bonded labor system that “was introduced by the British” during the colonial period and continues to exist in spite of the Bonded Labor System Abolition Act introduced in 1976 by the Indian government (IM xii), but she also implies global capitalism with which the local capitalist system in India has been entangled. The tribals, she adds, “have not been part of the decolonization of India” and “yet they have paid the [costly] price” with no reward and still remain as “suffering spectators of the India that is traveling toward the twenty-first century” (IM xi).

In “The Hunt” and “Douloti the Bountiful,” Devi narrates how women among the tribals in India are systematically oppressed and exploited. This, however, does not necessarily mean that women are the only victims in the process of development and

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter all the quotations from *Imaginary Maps* will be cited as IM followed by page numbers.

nation building. In “Douloti the Bountiful,” for example, Devi demonstrates, through the character of Ganori Nagesia, how men (particularly tribal men in India) are also systematically victimized and thoroughly exploited. My point here is that, in general, women are more likely to be victims and that men often play the role of oppressors. In particular, Devi leads us to confront the two female protagonists, Mary Oraon and Douloti Nagesia, both of whom are deeply entrapped in a web of oppression and exploitation in post-independence India. In spite of the dark and oppressive social reality in which they are deeply embedded, they somehow try to escape from it and in the process mark anti-colonial resistance by turning their colonized bodies into decolonizing or resisting ones. In “The Hunt,” Mary Oraon’s resistance culminates in her killing of her oppressor, Tehsildar Singh, in the guise of tribal hunting. In “Douloti the Bountiful,” Douloti Nagesia’s resistance is marked in a very different, ironic, and abrupt way. She falls down on the map of India drawn on a school playground and dies there miserably vomiting up blood on the morning of Independence Day. So the schoolmaster Mohan Srivastava cannot plant the Independence flag, for Douloti Nagesia’s tormented body occupies the map of the entire Indian peninsula. These two scenes appearing at the end of the two stories are hauntingly vivid and striking. I will discuss the ways in which both Mary and Douloti, albeit in quite different ways, mark their anti-colonial resistance against the

exploitative and oppressive system of development and nation building. I will argue how Devi tries to draw cartographies of struggle in Escobar's terms in her attempt to draw cartographies of resisting bodies in *Imaginary Maps*. This is, I will also argue, her attempt to deconstruct development and nation building in postcolonial India.

### **i. Mary Oraon, on the Way to Becoming an Organic Intellectual?**

When the subaltern "speaks" in order to be heard and gets into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance, he or she is or is on the way to becoming an organic intellectual.

-- Gayatri Spivak, IM, xxvi

In this section, I will explore whether (or to what extent) Mary Oraon in "The Hunt" embodies the process of becoming an organic intellectual by getting herself into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance.<sup>5</sup> Getting into

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<sup>5</sup> Antonio Gramsci first developed the concept of the organic intellectual. In his writing on intellectuals, he poses this question: "Are intellectuals an autonomous and independent social group, or does every social group have its own particular specialized category of intellectuals?" (301) The former question is about how traditional intellectuals are considered and the latter is about organic intellectuals. He thus adds: "Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields" (301). According to Gramsci, "all men [and women] are intellectuals, one could therefore say; but not all men [and women] have in society the function of intellectuals (thus, because it can happen that everyone at some time fries a couple of eggs or sews up a tear in a jacket, we do not necessarily say that everyone is a cook or tailor)" (304). How one's function of the intellectual is developed is important. Hence, Gramsci writes: "The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator (but superior at the same time to the abstract mathematical spirit); from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the historical humanistic conception without which one remains a 'specialist' and does not

the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance means getting into the structure of cartographies of struggle in Escobar's terms. "The Hunt" is also a story that leads us to think of the limit of resistance from the marginalized (particularly women) on an individual level and the need of resistance on a collective level against the systematic oppression of the dominant.

At the beginning of the story, two villages—Kuruda and Tohri—are contrasted. Kuruda was an economically booming area during the colonial period because there was an important natural resource to be consumed: "whites had *timber plantations* in Kuruda" (IM 2).<sup>6</sup> It was abandoned later because it was no longer profitable. The neighboring village Tohri, instead becomes an economically booming area in post-independence India, mainly because that area provides coal and timber, two important natural resources used for the purpose of development. Devi writes: "Tohri's bustle is an experience after the silence of Kuruda. It is an experience to watch the *train* move on the hilltop from distant villages. ... For people who live in villages like Kuruda, life holds few breaks other than annual festivals. So their eyes are charmed by the scenes on top of Kuruda hill" (IM 2). The peaceful atmosphere in Kuruda, however, is disturbed by the coming of Tehsildar

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become a 'leader' [*dirigente*] (specialist + politician)" (321-322, emphasis in original).

<sup>6</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all italicized words in citations from *Imaginary Maps* are following Spivak's way of marking "all words in English in the original" (IM xxxi).

Singh, an urban developer equipped with money and power.

He is considered, at first, to be the one who could bring money and an economic boom back to Kuruda. People in Kuruda, however, gradually realize that they are being exploited and that Singh is a big threat to their community: he turns out to be a predator rather than a benefactor. Singh represents the westernized indigenous elite who were often used “effectively” in the process of development and nation building. The westernized indigenous elite hooked on economic development played a significant role in the course of imposing and implementing development in the Third World. In a nutshell, in the postcolonial period, it is they who “masterminded the exploitation on grounds of ‘national interest’ and growing GNPs, and it was accomplished with more powerful technologies of appropriation and destruction” (Shiva 2).

“The Hunt” is a story of how both the natural environment (particularly Sal forest) and Mary are put in jeopardy with the coming of a local capitalist and developer Singh, and how Mary tries to escape from her predator Singh. Here arises a question that needs to be answered: Why are both women and the natural environment completely marginalized and placed in danger in the course of development and nation building? Vandana Shiva tackles this issue, arguing that the development project initiated in the process of nation building turns out to be another form of colonization because it is

fundamentally based on the exploitation of women, the natural environment, and other cultures. “Development thus, is equivalent to maldevelopment, a development bereft of the feminine, the conservation, the ecological principle” (Shiva 4). By the ecological principle, Shiva means “equality in diversity” and “unity and harmony in diversity” (5). Although she seems to fall back into “reductionism, duality and linearity” (Shiva 5) in critiquing development as a project of Western patriarchy and at the same time by giving her preference to the feminine and Eastern principles,<sup>7</sup> her critique of development as a project of Western patriarchy offers a theoretical frame through which to make sense of the systematic exclusion and exploitation of women and the natural environment in the course of development in India.

From Shiva’s perspective, Devi’s account of the exploited lives of women and nature in the name of development and nation building in postcolonial India makes it clear that development is a gendered (and patriarchal) project. Let me go further into this point here. Singh stays in Kuruda for two reasons: “He thought, the business of felling trees in this forest is most profitable. Mary can make his stay profitable in the other sense as well” (IM 9). Singh’s capitalist and developmentalist desire is here juxtaposed with his

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<sup>7</sup> Although Shiva criticizes development, she is not an anti-developmental. Instead, she suggests another kind of development that follows “the feminine principle as the basis for development which conserves and is ecological” (7).

rapist and colonizing desire. He is the one who penetrates into both the virgin forest (IM 7) and the virgin Mary in Kuruda: both the forest and Mary are considered just objects of consumption and rape.<sup>8</sup>

People in Kuruda, however, remain silent without any clear sign of resistance against the intrusion by an urban developer Singh, and as a result, the possible exploitation and destruction of their community. They, men and women, collaborate with Singh in the process of imposing and implementing the development project of felling and selling trees, and of building up a suitable infrastructure (particularly roads) for that purpose. Doing something against such a project is not easy, for the atmosphere seems oppressive and unchallengeable. In this situation, Mary Oraon plays the role of a woman freedom fighter. Mary's emergence as a woman freedom fighter, however, is made possible not by intention but by situation, an oppressive and inescapable situation into which she is gradually forced. This does not necessarily mean that Mary does not have any potential qualities as a woman freedom fighter. As Devi describes, "at a distance she looks most seductive, but close up you see a strong message of rejection in her glance" (IM 2). Although this character is formed in a circumstance where she cannot be a full participant of society due to her mixed race and blood, Mary wisely takes advantage of

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<sup>8</sup> The main character Douloti in the story "Douloti the Bountiful" as I will show below is considered in the same way.



her outward attractiveness and her defiant and resolute inner character as she tries to plan to kill Singh the predator.

Mary's in-between position or hybridity is worth a further investigation. She is racially mixed: "she is the illegitimate daughter of a white father" (IM 6) and a tribal mother. Due to this, she cannot fully belong to her tribe, the Oraons. As Devi writes, "You wouldn't call her a tribal at first sight. Yet she is a tribal" (2). Her outward appearance (particularly her skin) distinguishes her from others in society, as Devi puts it: "Daughter of an Oraon mother, she looks different, and she is also exceptionally tall. So she couldn't find a boy of her own kind. The color of Mary's skin is a resistant barrier to young Oraon men" (IM 3). As Devi also describes, "Mary is the regular contact and bridge between the outside world of Tohri and Kuruda" (IM 9). Her social position of in-betweenness or hybridity enables her to go beyond the societal boundary more easily and thus equips her with better knowledge of ongoing situations so as to form resistance against the intrusion from the outside world such as that of Singh. The universalization of her particular case, however, seems to be too much. Instead, as Spivak argues, through Mary,

Mahasweta thematizes the post-colonial in a body model. ... In place of the pure ethnic, the full-fledged tribal, she focuses on a half-caste, half tribal, half white woman. Named for the largest of the 300 tribal groups, the Oraon, Mary Oraon,

the main character in the story, is the product of a rape. But she is also the child of what I have in the past called epistemic violation, enabling violation. You and I would not be able to sit here and talk to each other if I had not been touched by the culture of imperialism. There is a very strong desire to deny that, and on the other hand it is that enabling violation that we must bitterly come to terms with. By 'we' I'm speaking about the post-colonial Indian. We *must* come to terms with that, because that is what makes it possible for us to establish sociality in the contemporary context. (1990: 83, original emphasis)

In this respect, Mary's resistance demonstrates the way in which she comes to terms with the post-colonial condition she is deeply embedded in. The post-colonial condition Mary and perhaps many formerly colonized people have to face and go through is the situation in which they are struggling with the burdens and legacies of the past colonial experience, at the same time confronting another kind of colonialism. Mary's case is one of the many that demonstrates how formerly colonized people can get over the postcolonial condition they inherit and are deeply embedded in.

The last two scenes—the first when Mary negotiates with Singh (IM 13-14) in order to escape from a moment of crisis in which she may otherwise be raped and likely abandoned later when her “usefulness” or “profitableness” runs out, and the second when

she leads Singh into a trap in order to kill him (IM 16)—in fact appear to be very seductive and even erotic. After the killing is completed, Devi describes Mary as follows: “Mary comes out. Walks naked to the cut. Bathing naked in the cut her face fills with deep satisfaction. As if she has been infinitely satisfied in a sexual embrace” (IM 17). The story ends with the following words: “Today all the mundane blood-conditioned fears of the wild quadruped are gone because she has killed the biggest beast” (IM 17). In a situation in which women and the natural environment are hunted down, Mary Oraon hunts down her and her community’s biggest enemy and gets justice in the guise of a tribal hunting festival. This is how Mary turns her colonized body into a decolonizing or resistant one. And this is how Mary marks resistance against the colonizing and patriarchal system of development.

In relation to Mary’s act of killing in the guise of a tribal hunting festival, there are two points that need to be further discussed here. First, her way of getting justice, i.e. her use of violence against violence is troubling. Devi explains:

People say that in the story I have gone too much for bloodshed, but I think as far as the tribals or the oppressed are concerned, violence is justified. When the system fails in—justice, violence is justified. The system resorts to violence when people rise to redress some grievance, to protest. ... When the system fails an

individual has a right to take to violence or any other means to get justice. The individual cannot go on suffering in silence. Tehsildar represents the mainstream. He is a contractor, the entire administration is behind him, because this illegal deforestation, which continues all over India, is done with great skill, and always the tribals are condemned. (IM xviii)

Mary's act of killing, according to Devi, can be justified in that it is the only way she can choose to resist bigger violence in a situation where women like her otherwise go through systematic exploitation and oppression. According to Spivak, Mary's reaction shows how she is "negotiating with the structures of violence" (1990: 90). In other words, what Devi tries to show through Mary is how the subaltern can respond to larger forms of violence—the structures of violence in Spivak's terms—in a situation where she has only two choices: resistance or subjection to exploitation. Mary chooses to actively resist against bigger violence instead of passively becoming a victim of the structures of violence.

Second, Mary's negotiation with the structures of violence takes place in the act (or in the guise) of tribal hunting. Jennifer Wenzel argues that "Mary revitalizes both the hunt and its judiciary function," i.e. a tribal way of getting justice (242). Jon Hegglund similarly argues that "Devi merges the ritual of the tribal women's hunt with Mary's

murder of her suitor, suggesting that indigenous practices still provide a fertile ground for myths that can be deployed to combat contemporary oppressions” (126). The tribal hunting festival in which Mary takes part offers a perfect opportunity for her to negotiate with (and resist against) the structures of violence, by removing a big threat to herself and to her community.

Mary’s act of resistance, according to Wenzel, is quite limited in that there is little possibility of going beyond a personal level to form a collective resistance. She argues that “the trajectory of Mary’s wonderful tale in no way changes the lives of the Oraons in Kuruda, and her own singularity lessens the likelihood of her resistance becoming exemplary. Other contractors will come; Prasad will sell his trees again; future hunts (if there is any forest left) will find no more beasts to kill” (243). The story supports Wenzel’s point: “She will walk seven *miles* tonight by way of Kuruda Hill and reach Tohri. She will awaken Jalim. From Tohri there are *buses, trucks*. They will go away somewhere. Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Gomo, Patna. Now, after the big kill, she wants Jalim” (IM 17). Here Devi suggests that Mary, along with her lover, will escape from Kuruda in search of a haven, because otherwise she would go through hardship in Kuruda where a colonizing, oppressive, patriarchal system is a dominant force of society. The story demonstrates how limited personal resistance against the structures of violence can be.

The story also suggests that realizing and acknowledging the limits of a personal practice of resistance against the structures of violence can be a stepping-stone from which a collectivity will emerge (Spivak 1990: 90), although this depends on how remaining people react to a personal resistance and its limit. In “The Hunt,” Devi argues how limited a personal resistance to bigger, systematic violence and oppression is and how urgently a collective resistance is necessary by showing how the subaltern Mary’s entry into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance is precluded.

## **ii. Building the Nation, Exploiting Women**

There’s no such thing as an Authentic India or a Real Indian. There is no Divine Committee that has the right to sanction one single, authorized version of what India is or should be. There is no one religion or language or caste or region or person or story or book that can claim to be its sole representative. There are, and can only be, visions of India, various ways of seeing it—honest, dishonest, wonderful, absurd, modern, traditional, male, female. They can be argued over, criticized, praised, scorned, but not banned or broken. Not hunted down.

-- Arundhati Roy, 1999, 123

By focusing on “Douloti the Bountiful” in *Imaginary Maps*, I will examine the way in which nation building in post-independence India turns out to be a project of exclusion and exploitation, particularly the exclusion and exploitation of women among the tribals. Although the other two stories in *Imaginary Maps* also deal with the same

issue in one way or another, “Douloti the Bountiful” vividly and strikingly narrates how nation building and decolonization end up as a systematic failure. As Waseem Anwar argues, “as the story proceeds we figure out that in the process of decolonization and a systematic *neocolonial* control, Douloti the land and Douloti the character have been shrunk to the status of a product. Land or body, Douloti is delineated as a space of intervention for its exporters and exploiters. As a land, she is vulnerable to its intruders for crossing its borders, and as a body, she is forced to cross the boundaries of ethical values of freewill in order to benefit others through self-plunder” (89-90). The story demonstrates in particular how “women are tortured, raped, humiliated, and murdered as part of the process by which a nation is created and reinforced” (Ghosh 2000: 127).

The abovementioned quotation raises two questions to be elaborated in what follows: how a nation is created or imagined and how women in particular are disproportionately marginalized, silenced, and exploited in the process of nation building—that is, in the process of reinforcing a certain version of the nation as imagined community. The two questions I am going to discuss here are not disparate but interrelated ones. On the issue of how the nation is created as an *imagined community*, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* is perhaps one of the most influential books over the last two decades. Anderson says that the nation “is *imagined* because the

members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991: 6). This imagined nation, however, is not inclusive without any boundary. It is confined to the geo-political boundary of the nation-state, which is the real and tangible embodiment of what is imagined in the minds of people. Although there has been an increasingly new phenomenon called “long-distance nationalism: a nationalism that no longer depends as it once did on territorial location in a home country,” one largely the result of globalization (Anderson 2001: 42), this kind of nationalism is still predominantly confined to the boundary of “blood.” Australians who are Sikh nationalists, Canadians as Croatian nationalists, French as Algerian nationalists, and Americans as Chinese nationalists, for example, are in almost every case immigrants from those countries or their descendants. Anderson points out this limited imagining of the nation as follows: “The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind” (7, original emphasis).<sup>9</sup> Here Anderson points out the opposing *political* tension—finite yet elastic—

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<sup>9</sup> Here the nation that imagines itself coterminous with mankind refers to cosmopolitanism. Although these days many are talking about globalization and cosmopolitanism, it seems that our world still remains far away from the ideal of cosmopolitanism in a true sense.



in establishing the boundaries of the nation. I use the term “political” because the imaginary boundaries of the nation can be marked as either finite or elastic depending on the decisions of those in power. For example, Catholic minorities in Northern Ireland, ethnic minorities in the U.S.A., and aboriginal peoples in North America (and the list goes on) cannot be fully included in (or are often marginalized by) the “official” imagined nations. This limited imagining of the nation demonstrates how the dynamic of exclusion and inclusion depending on class, gender, race, and religion operates in the process of nation building.

Anderson points out another limited imagining of the nation as follows: the nation “is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (7, original emphasis). I agree that such a fraternity made it possible for so many millions of people to die for the nation as an imagined community, *particularly* in times of war. “In peacetime,” as Gopal Balakrishnan argues, “telling striking workers that they are being unpatriotic will likely have little effect, as neither they nor the boss have a monopoly on the precise meaning of patriotic behaviour. In war,

the state acquires this monopoly and the nation then ceases to be an informal, contestable or taken-for-granted frame of reference, becoming instead a precise, univocal and resolutely imagined identity” (68). What is problematic is that such a monopoly of the idea of the nation that works effectively in times of war often continues even after wartime and particularly in the course of nation building during the postcolonial period, to the extent that other visions or versions of the nation can often be banned or hunted down. For so-called official nationalism (by nationalism I mean simply how people imagine the nation) is forcefully imposed on the masses in the course of decolonization and nation building, and other imaginings or voices of nation building are often oppressed and silenced.

Put another way: can nationalism achieve *full* and *inclusive* representational legitimacy with its own people—the many sub-spaces and the many other forms and thresholds of collective identity (such as the ethnic, the religious, and the communal)? Keeping this question in mind, I will examine how Devi questions nation building and decolonization in “Douloti the Bountiful” by representing the exploited lives of women among the tribals in postcolonial India. In particular, I will discuss how Devi suggests an *imagining otherwise* of nation building that supports Roy’s idea of the multiple possibilities of imagining the nation as shown in the epigraph of this section.

“Douloti the Bountiful” starts with a narration of a despairing life of the tribals in India, particularly their systematic exclusion from and exploitation in the process of nation building. Two tribal men’s exploited lives are described in the early part of the story. The first concerns how Ganori Nagesia has become Crook Nagesia, the second one how Bono Nagesia (uncle of the main character Douloti Nagesia) escapes from the vicious cycle of exploitation. The former is a gloomy story of Ganori Nagesia’s exploited and tortured life as a *kamiya*, while the latter is considered a fairy tale of the one who successfully gets out of the bondage of a miserable life. In his deeply despairing life, Crook Nagesia (the father of Douloti Nagesia and a bonded-slave) still has a strong desire for his story to be written down and heard. The story goes like this:

Sometimes Crook imagines some bespectacled town gentleman who has come by car, and listening to him, is writing down everything. Actually these people have heard that the government is going to abolish the bonded labor [*kamyouti*] system. Then bespectacled gentry will come from the towns and write everything down on paper. This too is a dream.

Crook talks to such a gentleman in his mind.

-- All work in the owner’s house is yours?

-- Why not, sir?

-- Why must you do all the work in Munabar's house?

-- How can I not have to do it all?

O learned town gentleman with glasses

All Munabar's work is Crook's work

I am his bondslave [*kamiya*].

-- You are his *kamiya*?

-- I am his bonded labourer [*seokia*].

-- His *seokia*?

-- I am his bonded worker [*beth-begar*].

-- Hey, what are you? *kamiya*, *seokia*, or *beth-begar*?

-- I am everything, I am his chattel slave. Come come, write everything down.

Write and get in your car, buzz off to town, and I stay behind in the jungle. Each in his own place.

-- You and I are men of two different worlds.

No such conversation has taken place. Crook has thought it all up. If such a thing had happened, if some bespectacled gentleman had come, words like this are what he would have heard from Crook Nagesia. (IM 20)

Crook Nagesia's strong desire for the story of his wretched life to be written down (and thus heard) is thwarted, because there exists a big gap that precludes any meaningful communication between his kind of people and some bespectacled town gentleman who has the power to write. As Devi narrates,

It's fate's decree to become a kamiya. Our Lord Fate comes to write fate on the forehead of the newborn in the dress of a head-shaved brahman. No one can evade what he writes down. On the high-caste boy's forehead he writes property, land, cattle, trade. Education, job, contract. On the outcastes' forehead he writes bondslavery. The sun and the moon move in the sky by Fate's rule. The poor boys of Seora village become kamiyas of the Munabars, Fate's rule. Who will change this rule? (IM 22)

Later in the story, a group of men such as Bono Nagesia, Mohan Srivastava (a school master), Prasad Mahato, Father Bomfuller (from a Western country), and Puranchand from the Gandhi Mission come to the whore house where Douloti is being exploited as a kamiya-whore (See 83-88). They witness and collect stories about the wretched lives of kamiyas so that the system of exploitation and injustice may be abolished. Their action, however, is doomed to failure, for "Boumfuller's survey report reached Delhi, and was imprisoned in a *file*" and "there's no solution even if there is a

law” (IM 89). Devi also writes: “Prasad shook his head hard and said, ‘There will be a fire.’ Bono kept shaking his head. ‘Who will light that fire, Prasadji? There is no one to light the fire [of resistance on behalf of kamiyas]. If there was, would the kamiya society be so large in Palamu? There are people for passing laws, there are people to ride *jeeps*, but no one to light the fire. Can’t you see the kamiya society is growing?’” (IM 88) There seems to be no way out. The wretched lives of kamiyas are deeply entangled with the system of exploitation and injustice, and the voices of bonded-slaves are completely silenced and their stories are systematically excluded.

Devi shows how the systematic exploitation and oppression of the tribals in India is established and continues to grow:

—Everything will end if bondslavery ends. ... Dhano said with profound conviction, ‘How can that be, Babuji? The boss-moneylender keeps kamiyas. Goremen [government people] will anger the boss-moneylender? Never will it anger them. Taking away our land by force they put us in such a state that we must borrow and become kamiyas. All that land the boss get written in his own name. And the clerks and officers of the goremens give the boss-moneylenders support in that move. As long as this goes on how can bonded labor be over? (IM 74)

Instead of being abolished, the kamiya society is rapidly growing and widespread. Devi writes:

In Andhra the people of Matangi, Jaggali, Malajangam, Mahar and other castes become Gothi. In Bihar Chamar, Nagesia, Parhaiya, Dusad become Kamiya or Seokiya. In Gujarat the Chalwaris, Naliyas, Thoris and others become Halpati. In Karnataka the low of birth become Jeetho, in Madhya Pradesh Haroyaha. In Orissa Gothi and in Rajasthan Sagri. The Chetty rayats of Tamil Nadu keep Bhumidases. In Uttar Pradesh the Bhumidas are called Maat or Khandit-Mundit or Sanjayat. The Bhumidases of the Laccadive Islands are Nadapu. Different names in different regions. The system is slavery. The marginal, the harijan, the tribal is its sacrifice. (IM 61)

The Indian government introduced the Bonded Labor System Abolition Act in 1976. The reality, however, is that “from Kashmir to the Indian Ocean, and from East to West, in every state, there are districts marked as bonded labor districts because there are more than forty thousand bonded laborers in each of them” (IM xii). The establishment of the bonded labor system goes back to the colonial period. Gabrielle Collu explains how the exploitative system of the bonded labor was introduced first during the British colonial period and continues in postcolonial India: “In short, British colonial presence

ended communal ownership of land, transformed it into a saleable commodity, and accelerated the dispossession of the *adivasis*, a dispossession that continues to this day despite independence and a series of ineffectual and unenforced laws designed to prevent discrimination and exploitation” (47).<sup>10</sup> The story “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha” in *Imaginary Maps* demonstrates how the tribals’ rights as citizens in independent India are thoroughly dispossessed due to their systematic exclusion from the process of nation building:

What is theirs by right? The constitutional rights of 7.76 percent of the population of India, of fifty-nine million, six hundred and twenty-eight thousand, six hundred and thirty-eight persons. They have not yet been informed of this. Although Delhi and the states print many different topics on millions of tons of paper. Radio doesn’t inform them, television doesn’t inform them, newsprint doesn’t inform them, the aspiring MLAs and MPs do not inform them, the rural administrative units or their heads do not inform them, the state governments don’t inform them, the tribal welfare ministries do not inform them. What an immense deal of labor and money is spent to keep up this directive of non-information. How many subtle heads work hard. How many political knots are tied. What was theirs by right. The

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<sup>10</sup> For detailed information see Collu 46-48.



Adivasis will enter the twenty-first century, ignorant of this in their shadowy habitation. Puran has heard that once Jawaharlal Nehru, and once Indira Gandhi, had tried to descend into those depths of Abujhmar, but had given up. No one else had even tried. (IM 110)

In this systematic blunder and plunder in the name of nation building, how can the tribals in India have a strong sense of community in a situation in which their basic constitutional and human rights are not guaranteed and their lives are not considered to be equally important with those of others—a situation in which they are merely considered to be commodities or “disposable people” (in Kevin Bales’ terms) for the causes of nation building and development?

Devi further problematizes the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in nation building in the conversation between the Delhi holy man (Sadhuji) and the washerwoman Rajbi. The Delhi holy man says that “You are not untouchable. You, me, Munabar Chandela, are offspring of the same mother” (IM 41). Rajbi responds: “If the offspring of the same mother, we are all brothers and sisters, yes? ... But Munabar doesn’t know that. Munabar’s children in my room, Munabar’s children in Mukami Dusadin’s place as well, and all these boys are bonded labor. Tell me how this can be” (IM 41). She cannot make

sense of the inequitable and exploitative situation in which some children are born bonded laborers and others are not. The confusion continues:

-- Sister, not that kind of mother, Mother India.

-- Who is that?

-- Our country, India.

-- This is our country?

-- Of course.

-- Oh Sadhuji, my place is Seora village. What do you call a country? I know *tahsil* [a pre-independence revenue-collection unit], I know station, I don't know country. India is not the country.

-- Hey, you are all independent India's free people, do you understand?

-- No, Sadhuji.

Bhuneswar and the others look around and shut up. Jhari says to Rajbi, 'Over the hill, you're old now, making like a tease. Listen to everything Sadhuji says. They will never understand what we say, and we will never understand what they say.

(IM 41)

There exists a big gap that thwarts meaningful communication between the Delhi holy man and the washerwoman Rajbi. Their conversation shows that there are at least

two different visions or versions of the nation as imagined community. To the government people like the Delhi holy man, there is only one authorized version of the nation as imagined community, which is called “India.” However, to the tribals like the washerwoman Rajbi, India is not considered in the same way because they are excluded and exploited throughout nation building, even though they have been living there since long before the nation-state called India was built. As Devi says, “India belonged to these tribals long before the incursion of the Aryan-speaking peoples” (IM ix). Their exclusion is so thorough that the question of inclusion/exclusion from the nation does not even present itself to them as a political possibility.

A clear sense of the tribals’ (particularly women’s) complete exclusion from and exploitation in the process of nation building unfolds through the female main character Douloti Nagesia. Not only does Devi show how cruelly women among the tribals in India suffer under the bonded labor system, but she also suggests how (an)other versions of India and Indians can be written. Devi shows how Douloti Nagesia’s colonized body can serve as a decolonizing and (resisting) body that problematizes and deconstructs the single, authorized version of what India is or should be.

Douloti Nagesia’s life is like a fairy tale, but one that ends in a “bloody, pain-filled life” (IM 50). It surely is a fairy tale that a tribal woman gets married to a Brahman:

it seems like a version of the Cinderella story. Brahman Paramananda suggests that he would get married to Douloti in order to help her father Crook Nagesia to solve his financial problem, although his real intention is to sell her to be a kamiya whore. Under the bonded labor system, a woman (a daughter or a wife) is often sold to be somebody's slave to relieve a family's financial burden. There is very little possibility for bonded laborers to get out of this web of exploitation. This is how the bonded labor system works. Douloti's realization of her harsh and exploitative reality comes slowly. She has to go through the brutal oppression, rape, and torture as a kamiya-whore under the system of exploitation established largely by men. As Devi writes, "The social system that makes Crook Nagesia a kamiya is made by men. Therefore do Douloti, Somni, Reoti have to quench the hunger of male flesh. Otherwise Paramananda does not get money. Why should Douloti be afraid? She has understood now that this is natural. Now she has no fear, no sorrow, no desire. She might have died even with the medicine" (IM 61). This is her realization of the bestial system of exploitation in which women like her are consumed until the monetary usefulness of their bodies ends and they are then thrown aside and forced to become beggars to survive.

In this system of exploitation and oppression where "women are just merchandise, commodities" (IM xx) that are disposable after their use ends, their voices do not appear

as ones that deserve to be heard and are thus easily silenced: there is very little possibility for women to form any kind of substantial resistance. While reading Douloti's story, I have wondered why Devi represents it in this gloomy and negative way. Douloti is depicted as a complete victim and is endlessly tormented under the patriarchal system of exploitation. Some men like Bono Nagesia, Mohan Srivastava (a school master), Father Bomfuller, and others know what is wrong and thus try to fix it. They hear of and themselves witness how women suffer under the bonded-labor system. In the end, however, what they come to realize is the bitter fact that they are helpless; the distressing and frustrating reality they have to face is that the tortured and raped kamiya-whore women's story remains completely silenced.

Devi marks a dramatic change in the flow of the story by making the ending of the story striking and vivid. In particular, the ending serves as a focal point in Devi's attempt to deconstruct nation building and decolonization: the last scene shows Devi trying to draw another map of India. Up to that point, the story remains gloomy and tragic. The abrupt ending, albeit still tragic, produces something powerful and subversive. Like other kamiya-whores, Douloti is finally released from the bondage of sex slavery when her body is completely dried up and contaminated by venereal disease. On the way to a hospital for proper treatment, she realizes that her disease cannot be cured due to the

weakened and tormented condition of her body. Sensing her impending death, Douloti hopes to go back home to see her parents. Since it becomes impossible to reach home, she lies down in the front yard of a school that is very carefully clay-washed. She gropes her way to the middle of the yard and dies tragically there. On the morning of Independence Day, people, children, and Mohan Srivastava, the schoolmaster, see that the dead body of Douloti Nagesia, a kamiya-whore, covers the entire map of India drawn on the school front yard. Their plan to raise the national flag and celebrate Independence Day is thwarted. Mohan Srivastava does not know what to do:

Filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas, here lies *bonded labor* spread-eagled, kamiya-whore Douloti Nagesia's tormented corpse, putrefied with venereal disease, having vomited up all the blood in its desiccated lungs. Today, on the fifteenth *August*, Douloti has left no room at all in the India of people like Mohan for planting the standard of the Independence flag. What will Mohan do now? Douloti is all over India. (IM 93)

The answer to the question "What will Mohan do now?" is a statement of the postcolonial reality in India: "Douloti is all over India." This last scene leads us also to pose a question: What does "independence" mean to people like Douloti Nagesia? Gabrielle Collu provides an answer:

This passage ... suggests the complete identification of the exploited *adivasi* women with India: she is all over India; she is India—meaning that the poor, exploited workers compose the majority of the people of India and that Independence is a lie for the vast majority of people in India or at the very least that it is meaningless to them. ... Devi uses the image of the bonded-sex-worker lying dead on a map of India to denounce exploitation and to destroy the myth of a free India for all. She suggests that real independence is impossible as long as there is gender, social and material inequality enabling one group to abuse another. For people like Douloti the *kamiya*-whore ... the tribals in the hills and the bonded-labourers in the fields, independence means nothing except the continuing and, in cases, increasing exploitation, the growing disparity between rich landowners and poor landless agricultural workers, and the overwhelming complicity of the government, the police, the landowners, the moneylenders, and the developers. (55-56)

Against the official discourse that all people in India are brothers and sisters of Mother India, Devi clearly and vividly identifies the exploited *adivasi* women with India: she is all over India; she is India. This demonstrates that although women are marginalized from the process of nation building, they are in fact at the heart of nation

building, insofar as it is a project built largely on the basis of “mortgaging women’s lives.”<sup>11</sup>

With regard to the strong visual effect of the last scene, Nandita Ghosh argues that “for a moment in the text, what becomes visible is the complicity between nation building efforts, male sexuality, and big capital in structures of exploitation” (2000: 140). The last scene, according to Waseem Anwar, does not merely depict the dark social reality and the structure of exploitation and oppression in postcolonial India. It also suggests how resistance can be formed: “While Douloti leaves no room for the flag bearers like Mohan to plant the standard of the Independence, her story flies all over India, excavating deep connections between the power structures of patriarchy, nationalism and late capitalism” (91). What Anwar suggests by “her story flies all over India, excavating ... late capitalism” is the power of a counter-discourse. Devi argues this point by allowing the subaltern Douloti to narrate an (excluded, exploited, and erased) story through her body.

As Ghosh argues, “presumably the school children were getting history and geography lessons on the story of modern India, a story of right and privileges which has no room for the story of bond slavery. In making Douloti die on the school map Devi writes over the official discourse of the nation with (an)other story of its making. ...

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<sup>11</sup> Borrowed from Pamela Sparr.



Douloti ... is everywhere: women like her map *the* story of the nation for it is on their bodies that the nation is built” (2005: 104-5). Devi’s attempt to write over the official discourse of the nation with (an)other story is an attempt to make the erased and silenced story of the subaltern like Douloti visible and heard: This is how Devi makes Douloti’s kind of story fly all over India. Note that Devi *overlaps* the official discourse of the nation with (an)other (suppressed) story of the nation instead of trying to rewrite the latter on the space where the former is erased. This is, according to Ghosh, “writ[ing] alternative history and creat[ing] alternative maps of belonging” (109). This is a critical position that supports Arundhati Roy’s point that

there’s no such thing as an Authentic India or a Real Indian. There is no Divine Committee that has the right to sanction one single, authorized version of what India is or should be. ... There are, and can only be, visions of India, various ways of seeing it—honest, dishonest, wonderful, absurd, modern, traditional, male, female. They can be argued over, criticized, praised, scorned, but not banned or broken. Not hunted down. (123).

Douloti’s dead body serves as the one that transcribes resistances against the dominant discourse of what the nation is and should be. This is how Devi turns the subaltern Douloti Nagesia’s colonized body into a decolonizing or resisting body. In both

“The Hunt” and “Douloti the Bountiful,” Devi draws another map of postcolonial India in order to show how human (particularly female) bodies are not only suffering from but also resisting the capitalist and patriarchal system of exploitation.

**Toward a Point of Communication with Ungraspable Others, or, What Does It Mean to Become a Political Intellectual?**

If read carefully, “Pterodactyl” will communicate the agony of the tribals, of marginalized people all over the world.

-- Devi, IM, xxi

All of which slowly brings us to the question of the writer himself in the third world, and to what must be called the function of the intellectual, it being understood that in the third-world situation the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual. No third world lesson is more timely or more urgent for us today, among whom the very term “intellectual” has withered away, as though it were the name for an extinct species.

-- Fredric Jameson, 1986, 74

In “The Hunt” and “Douloti the Bountiful” Devi engages literary representations of oppressed and tortured lives of the tribals in India centering on the two female characters, Mary Oraon and Douloti Nagesia. The two stories are literary representations based on Devi’s particular experience of certain tribals and their cultures in India. Unlike these two stories, Devi says that “Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha” (hereafter cited as

“Pterodactyl”) is “an abstract of my entire tribal experience” (IM xx). “Through the Nagesia experience,” she explains, “I have explained other tribal experiences as well. I have not kept to the customs of one tribe alone. In the matter of the respect for the dead, for example, I have mixed together the habits of many tribes” (IM xxi). In a note added to the end of the story, she writes that “in this piece no name—such as Madhya Pradesh or Nagesia—has been used literally. Madhya Pradesh is here India, Nagesia village the entire tribal society. I have deliberately conflated the ways, rules, and customs of different Austric tribes and groups, and the idea of the ancestral soul is also my own. I have merely tried to express my estimation, born of experience, of Indian tribal society, through the myth of the pterodactyl” (IM 196). “Pterodactyl” is a story through which Devi puts forward her ideas (from her lived experiences) of the tribals and their cultures in postcolonial India. In this regard, “Pterodactyl” is a story to which Jameson’s idea of third world literature is quite properly applied: “Third-world texts ... necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*” (Jameson 1986, 69: original emphases).

Although Devi, in “Pterodactyl,” narrates how the tribals undergo extreme marginalization and exploitation in the name of development and nation building in

postcolonial India, as she does in “The Hunt” and “Douloti the Bountiful,” the story mainly tackles the function of the intellectual as a political intellectual in Jameson’s terms through the main character, journalist Puran Sahay. The story unfolds along with Puran’s report of a journey to Pirtha Block, a small part of the bigger tribal villages.<sup>12</sup> Through Puran’s journey, Devi explores both the possibilities and limits of the role of the political intellectual by showing the way in which Puran agonizingly struggles to find a point of communication with the tribals. Through Puran’s journey, readers can also perceive Devi’s own questions about her role as a writer, journalist, and political intellectual who has worked for the sake of the tribals in India. Her critical engagement with the role of the intellectual as a political intellectual in relation to the tribals in India also leads us to (re)think of the same issue in representing (and working for the sake of) others and other cultures (particularly those under-or mis-represented) in general. In the remainder of this section, I will argue that Puran’s journey to Pirtha Block changes him, particularly his attitude towards the tribals and their cultures, and that his awareness as a political intellectual grows through the journey.

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<sup>12</sup> The journey can be compared to Charles Marlow’s journey along the Congo River in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, in the sense that his approach to others cannot be easily achieved and that his sense of self who tries to represent (or report) others becomes complicated throughout the journey.

In her narration of Puran's journey to Pirtha Block, Devi meticulously describes his conversations with those whom he meets in the process of his journey. He meets diverse people (such as the Sub-Division Officer, Shankar, Harisharan, the Sarpanch, Saraswati, Bikhia, and Kausalji) who have their own ideas about the tribals and their lives, and engages in vigorous debate with them around issues of the tribals. Through his debate and conversations with them, he gradually realizes and acknowledges that his approach to and his attempt to report (or represent) the tribals is fundamentally misguided: He launches his journey in the expectation of fulfilling a sense of achievement as a journalist (IM 97-8), but what he finds throughout the journey is that "the way to reach them is so inaccessible" (IM 110). His somewhat easy and naive attitude towards the tribals changes in the process of his journey to Pirtha Block when he has to realize and acknowledge a fundamental gap between him and the tribals: "He had always thought he was altogether self-reliant since he set out with nothing but a sarong and toothbrush in his shoulder bag. Now he sees that's not enough. He feels inadequate. It's true that he can't reach Shankar's people by eating little or sleeping on grass mats. There is a great gulf fixed between Puran's kind and Shankar's kind. But he does want to get close" (IM 140).

In spite of his persistent effort to get close to the tribals, Puran's journey turns out to be the journey through which he learns just how much he doesn't know about the

tribals and what he shouldn't do in dealing with them. He realizes that building a point of communication with the tribals is that which is needed in the first place before doing any other things. Toward the end of his journey, he says that "we build no communication point to establish contact with the tribals. Leaving it undiscovered, we have slowly destroyed a continent in the name of civilization" (IM 195). Without building a point of communication with the tribals, what has happened, according to Devi, is their exploitation and destruction in the name of development and progress. So Puran suggests: "To build it you must love beyond reason for a long time. For a few thousand years we haven't loved them, respected them. Where is the time now, at the last gasp of the century? Parallel ways, their world and our world are different, we have never had a real exchange with them, it could have enriched us" (IM 195). Devi says in an interview with Spivak:

The journalist, the representative of the mainstream people, has no point of contact with the tribals. Their roads have run parallel. He does not know what the tribal wants, what the tribal holds most dear to the heart. The tribals want to stay in the place which they know as their own. They want the respect that they hold for their dead ancestors. Whatever has come in the name of development has spelled disaster for the tribes. And they do not know how to dishonor others. Our

double task is to resist ‘development’ actively and to learn to love. (IM xxii)

Devi puts an equal emphasis upon both the active resistance of development and learning to love. The former refers to activism and the latter to something other than activism. At the end of the story, Devi says that “Love, excruciating love, let that be the first step. Now Puran’s amazed heart discovers what love for Pirtha there is in his heart, perhaps he cannot remain a distant spectator anywhere in life” (IM 196). Love means that Puran cannot remain a distant spectator; he will become an engaged political intellectual. In other words, love refers to “a simple name for ethical responsibility-in-singularity” (IM 200). Puran’s awareness as a political intellectual grows through his journey.

In the process of Puran’s growth as a political intellectual through his journey, it is significant that he learns the necessity of love after his experience of the impossible—that is, the impossibility of finding a point of communication with the tribals. Note that a sense of the impossible and learning to love are closely related. Spivak relates this issue to ethics by saying that “ethics is the experience of the impossible” (IM xxv). She explains further: “Please note that I am not saying that ethics are impossible, but rather that ethics is the experience of the impossible. This understanding only sharpens the sense of the crucial and continuing need for collective political struggle. For a collective struggle *supplemented* by the impossibility of full ethical engagement—not in the

rationalist sense of ‘doing the right thing,’ but in this more familiar sense of the impossibility of ‘love’ in the one-on-one way for each human being—the future is always around the corner, there is no victory, but only victories that are also warnings” (IM xxv, original emphasis). Spivak points to the limit of a personal struggle and how it must extend to a collective struggle so as to bring about a future that is quite different from that which one witnesses at the present.

In “Pterodactyl,” Devi also argues for both the necessity and limit of a personal struggle, and the necessity of a collective struggle against development and the exploitation of capitalism. The story ends like this: “A continent! We destroyed it undiscovered, as we are destroying the primordial forest, living beings, the human. A *truck* comes by. Puran raises his hand, steps up” (IM 196). This ending shows that Puran will enter into a structure of responsibility, although what lies in front of him is “a many-leveled problem” (IM 116) that thwarts any kind of attempt to find an easy solution. What it means to become a political intellectual is that he or she goes into a structure of responsibility despite the fact that what he or she can do is very limited. In the three stories of *Imaginary Maps*, Devi touches upon this point, for example, through Mary Oraon in “The Hunt,” through Mohan Srivastava in “Douloti the Bountiful,” and through Puran Sahay in “Pterodactyl.” The stories show how limited the desperate and persistent



personal struggles of these characters against bigger forces of exploiting capitalism are. This realization leads us to think of how a collective form of struggle might be made possible. In this regard, “Pterodactyl” is a story that leads us to (re)consider the function (i.e. the necessity and limit) of the intellectual as a political intellectual.

### **Conclusion: Thinking through Aesthetics and Politics**

In her article “Is There a Politics of Postcoloniality?” Diana Brydon argues that “the task of thinking through aesthetics and politics together remains one of the challenges before us.” “The task of thinking through aesthetics and politics together” is exactly what Devi engages in many of her literary works by reflecting and embodying what she experiences and learns through activism in her literary works. *Imaginary Maps* is a good example in which Devi’s activism for the tribals in India is represented in a literary form and is a good case through which to rethink the relationship between literature and social crises. In this regard, the literary (i.e. aesthetics) and the political (i.e. politics), I would argue, are the two creative forces that work in an interrelated and intermingled way throughout the textual production of *Imaginary Maps*. And the literary and the political are also the enduring forces that keep Devi engaged in not only activist but also literary (and journalistic) engagements. Devi says:

I think a creative writer should have a social conscience. I have a duty toward society. Yet I don't really know why I do these things. This sense of duty is an obsession, and I must remain accountable to myself. I ask myself this question a thousand times: have I done what I could have done? My house is full of them, they write to me, they come and stay with me, I go and stay with them. And this journalistic exposure is very necessary. The government officials admit that they are afraid of me. What will I write next? (IM xvi)

Of Devi's literary writing and activism, Spivak comments that "although her writing and her activism reflect one another, they are precisely that—'a folding back upon' one another—re-flection in the root sense" (IM xxvi). Donna Landry and Gerald Maclean add a similar comment on Devi's *Imaginary Maps*: "The literary is no substitute for local or global activism, but neither can activism alone put forward the new imaginary to an ecologically emancipated and sexually democratized future that fictions like Mahasweta's can obliquely provide" (268). Literary texts like *Imaginary Maps* that narrate the human consequences of colonialism and imperialism can contribute first to confronting the dark social reality and then to imagining a different future that can be generated from a deep sense of the impossible with regard to global injustice.<sup>13</sup> Although this kind of eye-

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<sup>13</sup> In his book *The Fiction of Imperialism*, Philip Darby argues that fictions dealing with

opening experience through literary engagement is indirect, it is an important step toward activism. It is because “we draw out from literary and social texts some impossible yet necessary project of changing the minds that innocently support a vicious system” (IM 200). It is also because “the intellectual’s provisional home is the domain of an exigent, resistant, intransigent art into which, alas, one can neither retreat nor search for solutions. But only in that precarious exilic realm can one first truly grasp the difficulty of what cannot be grasped and then go forth to try anyway” (Said 2004, 144). In the story “Pterodactyl,” Puran is depicted as an agonizing intellectual facing a sense of duty toward society and at the same time a sense of limitation as a political intellectual yet somehow returning to pen by believing in its power.<sup>14</sup> Devi strongly supports the role of a writer as a political intellectual on behalf of marginalized and exploited people such as the tribals in India.

With regard to Devi’s literary engagement in relation to activism, Spivak also argues that “Mahasweta’s fiction resonates with the possibility of constructing a new type of responsibility for the cultural worker” (IM xxvi). In *Imaginary Maps*, Devi shows what can and cannot be done in seeking to actively resist development and what is really

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postcolonial issues can contribute significantly to understanding the human consequences of colonialism and imperialism by narrating how ordinary people’s lives are affected by colonialism and imperialism.

<sup>14</sup> See IM 185-86.

needed: learning to love. Given that others like the tribals (and marginalized people all over the world) have been extremely exploited and that the demand of global justice is often unheard, Devi's suggestion that "our double task is to resist 'development' actively and to learn to love" (IM xxii) seems to be impossible. This, however, should not be the reason for our disengagement from facing what is considered to be impossible. As Derrida urges us, "we must do the impossible, we must do and think the impossible. If only the possible happened, nothing more would happen. If I only did what I can do, I wouldn't do anything." Through Puran's agonizing process of becoming an engaged political intellectual, Devi shows a possibility of constructing a new type of responsibility for the cultural worker: doing and thinking the impossible. Brydon elaborates a new type of responsibility for the cultural worker:

In my view, a postcolonial politics means turning away from cheap cynicisms and easy answers to enter instead into what Bonnie Honig calls, creating an adjective from the noun 'dilemma,' the 'dilemmatic spaces' of difficult engagements. Such dilemmatic spaces require a certain humbleness of approach, a willingness to be proven wrong, an openness to fresh ways of posing problems, a willingness to submit to the demands of 'infinite rehearsal' (Harris *Infinite*) rather than to seek any kind of 'final solution.'

So thinking and engaging through aesthetics and politics is Devi's politics of postcoloniality embodied in and through *Imaginary Maps*.

In the next chapter, I will deal with issues around "comfort women" who were sex slaves for Japanese imperial soldiers during the Pacific War, particularly focusing on the function of literary representations of Korean comfort women. Although the tribals in India and comfort woman in Korea perhaps do not know of one another's existence, the sufferings and ordeals they have gone through are to some extent similar. Relating these two issues leads us to (re)think of the (im)possibility of global justice.

## Chapter Three

### Traveling (or Troubling) Memories:

#### On Literary Representations of Korean “Comfort Women”<sup>15</sup>

#### Introduction: Testimonies of Former Comfort Women, Postmemory, and Literary

#### Witnessing

The Japanese government thinks if all “comfort women” die, it will be buried and forgotten. But it won’t. As long as our next generation knows about it, it won’t be forgotten. I go to the Wednesday Demonstration ... When I see young people there, I feel supported. I am there even if I am aching, because of them.

-- Gil Won-ok, a former comfort woman<sup>16</sup>

In this chapter, I analyze literary representations of Korean comfort women. Since the early 1990s, the issue of comfort women has rapidly been globalized and at the same time lots of material (historical, literary, political, and sociological) on the issue has been produced. There are also many websites that have contributed to spreading the issue of comfort women, particularly what is going on and what needs to be done for the sake of

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<sup>15</sup> In fact, comfort women were military sex slaves for the imperial Japanese soldiers and the term is a horrible euphemism given to them by the imperial Japanese soldiers. But I use it to show how problematic it is. This term demonstrates the way in which men (particularly the imperial Japanese soldiers during the Pacific War) consider and treat women (particularly women who were forced to serve as “comfort women”). In brief, women were considered nothing but commodities to be consumed. For a useful argument with regard to terminology, see Chung 220-222.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted from E. Tammy Kim 242. The Wednesday Demonstration has still been taking place in front of the Embassy of Japan in Korea since January 18, 1992 when it was originally organized in the same place in order to denounce the Japanese prime minister’s visit to Korea, demanding his apologies for what the Japanese colonizers did to colonized Korean people including the sex slavery of comfort women.

the unfulfilled justice and redress of former comfort women.<sup>17</sup> There have thus far been five published literary works on Korean comfort women written in English in North America by Korean North Americans: *A Gift of the Emperor* (1997) by Therese Park, *Comfort Woman* (1997) by Nora Okja Keller, *A Gesture Life* (1999) by Chang-rae Lee, *Comfort Women* (2006) by Chungmi Kim, and *A Dream Called Laundry* (2006) by Sang Kim. There are also literary works on comfort women published in South Korea and in Japan and France as well (Kim Miyoung 53-4).

Despite many published literary works on comfort women in different languages and places, it is quite significant that five literary works, along with other materials such as documentary films<sup>18</sup> and art works<sup>19</sup>, have been produced in North America—four in the United States and one in Canada.<sup>20</sup> This demonstrates that since the long-kept (almost half a century's) silence was broken in the early 1990s, the knowledge of comfort

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<sup>17</sup> As Nora Okja Keller mentions in her interview with Young-Oak Lee, “when I was writing the novel, I would type in ‘Comfort Woman/Women’ in the internet search engines and would only get things like ‘home making’ back. After my book was published, I was gratified to see that when I typed in ‘Comfort Woman,’ reviews and news stories about Korean and Filipina comfort camp survivors appeared” (Lee 155). But now one can quickly find so many useful websites that include a substantial amount of information on the comfort women issue.

<sup>18</sup> There are two documentary films produced by Americans: *Behind Forgotten Eyes* and *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*. There are more cinematic representations of comfort women in South Korea.

<sup>19</sup> For artistic works on comfort women, refer to footnote no. 9 in Kang (50) and also see “portfolio” in *Positions* 5.1 (275-284).

<sup>20</sup> *A Dream Called Laundry* is written by Korean Canadian Sang Kim.

women's traumatic experiences has quickly become a transnational and global issue, and has served as a stimulus to trigger the work of postmemory<sup>21</sup> in second-generation writers.<sup>22</sup> My study in this chapter will be focused on two literary texts by Nora Okja Keller and Chang-rae Lee<sup>23</sup> in order to examine the ways in which the colonial experience centering on comfort women affects not only people's lives directly relevant to comfort women (a former comfort woman in Keller's work and a former Japanese soldier during the Pacific War in Lee's work) but also succeeding generations (a former comfort woman's daughter in Keller's work and a Korean adoptee in Lee's work) who are situated in the United States.

Both Lee and Keller immigrated to the United States when they were babies and stories of comfort women are inherited as postmemory. Their position as second-generation Korean American writers who work on the cultural trauma of comfort women offers me an intriguing point from which to think about the comfort women issue as a transnational one. Unlike the other three works on comfort women that largely focus on

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<sup>21</sup> I use the term "postmemory" to refer to "second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences" (Hirsch 1997: 22). I will explore it in more detail below.

<sup>22</sup> By now many grassroots organizations around the world have been actively participating in the movements that seek to achieve justice for the sake of former comfort women. They argue that the comfort women issue is Japan's crime against humanity.

<sup>23</sup> Other works on comfort women will also be mentioned throughout this chapter whenever necessary.



comfort women and their lives during and after the Pacific War,<sup>24</sup> both Lee's and Keller's works deal with complex problems a former comfort woman and a former Japanese soldier face when they are displaced into the United States after the Pacific War: one main theme in these two works is a sense of belonging and identity crisis centering on a mother and daughter relationship in Keller's work and a father and daughter relationship in Lee's work. I will examine how certain colonial memories (particularly memories of former comfort women as sex slaves held by the Japanese military forces during the Pacific War) spread and travel both vertically (i.e. from generation to generation) and horizontally (i.e. beyond a certain boundary, particularly the boundary of a nation-state). I will also analyze what role literature does or can play and what traveling (or troubling) memories of comfort women can (or cannot) contribute to spreading the awareness of belated justice on a global level.

I use the term "postmemory" instead of memory in discussing memories of former comfort women in this chapter. Memory is a mental act of remembering at present

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<sup>24</sup> The narrative structure of *A Gift of the Emperor* by Therese Park is similar to that of autobiography. Park describes in detail how the main character Soon-ah becomes a comfort woman, how she survives sex slavery and how she comes back to Korea in the end. This novel is very different from the other four literary works on comfort women in which comfort women's stories are recollected and narrated from the perspective of the present, particularly focusing on how comfort women's traumatic colonial experience affects both surviving comfort women and people around them. Although former comfort women in both *Comfort Women* by Chungmi Kim and *A Dream Called Laundry* by Sang Kim are displaced to North America and their lives are haunted due to their traumatic experiences as comfort women, the authors focus on the theme of forced silence and how breaking silence can make a meaningful beginning toward redemption out of oppressed lives. In brief, in these three works, the comfort women issue remains pretty much an Asian (or a Korean) issue rather than an Asian American issue.

something that happened in the past. Adding “post” (meaning “after”) to memory seems to be redundant. However, I follow Marianne Hirsch’s use of the term postmemory. As she explains:

In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated. I have developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but I believe it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences. (Hirsch 1997: 22)<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The traumatic events and experiences Asian (particularly East and South-East Asian) people underwent by the imperial Japanese forces during the Pacific War—and most of those regions were under the Japanese colonial rule at that time—are often called the “Asian holocaust.” Japanese war atrocities include mass killings, experiments on humans and biological warfare carried out by Unit 731, use of chemical weapons, forced labour, comfort women, and so on. Unlike the Holocaust, however, the Asian holocaust is entirely under-represented and justice and redress for victims are still far from being achieved. (For detailed arguments on this issue, particularly on the US postwar policies and how the so-called Tokyo

Hirsch's postmemory is a very useful concept by which to make sense of second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences, such as those connected to the experiences of former comfort women. The reason I call the wounds inflicted upon both the bodies and the minds of former comfort women a cultural or collective trauma is because their wounds are delayed in their appearances and belated in their addresses not only on a personal but also on a collective level. This is largely due to the social conditioning to which comfort women were subjected even after their lives as sex slaves came to an end in 1945 at the conclusion of the Pacific War. By "social conditioning," I mean the dominant patriarchal ideology of female sexuality in Korean society that puts an excessive emphasis on women's chastity.<sup>26</sup> Under such circumstances, "the 'comfort women' drafted by the Japanese military for sexual services who returned from the war fronts have lived for half a century carefully guarding the past" (Choi 1998: 13). The voices of former comfort women are thoroughly suppressed and silenced in postcolonial Korean society. As Choi writes, they "are doubly colonized by the colonizers

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Tribunal or Trial failed, see Won Soon Park, Yoneyama (62-67), and Yuki Tanaka (84-109).) As Kang points out in comparison with "Holocaust studies," it is even possible for "Comfort Women Studies" to be established sooner or later largely due to the growing literature on comfort women since the 1990s (43). Hyunah Yang relates what comfort women went through as sex slaves for the Japanese imperial forces during the Pacific War to what women in Bosnia went through in recent years, arguing them as human rights issues and war crimes against humanity (1997: 62-3). In a similar way, Yuki Tanaka puts his argument in a broader context of the relationship of war and sexuality. In this regard, literature on comfort women can be effectively used in a class that deals with human rights issues.

<sup>26</sup> For detailed arguments on this issue, for example, see Choi 1998 and Yang 1998.

and by men of the same race” (Choi 1998: 14) and “their existence had been completely erased even in the most fervent anti-colonial nationalist [male-dominated] narrative in Korea” (Choi 1998: 13).<sup>27</sup>

Although the cultural or collective trauma of former comfort women has been suppressed and silenced for half a century, it has finally come to light and has now drawn attention from the public at home and abroad. Comfort women themselves have begun to break the long-kept silence, demonstrating their agency by testifying publicly, and engaging positively in activities such as lawsuits and demonstrations.<sup>28</sup> The oral and written testimonies of former comfort women get second-generation Korean North American writers’ attention, and they have a deep personal connection with former comfort women and their horrible experiences despite generational distance. All five Korean North American writers who produced literary works on comfort women’s experiences mention the eye-opening moments when they heard testimonies of former comfort women or learned about their lives as sex slaves and how these experiences

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<sup>27</sup> In this regard, breaking silence is an important issue with regard to the comfort women issue. That is why I think the topic of breaking silence is dealt with importantly yet in quite different ways in works by Nora Okja Keller, Chungmi Kim, and Sang Kim.

<sup>28</sup> This, however, does not mean that they did not receive any assistance from intellectuals and scholars. For example, Yun Chung Oak along with a group of women scholars and activists played a significant role to form the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan that has been founded for and devoted to the cause of getting justice on behalf of former comfort women. For the detailed information on the council and its past and ongoing activities, visit its website at <http://www.womenandwar.net/>

compelled them to undertake to represent comfort women's lives as sex slaves in literary form.<sup>29</sup>

Just as photographs, according to Hirsch, serve as the stimuli that trigger postmemorial imagination in second-generations, so do testimonies of former comfort women. As Hirsch writes:

Photographs in their enduring 'umbilical' connection to life are precisely the medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory and postmemory. They are the leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work of postmemory. They affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance. (Hirsch 1997: 23)

Testimonies of former comfort women not only testify to and affirm the past's existence (i.e., the fact that former comfort women's experiences as sex slaves for the Japanese imperial forces during the Pacific War are a historical truth), but also trigger postmemorial imagination in second-generation writers (and artists and activists). These testimonies (both oral and written) are, however, the leftovers and the fragmentary sources and building blocks of the work of postmemory, because testimonies of former

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<sup>29</sup> See Kang 29-31. In terms of generic difference, Chungmi Kim's and Sang Kim's works are dramas and the other three works are novels.

comfort women reveal certain things while hiding others.<sup>30</sup> As Cathy Caruth argues, trauma “is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and language” (4). Testimonies of former comfort women offer an outlet through which trauma—the mental and physical wounds of former comfort women—can be expressed. One can see their cries (not only for the lost years as sex slaves but also for justice to be achieved) in their testimonies that have broken forced silence and revealed a suppressed truth not otherwise available. Speaking out can serve both as a healing mechanism, albeit in a limited way, and as a powerful political weapon for resistance to those who have been forcefully silenced for a long period of time.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Dai Sil Kim-Gibson makes an interesting point about the limitation and subjectivity of testimonies by former comfort women. In the introduction to her book *Silence Broken: Korean Comfort Women*, she says that a single story of former comfort women is limited and fragmentary but that “bound together individual accounts can form a collective truth” (8). What makes her book interesting is that she adds her own emotional responses to former comfort women’s testimonies. Her book is “a product of double subjectivity” (9). She adopts this kind of writing style in order to make her book a counter-discourse against “carefully selected ‘objective’ accounts written as ‘official’ histories in the Japanese text books” where comfort women’s stories are completely silenced (10) and also against the so-called established scholarship on comfort women that “in the name of objectivity and scholarship, much of their stories are refined, hence taking away the raw pain and feelings from their stories. [And thus that] they have largely become issues, numbers, things, and objects of studies, not full human beings” (9). See the introduction to Kim-Gibson’s book *Silence Broken* and her article “They Are Our Grandmas.”

<sup>31</sup> Kang offers a critical perspective on breaking silence in relation to literary representations of comfort women’s lives by Korean American writers (30-32). Silence is usually regarded negatively as oppression and thus as something to be broken. In *Articulate Silences* and *Tell This Silence*, however, King-

Literary representations of former comfort women's experiences through an imaginative investment and creation offer another outlet through which former comfort women's trauma can be reflected in a different way from that of testimonies, particularly by enabling us to witness not only what is known but also what remains unknown in testimonies of former comfort women, which are narrated in a limited way, and hidden in the official narrative of history.<sup>32</sup> "Through the 'voice' of Akiko's wounds," for instance, "Keller gives us access to a historical truth that has been otherwise occluded and obscured by the nationalist patriarchal discourses of Japan, Korea, and the U.S." (Jodi Kim 63). I thus examine in this chapter "how literary representation becomes an act of witness" (Miller 3).

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Kok Cheung and Patti Duncan respectively argue Asian American women's silence as something in and through which resistance can be articulated.

<sup>32</sup> With regard to the ways in which comfort women are described in history, for example, in *A Revised History of Contemporary Korea* written by a foremost and progressive historian Kang Man Kil, history on comfort women is merely abstracted into several sentences. Bruce Cummings' accounts of comfort women in *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* are not much better than those of Kang Man Kil. Even after the historical truth on comfort women has widely been known to the public since the early 1990s, comfort women and their experiences as sex slaves are still marginalized in history. In "History and Memory," Hyun Sook Kim deals with the marginalization of the comfort women issue in history both in South Korea and in Japan. Another good example is that the memorialization of Korean comfort women's sufferings was not included in the "Independence Memorial Museum," which was a project to overcome colonial history by Japan funded by the Korean government which opened August 15, 1987. So the Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan has undertaken a museum project to memorialize Korean comfort women's sufferings properly and to teach their history to subsequent generations.

Given that many of the crucial government documents on the Pacific War have been destroyed<sup>33</sup> and even scholars' access to remaining government documents on the Pacific War is prohibited, the literary (or aesthetic) witnessing of a cultural or collective trauma, such as the trauma of former comfort women, is absolutely necessary. The Japanese government continues to deny the fact that its imperial military forces were systematically involved in drafting comfort women and organizing and operating the comfort women facilities during the Pacific War, despite growing amounts of verifying evidence. Witnessing trauma through literature does not just mean representing trauma in a literary form, that is, in a more humanistic and realistic way than other writings on the same issue such as historical, political, and sociological ones. Here I put emphasis on an emotional and psychological effect of literature because witnessing trauma through literature enables readers to confront and respond to horrible traumatic events and experiences of former comfort women in a more personal and emotional way.<sup>34</sup> Such a response can lead us to think of "unforgetting trauma" (Johnson). In brief, literary representations of former comfort women's trauma can contribute significantly to the

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<sup>33</sup> The Japanese military forces systematically destroyed governmental and military documents on comfort women and other war crimes during the Pacific War just before Japan surrendered to the Allied forces. But as time goes on, significant historical materials have gradually been brought to light.

<sup>34</sup> Here I am thinking of what Philip Darby argues in *The Fiction of Imperialism*: "the ethical possibilities of the novel" (50) in dealing with colonialism and its effects upon the postcolonial life of colonized people. For a full argument, see 34-50.



process of unforgetting or postcolonial remembering (by which I mean the whole ongoing cultural and political movements taking place on behalf of former comfort women) and serve as a useful and effective counter-discourse against the dominant discourse of forgetting with regard to the comfort women issue.<sup>35</sup>

Many former Japanese colonizers and even many Korean people argue that the past is just the past and that in order to build up a better future relationship between Korea and Japan we need to “forget” the colonial past, such as what former comfort women went through as sex slaves to Japanese soldiers or similar troubling colonial histories.<sup>36</sup> According to Leela Gandhi, “the emergence of anti-colonial and ‘independent’ nation-States after colonialism is frequently accompanied by a desire to forget the colonial past. ... Principally, postcolonial amnesia is symptomatic of the urge for historical self-invention or the need to make a new start—to erase painful memories of colonial subordination” (4). Postcolonial amnesia, however, does not just happen, largely because trauma of the colonial experiences is not something that can be erased in memories of the

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<sup>35</sup> E. Tammy Kim uses “social reparation” to describe the whole process of unforgetting that takes place on the cultural, economic, and political levels of society and that can bring about healing not only on a personal level but also on a social level with regard to unfulfilled and delayed justice on behalf of comfort women. Kim’s concept of social reparation in relation to literary representations of comfort women will be revisited in the conclusion of this chapter.

<sup>36</sup> Overcoming the colonial past and its legacies is a major social and political issue since Korea’s independence from the Japanese empire in 1945, which has had a tremendous impact on postcolonial Korean society. It is often argued that South Korea still is in the process of overcoming colonial legacies largely because such a task could not be carried out successfully until recently, due to the pro-American and long-lasting military regimes during the Cold War.

formerly colonized. And there is also the politics of postcolonial amnesia, which means that certain painful memories of colonial subordination are remembered selectively as “official” histories of the colonial past in textbooks but that others such as the history of comfort women are thoroughly suppressed and silenced.<sup>37</sup> Thus, “the mere repression of colonial memories is never, in itself, tantamount to a surpassing of or emancipation from the uncomfortable realities of the colonial encounter” (Gandhi 4). In this regard, postcolonialism (or postcolonial remembering) leading to “revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (Gandhi 4) is absolutely necessary because it enables us to engage colonial history and its representations critically. The literary representations of comfort women are a subject that leads to such postcolonial remembering. It is perhaps too much to say that literary representations of comfort women can be tantamount to the surpassing of or emancipation from the painfully tenacious realities of the colonial encounter. It is, however, quite plausible to think that literary representations of comfort women can contribute to the process of overcoming

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<sup>37</sup> For a full argument about this issue, see Hyun Sook Kim’s “History and Memory.” There was also an economic imperative to forget the colonial past, such as colonial history on comfort women, as Japan became the dominant economic power in Asia in the second half of the twentieth century and South Korea desperately sought long-term Japanese economic assistance and trade with Japan. This forgetting initiated by the Korean military regime resulted in the Japan-ROK normalization treaty in 1965, although the majority of Korean people along with opposition parties strongly opposed it.

the colonial past and its tenacious postcolonial effects. *How* it can be made possible will be explored through my critical analysis of both Keller's and Lee's novels in this chapter.

### **Traveling Memories: Asian American Studies, Transnationalism, and the Comfort Women Issue**

In his essay "Traveling Theory," Edward Said argues that

Like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel—from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another. Cultural and intellectual life are usually nourished and often sustained by this circulation of ideas, and whether it takes the form of acknowledgement or unconscious influence, creative borrowing, or wholesale appropriation, the movement of ideas and theories from one place to another is both a fact of life and a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity. Having said that, however, one should go on to specify the kinds of movement that are possible, in order to ask whether by virtue of having moved from one place and time to another an idea or a theory gains or loses in strength, and whether a theory in one historical period and national culture becomes altogether different for another period or situation. (226)

Memories of former comfort women have travelled from person to person,

situation to situation and one national culture to another. I have two points to elaborate with regard to the traveling memories of former comfort women. First, the travel of memories of former comfort women to the United States, and as a result, the production of literary works on the same issue, have nourished cultural and intellectual life, particularly for scholars in Asian American studies, by serving as a usefully enabling condition of intellectual activity. For example, there have been so far two significant academic and intellectual activities: two special volumes on the comfort women issue in *JAAS (Journal of Asian American Studies)* in 2003 and *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* in 1997, and noteworthy transnational activism I want to call an “Asian American movement” that has supported House Resolution 121 so that it can be passed in the US House of Representatives.<sup>38</sup> The reason I call it an Asian American movement is because many Koreans, Korean Americans, and growing numbers of other Asian Americans have participated in the cause thanks to the increasing awareness of the

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<sup>38</sup> While writing this part of my thesis, I heard the news that the resolution was passed at the US House of Representatives with a unanimous vote on July 30, 2007. Although this resolution does not have any legal enforcement that can be imposed upon the Japanese government, its political meaning and impact is not insignificant. To former comfort women and activists, the passing of the resolution at the US House of Representatives is a great achievement and an important step toward justice, largely because they overcame the systematic lobby by the Japanese government that had thwarted the passing of a similar resolution several times in the past. House Resolution 121 puts a particular emphasis on the acknowledgement of historical truth of comfort women, and the sincere apology for that and the education of history on comfort women to current and future generations. Since this resolution passed, other countries such as the Netherlands, Canada, and EU have also joined to pass similar resolutions to urge the Japanese government to take the responsibility for the harm inflicted on many Asian women during the Pacific War.

comfort women issue as a Japanese war crime against humanity.<sup>39</sup> Second, in dealing with whether the movement of memories of former comfort women from one person to another (particularly generational transference) and from one place (particularly one national place and culture) to another means that these memories gain or lose in strength, Said offers a site from which I can elaborate my argument:

First, there is a point of origin, or what seems like one, a set of initial circumstances in which the idea came to birth or entered discourse. Second, there is a distance transversed, a passage through the pressure of various contexts as the idea moves from an earlier point to another time and place where it will come into a new prominence. Third, there is a set of conditions—call them conditions of acceptance or, as an inevitable part of acceptance, resistances—which then confronts the transplanted theory or idea, making possible its introduction or toleration, however alien it might appear to be. Fourth, the now full (or partly)

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<sup>39</sup> I do not mean that memories of former comfort women have traveled only to the United States and produced literary works on that subject there. While literary representations on comfort women are quite prominent in the United States, there has been widespread global activism on behalf of former comfort women. For example, when the Japanese government tried to be included as a permanent member of the UN Security Council in recent years, there was a global resistance movement against it, which demanded that the Japanese government try to resolve their past colonial history and subsequent colonial legacies in many of Asian countries. Another example is that while Japan was commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the “defeat” of the Pacific War, surviving Korean comfort women and activists held global demonstrations in front of Japanese embassies and consulates around the world in order to counter the discourse that describes Japan as horribly defeated by the United States, arguing instead how horrible the Japanese colonial rule was in Korea and many parts of Asia, highlighting in particular comfort women and their lives as sex slaves.

accommodated (or incorporated) idea is to some extent transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place. (226-27)

The travel of memories of former comfort women to the United States roughly goes through these stages. With regard to the comfort women issue, the point of origin should go back to the Pacific War when the Japanese imperial forces began to mobilize many Asian women as comfort women. However, it took half a century for stories and experiences of former comfort women to be widely available to the public and to become a real and global issue. The idea of comfort women as sex slaves for the Japanese military forces during the Pacific War (and of regarding it as a Japanese war crime against humanity) have come to birth and entered public discourse. Specifically, the global dissemination of the idea of comfort women as sex slaves has generated ongoing debate and discussion around the comfort women issue, basically between former colonizers and the former colonized, mainly concerning whether comfort women were mobilized to serve as sex slaves by force and deception or whether they entered this state voluntarily. There is also contention over the issue of whether the Japanese imperial government and military forces were involved systematically in the establishment of the comfort women system, although evidence increasingly runs counter to the denial of the systematic involvement by the government and the military.

As I have mentioned above, there is a long temporal distance transversed between the point of origin when comfort women were plunged into unbearable sufferings and tortures and the point at which knowledge of their ordeal finally became publicized and globalized.<sup>40</sup> As Said points out, this temporal distance includes “a passage through the pressure of various contexts as the idea moves from an earlier point to another time and place where it will come into a new prominence.” There are two points I want to further elaborate here. First, pressure from within the social context in South Korea after the Pacific War, strongly informed by patriarchy (as I have pointed earlier in this chapter), has contributed significantly to suppressing voices of former comfort women so that their message cannot be uttered and heard.

Second, knowledge of comfort women has now traveled to the United States where it has come into new prominence. This is made possible because some of the former comfort women were invited to share their testimonies with audiences in the United States and also because feminist activists in South Korea and the West worked

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<sup>40</sup> This does not, however, mean that there were not any previous revelations of former comfort women’s experiences during the Pacific War. As Susan Brownmiller writes, “Japan’s military brothels were not exactly an undocumented story when the Korean comfort women launched their international campaign. Two books on the subject published in the 1970s have assumed a modest place in Japan’s growing literature of conscience, but the research of Kim Il Myon, a Korean, and Senda Kako, a Japanese, had produced little interest and only scant indignation. It took the rise of an indigenous feminist movement in Asia to supply the moral outrage and place the dormant issue in a modern context” (xv). This gives an answer to the question of why the globalization of the former comfort women issue was made possible in the 1990s although there were some revelations of the comfort women issue in the past.

together to spread the comfort women issue globally. Why then has the comfort women issue come into a new prominence in the United States? It requires a comprehensive study of the issue to answer this question fully and broadly because it is not just a matter of some writers deciding to write about the experiences of comfort women; there are also perhaps economic and political reasons for the US government taking up this issue. I will not go further into this issue here because it needs to be undertaken as another, separate project,<sup>41</sup> and more importantly because my current project focuses on the literary and cultural effects of the comfort women issue. I am particularly interested in regarding and examining the comfort women issue not only as a Korean and/or an Asian issue but also more significantly as an Asian American issue.<sup>42</sup> My argument about the third and fourth points Said suggests in terms of how ideas and theories travel—how the comfort women issue is accepted and to some extent transformed in a new time and place—will be unfolded as this chapter develops.

I put the comfort women issue in the broader perspective of transnationalism. As

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<sup>41</sup> The special issue of *JAAS* edited by Kandice Chuh deals with the Americanization of the comfort women issue.

<sup>42</sup> Literary works on comfort women, particularly works by Keller, Chungmi Kim, and Sang Kim, narrate displaced lives of former comfort women in the United States and Canada. According to Dai Sil Kim-Gibson, this displacement of former comfort women is historically true although there is no specific data or information about how many former comfort women have moved to the United States or Canada. Kim-Gibson mentions that she visited a former comfort woman living in the United States but that her attempt to interview her was not successful (1999: 99). Chang-rae Lee's work, *A Gesture Life*, unlike all the other four literary works, is about a former Japanese soldier (now displaced in small-town USA) who witnessed comfort women's horrible lives during the Pacific War.



King-Kok Cheung remarks:

A significant switch in emphasis has ... occurred in Asian American literary studies. Whereas identity politics—with its stress on cultural nationalism and American nativity—governed earlier theoretical and critical formulations, the stress is now on heterogeneity and diaspora. The shift has been from seeking to ‘claim America’ to forging a connection between Asia and Asian America. (Cheung 1997: 1)<sup>43</sup>

I deal with the transnational turn of Asian American studies, focusing on how the connection between Asia and Asian America has been made. Although Asians in the United States are different from Asians in Asia in a number of substantial ways, the Asian identities or Asian legacies of Asians in the United States play a significant role in forging connections between Asia and Asian America.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, in recent years, transnationalism revitalized by globalization has served as one of the major driving forces

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<sup>43</sup> I give a particular focus on diaspora in relation to the transnational turn in Asian American studies here. With regard to heterogeneity among Asian American communities, see, for instance, Lisa Lowe’s pioneering essay “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences.” Following her formulation, Asian America or Asian Americans in my study also mean not a homogeneous but a dynamic, complicated entity that is well characterized in such terms as heterogeneity, hybridity, and multiplicity. See also Wong’s “Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads” in which the author investigates the transnational turn in Asian American studies under the three subtitles: the easing of cultural nationalist concerns, growing permeability between Asian and Asian American, and shifting from a domestic to a diasporic perspective (2-12).

<sup>44</sup> In American history, however, the transnationalism of certain groups of Americans (for example, Japanese Americans in the past and Arab Americans recently) is seriously doubted by the dominant white. I examine this issue in my article “Racism Masquerading as Nationalism: Wars, Japanese-Americans, and Arab-Americans.”

that have brought about wide-ranging cultural, political, and social changes in the United States by further forging a connection between Asia and Asian America.

What can transnationalism contribute to Asian American studies? As Erika Lee and Naoko Shibusawa argue, “a transnational framework deepens Asian American history and has allowed Asian Americanists to make their narratives more complex, nuanced, and historically accurate” because “paying more attention to the story beyond the U.S. borders forces us to rethink established narratives about the Asian American experience” (xii). Here “established narratives about the Asian American experience” refers to narratives about Asians’ movement to and settlement in the United States that do not properly take into consideration their experiences and situations in their original home countries that caused them to immigrate to the United States, as well as their relations with other ethnic minority groups within the United States. The transnational turn in Asian American studies gives desirable (if belated) critical attention to Asian American experience as not only a national but also a transnational one. In other words, the transnational turn in Asian American studies “is not to overlook the national and its significance, but to expand the coverage and focus on comparative experiences” (Hu-Dehart 312).<sup>45</sup> Lee and Shibusawa

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<sup>45</sup> Shirley Geok-Lin Lim et al. make a similar point, particularly using such terms as site and transit. Here site “denotes attitudes and postures, the arrested moment of identity in a place and time, while transit denotes ... instance of passing or journeying cross” (1). They argue that “the transnational texts [such as literary works on comfort women] ... are grounded in specific sites [for example, in the United States], but

take the matter further and suggest that “whenever possible, we should also expand our vision beyond U.S. borders to explain why and how transnational linkages were maintained across the Pacific with Asia, north and south within the Americas, and around the world” (xv). This will contribute to deepening Asian American history by means of a comparative study and help Asian Americanists to make their narratives more complex, nuanced, and historically accurate, particularly by offering a new and different perspective on Asian American history instead of passively acknowledging and accepting Asian American history as narrated by the dominant white culture. Francoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih call this kind of transnational critical engagement a transnationalism from a minor perspective that helps us to deconstruct “the prevalent notions of transnationalism as a homogenizing force” (5). So we need to differentiate “transnationalism from above” from “transnationalism from below” because imperialism and colonialism are precisely examples of transnationalism from above.<sup>46</sup> Lionnet and Shih thus argue:

If the minor mood in music is an introspective and mournful tone different from the more triumphant ‘major’ key, then ‘minor transnationalism’ is perhaps the mode in which the traumas of colonial, imperial, and global hegemonies as well as

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they also feature decentering themes and aesthetics that reflect the dynamics and trajectories of Asian American transits” (22).

<sup>46</sup> Kandice Chuh’s “Transnationalism and Its Pasts” discusses this issue in American history.

the affective dimensions of transcolonial solidarities [among the former colonized] continue to work themselves out and produce new possibilities. (21)

The comfort women issue is exactly such a subject, one which embodies not only the trauma of the colonial and imperial hegemony of Japanese imperialism upon Asian people (particularly former comfort women) but also addresses the affective dimension of transcolonial solidarity among the former colonized, including Asians who experienced colonialism by Japan and other ethnic minority groups (for example, African-Americans) in the United States who have had a similar kind of colonial experience and its legacies. In this regard, the comfort women issue is the one into which “‘Asia’ and ‘America’ have merged and continue to merge in different ways on different terrains of the imagination, as well as in real political, ideological, and economic arenas” (Palumbo-Liu 3).

### **The Postcolonial Condition of Asian Americans and the Search for Decolonizing Subjects in *Comfort Woman***

Keller’s *Comfort Woman* centres on a mother (Akiko, a former comfort woman) and daughter (Beccah) relationship, which is a common theme in Asian American novels. Structurally, her novel is divided into small chapters under the titles of either Akiko or Beccah, except one chapter entitled Soon Hyo, which is Akiko’s Korean name. These

alternate chapters make the narrative structure of the novel complicated and this complication begins to be disentangled from the Soon Hyo chapter near to the end of the novel. The story narrated under the title of Akiko—or the Akiko story—describes the life story of Akiko, who tries to establish her relationship with her baby daughter Beccah; the story narrated under the title of Beccah—or the Beccah story—describes the life story of grown-up Beccah who tries to establish her relationship with her mother. My analysis of *Comfort Woman* puts this narrative structure in chronological order to help to make clear sense of the life stories of two Asian American women, Akiko and Beccah, i.e. stories of their struggles on the edge of society, a place to which they are pushed. In particular, I will analyze how their search to become decolonizing subjects out of the oppressive (and postcolonial) social condition is embodied in relation to their struggle to establish a meaningful relationship with one another.<sup>47</sup> By decolonizing subjects I mean the subjectivities that are being shaped while Akiko and Beccah struggle to overcome the colonizing situations into which they are pushed; decolonizing subjects are subjectivities in process rather than fixed ones.

As the worlds of Akiko and Beccah being unfolded dialectically, *Comfort Woman* is, in brief, a story of “the dual bildung of mother and daughter” (Najmi 219). The Akiko

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<sup>47</sup> By postcolonial I mean the strong effects of Akiko’s colonial experience as a sex slave upon both her own and her daughter’s lives.

story describes how Akiko goes through displacements first to a Japanese “recreation” camp and later to the United States and how she struggles to survive an exploitative life as a sex slave in the “recreation” camps and a haunted life in a new country by establishing her relationship with her baby daughter Beccah. The Beccah story is mainly about how she tries to make sense of her mother’s life. Keller describes how deep the generational and cultural gap between Beccah and Akiko is and how Beccah struggles to find out her mother’s true identity. Towards the end of the novel, she unexpectedly unearths her mother’s hidden identity as a comfort woman and her real, Korean name, Soon Hyo, while searching her mother’s jewellery box. This discovery facilitates her own growth.

Najmi argues that *Comfort Woman* as an Asian American woman’s Bildungsroman is different from one written by white male and female writers, giving particular attention to Keller’s way of fusing two traditionally male genres (the Bildungsroman and the war narrative) “simultaneously gendering and ‘Asianizing’ them, to interrupt dominant feminist and nationalist discourses” (210). According to Najmi, Keller both appropriates and reinvents the generic conventions of Bildungsroman because the possibility of subverting or decolonizing the Bildungsroman (and thus building up the agency of Asian Americans) resides “in this mutually constitutive process and transformative

engagement” (Xiaojing and Najmi 25). I give particular attention to the dynamic and dialectical logic that generates *transformation through/in appropriation* in dealing with Akiko’s and Beccah’s subject formation as Asian Americans.

Lisa Lowe discusses decolonization and the agency of Asian Americans in “Decolonization, Displacement, Disidentification: Asian American ‘Novels’ and the Question of History.” Lowe explores how Asian American writers—e.g. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha in *Dictée*, Jessica Hagedorn in *Dogeaters*, and Fae Myenne Ng in *Bone*—engage oppositional cultural politics “out of the conditions of decolonization, displacement, and disidentification” (103) that characterize the postcolonial condition of Asian Americans. Here decolonization is an existential human condition of struggle into which Asian Americans are often situated in the United States. This condition of struggle is, according to Lowe, caused by displacement (both forced and willing) and disidentification (which is what Asian Americans go through mainly due to racism). Lowe writes: “if we understand ‘decolonization’ as an ongoing disruption of the colonial mode of production, then Asian American writing participates in that disruption from a location already marked by the uneven and unsynthetic encounters of colonial, neo-colonial, and mass and elite indigenous cultures that characterize decolonization” (107). With regard to Keller’s *Comfort Woman*, I am primarily concerned with the ways in which Keller,

through both Akiko and Beccah, explores the possibility of an oppositional cultural politics *out of* the postcolonial condition of Asian Americans characterized in such terms as decolonization, displacement, and disidentification. By postcolonial I simply mean the dynamics of both the continuation of colonialism or the tenacity of colonial legacies and resistance against colonialism or its legacies. In this regard, I will explore how the structure of oppression shaped by decolonization, displacement, and disidentification can (or cannot) be transformed into the structure of a possibility in which the search for decolonizing Asian American subjects can be undertaken.

I describe the postcolonial condition of a former comfort woman Akiko and her daughter Beccah in *Comfort Woman* as *displaced* and *haunted*, although there is a significant difference between them in terms of the extent to which each of them has to undergo displaced and haunted lives. Akiko's tragic life embodies the vulnerability of colonized (Korean) women and the systematic exploitation they were often subjected to under the Japanese colonial rule in general and the Pacific War in particular. Under such circumstances, Akiko is displaced by deception to a comfort station and endures sex slavery as a comfort woman for the Japanese military forces during wartime; she is later displaced to the United States as a Korean refugee of World War Two with the "help" of American missionaries. Her postcolonial situation in the United States is characterized as



haunted endlessly by her past colonial experience as a comfort woman. *Comfort Woman* focuses on how Akiko tries to deal with her traumatic colonial experience as a comfort woman while going through a different kind of colonial experience in a new land. Although she appears to be utterly powerless in the process of her displaced and haunted life, her survival story narrates how she struggles to undergo a decolonizing process in/through continuous oppressive moments of the (postcolonial) present.

The displacement Beccah lives through is quite different from that of her mother in that hers is not physical but mental displacement generated largely from an identity crisis: a sense of displacement as a Korean American caused by her feeling that she does not (or cannot) belong to a society where she is supposed to feel at home. This sense of displacement intensifies due to her sense of guilt that she is utterly foreign to her mother. In short, her sense of displacement is caused largely by her “broken” relationship vertically (with her mother) and horizontally (with those around her). In addition, she is also haunted not directly by a ghost just like her mother but indirectly by witnessing her mother’s possession by a ghost, yet making no sense of it. Her mother’s world is thoroughly concealed from her. Her mother’s death and her inability to write an obituary for her mother in particular lead her to seriously question and undertake the search for her mother’s true identity. Significantly, this search results in her own coming-of-age and

turns out to be her own struggle to become a decolonizing subject.

### **i. The Akiko Story: A Story of a Former Comfort Woman and Korean Refugee of WWII**

Narrated from Akiko's first person perspective, the Akiko story is to some extent similar to testimonies of former comfort women, particularly in the sense that it describes how Akiko becomes a comfort woman, how she goes through unbearable sufferings at the comfort stations, and how her traumatic experience as a sex slave for the Japanese military forces ruins her whole life. This story, however, is quite different from testimonies of former comfort women because it focuses on Akiko's life after the Pacific War and in particular her life in the United States where she has to endure the trauma caused by her past experience as a sex slave.<sup>48</sup> I will examine the way in which Akiko struggles to go through the (post)colonial experiences into which she has been forced. By (post)colonial experiences I mean all that Akiko goes through before, during, and after her experience of sex slavery at the comfort camps. My question is: Does Akiko's struggle for survival demonstrate her agency as a decolonizing subject?

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<sup>48</sup> Testimonies of former comfort women are often focused on certain colonial moments of their exploited and ruined lives, thoroughly disregarding their postcolonial struggle. In the murmuring trilogy—*The Murmuring* (1995), *Habitual Sadness* (1997), and *My Own Breathing* (1999), director Byun Young-joo shows how former comfort women gradually develop their agency as decolonizing subjects against continually silencing colonizing forces.

Akiko is sold and later displaced to a Japanese “recreation” camp mainly due to poverty. She narrates: “Perhaps if my parents had not died so early, I might have been able to live a full life. Perhaps not; we were a poor family. I might have been sold anyway” (*Comfort Woman*, 17).<sup>49</sup> She is sold for her sister’s dowry, just “like one of the cows before and after” her, and later is displaced to a comfort station, which is completely opposite to what she was told that she “[could] learn factory work or serve in restaurants” to make lots of money (CW 18). The process of Akiko’s being sold and displaced in *Comfort Woman* accurately reflects testimonies of former comfort women: in brief, comfort women did not volunteer for but were tricked or forced into sex slavery (CW 18-9). Akiko narrates: “I knew I would not see the city. We had heard the rumors: girls bought or stolen from villages outside the city, sent to Japanese recreation centers. But still, we did not know what the centers were like. At worst, I thought, I would do what I’ve done all my life: clean, cook, wash clothes, work hard. How could I imagine anything else?” (CW 19) This brief narration describes the gloomy destiny women in the lower class like Akiko had to endure not only under the influence of Confucian patriarchy but also under the Japanese colonial rule; it also conforms to the fact that the majority of

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<sup>49</sup> Hereafter all the quotations from *Comfort Woman* will be cited as CW followed by page numbers.

the Korean comfort women were drawn from the lower class.<sup>50</sup> Although Akiko is pushed into an inescapable situation due to poverty, her attitude toward the harsh reality is somewhat positive. She chooses to confront an unknown and fearful future, and is even ready to go through a hard life—whatever it might be—if she cannot escape from it.

In the comfort station where she is displaced, she works as a servant and secret messenger for other comfort women for a while because she is too young to be a comfort woman. However, when Akiko 40 is killed in a horrible way by Japanese soldiers because “she denounced the soldiers, yelling at them to stop their invasion of her country and her body” (CW 20), she becomes Akiko 41. This numbering of comfort women demonstrates that comfort women were merely considered commodities to be consumed. She describes how Japanese soldiers treat the dead body of Akiko 40: “They brought her back skewered from her vagina to her mouth, like a pig ready for roasting. A lesson, they told the rest of us, warning us into silence” (CW 20-1). And she comments on her death: “That is how I

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<sup>50</sup> Under the Japanese colonial rule (1910-45), many colonized Korean people (both men and women) in poverty-stricken rural areas could not but choose to move to other places such as urban centers in Korea and in Japan to get jobs there or to Manchuria in order to escape from the oppression by Japanese colonizers and a subsequent hard life. Manchuria and its vicinities were well-known places to which many Korean freedom fighters escaped and engaged in guerilla warfare against the Japanese military forces often in cooperation with the Chinese. During the Japanese colonial rule, the Korean interim government in exile was located in Shanghai. Many Korean people’s displacement to Manchuria and to Japan during the Japanese colonial rule contributed to forming Korean communities in those regions that still exist today. According to Korean historian Kang Man-Kil, the displacement of Korean people took place on a large scale during the Pacific War (1937-45). During this time, more than one million Korean people—both men and women—were drafted by force to serve in the Japanese military forces as soldiers or as laborers in coal mines or in factories or as comfort women (Kang 44-47). Concerning the question of why so many Korean women were drafted to serve as comfort women, see Yang 1997, 57-66.

know Induk [Akiko 40's Korean name] didn't go crazy. She was going sane. She was planning her escape. The corpse the soldiers brought back from the woods wasn't Induk. It was Akiko 41. It was me" (CW 21). The beginning of Akiko's life as a comfort woman is marked as the moment of death. This implies that her life afterwards is like a life in death. The rest of her life thus shows how she struggles to go through a life like death.

Keller does not provide a detailed description of Akiko's own experience as a comfort woman—in particular, how she is sexually abused as a comfort woman. Instead, she narrates her traumatic experiences of unutterable sexual abuses at the camps: both her own experiences and her witness to others' experiences and her own horrible experience of abortion (CW 22), focusing in particular on their effects on her life, up until the end of her life. Although Akiko flees from the camps and is led to the mission house that is supposed to be a safe haven, her life there becomes restless as she suffers from trauma endlessly. In order not to be haunted by memories of the comfort stations, she makes every effort to preoccupy herself with other work (CW 65). Even during a speech by a missionary, she is haunted by these memories of the camps, particularly the inhumane treatment of comfort women such as horrible sexual abuse and murder at the hands of Japanese soldiers (CW 70). These experiences are also narrated in connection with her relationship with her missionary husband and her baby daughter Beccah. Her relationship

with her missionary husband turns out to be another form of colonial experience. In particular, she puts her missionary husband's hidden sexual desire for her in parallel with that of Japanese soldiers in the comfort stations (CW 94-5); while having a sexual relationship with her missionary husband, she even thought that her "body was, and always would be, locked in a cubicle at the camps, trapped under the bodies of innumerable men" (CW 106).<sup>51</sup> Keller's detailed description of Akiko's traumatized and haunted life demonstrates the physical sufferings and mental wounds that comfort women have to endure and deal with.

Akiko is displaced to the United States through marriage to the American missionary, Richard Bradley. Akiko says:

We are being called home, back to America, they explained to the girls in their care. We will find homes and sponsors for you, if you wish to come with us. Most of the girls declined, saying they would try to find their families, saying they had somewhere they could return to, now that the war was over. They could pick up the threads of their lives, weaving them into a future as if the war had been a minor disruption in the fabric, but I knew I had to leave with the missionaries. I knew, had known that moment I crossed the Yalu and entered the recreation camps,

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<sup>51</sup> In general, Keller in *Comfort Woman* describes the missionary work by American missionaries very negatively, particularly relating it to American imperialism.

that my home village of Sulsulham was as far away as heaven for me. So when the minister told me I should marry him if I wanted to leave Pyongyang and come to America with them, I did. I made it easy for him to take me. (CW 100-101)

Unlike many former comfort women's desire, the reality they had to confront after the Pacific War was that not only was it not easy for them to return to their homes, but it was also impossible for them to remember and talk about their shameful experiences as sex slaves. To be exact, their desire for the stories of their ruined lives to be heard was thoroughly thwarted. Many of the former comfort women had to suffer from trauma—both mental and physical wounds—carefully guarding the horrible past in their hearts for almost half a century. Their life even after the war was a continuation of colonization. From this perspective, one can understand Akiko's choice to go to America to escape from the unbearable reality she might go through in her original home. To Akiko, the disruption in the fabric of her life caused by her traumatic experiences as a sex slave is so serious that it is considered to be impossible for her to pick up the thread of her life and weave it into a future. Her choice to go to America, however, turns out to be an escape to another tragedy rather than to a new home.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Here Keller relates the history of Asian comfort women to the history of Asian immigration to the United States that takes place after the Pacific War. In Lee's *A Gesture Life*, the former Japanese soldier Hata's immigration to the United States takes place in the sixties just after the new immigration law passed in 1965. Although there is a clear difference between these two phases in US immigration history, Akiko's

Although Akiko experiences many new things in America and the abundance of American society in particular attracts her for a while, she comes to a conclusion: “That’s what all of America was like to me. When you see it for the first time, it glitters, beautiful, like a dream. But then, the longer you walk through it, the more you realize that the dream is empty, false, sterile. You realize that you have no face and no place in this country” (CW 110). She feels a deep sense of displacement in America. Indeed, the last sentence—“You realize that you have no face and no place in this country”—succinctly describes what Akiko and her daughter go through: Here “no face” is similar to what Lowe calls disidentification and “no place,” what Lowe calls displacement. “No face” and “no place” concisely characterize not only Akiko’s but also many Asian (and other, non-white) immigrants’ lives in the United States.

In the midst of her displaced and haunted life in the United States that keeps her from having a normal relationship with others, Akiko finds a possibility of redemption in her attempt to establish a relationship with her baby daughter Beccah. Akiko never expected that she could have a baby because the sexual abuse—in particular, the abortion—she had experienced at the comfort camps made her “insides too bruised and battered, impossible to properly heal” (CW 15). Akiko also says, “The baby I could keep

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and Hata’s immigration to the United States can be summarized as leaving the (colonial) past behind towards a new and better world, a typical immigration story.



came when I was already dead” (CW 15). The birth of little Beccah revives her “dead” life and also gives her existence meaning in the midst of an unbearable life in a new country where she feels completely isolated. Akiko says, “I will call her Bek-hap, the lily, purest white. Blooming in the boundary between Korea and America, between life and death, this child, with the tendril of her body, keeps me from crossing over and roots me to this earth” (CW 116-7).

For instance, Akiko puts a significant meaning, even beyond a symbolic level, on Beccah’s umbilical cord that literally connected them to each other. One day when she finds out that the birth cord is gone out of Beccah’s belly, she is “panicked, suddenly frantic to find this one piece of flesh that was both me and my daughter” (CW 97). When she finally finds it after a frantic search, she says: “I would keep the cord so that as she grows into the person she will become, a person I do not know yet, we will both be reminded that we share one body, one flesh” (CW 97). Another example is Akiko’s act of drinking dirt during her pregnancy and later leading also her daughter to eat the same dirt. Akiko says,

When I was pregnant with my daughter, I made tea with the black dirt from the garden outside our room at the Mission House for Boys. I drank the earth, nourishing her within the womb, so that she would never feel homeless, lost. After

her birth, I rubbed that same earth across my nipples and touched it to my daughter's lips, so that, with her first suck, with her first taste of the dirt and the salt and the milk that is me, she would know that I am, and will always be, her home. (CW 113)

I want to put this particular attempt to establish a meaningful relationship with her daughter in comparison with her other relationships, particularly her relationships with men such as Japanese soldiers and her husband. Japanese soldiers treat Akiko merely as an object through which they just want to gratify their sexual desire. She is considered a disposable commodity. She is expected to comply with whatever she is told to do and to keep silent instead of voicing what is in her mind and heart. Akiko's relationship with her husband is very similar to her relationship with Japanese soldiers. Although her husband (a white man) pretends to be her "saviour," his real intention is his longing for the young girl Akiko (CW 93-5). During his lecture trips in America, she stands by her husband's side in her Korean dress as a kind of a display of his achievement while he gives lectures about his works in the "obscure orient"; at home, however, he treats her as a mere object of his sexual desire (CW 106-7). Compared with her relationships with Japanese soldiers and her husband, her unique and somewhat desperate attempt to establish a relationship with her daughter makes sense; unlike her relationships with men who dominate and

destroy her body and soul, her relationship with little Beccah helps her to find the life and meaning with which she can continue to live. More significantly, in this relationship, she does not remain as a passive recipient (i.e. an object of others' desire) but positively finds her subjectivity as a mother who must nurture her baby.

Patricia Chu argues that “Keller’s choice to rely on mother-daughter bonds as the sole examples of intersubjective recognition renders the novel unsatisfying even as a fictional psychological portrait, because the mother-daughter plot denies that subjects must exist in a wider social world” (64). As she further argues, “this isolation is readable ... as a symptom of her oppression” (78). Ideally, one’s search for an intersubjective self needs to be pursued not only person-to-person but also in a wider social world. Keeping in mind her life situation as an Asian American immigrant, single mother, and former comfort woman, the choices she can make are in fact very limited. With no skill and language ability, she has to struggle to survive at the bottom of society, “drifting in and out of under-the-table jobs” (CW 4) and is barely able to make ends meet until she works as a fortuneteller. In addition to this serious material disadvantage, she has to overcome a social disadvantage as an Asian American woman. On top of this oppressive and unfavourable material life condition in a new country, Akiko also has to deal with the internal oppression and torment caused by her traumatic experience as a comfort woman.

Indeed, isolation is the existential, difficult life situation she has to overcome. From this perspective, it is very natural and significant that she tries to find a possibility of survival through the establishment of a relationship with her daughter. Hence, the mother-daughter plot in *Comfort Woman*, I would argue, shows the way in which Akiko, a former comfort woman and Korean refugee of World War Two, copes with the oppressive situations in which she is situated in search of survival because that is perhaps the only meaningful relationship she can make.<sup>53</sup>

The Akiko story narrates how Akiko struggles to survive both the sex slavery in the Japanese comfort camps and the oppressive, marginalized life in the United States. Except for the possibility of building up her subjectivity as a mother for her own daughter, her life story describes her as a powerless victim. What makes Akiko's way of survival unique and interesting is that she does not claim but hides her true identity. As she says, "hiding my true self ... enabled me to survive in the recreation camp and in a new country" (CW 153). This means that by hiding her true self "in every situation she

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<sup>53</sup> However, grownup Beccah belatedly realizes and acknowledges the bitter fact that although her mother really needed her, she could not overcome the gap between her mother and herself. In this respect, we can make sense of Akiko's suicide. In her completely isolated life, she has no choice but to kill herself. Her death, however, signifies more than her self-denial because it leads Beccah to struggle to make a relationship with her dead mother. This issue will be further elaborated in the next section. How then can we make sense of Akiko's relationship with ghosts and her possession? Indeed, ghosts play a significant role throughout the novel. In a positive sense, the ghost of Induk serves as a sort of a guardian angel for Akiko in the Akiko story, and later her possession even contributes significantly to the financial needs of her family as she begins to work as a fortuneteller. Tina Chen discusses the latter subject in detail focusing on the role of shamanism in *Comfort Woman*. In a negative sense, however, her possession isolates her from her daughter and the outside world.

encounters, Akiko is able to negotiate the strictures imposed upon her” (Chen 137). From this perspective, I’d like to argue that Akiko’s life story insists on her own agency: that she is a survivor rather than a victim. Unlike testimonies of former comfort women that mainly emphasize how their lives as innocent, pure, beautiful, and promising young girls are completely ruined by the forced sex slavery at the Japanese comfort stations, *Comfort Woman* goes further by “explor[ing] how a young girl might survive and establish a vital sense of her own worth and subjectivity in the face of brutal, systemic objectification” (Chu 77).

## **ii. The Beccah Story: A Story of a Daughter of a Former Comfort Woman**

Narrated from Beccah’s first-person perspective and focused particularly on her view of her mother’s life, the Beccah story is in the main a story of relationship. The central motif of the story is her inability to write her mother’s obituary, even though she has worked as a recorder of the lives of the dead in the *Honolulu Star Bulletin* for the previous six years. She says: “I have recorded so many deaths that the formula is templated in my brain: Name, age, date of birth, survivors, services. And yet, when it came time for me to write my own mother’s obituary, as I held a copy of her death certificate in my hand, I found that I did not have the facts for even the most basic,

skeletal obituary. And I found I did not know how to start imagining her life” (CW 26). This sense of guilt prompts her to undertake a journey to discover her mother’s true identity; this journey also turns out to be a journey through which she discovers herself and her inner strength. I will first discuss how Beccah’s coming-of-age as a daughter of an Asian American woman, which is characterized as her journey to discover her mother’s true identity, also leads to the build-up of her subjectivity as a decolonizing subject, by which I mean that she positively accepts her identity as an Asian (Korean) American, just as her mother calls her “Bek-hap, the lily, purest white. Blooming in the boundary between Korea and America” (CW 116). I will go on to discuss how, structurally, the Beccah story embodies the way in which the comfort women’s buried story is dug out and comes to light. This point will be analyzed in relation to the way in which former comfort women’s stories since the early 1990s have been widely spread to the public both locally and globally and as a result have inspired the literary imagination of comfort women’s stories as postmemory.

After her husband’s death, Akiko tries to return to Korea, but she just gets as far as Hawaii. Unlike the Akiko story that is mainly about the life of Akiko, her husband, and little Beccah, as it is situated in the mainland U.S., the Beccah story is about the life of Beccah and Akiko in Hawaii that is located on the boundary of the United States. This

locality of their dwelling implies their physical and mental states of being located on the edge. Physically, as a single mother and immigrant, Akiko has to go through difficulties financially, “drifting in and out of under-the-table jobs—washing dishes in Vietnamese restaurants, slinging drinks in Korean bars on Keeaumoku—stringing together enough change to pay the weekly rent on a dirty second-floor apartment off Kapiolani Boulevard” (CW 4). Although their financial situation gets better when Auntie Reno discovers Akiko’s potential and helps her to work as a fortuneteller, Akiko’s possession continues to keep her on the edge of sanity.

Beccah’s life on the edge is symbolized in the apartment she and her mother live in: “I remember the darkness of that apartment: the brown imitation-wood wall paneling blackened from exhaust from the street, the boarded-up windows, the nights without electricity when we could not pay the bill” (CW 4-5). Here the darkness refers to the material disadvantage Beccah and her mother experience as well as symbolizing the strain of her mother’s mental state. Beccah adds: “And I remember nights that seemed to last for days, when my mother dropped into a darkness of her own, so deep that I did not think she would ever come back to me” (CW 5). The darkness here refers to the fear that the already detached relationship between Beccah and her mother might remain forever. This darkness also refers to her ignorance about her mother’s world or her inability to

approach her mother's world so it just remains utterly dark to her. Beccah narrates:

When the spirits called to her, my mother would leave me and slip inside herself, to somewhere I could not and did not want to follow. It was as if the mother I knew turned off, checked out, and someone else came to rent the space. During these times, the body of my mother would float through our one-bedroom apartment, slamming into walls and bookshelves and bumping into the corners of the coffee table and the television. If I could catch her, I would try to clean her cuts with *Cambison* ointment, dab the bruises with vinegar to stop the swelling. But most times I just left her food and water and hid in the bedroom, where I listened to long stretches of thumping accentuated by occasional shouts to a spirit named Induk. (CW 4)

Beccah and her mother fall into each one's world of darkness. Their lives go on in this parallel way until, towards the end of the novel, Beccah discovers her mother's hidden life through her desperate search prompted by her mother's death. It is because as Beccah says "I often looked at my mother through the finger frame, trying to put her in perspective. I liked the way my fingers captured her, making her manageable. Squinting my eye through my lens, I could make her any size I wanted. I could make her shrink, smaller and smaller, until she disappeared with a blink" (CW 198). In brief, her



understanding of her mother's life is very shallow and partial, merely seen unilaterally from her own point of view; this is also equivalent to seeing her mother as a mere object, as the above quotation suggests. Her journey to discover her mother's true identity thus enables her to reconsider her way of seeing her mother. As Beccah comes to recognize her mother as a survivor of unutterably traumatic sex slavery, she has to deal not only with who her mother is but also with who she herself is. In the midst of her journey of self-discovery, in contrast to her other relationships that end up unsuccessfully, she slowly begins to establish a meaningful relationship with her mother and figure out the traumatic history of comfort women.

One day after her mother is saved from her suicide attempt, through her conversation with her mother, Beccah realizes that "I was her finder, and she needed me. I wanted to remind her that she was bound to me" (CW 48). Her mother tells Beccah the story of Princess Pari. That story is about how a princess saved her parents who were sent to hell after their death. In hell, the princess found her parents whose souls were trapped in fish bodies and she brought them out of hell into the Lotus Paradise where they were reborn as angels (CW 48-50). In spite of her resolution to become her mother's protector, Beccah's mother takes her own life. This part of the novel ends:

That Saturday after my mother died, I watched the water of the canal lap at the

trash under me and waited for something, some sign from my mother. I don't know what I was thinking, but I never caught a glimpse of a fish that might have carried her spirit. When the time came, when she needed me, I had failed to rescue her. No Princess Pari, I could not swim to the far shores of death to pull my mother back to life; I could not even put my feet in the water. (CW 51)

Beccah regrets that she could not save her mother just like Princess Pari in the story did. However, Beccah happens to find her role as a different kind of Princess Pari by becoming the one who retrieves something that her mother lost; this role makes Beccah realize how much her mother indeed needed her and how much she is bound to her mother.<sup>54</sup>

It is, however, not until Beccah finds and opens her mother's jewelry box that she begins to understand and puzzle out what her mother lost. When she finds the jewelry box, she expects that it may contain such things as "frog pins and pendants and earrings given to her by her regular customers, assorted buttons, the gold and jade hoops that she sewed on my clothes for protection, her wedding band, a baby tooth, my umbilical cord, school pictures and report cards, her jade frog" (CW 169). Instead, she "unearth[s] something

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<sup>54</sup> For a detailed discussion of the myth of Princess Pari in *Comfort Woman*, see Kun Jong Lee's "Princess Pari in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*." He studies "the full spectrum of Keller's arduous engagement with the myth of Princess Pari as a valuable and potent site for feminist articulation" (433).

unexpected under the tangle of jewelry: a cassette tape marked ‘Beccah’” (CW 171). Going through newspaper articles collected along with the cassette tape, Beccah happens to see many unfamiliar words and names, and her mother’s real name for the first time. She says: “I sat, surrounded by the papers, by the secrets she had guarded and cultivated like a garden. I sat and I waited for some way to understand, to know this person called Soon Hyo, thinking that I had always been waiting for my mother, wasting time in the hallway of her life, waiting for an invitation to step over the threshold and into her home” (CW 173). This is how Beccah begins to get into her mother’s hidden life and pick up the threads of her mother’s ruined life bit by bit, weaving them into a future. The two alternate stories—the Akiko and Beccah stories—that seem to go parallel converge at this point as Beccah begins to make sense of her mother’s life story.

In the Beccah tape, her mother invites Beccah to hear the concealed history of the atrocities of comfort women. Keller describes what and how comfort women suffered in general instead of narrating Akiko’s personal story at the comfort camps. *Chongshindae* is the key word into that secret world. Beccah tells: “Wishing I could turn up the volume even more, I added my own voice, an echo until I stumbled over a term I did not recognize: *Chongshindae*. I fit the words into my mouth, syllable by syllable, and flipped through my Korean-English dictionary, sounding out a rough, possible translation:

Battalion slave” (CW 193).<sup>55</sup> Keller adds in detail:

*Chongshindae: Our brothers and fathers conscripted. The women left to be picked over like fruit to be tasted, consumed, the pits spit out as Chongshindae, where we rotted under the body of orders from the Emperor of Japan. Under the Emperor’s orders, we were beaten and starved. Under Emperor’s orders, the holes of our bodies were used to bury their excrement. Under Emperor’s orders, we were bled again and again until we were thrown into a pit and burned, the ash from our thrashing arms dusting the surface of the river in which we had sometimes been allowed to bathe. Under Emperor’s orders, we could not prepare those in the river for the journey out of hell. (CW 193, original emphases)<sup>56</sup>*

In disbelief, Beccah rewinds the tape to hear this unbelievable account again: “I rewound the tape where my mother spoke of the *Chongshindae*, listening to her accounts of crimes made against each woman she could remember, so many crimes and so many names that my stomach cramped” (CW 194). In Akiko/Soon Hyo’s accounts of sex slaves,

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<sup>55</sup> The term “Chongshindae” is the Korean word for former Korean comfort women, and activists and scholars working on behalf of them are using it instead of the problematic term “comfort women”. However, using this term in place of comfort women is also problematic in that its literal English translation is “voluntarily offered body corps” (Howard v). The comfort women did not offer their bodies voluntarily but were forced to do so. Chang-rae Lee deals with this issue in his novel *A Gesture Life*. So many use the term “sex slave” instead. Concerning the problem of terminology, see Chung 220-22.

<sup>56</sup> The title of Therese Park’s fiction on comfort women *A Gift of the Emperor* succinctly captures what is described in the quotation: in brief, comfort women were just a “gift” sent to the Japanese imperial forces by the emperor.

she repeats and emphasizes the fact that such horrible war crimes were committed by the orders of the Emperor of Japan. Keller adds: “Without reference, unable to recognize any of the names, I did not know how to place my mother, who sounded like an avenging angel recounting the crimes of men” (CW 194). The contents of the tape are a former comfort woman’s cry for justice, not just on a personal level but more significantly on a collective level because Keller’s description of the atrocities of comfort women is focused on the traumatic sufferings of comfort women in general.

As the ending of the novel implies, former comfort women’s testimonies are like “a small seed planted” and “waiting to be born” (CW 213): this ending is positive yet open-ended. Keller’s *Comfort Woman* is a good example that shows a particular way such a seed can be brought to fruit and also demonstrates the way in which testimonies of former comfort women can serve as postmemory that results in literary imagination. The literary representation of comfort women, however, is just one way for the small seed planted by comfort women to be born to fruit. In regard to social activism for justice on behalf of comfort women, the seed planted and waiting to be born seems to imply that it depends on how we react to the issue to bear the fruit of justice for the sake of comfort women. As Tina Chen points out, “the issues at the heart of *Comfort Woman* are indeed about the ethical responsibility we bear as readers and critics of—and also as witnesses

to—this story” (116).

In terms of the issue of Akiko’s subject formation, I have argued that her subjectivity as a decolonizing subject is shaped in the course of her struggle to survive unbearable life situations in the comfort camps and in a new country. As her death by suicide shows, her life struggle ends up tragically. What is significant about her life is that she leaves her traumatic experiences as a sex slave behind so that her daughter can find it and begin to pick up the threads of her ruined life so as to weave it into a future. With regard to Beccah’s decolonizing subjecthood, her discovery of how her mother survived a horrible life as a sex slave brings her to a new perspective on her mother: she sees her as a survivor rather than a “weak and vulnerable” victim (CW 194). Albeit belatedly, as she begins to establish a relationship with her mother, she also realizes that she can take up the role of Princess Pari on behalf of her mother. As the open-ended ending of the novel shows, whether she can play such a role successfully is yet to be determined. It is perhaps because justice for comfort women is still an ongoing project. As the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter points out, justice for comfort women is the project that requires the next generation’s participation so that it will not be buried and forgotten. What makes Beccah’s decolonizing subject position distinct from that of her mother is that she accepts her Asian American identity positively at the end of the novel by taking up the role of

Princess Pari on behalf of her mother and thus becoming “Bek-hap, the lily, purest white. Blooming in the boundary between Korea and America” (CW 116). In brief, Beccah’s Asian American identity affirms both sides of her hyphenated identity

### **The Return of the Repressed: Memory and Identity in *A Gesture Life***

Although both Keller’s *Comfort Woman* and Lee’s *A Gesture Life* are considered novels on comfort women, they deal with that issue in contrasting ways. Unlike Keller’s *Comfort Woman* which focuses on a former comfort woman and her daughter, Lee’s *A Gesture Life* is about a story of a former Japanese soldier, Hata, and his adopted daughter, Sunny. In *Comfort Woman*, a former comfort woman Akiko’s experience as a sex slave at the Japanese comfort stations in wartime and its effects upon herself and her daughter afterwards are the central and overpowering theme in the novel. In particular, the ways in which they are continuously haunted demonstrates the tenacity of the colonial experience upon the (formerly) colonized. In *A Gesture Life*, the story of a comfort woman remains in the background; it begins to appear only after almost a third of the novel has passed, when Hata begins to recollect the past that is provoked while he is searching for his runaway daughter Sunny. Unlike other novels on comfort women, such as *A Gift of the Emperor* and *Comfort Woman*, in which comfort women’s stories are meticulously

described from a former comfort woman's (i.e. victim's) first person perspective, a comfort woman's story in Lee's novel is narrated in much less detail from a former Japanese soldier's (i.e. a victimizer's) perspective.<sup>57</sup> *Comfort Woman* is a story of two marginalized Asian American women's struggle to survive on the edge of society. In *A Gesture Life*, Hata appears to belong to the mainstream of society: he is materially affluent and also well recognized by people in a white-dominant, suburban community called Bedley Run: he seems to be a "model minority." *Comfort Woman* is focused on Akiko and Beccah and their small world, with no meaningful relationship with others except for Auntie Reno. Although Hata also remains in a small world—Bedley Run and its vicinities—in *A Gesture Life*, which centers on his relationship with his adopted daughter, Sunny, there still appears to be quite a number of people involved in his life throughout the novel.

Despite these obvious differences between the two novels, one common theme is that they are stories about the relationship between parent and child—mother-daughter (*Comfort Woman*) and father-daughter (*A Gesture Life*)—and that in these relationships

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<sup>57</sup> See Young-Oak Lee's "Gender, Race, and the Nation in *A Gesture Life*" and Hamilton Carroll's "Traumatic Patriarchy" for detailed discussions on comfort women's experiences from a male, victimizer's point of view.



the protagonists of both novels engage the issue of identity and belonging.<sup>58</sup> Akiko and Beccah in *Comfort Woman* go through a deep sense of isolation. Although Hata believes that he belongs to society, his sense of belonging is seriously questioned throughout the novel, particularly in his struggle to establish a relationship with his adopted daughter; his adopted daughter questions his identity—his American identity. And in this struggle, he also begins to recollect another woman, the comfort woman he met in the past in wartime: she also questions his identity—his Japanese identity. Indeed, Hata's identity is somewhat ambiguous because although he is a Korean ethnically, his national identity is Japanese: he is adopted by a Japanese couple and raised as Japanese during the Japanese colonial rule of Korea. His sense of failure as a father to Sunny leads him to doubt his belonging to American society. Unlike *Comfort Woman* where the broken relationship between mother and daughter begins to be reconciled as Beccah discovers her mother's hidden identity as a comfort woman, the two women—Kkutaeh or K, the Korean comfort woman Hata met in wartime, and Sunny, Hata's Korean adoptee—trouble Hata in *A Gesture Life* by challenging his identity so much so that he has to deal with the questions of who he is and where he belongs seriously. As Hamilton Carroll sums up, "Lee's novel ... shows

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<sup>58</sup> I have argued how *Comfort Woman* as a Bildungsroman is different from the conventional mode of Bildungsroman earlier in this chapter. Hamilton Carroll argues similarly with regard to *A Gesture Life* as a Bildungsroman.

how Doc Hata's attempts to inaugurate his own nationally visible subjectivity are predicated on his abjection of K and Sunny and how—against Hata's will—a narrative that foregrounds the subordinated, marginalized position of female subjects displaces and overturns the masculine, cultural nationalism of his immigration story" (594).

Focusing on Hata's relationships with K and Sunny, I will analyze how the unwanted past once repressed in Hata's life return by means of the work of memory. I will also discuss the way(s) in which Hata is led to put his identity into question in the work of his memory and in particular in his struggle to establish relationships with the two women—K and Sunny.<sup>59</sup> Prior to going further into this subject, I'd like to think about the author Chang-rae Lee's struggle in putting the comfort women's stories he finds and hears into a narrative because that struggle demonstrates the way in which he ends up repressing the original desire and plan to write a novel on comfort women. I will analyze this point in relation to the protagonist Hata's suppression of the story of a comfort woman; by doing so, I will argue that the comfort woman's story, albeit repressed and marginalized, still remains a central theme in *A Gesture Life*: the return of the repressed.

In his introduction to a Korean translation of *A Gesture Life*, Lee tells in detail

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<sup>59</sup> Mark Jerng and Hamilton Carroll also analyze *A Gesture Life* focusing on Hata's relationships with K and Sunny, albeit dealing with very different subjects: Jerng on transracial adoption and Carroll on gendered nationalism.

about how and why the novel turns out in a quite different way from the one that he originally planned to write.<sup>60</sup> Lee intended to write a story whose protagonist is a former comfort woman who settles in the slums of Seoul after the Pacific War. When the story was almost finished after two years of writing, after a great deal of agonizing he made a decision to destroy it and write another. The reason why he articulates this process of writing is because the story he originally planned to write still strongly grips him even after it is destroyed and a very different story produced. I am interested in why the story is re-written and what role the story of a comfort woman, although pushed to the margins, plays in the new story.

Lee writes about how strongly he is overwhelmed when he first comes across oral testimonies of former comfort women. In an interview, he describes the moment: “I was doing some reading about Korea, and I found out about what happened to these women, and I was just blown away. I remember being on a bus after reading what was otherwise a pretty dry academic article on the subject, and I had to get off and walk home just to think about what had happened” (Garner 6). This discovery inspires him to undertake further research on the subject. He later visits former comfort women in Seoul to have an interview with them. There he hears their traumatic stories and collects many dramatic

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<sup>60</sup> Unless otherwise marked hereafter, my mention of the process of the production of Lee’s *A Gesture Life* is taken from his introduction to the Korean translation of the novel.

materials relevant to the issue of comfort women. This equips him with sufficient resources with which he can begin to write a story on comfort women. Like other Korean American writers who produce works on comfort women, Lee also has a strong feeling, almost a sense of mission, that he should do his best in order to materialize the stories he has heard directly from former comfort women into a narrative. The testimonies (both oral and written) of former comfort women come to serve as the work of postmemory to Lee.

Lee also mentions that his original story on a comfort woman is produced easier than he had expected due to the abundance of the available materials dealing with them. Although the voice of the narrative he invents is quite persuasive, he is not quite satisfied with the story. The comparison of his story with the testimonies of former comfort women he has collected leads him to feel and wonder whether his fictional representation is able to accurately grasp the comfort women's truth. Lee says in an interview, "I began to feel that there was nothing like live witness" in dealing with the comfort women's truth (Garner 6). This is how Lee begins to write the story from a completely different point of view, that is, from a victimizer's point of view. As Lee points out in another interview, "the book is not really about comfort women in the end. ... [B]ut it is about a man whose entire life has been changed by it. Really, it's the opposite book of a book about comfort

women” (Young-Oak Lee 2004: 221).

My particular interest is in the way in which Lee’s story turns out to be an Asian American story rather than an Asian story. Lee’s suppression of his original story on a comfort woman—which might have resulted in a story focused on Asian themes—leads him to produce a story dealing with an Asian American theme. My differentiation between an Asian story and an Asian American story is simply based on the contents of a story. I acknowledge that what defines a story an Asian or an Asian American story is a very complicated issue, because an Asian American writer can write about Asian things or an Asian writer can write about Asian American things. What can be Asian things or Asian American things is also another complicated issue. Though this issue needs further investigation, this is not my main concern here.<sup>61</sup> What I am most interested in here is that although Lee’s new story is narrated from the perspective of a former Japanese soldier, he successfully makes it an Asian American story by describing Hata’s immigration to and settlement in the United States along with his Korean adoptee Sunny’s settlement story. This mode of story telling also well accommodates a comfort woman’s story, which is indeed a transnational topic that bridges Asia and Asian America.

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<sup>61</sup> Ha Jin’s case is very interesting in the sense that while his writings in the past are completely about Chinese people’s lives in the mainland China, only in his recent writings (since the publication of *A Free Life* in 2007) has he begun to deal with Chinese Immigrants’ lives of struggles in a new land.

In the new novel, Hata, originally a marginal character turns out to be the main character. Lee's repressed story on a comfort woman returns through Hata's memory; Hata's repressed memory of his past in wartime returns through Sunny. A comfort woman's story pushed to the margin, however, still serves as a central motif of Lee's novel, if in a very different way from that which Lee originally planned. In addition, in the midst of Hata's memory of K and Sunny, Lee shows how Hata has to tackle the question of identity seriously because K and Sunny remind him of his repressed identity—his Korean identity that he has wanted to hide. The theme of memory and identity is interwoven in Lee's novel.<sup>62</sup>

Lee enables readers to participate in observing Hata's wartime experiences, particularly his relationship with a comfort woman K, through a series of intermittent flashbacks initially prompted in his memory of Sunny. Hata's memory of the colonial past is repressed yet it affects him throughout his life. Lee elaborates this point: "I'm trying to focus on someone who was desperate to belong to the powerful factions in the society, to

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<sup>62</sup> Like Lee, Keller also has to deal with a similar kind of emotional burden in her struggle to materialize comfort women's truth into a narrative. In "A Penguin Readers Guide to Comfort Woman" added to her novel, Keller says how she had to cope with a burden that came from a sense of responsibility to get the facts out about comfort women: "With these documents, I had facts—proof that the camps existed, that hundreds of thousands of women were forced into prostitution there—but I had very little detail, very little personal testimony, about what it was actually like for the women in these camps. I had to imagine their daily lives, their physical and emotional anguish, the aftermath. Taking that leap was scary, and quite often I tried to resist it by postponing writing certain sections for weeks" (5). Both of them cope well with their emotional burdens in very different ways that have resulted in two very interesting stories on the same subject.

belong to the Japanese and to belong to the military and to belong—so that that, in turn, causes certain things for him not to do, which is not to stand up for people, not to stand up for what was right, not to protect people. You know, his failures. So for me, it's not a book about his one sin and how his whole life was changed. It's really more about his whole life and how this one sin reflects that. It's not a cause-effect thing for me" (Young-Oak Lee 2004: 221-222).<sup>63</sup>

One day, Hata visits the place where he believes Sunny is staying. The somewhat exotic atmosphere surrounding the house—"the ruined cobble of the patio under a wide starless sky, the reports of music and voices playing off the hidden trees" (*A Gesture Life*, 105)—suddenly reminds him of the past buried and almost forgotten: his wartime experiences.<sup>64</sup> Just days before he will be shipped out to the front line, he stays in Singapore. "It was an august time, those first years of the war, and everyone to the man was supremely hopeful of a swift and glorious end to the fighting" (GL 105). This cheerful atmosphere at the beginning of the "glorious" war and the hopeful expectations of imperial soldiers turn into the completely opposite mood, such as doubt, despair, etc. at

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<sup>63</sup> Hata's relationship with Sunny also shows the same dynamic as that depicted in his relationship with K. Hata has a strong desire to belong to the mainstream of the American society but at the same time he has a sense of failure as a father because he thinks he has failed to take good care of his adopted daughter Sunny. This point will be discussed later in this section.

<sup>64</sup> Hereafter all the quotations from *A Gesture Life* will be cited as GL followed by page numbers.

the end of the war as Lee describes later in the novel.

Young officer Hata, a Korean ethnically yet adopted by the family Kurohata, is raised as “wholly and thoroughly Japanese” (GL 235). This upbringing makes him totally blind to anything relevant to Korea, a colony of imperial Japan. He joined the imperial army in his desire for “fulfilling my duty for Nation and Emperor” (GL 120). The novel does not mention in detail about his upbringing as a Japanese and about the erasure of his Korean identity. However, his conscious effort to repress any hint of his Korean identity whenever it is pushed to revelation in wartime exposes something about his thorough Japanese upbringing. His participation in the war that intended to prove his loyalty to his nation and emperor rather unexpectedly enables him to confront what has been hidden in terms of the war and what has been suppressed in his life with regard to his identity.

His (suppressed) Korean identity is slowly revealed when he happens to see comfort women in a comfort station in Singapore. There he witnesses a comfort girl who has just killed herself by throwing her body from the second floor to the first floor only to hit her head and die. He says: “She was just a girl, otherwise unremarkable, perhaps fifteen or so. I kept thinking she looked to be Korean, with her broad, square face” (GL 108). Only by watching her face does he quickly realize that she is a Korean. At this point, however, it is not clear whether young Hata finds out her Korean identity because he



himself is ethnically Korean. Being confused and shocked by what he has unexpectedly witnessed in the comfort station, Hata wanders in the upstairs of the comfort station, although he was “not particularly interested in the entertainments of the new girls” (GL 109). All of sudden, he confronts another girl in the hallway of the comfort station who is about to try to run away. In this scene, Lee shows how an uncomfortable feeling begins to bother Hata because of the Korean language the girl speaks. Lee describes their encounter:

“Please,” she said, her eyes frantic. “Let me go, please, let me go!” “There’s no place to go,” I said, unthinking. “You must stay in the house.” She looked surprised at my words, staring at me as if I were someone she knew. ... “I beg you, *O-ppah*, let me go!” ... “I thought I heard you say something, in her tongue.” “No sir, I didn’t.” ... He led her back down the hall to the open door. She followed him, in limp half-steps. Before they reached the room, the girl looked back at me, the side of her face raised red from the blow. I thought she was going to say something again, maybe *O-ppah*, how a girl would address her older brother or other male, but she just gazed at me instead, ashen-faced, as if in wonder whether I had uttered the words to her at all. (GL 111-112)

It is not clear whether Hata spoke something in Korean in his conversation with

the Korean comfort girl. It is, however, clear that the Korean word *O-ppah* disturbs him. He had already been troubled when he saw how other soldiers treated the girl's dead body: it is treated as insignificant, "like a sack of radishes" (109). He is all the more troubled when he finds himself helpless to do anything in response to another girl's urgent plea for help. This troubled feeling intensifies when he meets the comfort woman K with whom he even falls in love.

K first approaches Hata and challenges him by revealing his Korean identity:

But when I turned, K was still standing in the doorway. She had been watching me as I put away the supplies. And then she said, quite plainly: "You are a Korean." "No," I told her. "I am not." "I think you are," she said, not looking away as she spoke. I didn't know what to say. She sounded much more confident and mature in her own tongue than when she mumbled and half-whispered in Japanese. And there was an uprightness about her posture. Certainly I had an impulse to order her to be silent, harshly command that she leave immediately. But I felt unsettled by her forward bearing, as I was at once amazed and strangely intimidated. (GL 234)

Hata plainly denies his Korean identity yet there is a hidden, suppressed desire incited by K's persistent questioning. Hata narrates: "I did not wish to go on conversing with her any longer, and yet I found myself listening to her closely, for it was some time

since I had heard so much of the language [i.e. his mother tongue the Korean language]... It was almost pleasing to hear the words, in a normal register” (GL 235). Hata slowly yet hesitantly reveals his suppressed, almost forgotten Korean identity. He says, “Yes, you are *partly* correct. I spoke some Korean as a boy. But then no more. *Such things are not easily forgotten*, and so I have the ability still. But this is none of your concern” (GL 235, emphases added). K reveals her Korean name, Kkutaeh, to Hata. And Hata responds, “I don’t have one” (GL 235). In his further narration, he reveals the hidden truth about his identity: “But this was not exactly true. I’d had one at birth, naturally, but it was never used by anyone, including my real parents, who, it must be said, wished as much as I that I become *wholly* and *thoroughly* Japanese. They had of course agreed to give me up to the office of the children’s authority, which in turn placed me with the family Kurohata, and the day the administrator came for me was the last time I heard their tanners’ rasp voices, and their birth-name for me” (GL 235-236, emphases added). The denial of his (Korean) birth name reveals his desire to suppress and erase his Korean identity in order to become wholly and thoroughly Japanese, which is in fact a way of survival for many of the Koreans to adopt under the Japanese colonial rule. However, as he also mentions, such things as mother tongue and identity cannot easily be forgotten and erased: he cannot be a whole entity no matter how hard he tries to be, because his identity is indeed an amalgam

of two different, opposing entities—ethnically Korean and nationally Japanese: a diasporic identity.<sup>65</sup>

Another of Hata's wartime memories in relation to K is prompted directly by Sunny his adopted daughter. After Sunny returns from the Gizzi house, Hata tries to converse with her about her stay there and what is going on between her, Gizzi, and Lincoln. Although Hata has already known what happened to her through his visit to that place, he wants to hear directly from Sunny. In the end, Sunny bursts out:

"I don't want to talk about it anymore," she said, picking up the laundry basket.

"It's over. Nothing like that is ever going to happen to me again. I'll kill myself before it does, I swear." ... I was simply shocked and outraged by what she had implied, but even more, if I'm to reflect fully, I felt the drug of fear course through me, and with it the revisitation of a long-stored memory of another young woman who once spoke nearly the same words. (GL 150)

Lee suggests how two women K and Sunny—one in the past and the other at the present—are interrelated in his life. Before narrating the development of Hata's relationship with K, Lee describes Hata's army life as an assistant to the camp medical

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<sup>65</sup> Lee also deals with this point through Hata's relationship with Sunny, which will be further discussed later in this section. For a full discussion on a diasporic identity, see, for example, Stuart Hall's article "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Although his argument is in the main about the ways in which diaspora has affected the formation of Caribbean identity, his idea is helpful and useful to make sense of the effect of diaspora on identity formation in general.

doctor Captain Ono and in particular how he gradually comes to realize the hidden truth of comfort women, the truth that they are not “‘volunteers,’ as they were referred to” (GL 163) but forced to serve as sex slaves for the imperial soldiers. He says,

Certainly, I had heard of the longtime mobilization of such a corps, in Northern China and in the Philippines and on the other islands, and like every one else appreciated the logic of deploying young women to help maintain the morale of officers and foot soldiers in the field, though I never bothered to consider it until that night. And like everyone else, I suppose, I assumed it would be a most familiar modality, just one among the many thousand details and notices in a wartime camp. But when the day finally came I realized that I was mistaken. (GL 163)

The realization that he is thoroughly mistaken not only about comfort women but also about the war itself comes about as he establishes a closer relationship with K. One day, Hata hears directly from K about how she and her sister were drafted by deception to be sex slaves for the imperial soldiers instead of “work[ing] in a boot factory outside of Shimonoseki” (GL 250). This revealed truth is unbelievable to Hata. Yet his blind eyes open slowly:

I was somewhat taken aback by her account. I could not quite accept the whole

truth of it. But it was more perhaps that I had reached the limits of my conception, than thinking there was something in her story to doubt. Although it was the most naïve and vacant of notions to think that anyone would willingly give herself to such a fate, like everyone else I had assumed the girls had indeed been ‘volunteers,’ as they were always called. (GL 250)<sup>66</sup>

Hata further explains his naïve and limited thinking as the one participating in the work of empire building: “perhaps my thinking was as a rich man’s, who might hardly acknowledge the many servants working about his house or on the property, their efforts and struggles, and see them only as parts of the larger mechanism of his living, the steady machine that grinds along each night and day” (GL 251). The above-mentioned two quotations demonstrate the extent to which Hata (and many others) are blind to the dark side of the war and empire building, such practices as the systematic exploitation of young girls as sex slaves. Painfully, he comes to realize and acknowledge the war in which he has been participating in the name of nation and emperor is deeply problematic.

Disillusioned Hata wants to get out of the larger mechanism of his living, that is,

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<sup>66</sup> Compared with Keller, Lee offers a quite detailed description of how the imperial discourse of comfort women as “volunteers” turns out to be false. This part is clearly related to Lee’s own gradual realization of comfort women’s sexual slavery. In an interview, he says: “I didn’t know what it was at that point—I thought they were just being shipped as labor. I thought they were going to be working in a factory because that’s what I had read, that they were just working in a factory or as a kind of field laborer. But I didn’t know about the actual circumstances, what they actually did, until much later” (Young-Oak Lee 2004: 220).

nationalism and imperialism, under which colonized women's bodies are merely treated as the objects of imperial soldiers' sexual desire. He says,

And had I been of the slightest different opinion, I too would probably have thought of them that way, as soft slips of flesh, a brief warm pleasure to be taken before it was gone, which is the basic mode of wartime. But with K, I was beginning to think otherwise, of how to preserve her, how I might keep her apart from all uses in any way I could. (GL 251)

In addition to this thinking otherwise, as his relationship with K grows deeper, he thinks that there might be a possibility for him to be found in his relationship with K—perhaps, accepting his identity as it is instead of disguising himself as someone else. In a decisive moment, however, he chooses not to take the risk of losing the privilege as the one who belongs to the side of the colonizers: he chooses to remain as a part of the larger mechanism of his living. Although K wants to escape with the help of Hata from the horrible sufferings she shall face, he cannot do anything for her. Although she is about to be raped and killed by other soldiers, he cannot do anything. What he does is cry bitterly before the remains of K. Hata's relationship with his adopted daughter Sunny follows suit.

The process of Hata's adoption of a girl—Lee describes how strong and even obstinate his desire for a girl is (GL 74)—reveals the guarded desire in him to make

amends for his past sin with K. Hata waits for his adopted daughter with a high expectation of making a new beginning. As he confesses, “the moment of her arrival ... would serve to mark the recommencement of my days” (GL 74) because “I had wished to make my own family, and if by necessity the single-parent kind then at least one that would soon be well reputed and happily known, the Hatas of Bedley Run” (GL 204). This expectation, however, quickly turns out to be a great disappointment and disillusionment. And Sunny rather serves as a mirror that reflects and reveals Hata’s shameful, repressed past sin. Hata remembers his first meeting with Sunny:

When Officer Como casually mentioned at the hospital that she had seen Sunny, I instantly saw in my mind the picture of her at the age when she first came to me. A skinny, jointy young girl, with thick, wavy black hair and dark-hued skin. I was disappointed initially; the agency had promised a child from a hardworking, if squarely humble, Korean family who had gone down on their luck. I had wished to make my own family, and if by necessity the single-parent kind then at least one that would soon be well reputed and happily known, the Hatas of Bedley Run. But of course I was overhopeful and naïve, and should have known that he or she would likely be the product of a much less dignified circumstance, a night’s wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl. I had assumed the child and I



would have a ready, natural affinity, and that my colleagues and associates and neighbors, though knowing her to be adopted, would have little trouble quickly accepting our being of a single kind and blood. But when I saw her for the first time I realized there could be no such conceit for us, no easy persuasion. Her hair, her skin, were there to see, self-evident, and it was obvious how some other color (colors) ran deep within her. And perhaps it was right from that moment, the very start, that the young girl sensed my hesitance, the blighted hope in my eyes (GL 204).

His attempt to make amends for his past sin appears to be doomed to failure from the beginning largely because of his preconception of racial identity based on one's outward appearance. When he sees young Sunny—her wavy black hair and dark-hued skin—that reveals her identity as a child of mixed blood, a product of a black GI and a Korean bar girl, he does not identify himself with her, although he himself is also a product of mixed identity (in terms of ethnicity *and* class: he is originally from a lower class Korean family and adopted by a middle class Japanese family [GL 72]). Their first meeting marks the beginning of another tragic relationship rather than the beginning of the healing of Hata's broken relationship. In the novel, Lee also shows Hata's preconception of black people, which makes his relationship with Sunny get worse because he cannot accept the fact that

Sunny is associating with black people. When Hata visits Sunny after almost thirteen years of separation, he finds out that her son Tommy is also a product of mixed blood: his father is definitely black. In the novel, Hata identifies himself more with white people. There is hardly any encounter or association with people of color, such as other Asian people or black people, described positively. Whenever he encounters them, he feels bothered or uncomfortable. Lee describes Hata's encounter with another Japanese American who is American-born, third generation. Hata remembers:

I first wondered if he felt he wasn't Japanese enough for me [because of his fluent English], or whether I thought myself not American enough for him [because of my accent]. But later on, after returning home, I thought perhaps it was that we felt different from everyone by virtue of being together (these two Japanese in a convention crowd), and that it was this fact that made us realize, for a moment, our sudden and unmistakable sense of not fitting in. (GL 20)

Although Hata thinks that he fits well in the community of Bedley Run, in fact, that is what he desires and struggles for throughout his stay in the community. Sunny challenges his thinking:

“Well, no one in Bedley Run really gives a damn. You know what I overheard down at the card shop? How nice it is to have such a ‘good Charlie’ to organize

the garbage and sidewalk-cleaning schedule. That's what they really think of you.

It's become your job to be the number-one citizen." (GL 95)

Despite the decades of his struggle to belong to the community, it is still questionable whether he can feel at home there. He himself says, "I've gone from being good Doc Hata to the nice old fellow to whoever that ancient Oriental is, a sentence (I heard it whispered last summer while paying for my lunch at the new Church Street Diner) which carries no hard malice or prejudice but leaves me in wonder all the same" (GL 200-201). In the end, Hata is considered to be an ancient Oriental on the basis of how he looks, which is something he can never change. After a life-long struggle, he still seems to tackle the same issue.

In the novel, Hata does not seem to have a proper and complete understanding and awareness of the current issues of the times outside his own small world and around Bedley Run. As his conversation with Liv shows (GL 132-135), his understanding about the changing racial geography in Bedley Run comes very slowly and only partially. He says, "the worst part is that I'm beginning to think I should have realized this long ago, and that I've been living for years inside an ugly cloud" (GL 135). However, he still says, "If people say things [about people of color or new immigrants], I try not to listen. In the end, I have learned I must make whatever peace and solace of my own" (GL 135). This is

his way of survival, which is, however, not a solution at all but rather more like an escape to avoid the core of the problem: *a gesture life*.

Hata's relationship with Sunny embodies not only his (mistaken) concept of racial identity but also his life attitude that tries to make whatever peace and solace he can in the midst of problems and conflicts instead of confronting and trying to resolve those problems or conflicts. With such an attitude, Hata tries to deal with his disappointment with Sunny, merely out of the responsibility and duty rather than genuine love for her. So his relationship with Sunny is not like a father and daughter relationship in a true sense but more like a benefactor and recipient relationship. Mary Burns comments on their relationship: "But it's as if she's a woman to whom you're beholden, which I can't understand. I don't see the reason. You're the one who wanted her. You adopted her. But you act almost guilty, as if she's someone you hurt once, or betrayed, and now you're obliged to do whatever she wishes, which is never good for anyone, much less a child" (GL 60). His past sin committed in wartime is like the "original sin" that traps him during the rest of his life. A deep sense of guilt prevents him from making atonement for his failure with K in the past through Sunny in the present for two reasons. First, these two figures remind him of something that he does not want to remember: colonial history—in particular traumatic sufferings of comfort women and his participation in that shameful

history. Second, these two figures also remind him of something that he wants to erase: his Korean identity.

Sunny points out her father's life problem:

“But all I’ve ever seen is how careful you are with everything. With our fancy big house and this store and all the customers. How you sweep the sidewalk and nice-talk to the other shopkeepers. You make a whole life out of gestures and politeness. You’re always having to be the ideal partner and colleague.” (GL 95)

This is what made Hata a model minority yet at the cost of finding his true identity. His identity formation is completely dependent on the politics of recognition by the dominant white. Hata wants Sunny to grow to be someone he desires her to be. He wants her to make her life out of gestures and politeness just like he has done. However, she resists living in the guise of a white mask and chooses to live her own life characterized as the color of black: she herself is a daughter of a black GI and her son is also black. In this respect, Sunny's life is the very opposite to that of Hata who desires to belong to the white dominant society.<sup>67</sup>

Almost thirteen years later, Hata visits the Ebbington Center Mall where his “erstwhile daughter now makes her living” (GL 201). Although there still remains a

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<sup>67</sup> Hata's struggle and sense of displacement in between the dominant white and the marginalized black deconstructs the discourse that regards Asian Americans as the model minority.

tension and barrier between them, his attitude seems to change. He acknowledges and accepts what lies before him with regard to his grown-up daughter and his grand son Tommy, a black boy. Although Hata's relationship with Sunny seems to get better and be restored through the grand son Tommy, his life journey does not end there. He says,

And with what remains, if Liv is right and all goes well, I'll have just enough to go away from here and live out modestly the rest of my unappointed days. Perhaps I'll travel to where Sunny wouldn't go, to the south and west and maybe farther still, across the oceans, to land on former shores. But I think it won't be any kind of pilgrimage. I won't be seeking out my destiny of fate. I won't attempt to find comfort in the visage of a creator or the forgiving dead. Let me simply bear my flesh, and blood, and bones. I will fly a flag. Tomorrow, when this house is alive and full, I will be outside looking in. I will be already on a walk someplace, in this town or the next or one five thousand miles away. I will circle round and arrive again. *Come almost home.* (GL 355-356, emphases added)

Hata will leave Bedley Run and leave Sunny and Thomas behind and undertake a journey. But this journey is not a journey toward a specific destination that can help settle his life problems. Instead, it is a journey toward home. To Hata, however, the question of where his home really is is the one that cannot be easily answered because, as Lee

demonstrates through Hata's relationships with K and Sunny in the novel, Hata's identity and belonging is continually questioned. This ending is also sharply contrasted with the beginning of the novel where Hata seems to have a deep and strong attachment and belonging to Bedley Run. Hata's journey toward home characterizes a diasporic and transnational identity formation such as that of Asian Americans, which is described by Lee as "Come almost home." Lee elaborates this sense of belonging:

There is something exemplary to the sensation of near-perfect lightness, of being in a place and not being there, which seems of course a chronic condition of my life but then, too, its everyday unction, the trouble finding a remedy but not quite a cure, so that the problem naturally proliferates until it has become you through and through. Such is the case of my belonging, molding to whatever is at hand.

(GL 289-290)

To the eyes of Sunny, Hata's sense of belonging described above is something she cannot accept and follow: she considers it undesirable. However, apart from whether this identity formation is desirable or not, what I want to emphasize here is that that is the life experience of many of Asian Americans like Hata: *come almost home* or *being un-homely*. To Hata, being un-homely is considered uncomfortable and undesirable, too because he desires to belong to the society in which he lives. His limitation is that he develops an

illusion that he belongs well to the society and that he cannot affirmatively acknowledge and accept the sense of being un-homely because thus far he sees himself as the one who is not quite white instead of accepting his hyphenated identity in a positive way. Through the ending of the novel, Lee suggests “the need for a transnational approach to conceiving the processes of ‘Asian American’ subject formation” (Chuh 2003: 110) because that gives us a historically accurate perspective on the formation of the Asian American communities and helps us to challenge the bounded, linear narrative of nation building toward “the promise of a flexible, porous, and open-ended national culture” (Stratton and Ang 160).

## **Conclusion: Literature and Social Reparation, or, Witnessing Trauma through**

### **Literary Texts**

Japan ruined my life. How can Japan now dare to evade the issue? They ruined my life. They took away my chance to get married. Could a verbal apology from them ever be good enough? I will never forget what I have had to go through so long as I live. No, I will not be able to forget what happened even after I die.

-- Yun Turi, a former comfort woman<sup>68</sup>

What is common in the literary texts on comfort women is the strong effects of haunting. In the above epigraph, Yun Turi says that she will never forget the traumatic

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<sup>68</sup> Quoted from Keith Howard 192.



experiences she was forced to go through as a sex slave not only while she is alive but also even after she dies. Her grudge is harbored deep against Japanese soldiers in wartime and Japanese people, particularly those in power at the present who continue to play just a political game without making a genuine apology. Her strong will not to forget her traumatic experiences as a sex slave even after her death shows the desire for her story to be remembered by following generations: former comfort women's stories as postmemory. This is the haunting effect of the cultural trauma of comfort women. I have argued how such haunting is represented in fictional narratives such as *Comfort Woman* and *A Gesture Life* in this chapter.

Can literary representations of comfort women's trauma contribute to the process of overcoming the colonial past and its tenacious postcolonial effects? Concerning the comfort women issue, this question is equivalent to the question of justice for the sake of comfort women. That is, what can literary texts on comfort women contribute to justice on behalf of them? In order to ask this question, there should be a clear concept of justice. What kind of justice do comfort women want? A genuine verbal apology from the Japanese government, not the one fraught with political rhetoric, and subsequent monetary compensation. These are necessary elements and parts of justice. Can these bring back what comfort women lost, i.e. their ruined lives? What they really need

perhaps is healing. By healing I mean not only healing on a personal level but more importantly healing on a collective level, that is, the cultural process of healing that needs to be engaged on diverse levels of society, such as cultural, political, and economic levels.

In “Performing Social Reparation,” E. Tammy Kim elaborates how such a healing process can be made possible. Her elaboration of the idea of social reparation is prompted by “the feebleness of verbal apology” by Japanese political leaders (232)<sup>69</sup> and by her “question ... [of] the ability of money to repair physical or emotional harm” (233). My particular interest is in her emphasis on the role of memory or memorialization.<sup>70</sup> She says: “Yes, they want an official apology, and want and need monetary payment. But they also want to be remembered, to tell the world what has happened, and to prevent the cycling of their violent history. Testimony thus figures centrally, making ‘comfort women’ moral witnesses whose story- and truth-telling have eclipsed the war” (241). In other words, comfort women’s testimonies serve as a counter discourse against the official memories or memorialization of the Pacific War by the government of Japan, the government of the United States, and the government of South Korea by revealing what is

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<sup>69</sup> For Japanese political leaders’ politics of apology with regard to the comfort women issue, see Norma Field, E. Tammy Kim (230-32), and You-me Park.

<sup>70</sup> The indefatigable memorialization of the Holocaust even after justice (a verbal apology and monetary compensation) was achieved shows the absolute necessity of social reparation by means of memory and memorialization by following generations.

completely hidden—stories of comfort women—in those official narratives of war history.<sup>71</sup> Regarding literature as an effective mode of memory that can pick up the threads of comfort women’s ruined lives and weave them into a future, literary texts on comfort women are able to contribute significantly to the process of social reparation by directing our attention to other texts on comfort women such as their testimonies and historical, political, and sociological texts dealing with the issue of comfort women. Hence, literary texts on comfort women including the two texts I have analyzed here can be very effective mediums through which to witness the cultural trauma of comfort women, just as literary (and cultural) representations of the Holocaust have been so.

I want to go further into the way in which the cultural trauma of comfort women serves as a creative and political force in the process of social reparation, in other words, in the process of memory and memorialization of comfort women’s traumatic history. History of comfort women’s traumatic experiences as sex slaves is something which cannot be fully understood. What we hear and see is merely what remains. There is the loss both surviving comfort women and we who try to witness such fragmented, traumatic history cannot fully measure. To us who confront comfort women’s history and try hard to

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<sup>71</sup> In the official memories or memorialization of the Pacific War by these three governments, Japan is described as a victim country by emphasizing how Japanese people suffered due to the A-bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, how U.S. forces did not properly deal with war crimes by the imperial Japanese forces for political reasons is often marginalized, and the Korean government tries not to be involved officially in resolving comfort women’s shameful history for political reasons.

figure it out, it is history of endless mourning. “The model of melancholia can help us comprehend grief and loss on the part of the aggrieved, not just as a symptom but also as a dynamic process with both coercive and transformative potentials for political imagination” (Cheng 2000: xi).

With regard to melancholia as a dynamic process with transformative potentials for political imagination, David Eng and David Kazanjian argue:

We find in Freud’s conception of melancholia’s persistent struggle with its lost objects not simply a “grasping” and “holding” on to a fixed notion of the past but rather a continuous engagement with loss and its remains. This engagement generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future. While mourning abandons lost objects by laying their histories to rest, melancholia’s continued and open relation to the past finally allows us to gain new perspectives on and new understanding of lost objects. (4)

As Yun Turi the former comfort woman exclaims, it is impossible for her (and other comfort women’s ruined lives) to be recovered. Yet this deep sense of loss does not make them frustrated. Instead, the sense of “the irrecoverable [or their melancholia] becomes, paradoxically, the condition of a new political agency” (Butler 467). This is the politics of mourning engaged by both surviving comfort women and following generations including

creative writers and feminist activists who participate in the process of social reparation on behalf of all the comfort women, dead and alive.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Rewriting Colonial History, Marking Postcolonial Resistance:**

#### **Language, Culture, and Writing**

##### **Introduction: Making a Connection between Korea and Ireland**

Colonialism has a global history that has had significant impacts on people's lives not only in the third world but also in the first. In the previous two chapters, my discussion focused on colonialism and postcolonialism in India and Korea respectively, tackling two unsettled postcolonial issues: the marginalized and exploited lives of the Indian tribals and the unfulfilled justice of the Korean comfort women. I have argued that colonialism and postcolonialism in these two Asian countries cross over the boundaries of their national spaces and stand in relation to the global forces of colonialism and imperialism in important ways that need to be addressed.

In this chapter, I undertake a comparative study of postcoloniality and the struggle for decolonization in Korea and Ireland. Trying to make a connection between Korea and Ireland seems questionable not only because of the geographic distances separating the two countries but also because culturally the countries have not had any substantial

relationship until very recently.<sup>72</sup> However, colonial experience and its aftermath--that is, its psychological and cultural hold after political independence--bind both countries together. What I am particularly interested in with regard to colonialism and postcolonialism in Korea and Ireland is that both countries' geopolitical proximity to the empires—Ireland to the British Empire and Korea to the Japanese Empire—contributes significantly to shaping national sentiments and cultures.<sup>73</sup> The attitude of people in both countries toward the former empires is ambivalent. On the one hand, they struggle to overcome the colonial legacies embedded in their postcolonial culture. On the other hand, they take the need to learn from the former empires in order to pursue modernization as an unavoidable necessity. To put it simply, the process of postcolonial struggle and modernization in both countries is generated out of an ambivalent struggle with history and the vagaries of geography.

I undertake this project of postcolonial comparative study on Korea and Ireland by providing a critical reading of *Dictée* by Korean American writer Theresa Hak Kyung

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<sup>72</sup> Irish literature such as W. B. Yeats and James Joyce has had a quite significant impact upon literary scholars in South Korea for a long period of time. In recent years, the academic associations organized by Yeats and Joyce scholars in South Korea have served as the mediums through which to spread not only modern Irish literature but also Irish culture in general.

<sup>73</sup> When it comes to Korea's geopolitical proximity to empires, there were many empires in the area now generally known as China before the Japanese empire began to occupy the Korean Peninsula in the early twentieth century. Korea's history can be described as the history of resistance against and compromise with the challenges posed by powerful empires established in China, just as the history of Ireland was formed against the challenges from the neighboring powerful empire.

Cha and *Translations* by Irish playwright Brian Friel in order to see what a perhaps unexpected comparative study can tell us about processes of colonialism. This comparative study is my attempt to further develop the topography of the historical experience of colonialism and imperialism that Edward Said calls “a global process” (xxii). With regard to the need for a comparative study on the global history of colonialism and imperialism, Said argues:

One of imperialism’s achievements was to bring the world closer together, and although in the process the separation between Europeans and natives was an insidious and fundamentally unjust one, most of us should now regard the historical experience of empire as a common one. The task then is to describe it as pertaining to Indians *and* Britishers, Algerians *and* French, Westerners *and* Africans, Asians, Latin Americans, and Australians despite the horrors, the bloodshed, and the vengeful bitterness. (xxi-xxii, original emphases)

As this list shows, Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* focuses on the interconnected relationships between former colonial centres in the West and colonized peripheries. In this chapter, my comparative study will be focused on two former colonized peripheries. Postcolonial literary and cultural studies in English have often been focused on cultures and literature of the former colonies of the British Empire, such as African countries,



Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, and the West Indies. Postcolonial studies of the Japanese Empire and its colonies have been engaged in by scholars in Asian and/or East Asian studies. By making a connection between Korea and Ireland under the theme of colonialism and postcolonialism in this chapter, I analyze the way in which these two imperialisms—one European and the other Asian—are more similar than different, particularly in terms of the issue of imposing their languages upon colonized people.<sup>74</sup>

In order to discuss colonialism, postcolonialism, and the issue of language in Korea and Ireland, I want to explore *Dictée* by Cha and *Translations* by Friel because both authors revisit and represent the colonial past in Korea and Ireland respectively, focusing in particular on the colonial policy of imposing colonizers' languages on colonized people and its postcolonial effects. In *Translations*, Friel represents the colonial encounter that marks a critical moment in Irish history during which the Irish language began to be diminished by the imposition of the English language. Although Cha also describes how Korean people were forced to use the Japanese language under colonial rule, she relates this colonial history to Korean (and other) immigrants' struggle with a

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<sup>74</sup> Although Japanese imperialists pretended to protect Asian people from Western imperialisms, they exactly followed the way of Western empires. Under the imperial propaganda of the so-called "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," the Japanese Empire tried to create a Great East Asia that would establish a new international order seeking "co-prosperity" for Asian countries which would share prosperity and peace, free from Western colonialism and domination. However, this was nothing but an imperial policy through which to subjugate and exploit neighbouring weaker Asian peoples in order to fulfill the Japanese imperialist desire.

new language and culture. In this respect, just as in the previous chapter, my analysis here emerges at the juncture of postcolonial studies and Asian American studies. The main theme I am going to tackle throughout this chapter is how Cha and Friel rewrite colonial history and mark postcolonial resistance, engaging the issue of finding a voice of difference and resistance in a language not their own.

### **On the Question of the Influence and Significance of Language on Culture and Writing**

In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation.

-- Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, 9

One has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own.

-- Raja Rao, *Kanthapura*, vii

Imposing colonizers' languages on colonized people is a typical strategy in the process of their imperial expansion, because "educating the natives in English not only served the civilizing mission but also—and more importantly perhaps—the imperial mission of exerting better control over them" (Talib 9). Unlike the former colonies of the Japanese Empire, most of the former colonies of the British Empire still use the English

language that was imposed upon them. As the “voluntary” establishment of the Commonwealth composed of former British colonies implies, the former Empire still keeps a close relationship with its former colonies linguistically and culturally as well as economically and politically. Most of the former Japanese colonies keep a close relationship with their former empire economically and politically, yet not quite so linguistically and culturally.

What brings about this difference between the two empires is a complex issue. First, there is a clear difference in the length of colonization. The British Empire lasted for a much longer period of time, starting from the late sixteenth century and ending in the mid twentieth century, spreading over about a quarter of the landmass, and governing about a quarter of the population, of the world at its height. The Japanese Empire started in the late nineteenth century and ended in 1945 with its defeat in the Pacific War against the United States. Second, many of the former British colonies are multilingual and multicultural societies. After independence, English was adopted as a lingua franca through which to unite postcolonial societies politically, economically, and culturally. On the other hand, many of the former Japanese colonies in Asia do not need to use the colonizers’ language in the postcolonial period because the cultural and linguistic conflicts that happened in many of the former British colonies due to the deeply rooted

multiplicity of culture and language do not take place in a similar way. In addition, many of the former Japanese colonies had already established certain national languages as lingua franca even before the Japanese colonization.<sup>75</sup> Despite these differences between the two former empires and their relationships with former colonies, one can find many similarities in terms of the policies employed in the process of empire building. My main concern is how the colonizers' language affects the culture and lives of (formerly) colonized people in the postcolonial period and how (formerly) colonized people can transform the language of colonization into the language of difference and resistance in order to achieve a decolonization of the mind.

The use of English in former British colonies even after political independence has been the subject of heated debate in postcolonial studies. African writers Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's arguments are well-known and representative of the debate about using the language of the colonizer.<sup>76</sup> Their positions on the issue are sharply contrasting: Achebe chooses to use English while Ngugi chooses to use his native

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<sup>75</sup> Colonialism and imperialism in North East and South East Asia, in actuality, evolved in a very complicated way because the European empires such as British, French, Dutch, and Russian empires, the American and the Japanese empires competed with each other in order to occupy those Asian regions. In this imperial competition, the Japanese empire later came to occupy most of the South-East Asian regions, parts of China, and the whole Korean peninsula.

<sup>76</sup> This debate still powerfully resonates in South Korean society along with the recent and on-going heated argument over the use of English as the public language and enforcing the policy of English immersion education in all levels of the school system in South Korea.

tongue.<sup>77</sup> Despite their opposing positions, their ultimate goal is the same: decolonization. Ngugi's position is a nationalist one that seeks to completely sever the new nation's linguistic and cultural ties from the former empires. He thinks that the process of decolonization includes both political and cultural independence from the empires and that language is at the heart of cultural decolonization. He argues that since the colonizers' language was the means of the spiritual subjugation, using the indigenous languages is a form of decolonization—the decolonization of the (colonized) mind. This is an Africanist attempt to overcome not only the colonial linguistic and cultural legacy but the continuing, neo-colonial influence exercised in collaboration with Westernized, indigenous intellectuals. In contrast, Achebe's position is the one chosen by many Westernized intellectuals in their attempts to achieve decolonization, although such attempts are often criticized by intellectuals such as Ngugi. These are the two typical directions taken by many Third World intellectuals in the postcolonial period, including discussions of the use of the colonizers' language in Ireland as well.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Since his exile first to Britain and later to USA, he has been using English as a main medium through which to teach and write although he still produces his novels first in his native tongue Gikuyu and translates them into English. It seems that this situation of his work and writing in the English-speaking environment rather provides us an interesting case study that supports the idea of how the colonizer's language can be appropriated in the process of decolonization. I will not discuss his work after exile into Western societies. For a discussion on this issue, see Gikandi.

<sup>78</sup> For example, the debate between W. B. Yeats and Douglas Hyde on the issue of “de-Anglicizing Ireland” is quite similar to that of Ngugi and Achebe. See Hyde's “The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland” and Yeats's “The De-Anglicising of Ireland.”

In “The Language of African Literature,” Ngugi elaborates why African people should use African languages as a way of decolonizing the (colonized) mind. As he points out, “the choice of language and the use to which language is put is central to a people’s definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe. Hence language has always been at the heart of the two contending social forces in the Africa of the twentieth century” (4). For Ngugi:

Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationships to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world. (15-6)

Language, according to Ngugi, is something that helps to establish one’s solid identity firmly rooted in one’s place. This harmonious relationship between one’s language and one’s place, however, begins to split as colonized students are forced to

receive colonial education and thus begin to experience what Ngugi calls “colonial alienation” (17). He writes: “In Kenya, English became more than a language: it was *the* language, and all the others had to bow before it in deference. ... English became the main determinant of a child’s progress up the ladder of formal education... English was the official vehicle and the magic formula to colonial elitedom” (11, 12, original emphasis). Hence, in this situation, “language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds” (12). So the establishment of colonial education contributes significantly to the project of colonizing the mental universe of the colonized. As Ashcroft, et al. suggest, “the imperial education system installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all ‘variants’ as impurities. ... Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth,’ ‘order,’ and ‘reality’ become established” (7).

Despite his acknowledgment of the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist orientation of African literature written in English and other European languages, Ngugi concludes that African literature written in English and other European languages only for the readership of certain privileged groups of people cannot be called African literature in a true sense. “African literature,” he adds, “can only be written in African languages, that is,

the languages of the African peasantry and working class, the major alliance of classes in each of our nationalities and the agency for the coming inevitable revolutionary break with neo-colonialism” (27).

Ngugi thus proposes that the break with the colonizer’s language(s) is the way of pursuing decolonization. Yet it has also been argued that it is possible to pursue decolonization precisely through the colonizers’ language(s) in the postcolonial period. In “The African Writer and the English Language,” Achebe articulates his ideas about African literature written in English. He poses the question of what defines “African Literature.”

Was it literature produced *in* Africa or *about* Africa? Could African literature be on any subject, or must it have an African theme? Should it embrace the whole continent or South of the Sahara, or just *Black* Africa? And then the question of language. Should it be in indigenous African languages or should it include Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Afrikaans, etc? (55, original emphases)

He does not, however, give a clear answer to the above questions. Instead, he points out the difficulty of “cram[ming] African literature into a small, neat definition” (56), because independent African countries are composed of multi-lingual and multi-cultural societies



(the result of colonization by European empires) and European languages exist along with a variety of native tongues even after independence. Achebe thus suggests:

I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units—in fact the sum total of all the *national* and *ethnic* literatures of Africa. A national literature is one that takes the whole nation for its province and has a realised or potential audience throughout its territory. In other words a literature that is written in the *national* language. An ethnic literature is one which is available only to one ethnic group within the nation. If you take Nigeria as an example, the national literature, as I see it, is the literature written in English; and the ethnic literatures are in Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Efik, Edo, Ijaw, etc., etc. (56, original emphases)

The literature written in English and other European languages, according to Achebe, constitutes an essential part of African literature. However, he does not maintain that it is *the* African literature. Rather, both national and ethnic literatures form the two essential parts of African literature. Contrary to what Ngugi's critique might suggest, Achebe's definition of African literature is not pro-imperialist either. Achebe says that he proposes such definition of African literature after very careful and serious consideration of "the complexities of the African scene at the material time" (56). He also says that his

suggestion is firmly based on “the reality of present-day Africa” (57). By the complexities of the African scene and the reality of present-day Africa, Achebe means the postcolonial period in Africa in which independence is quickly swallowed up by turmoil and violence due to conflicts among tribes. He does not deny the fact that English is a legacy of the British colonial rule, yet he adds that it can still nevertheless function as a national language. By “national” he signifies the extent to which English (and other European languages) as the lingua franca can contribute to the unity of African people, because those languages are “central language[s] enjoying nation-wide currency” (58). Therefore, Achebe’s position of using colonizers’ language(s) even after independence is based on the practical use of those languages for the sake of unity in newly independent African countries rather than any desire to prolong imperialism.<sup>79</sup>

Although Achebe proposes using English out of practical need, he does not remain a passive recipient of the colonial legacy. As a writer, he agonizes and struggles to express himself properly and efficiently in a language not his own, in an effort to embody a voice of the oppressed in the language of the oppressor. He refers to Joseph Conrad and Olaudah Equiano as “examples of writers who have performed the feat of writing effectively in a second language” (59). His question is not whether African writers can (or

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<sup>79</sup> See also his essay on the African novel and language entitled “Thoughts on the African novel” (49-54) collected in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*.

should) learn to use English like native speakers but how effectively African writers can learn it in order to use it in creative writing. In other words, the question he tackles is whether they can fashion “an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience” (61). He concludes: “I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings” (62). This is the agonizing postcolonial struggle of how “one has to convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own” (Rao vii).

What Achebe and Rao seek to achieve by using the colonizers’ language is exactly that which many writers in former British colonies try to accomplish in their writing. Bill Ashcroft et al. elaborate this point in *The Empire Writes Back*, arguing that “the crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place” (38). Specifically, they point out two textual strategies in postcolonial writing: abrogation and appropriation. The former “is a refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or ‘correct’ usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning ‘inscribed’ in the words” (38). Ngugi’s way of decolonizing the mind by refusing to use the colonizers’

language is similar to what Ashcroft et al. mean by abrogation. On the other hand, appropriation “is the process by which the language is taken and made to ‘bear the burden’ of one’s own cultural experience” (38). These two textual strategies in postcolonial writing work not separately but simultaneously; hence, postcolonial writing lies in and is produced out of the tension between abrogation and appropriation.

“Therefore,” they propose,

the english language becomes a tool with which a ‘world’ can be textually constructed. The most interesting feature of its use in post-colonial literature may be the way in which it also constructs difference, separation, and absence from the metropolitan norm. But the ground on which such construction is based is an abrogation of the essentialist assumption of that norm and a dismantling of its imperialist centralism. (44)

“english” is the term Ashcroft et al. use in their book to differentiate the English language used by colonizers from the one used by colonized people to mark the way in which it can serve as a language of difference and resistance that contributes to a construction of difference, separation, and absence from the metropolitan norm. How this can be made possible depends on how successfully writers can achieve an abrogation of the essentialist assumption of that norm and a dismantling of its imperialist centralism.

In their intriguing study on postcolonial translation, Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi relate translation studies to postcolonial studies and propose cannibalism as a metaphor that can help us to make sense of how effectively writers in former European colonies can find their voice(s) in a language not their own and turn colonizers' language(s) into a language of difference and resistance. They deconstruct the idea that cannibalism is considered an act of barbarism and lead us to think of its metaphoric implication for the relationship between colonizers and colonized. They write:

The eating of the priest was not an illogical act on the part of the Tupinamba, and may even be said to have been an act of homage. After all, one does not eat people one does not respect, and in some societies the devouring of the strongest enemies or most worthy elders has been seen as a means of acquiring the powers they had wielded in life. (1)

Metaphorically, this act of eating a colonizer's flesh is very similar to what Ashcroft et al. call "appropriation." And acquiring the power a colonizer wields implies the potentiality of subversion--that is, what Ashcroft et al. call "abrogation." This metaphor of cannibalism demonstrates how the (formerly) colonized can establish a form of resistance or subversion in a situation in which power is still structured pretty much unilaterally from center(s) to peripheries.

Bassnett and Trivedi further elaborate this point by arguing that recent work of translation studies “challenged the long-standing notion of their translation as inferior to the original” (2). “The concept of the high-status original,” according to them, is a relatively recent phenomenon. ... It is significant ... that the invention of the idea of the original coincides with the period of early colonial expansion” by European empires (2). Thus,

Europe was regarded as the great Original, the starting point, and the colonies were therefore copies, or ‘translations’ of Europe, which they were supposed to duplicate. Moreover, being copies, translations were evaluated as less than originals, and the myth of the translation as something that diminished the greater original established itself. It is important also to remember that the language of ‘loss’ has featured so strongly in many comments on translation. ... The notion of the colony as a copy or translation of the great European Original inevitably involves a value judgment that ranks the translation in a lesser position in the literary hierarchy. The colony ... is therefore less than its colonizer, its original. (4)

Hence, in order to engage the postcolonial struggle to resist against and/or reverse such colonial power structure, (formerly) colonized people should tackle this question: “How

might they find a way to assert themselves and their own culture, to reject the appellation of ‘copy’ or ‘translation’ without at the same time rejecting everything that might be of value that came from Europe?” (4) This is also the question postcolonial writers engage with in their struggle for decolonization to express their voice(s) in a language not their own. Bassnett and Trivedi note that

Today, increasingly, assumptions about the powerful original are being questioned, and a major source of that challenge comes from the domains of the fearsome cannibals, from outside the safety of the hedges and neat brick walls of Europe. ... From India, from Latin America, from Canada, from Ireland—in short, from former colonies around the world that challenge established European norms about what translation is and what it signifies. (2, 4)

In brief, they argue that postcolonial translation studies productively and creatively engaged in the so-called (formerly colonized) peripheries can bring about a paradigm shift through which to rethink and reverse the cultural politics of colonialism and postcolonialism.

My particular interest is in the way in which translation is closely related to postcolonial writing. Considering “translation as metaphor for post-colonial writing,” Maria Tymoczko elaborates the differences and similarities between translation and

postcolonial writing. As she writes, first, “the task of the interlingual translator has much in common with the task of the post-colonial writer; where one has a text, however, the other has the metatext of culture itself” (21). Second, “the two types of writing converge on the shared limit defined by cultural interface” (22). Tymoczko thus summarizes: “as the metaphor of translation suggests, the transmission of elements from one culture to another across a cultural and/or linguistic gap is a central concern of both these types of intercultural writing and similar constraints on the process of relocation affect both these types of texts” (23). *Translations* and *Dictée* are just such texts that deal with the theme of intercultural and interlingual contacts taking place in the context of colonialism and postcolonialism.

In *Translations*, Friel revisits the colonial encounter in Ireland, focusing in particular on the process of translating Irish place names into English ones. I want to argue that the colonial encounter is a two-way rather than one-way process that brings about cultural impacts on both sides. I hope to offer a better way to treat “the relations among colonizers and colonized ... not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt 7). Although Cha touches upon similar issues in *Dictée*, she relates the colonial policy of imposing the colonizers’ language upon



colonized people to the process in which immigrants are “forced” to learn a new language and to adapt to a new culture. In particular, Cha tries to grasp and depict what it means to be a “translated” person who has been born across the world as a result of displacement (Rushdie 17). By displacement, she means the situation in which colonized people and immigrants are forced to live in another tongue and in another place, thus going through what Ngugi calls “colonial alienation” (17). Significantly, Cha embodies such a sense of colonial displacement and alienation through a unique textual and narrative form. “The nonlinear and nondevelopmental narrative of *Dictee*,” as Lisa Lowe points out, “refuses closure and totalization” (54). This textual formation of *Dictee* points to endless deconstruction and makes it harder for readers to form a total view of the text. The structure of Cha’s *Dictee*—nonlinear and nondevelopmental—which refuses to be faithful to what is considered to be the “normal” and “original” form of a text also describes a deep sense of disorientation and alienation generated from the displacement of colonized subjects in another tongue and in another land. In what follows, I examine the different ways in which *Translations* and *Dictee* are postcolonial texts which embody a language of difference and resistance or subversion by using colonizers’ languages in pursuit of decolonization. As the plurality of the title *Translations* implies, Friel points to a multiplicity of translation instead of a monopoly of one translation in his work. The

French word dictée (dictation in English) has the meaning of “the pronouncing of words in order to their being written down” (*OED*). Cha questions such order of prescription in her work, arguing that an authoritative dictation of history and writing is a form of the exercise of dictatorship, i.e. colonizing the mind.

### **Bearing Across: Representing the Colonial Encounter in Friel’s *Translations***

In *Translations*, Friel revisits the colonial encounter in Irish history and explores how linguistic imperialism is imposed upon the Irish. This colonial project is carried out not only through force but through the collaboration of the Irish. Both collaboration and resistance from the Irish accompanied such projects of linguistic imperialism. Friel describes this process as the clash of two cultures. Significantly, Friel does not focus on this antagonism and clash between the two cultures; instead, he proposes a third way by means of which to elaborate his ideas concerning language, culture, and identity in relation to the postcolonial condition of Northern Ireland. Friel’s representation of the colonial encounter in Irish history leads us to think about and explore the specific character of the postcolonial condition of Northern Ireland.

Friel remarks on the postcolonial condition of Northern Ireland in an interview:

There will be no solution until the British leave this island, but even when they have gone, the residue of their presence will still be with us. This is an area that we still have to resolve, and that brings us back to the question of language for this is one of the big inheritances which we have received from the British. In fact twenty miles from where we are sitting, you can hear very strong elements of Elizabethan English being spoken every day. The departure of the British army will have absolutely no bearing on the tongue that is spoken in that area. *We must continually look at ourselves, recognize and identify ourselves. We must make English identifiably our own language.* ... Hugh's words are perhaps a fairly accurate description of how we all live, specifically at the present time. (Murray 87-88, emphases added)

That which Friel suggests above is reflected in the main character Hugh: "We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home" (*Translations*, 66).<sup>80</sup> Friel articulates in Hugh's words his position on how Irish people should and can deal with the question of language in the postcolonial period. If linguistic imperialism is the process by which colonized cultures are translated into colonizers' language(s), (formerly) colonized people's struggle to make that colonizers'

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<sup>80</sup> Hereafter all the quotations from *Translations* will be cited as TR followed by page numbers.

language their own one is a way of marking postcolonial resistance. This postcolonial struggle is a refusal of the colonial order in terms of what can be considered normative and original by suggesting that there are multiple possibilities of cultural and linguistic translation. This mode of postcolonial resistance is also different from one that mystifies or idealizes the pre-colonial period in Irish history in an effort to overcome colonial history and its postcolonial legacies because it points to the future—the reconciliation and co-existence—of the Northern Irish society, which was going through postcolonial turmoil such as incessant terrorism and violence due to the extreme antagonism and tensions caused by religious, political, and cultural conflicts. As Timothy O’Leary argues,

For Friel and Field Day [the theatre company that produced *Translations*], the task was to come to terms with the bitter sectarian aftermath of colonisation in Northern Land. For them, the political task was neither independence nor union, but the working out of new ways of accommodating the Catholic nationalist and Protestant unionist traditions. ... The period from 1980 to the present can be seen as a period of intense post-colonial labour. That is, the objective is no longer to achieve independence from colonial rule, but to achieve some sort of freedom from the pernicious effects of its legacy. (29)

Friel’s *Translations*, the first project of the Field Day Theatre Company, was

performed in Derry “because it embodied the meeting of two cultures: the place became an extension of the play” (Murray 79).<sup>81</sup> In brief, what Friel argues in *Translations* is “that cultural identities survive, not through shoring up monolingual and monocultural defences, but through readiness for linguistic and cultural appropriation” of other culture(s) (Davies 1). The colonial encounter, according to Friel, is a moment not just of colonial subjugation and cultural loss but also of intercultural contact from which a hybrid Northern Irish culture is generated.

Friel’s manner of resolving the extreme antagonism and conflicts in postcolonial Northern Ireland is close to that which Homi Bhabha outlines through the concept of the “Third Space” in his essay “The Commitment to Theory.” The Third Space is the “contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation,” through which “we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable” (Bhabha 37). Bhabha adds: “It is that Third Space ... which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture

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<sup>81</sup> The Field Day Theatre was formed by the collaboration between playwright Brian Friel and actor Stephen Rea, and later prominent Northern Irish writers, such as Seamus Deane, David Hammond, Seamus Heaney, the Nobel laureate in literature in 1995, and Tom Paulin were invited to join the project. In brief, it is a cultural movement that engaged with the Northern Irish postcolonial situation. The Field Day Theatre is compared with the Abbey Theatre (which later became the National Theatre of Ireland) formed at the turn of the previous century by W. B. Yeats, John M. Synge, and Lady Gregory. As O’Leary points out, “both the Irish Literary Theatre [i.e. the Abbey Theatre] and Field Day were based on the premise that art neither could nor should be insulated from the political contexts in which it was produced and received” (28). Both the Abbey Theatre and the Field Day Theatre are formed in the course of Irish artists’ conscious responses to and struggles against colonial and postcolonial conditions of the society where they are situated. For the comparison of both theatres, see Josephine Lee and O’Leary (27-9).

have no unity or fixity; that *the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew*" (37, emphases added). In brief, the Third Space is where the dynamic and dialectical force of cultural formation resides that can open the way to a new (national) culture generated by (colonial) intercultural contact. By exploring this Third Space articulated in *Translations*, I would like to think about the way in which "we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (Bhabha 39).

The colonial encounter Friel represents in *Translations* centers on a hedge-school in the townland of Baile Beag/Ballybeg, an Irish-speaking community in County Donegal in 1833, during which the Ordnance Survey to produce an Anglicized map of Ireland was undertaken by the British Corps of Royal Engineers.<sup>82</sup> "It is a time of transition in every sense, for it becomes clear that the local hedge-school will soon be replaced by a state-sponsored National School providing free education in English for all" (Kiberd 614). The hedge schools, according to F. C. McGrath, play an important role in keeping Irish culture

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<sup>82</sup> Friel does not exactly follow historical facts in *Translations*, as historians narrate them. Kurt Bullock harshly criticizes Friel, accusing him of misusing historical facts from John Andrews's *A Paper Landscape: The Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*. Tony Corbett, on the contrary, argues that we have to regard Friel's *Translations* (along with *The Enemy Within* and *Making History*) as "history-plays," not as "historical plays." "A historical play," he explains, "is one from which a historical accuracy can be expected .... From a history-play, [however], one can expect artistic integrity" (34). The reason critics and historians blame Friel for his "misuse" of historical facts is, according to Corbett, because they "have failed to grasp not only the difference between the two [that is, historical plays and history-plays] in relation to Friel, but have also neglected to notice that a large part of Friel's project is the questioning of the status of, or, indeed, the possibility of, any kind of accuracy or truth" (34). In this respect, Friel's representation of the colonial past through his literary imagination produces a work of art that reflects enduring tensions between politics and aesthetics.

and language alive even during a century of severe political and cultural oppression by the British Empire, but Irish culture and language are effectively eradicated by the new national schools, in which Irish children must learn the history of Ireland from texts written in English and from the perspective of colonizers (179-180).<sup>83</sup> This is, according to Ngugi, the typical colonial process of how colonizers put the mental universe of the colonized under subjugation by forcing them to use the colonizers' language(s), introduced through the establishment of the colonial education system.

The hedge-school where most of the play takes place represents the archaic and agrarian milieu of the rural area of Ireland, which is still insulated from the influence of the project of colonial modernity (TR 11).<sup>84</sup> When the play opens, there is Manus the

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<sup>83</sup> In addition, McGrath adds that the Potato Famine which took place between 1845 and 1849 contributes to accelerating such a sea change in the topography of Irish culture (179-180). In *Translations*, Friel mentions the famine indirectly as the spread of the sweet smell (See TR 21 and 63). The significance of the Potato Famine is that it brought about a drastic and sweeping change in the whole colonial Irish society; in particular, the famine accelerated Irish people's emigration to North America in an unprecedented way in terms of speed and scope. Just as many Irish people had to emigrate to North America due to the harsh conditions of lives under the British colonial rule, so did many Korean people emigrate to Manchuria and its vicinities for similar reasons under the Japanese colonial rule. In *Dictee*, Cha describes how Korean people's forced displacement took place under the Japanese colonial rule.

<sup>84</sup> By colonial modernity I mean that colonized Ireland served as "the colonial laboratory" where "a number of modernizing experiments [were] conducted ... in the mid-nineteenth century before being applied in England" (Kiberd 614). Kiberd provides two such examples: a state-sponsored National School system providing free education in English for all and the introduction of a streamlined postal service (614). Korean people under the Japanese colonial rule had to go through the process of colonial modernity. The project of colonial modernity has brought about heated debate in the period of decolonization both in Ireland and South Korea because on the one hand there are some who argue that that project contributed significantly to the process of modernity and on the other hand there are others who point out that that project in the first place intended not to be of benefit to colonized people but to exploit them more efficiently. Interestingly enough, both South Korea and Ireland have become leading countries among formerly colonized countries in terms of industrial development. The relationship between the achievement of their modernization and the project of colonial modernity is a big issue that requires a comprehensive

master's older son, who is struggling to teach Sarah to speak. She has a speech defect, is "considered locally to be dumb" (TR 11), and is described as having "a waiflike appearance and could be any age from seventeen to thirty-five" (TR 11). Although she reaches the threshold of speaking with the help of Manus, she is "terrorized into silence again by Captain Lancey's threat of violence at the end of the play" (McGrath 192). McGrath interprets this process of speaking and being silenced again in close relation to the way in which the Irish lose their language and their traditional culture. McGrath argues: "Seamus Heaney has extended Sarah's significance to represent Ireland herself. In his allegorical reading he says, 'It is as if some symbolic figure of Ireland from an eighteenth-century vision poem, the one who confidently called herself Cathleen Ni Houlihan, has been struck dumb by the shock of modernity'" (Heaney 1199; qtd. in McGrath 192). Cathleen Ni Houlihan is a mythical symbol and emblem of Irish nationalism sometimes found in literature, art, and various media representing Ireland as a personified woman.<sup>85</sup> In this respect, Sarah's silence represents the subjugation and powerlessness of colonized Ireland. Friel further explores the way in which the hedge-

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and separate research project. In South Korea, there have recently been a growing number of studies on this issue. This shows that colonial modernity is still a hot topic in postcolonial Korean society that sharply divides society according to ideological orientation.

<sup>85</sup> For example, Yeats, along with Lady Gregory, co-authored his play entitled *Cathleen ni Houlihan* in 1902, which served as a part of the Irish National Theatre movement. The historical background of the play is the unsuccessful rebellion in 1798 led by Wolfe Tone.



school serves as a “Third Space” in Bhabha’s terms in that it does not just remain a place of oppression and loss caused by colonial rule but more significantly turns out to be a space where a possibility of bridging (or mixing) two cultures is explored.

Although the students in the hedge-school in *Translations* witness what is happening around them, particularly the Ordnance Survey undertaken by English soldiers, and they know that the national school where they are forced to use only English is going to be established, many of them do not have any clear sense of the significance and impact of such changes upon their lives as colonized people. Only Maire and Hugh have any sense of how to respond to such changes. Maire’s compliance with the colonial policy of imposing the colonizers’ language upon colonized people and desire to learn English is based on practical reasons. She needs to learn English because she wants to immigrate to America to earn money for the sake of her ten siblings. Her ideas about the need to learn English are also influenced by Daniel O’Connell.<sup>86</sup> Maire says,

We should all be learning to speak English. That’s what my mother says. That’s what I say. That’s what Dan O’Connell said last month in Ennis. He said the sooner we all learn to speak English the better. ... I am talking about the Liberator,

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<sup>86</sup> O’Connell (1775-1847) was an important political figure in Irish history, known as the liberator or the emancipator, who particularly devoted himself to the causes of the Catholic Emancipation, the right for Catholics to sit in the Westminster Parliament, and the Repeal of the Union between Ireland and Great Britain. The former was achieved in his life yet the latter was not.

Master, as you well know. And what he said was this: ‘The old language is a barrier to modern progress.’ He said that last month. And he’s right. I don’t want Greek. I don’t want Latin. I want English. (TR 25)

In opposition to Maire, Hugh states that “our own culture and the classical tongues [that is, Latin and Greek] made a happier conjugation” (TR 25). “English,” Hugh says, “couldn’t really express us” because it is the language suited “for the purposes of commerce” (TR 25). This tension based on the binary opposition between tradition and modernity gradually develops into the direct contact and clash between colonizers and the colonized, as Hugh’s second son Owen suddenly comes back home along with two colonizers, Captain Lancey and Lieutenant Yolland.

Friel further draws out the contrast between tradition and modernity through the character of Owen. He is sharply contrasted with students in the hedge-school, particularly with his brother Manus who looks shabby, poor, and timid. In Friel’s words, “Owen is the younger son, a handsome, attractive young man in his twenties. He is dressed smartly—a city man. His manner is easy and charming: everything he does is invested with consideration and enthusiasm” (TR 26). Indeed, he made a fortune in Dublin, an urban centre that served as a major outpost of the empire. He represents a man of modernity and progress. He is quite surprised by the fact that even though he comes

back home after six long years, everything in the hedge-school is “just as it was! Nothing’s changed! Not a thing!” (TR 27)

His homecoming is arranged through his employment as an interpreter for English soldiers who undertake the project of the Ordnance Survey in Ireland. Although he is assumed to be a mediator between two cultures, in fact he turns out to be a quisling; this realization, however, comes to him belatedly. He says that “my job is to translate the quaint, archaic tongue you people persist in speaking into the King’s good English” (TR 29). This is exactly the reflection of colonizers’ ideology that identifies Irish people and their language with backwardness and colonizers and their language with progress and modernity. The colonizers’ language is also considered the standard into which colonized people’s language needs to be translated.

Through Owen’s translation of Captain Lancey’s announcement about the Ordnance Survey, Friel shows the way in which translation is appropriated by those with knowledge and power in order to cover up the real intention of linguistic imperialism. Owen does not translate into Irish all Captain Lancey says; instead, he chooses what is translated. His ability to use the colonizers’ language separates him from other Irish people and enables him to become like a colonizer. Owen’s mode of translation demonstrates that he is motivated by colonial ideology. Since Manus is able to understand

English, he poses a question about Owen's translation.

Manus: You weren't saying what Lancey was saying!

Owen: 'Uncertainty in meaning is incipient poetry'—who said that?

Manus: There was nothing uncertain about what Lancey said: it's a bloody military operation, Owen! And what's Yolland's function? What's 'incorrect' about the place-names we have here?

Owen: Nothing at all. They're just going to be standardised.

Manus: You mean changed into English?

Owen: Where there's ambiguity, they'll be Anglicised. (TR 32)

Although Owen defends himself by pointing out problems with colonized people's language—uncertainty or ambiguity in meaning and incorrectness about the place-names—this just reflects how the English view the Irish. The uncertainty or ambiguity here is not something inherent in the Irish language but the reflection of how colonizers view the Irish language. It is merely considered the language that needs to be standardised, that is, changed into English.

Owen takes up his job as a mediator between two cultures yet he does not have a clear understanding of the effect of language on the formation of culture and identity. He answers to his brother Manus' question of why colonizers call him Roland: "Easy, man,

easy. Owen—Roland—what the hell. It's only a name. It's the same me, isn't it? Well, isn't it?" (TR 33). Manus responds, "Indeed, it is. It's the same Owen" (TR 33). Although these two characters, unlike the others, understand, to some degree, the meaning of the colonial project of the Ordnance Survey because of their knowledge of two languages, they still do not make sense of the extent to which that project can have cultural and political impacts upon colonized people. Only after realizing belatedly the tragic consequences of his collaboration with colonizers, Owen appears to make a dramatic choice to join a resistance movement along with Doalty (see TR 64, 66). Manus suddenly disappears just before colonizers escalate the military operations which will further oppress the Irish.

When Lancey announces the possible military operations to be carried out in case no one gives any information on the whereabouts of Yolland, the play reaches its climax: a seemingly cultural project turns out to be a military operation, although in fact both of them are rather related aspects of imperialism. In this critical situation, all the other characters gradually disappear from the main stage of the play. Yet Friel delivers a significant message through Hugh and Jimmy who are confined to their own worlds: Jimmy to the archaic world of Greek and Latin and Hugh to the small world of a hedge-school. These two characters represent tradition as opposed to colonial modernity

initiated by colonizers and Owen. Jimmy says:

Do you know the Greek word *endogamein*? It means to marry within the tribe. And the word *exogamein* means to marry outside the tribe. And you don't cross those borders casually—both sides get very angry. Now, the problem is this: Is Athene sufficiently mortal or am I sufficiently godlike for the marriage to be acceptable to her people and to my people? You think about that. (TR 68)

These words are actually given to Maire who is waiting for Yolland's comeback. Although Jimmy is talking about his own marriage with Athene, what he says is much more relevant to Maire's relationship with Yolland and in a broader sense the postcolonial condition of Northern Ireland in which Friel's *Translations* is situated: the deeply-rooted antagonism between the Catholic nationalist and the Protestant unionist in Northern Ireland. Jimmy's words lead us to think about the issue of "crossing borders" or "bridging two cultures." The problem, as Jimmy points out, is that one side (often the one who has power) demands that the other side conform to the rules or standards already established in a unilateral way. The contacts or clashes between two cultures within a society are indeed so complicated that these issues entangled with unresolved colonial legacies in many parts of our world often thwart any easy and quick judgment and resolution. Northern Ireland is one of such societies.

Friel reflects his thoughts on the postcolonial condition of Northern Ireland through Hugh's words:

We must learn those new names. ... We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home. ... I look at James and three thoughts occur to me: A—that it is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language. ... B—we must never cease renewing those images; because once we do, we fossilise. (TR 66)

Friel narrates these words not through Manus, Owen, or Maire but through Hugh who mentioned earlier in the play that English could not be an appropriate medium through which Irish people could express themselves. Unlike other characters who fall onto either side of the binary opposition--tradition or (colonial) modernity--as the play evolves, Hugh "is the backward-looking hedge-schoolmaster who finally opts for English, modernity and the world of facts" (Kiberd 618). Hugh is the character through whom Friel shows how tradition and (colonial) modernity are negotiated, which is an undeniable and uncomfortable historical reality and process that has shaped the postcolonial condition of Northern Ireland, and indeed most of the postcolonial world.

Hugh's words—"we must learn those new names. ... We must learn where we live. We must learn to make them our own. We must make them our new home"—however, do

not suggest that being colonized is something acceptable (Hawkins 34). Instead, those words “recognize and accept the cultural and linguistic consequences of Ireland’s historical colonization, but without either nostalgia for the old Gaelic traditions or continued submission to British cultural imperialism” (McGrath 195). How to learn those new names and how to make them “our” new home is the question that (formerly) colonized people have to tackle in their struggle for decolonization. As Achebe suggests, this struggle is making English a new English that can carry the weight of formerly colonized people’s postcolonial experience. This struggle is also creating a postcolonial language of difference and resistance or subversion. Although changing Irish place names into English ones is like imprisoning them in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of fact (TR 43), Friel questions the possibility of colonizing the mind of the colonized by means of linguistic imperialism because, as he argues, the same signs of language imposed by colonizers can be appropriated, translated, and rehistoricized in a way to reverse the colonial order and thus to mark postcolonial resistance.

Friel further articulates how such postcolonial language of difference, resistance, and subversion can be made possible. He says: “It is not the literal past, the ‘facts’ of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language” (TR 66). Here Friel



points out the role of language, which not only reflects but also contributes to bringing about changes in reality. That is why he proposes that “we must never cease renewing those images; because once we do, we fossilise” (TR 66). By renewing cultural images through language Friel refers to the dynamics of language in terms of (re)shaping reality. That is, Friel suggests how the colonized can use the colonizers’ language “to combat the effects of colonization and to preserve and reinvigorate their culture, identity, and lives” (Hawkins 25) in their postcolonial struggle.

Tackling the colonial legacy of the colonizers’ language has been an indefatigable struggle for many Irish writers from the early to the late twentieth century. This struggle has generated a remarkable tradition of Anglo-Irish literary culture, like the literary traditions, for instance, of Anglo-African and Anglo-Indian writings. As Richard Kearney summarizes:

If history has deprived the Irish of their native tongue, this will not prevent them from recreating their identity in a new language. Speaking in his capacity as poet, Hugh bequeaths to his community a legacy of challenge, the challenge of an Irish literature written in English, the challenge to persist in an aesthetic reconquest of that cultural self-image brutally vanquished by the empirical fact of colonization.

We the audience recognize of course that the entire modern tradition of Irish

writers of English—extending from Synge, Yeats and Joyce to Friel himself—has arisen as a response to just this challenge. ... The historical fatality of linguistic dispossession has not condemned the Irish imagination to dumb show. Our best writers have masterfully succeeded in reworking their adopted language so as to reflect upon and renew the original images of their cultural past. (100)

In short, Friel “opens up the possibility that if these ‘images’ [of the past] are re-made, if these translations are reworked, then we might be reshaped” (O’Leary 38). From this perspective, translation, not as mere copies but as “a renewed version of the original,” can be a process of “cultural re-imagination” and “transformation” (O’Leary 29, 39). Here cultural re-imagination and transformation is close to what Leela Gandhi calls the “therapeutic retrieval of the colonial past” (5). Friel strongly believes in the role of literature or art that can bring about postcolonial transformation.

It is fair to say that people in Northern Ireland had to go through extreme violence and painful wounds in their postcolonial struggle for a long period of conflict called “the Troubles” that lasted from the late 1960s until the Belfast Agreement of April 10, 1998. How arts bring about “real” change is not an easy question to be answered. However, in their engagement with social issues, writers and artists have produced works of art that not only reflect some gloomy political and social realities, but also foster social

engagement by enabling readers to imagine other possibilities. Collin Meissner's questions raised in relation to the Northern Irish situation—"how does one renew those images when the language in which they are embodied no longer exists? How do you renew through history what history has erased? How can Swinefort represent Lis na Muc?" (173)—are also the ones that many (formerly) colonized people still have to tackle in extreme anguish. Theresa Hak Kyung Cha takes up these difficult questions in her experimental work *Dictee* in order to deal with the issue of (post)colonialism and language in a quite distinct way.

### **Against Colonial Erasure: History, Identity, and Language in Cha's *Dictee***

Being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification.

-- Homi Bhabha, "DissemiNation," 311

Postcolonialism intends to serve as a discourse of resistance against the desire of forgetting colonialism by undertaking the task of revisiting, remembering, and interrogating the colonial past (Gandhi 4). This is the characteristic of Cha's *Dictee* as postcolonial writing. Like Friel, Cha uses historical facts in a way which challenges the acceptance of their accuracy because she is more concerned with how to remember and

represent them at the present moments than how accurately historical facts can be represented in her text. Historical facts in *Dictee* are rearranged to foster critical engagements with them on the part of readers. For “the colonial past is not simply a reservoir of ‘raw’ political experiences and practices to be theorised from the detached and enlightened perspective of the present. It is also the scene of intense discursive and conceptual activity, characterised by a profusion of thought and writing about the cultural and political identities of colonised subjects” (Gandhi 5). Indeed, *Dictee* is acknowledged as a canonical work in Asian American studies, generating a large number of critical works on it within a short period of time, despite the fact that it was discovered belatedly as an important text in the nineties. Her text turns out to be one that is able to foster a profusion of thought and writing about the cultural and political identities of colonised subjects who are forced to live in another tongue and in another place. In this section, I am interested in the unique way in which Cha represents and rewrites colonial history and marks the postcolonial resistance that serves as a counter-discourse against colonial erasure.

Colonial regimes adopt a cultural policy through which they hope to erase colonized people’s history and identity, by rewriting them in order to rationalize their colonial occupation and exploitation. Resistance against such a history of colonial erasure

is an essential part of the project of decolonization. For instance, representing and rewriting colonial history from the perspective of the (formerly) colonized and establishing a new, national identity is a postcolonial policy that nationalist independent governments often adopt to overcome the colonial aftermath. What is significant in Cha's way of revisiting, remembering, and interrogating the colonial past is that she represents two histories—Korean and Korean American—focusing on colonial and postcolonial displacement by “connect[ing] the colonial context of Japanese occupation in Korea with the neocolonial context of the United States in which she perceives the immigrant's ethnic identity to be endangered” (Mukherjee 198).<sup>87</sup> Just as Korean people had to go through the loss of the land and language and a deep sense of displacement under colonial rule, Cha and many other immigrants experience a similar kind of postcolonial displacement in a situation where they are forced to live in another place and in another tongue. I am going to explore the way in which Cha tries to find and register “an effective post-colonial voice” (Ashcroft, et al 7) which can mark a language of difference and resistance in another place and in another tongue.

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<sup>87</sup> Here by neocolonial Mukherjee implies “a sociopolitical climate within a given country in which immigrant/ethnic groups (and particularly those of color) are ‘otherized’ by the majority culture and frequently made to feel they need to conform to the values of that culture” (210).

The image of the Korean words placed at the beginning of the text signifies the colonial displacement that shaped Korean people's life under Japanese colonial rule. "The frontispiece [also] signals the displacement—cultural, physical, and linguistic—that continues to shape Korean American life" (Duncan 138). The words inscribed on the wall are translated as follows: *I want to return to my hometown, I am hungry, and I miss my mother* (from left to right, emphases added). These words impart a strong sense of longing for home in an extremely miserable, oppressed, and lonely situation. With regard to the historical background of that inscription, it is said that somebody forced to move to Japan for physical work during the colonial period inscribed those words on the wall in a coalmine. This displacement for the physical exploitation of the colonized forced many Koreans during Japanese colonial rule to be scattered to Manchuria, Japan, and the front lines of battlefields during the Pacific War.<sup>88</sup> The displaced Koreans who could not come back home later ended up forming Korean diasporic communities in China (around the regions near the current border between North Korea and China) and Japan. Some Koreans in Japan were even forced to move to inner parts of Russia, when as a part of the Allies during World War Two, Russia began to occupy Northern parts of Japan. Those

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<sup>88</sup> More than a million colonized Korean people were displaced under the Japanese colonial rule (Kang 45).

left behind in Japan (and their descendants) have had to go through unbearable hardships by being continually discriminated against and oppressed as aliens in the land of their (former) colonizers. One of the most tragic colonial histories in modern Korea—the colonial diaspora—is condensed into the image of these Korean words. The period of the colonial occupation by the Japanese Empire in the early twentieth century marks a tragic and traumatic historical watershed in modern Korea.<sup>89</sup>

The tarnished image of the Korean words connotes that although they have been weathered by time, they still remain. This sense of endurance and resistance against erasure is further solidified by the image placed on the previous page of Cha's book, on which the image of small sphinxes and a pyramid appear, which are in the process of crumbling away by the natural process of time rather than by human activity. After these two powerful visual images, Cha adds the following words from Sappho: "May I write words more naked than flesh, stronger than bone, more resilient than sinew, sensitive than nerve." This quotation articulates Cha's desire and longing for powerful words whose impact does not wither with time, but retains their power. Toward the end of her text, Cha

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<sup>89</sup> In colonial Irish history, the Potato Famine does so in a similar yet quite distinct way, due in part to its scale (the Potato Famine caused the mass emigration of the Irish to North America between 1845 and 1852). Friel touches upon this colonial history in Ireland indirectly in *Translations* largely because historically the Ordnance Survey was undertaken between 1829 and 1842 and Friel represents small happenings in a rural area of Ireland in 1833. What binds these two (Korean and Irish) colonial histories together is that they mark significant historical moments of the colonial diaspora—the history of being scattered and erased—whose impacts linger on in the postcolonial present.

adds: “Words cast each by each to weather avowed indisputably, to time. If it should impress, make fossil trace of word, residue of word, stand as a ruin stands, simply, as mark having relinquished itself to time to distance” (*Dictée* 177). Cha’s whole text appears to be the composition of traces and residues of words and images that stand against the linear and developmental stream of time and history so as to “brush history against the grain” (Benjamin 259). The Korean words (and the images that capture historical moments in modern Korean history) occupy a special place in the whole text because they represent what Cha means by “words more naked than flesh, stronger than bone, more resilient than sinew, sensitive than nerve.” Not only does the image of the Korean words implicate the extent to which Korean identity and history are placed under colonial erasure, but more significantly it suggests how the Korean people’s history of resistance against colonial erasure can be characterized as a history of endurance and resilience.

The history of colonial oppression, forced displacement, and inhumane exploitation, however, can be hidden to those who do not know the Korean language and who are not familiar with Korean history because Cha does not provide an explanatory note regarding the historical background of the Korean words or an English translation. Instead, what I call signifiers of Koreanness—fragmented historical narratives and



displaced visual images—are scattered throughout her text. The effect of the Korean words and the displaced visual images in terms of marking Koreanness is that while they are exposed and seen, what they imply is delayed and concealed. This simultaneous exposure and concealment is the textual tactic employed by Cha in *Dictée* in order to mark Korean identity and history in the United States. This is the way in which Cha enables us to witness the history of the colonized—the history of being forced to be scattered and erased—so that we may be able to rethink and question that history, which is not only something that happened in the past but continues today, albeit in different forms. In this section, I am going to examine the way in which Cha attempts to “imagin[e] the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification” (Bhabha 311).

In “Clio: History,” Cha represents both a colonizing moment—how the Japanese colonial policy drastically changed colonized people’s lives—and the March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1919 anti-colonial mass demonstration in Korean history. Interestingly, this section ends by raising a question regarding the representation of a particular colonial history. Cha writes:

To the other nations who are not witnesses, who are not subject to the same oppressions, they cannot know. Unfathomable the words, the terminology: enemy, atrocities, conquest, betrayal, invasion, destruction. They exist only in the larger

perception of History's recording, that affirmed, admittedly and unmistakably, one enemy nation has disregarded the humanity of another. Not physical enough. Not to the very flesh and bone, to the core, to the mark, to the point where it is necessary to intervene, even if to invent anew, expressions, for *this* experience, for *this outcome*, that does not cease to continue. To the others, these accounts are about (one more) distant land, like (any other) distant land, without any discernable features in the narrative, (all the same) distant like any other. (*Dictee* 32-33, original emphases)

Cha addresses how colonized people's plea for independence is disregarded in history because the oppression and suffering colonized people go through are considered something distant to those who do not witness them and who do not experience the same oppression and suffering. To them, even such terms as enemy, atrocities, conquest, betrayal, invasion, and destruction are just unfathomable words. As Cha suggests, this rather intentional disregard for others' suffering and oppression still continues for political reasons. For instance, powerful countries often choose not to intervene in regional conflicts for political reasons such as the Rwandan Genocide that took place in 1994 and the still on-going genocide in Darfur, Sudan. Is this because they do not know the meanings of those words? Not necessarily. Cha continues:

This document is transmitted through, by the same means, the same channel without distinction the content is delivered in the same style: the word. The image. To appeal to the masses to congeal the information to make bland, mundane, no longer able to transcend their own conspirator method, no matter how alluring their presentation. The response is pre-coded to perform predictably however passively possible. Neutralized to achieve the no-response, to make absorb, to submit to the uni-directional correspondence. (*Dictee 33*)

The significance of this statement can be clarified in relation to the petition letter to President Roosevelt authorized by Koreans residing in Hawaii in 1905 (which is attached in *Dictee 34-36*). The afore-mentioned quotation exactly describes the fate of that letter, because as Cha notes “the response is pre-coded to perform predictably however passively possible. Neutralized to achieve the no-response, to make absorb, to submit to the uni-directional correspondence” (*Dictee 33*). In fact, in the same year when the letter was sent to President Roosevelt, “the U.S. signed a secret pact with Japan, the Taft-Katsura Pact” that “allowed Japan free rein in Korea in exchange for her promise to allow U.S. to dominate the Philippines, which had recently been acquired in the Spanish-American War” (Elaine Kim 10). Cha adds:

Why resurrect it all now. From the Past. History, the old wound. The past

emotions all over again. To confess to relive the same folly. To name it now so as not to repeat history in oblivion. To extract each fragmentation by each fragmentation from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion. (*Dictee* 33)

Unlike Cha's wish in this quotation, colonial history repeats. Cha experiences a similar kind of (neo)colonial history of being scattered and erased, which is caused by displacement into a new language and a new land. Out of that colonial history, she needs "to extract each fragmentation by each fragmentation from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion" (33). Her attempt to revisit and represent colonial history leads to an exploration into history rather than a definitive answer.

In "Calliope: Epic Poetry," Cha narrates such a history of being scattered and erased during the colonial period through her mother's story. Especially, Cha narrates her mother's story in relation to her own story. Both stories are about lives in another land and in another tongue. The story of Cha's mother is about her life in exile in Manchuria where many Korean people under the Japanese colonial rule "moved ... to escape the Japanese occupation" (*Dictee* 45). These displaced Korean people are called "Refugees. Immigrants. Exiles. Farther away from the land that is not [their] ... own. Not [their] ...

own any longer” (45). Cha’s mother was born there as a second generation. Cha describes her mother’s life in exile: “your father left and your mother left as the others. You suffer the knowledge of having to leave. Of having left” (45). Cha’s mother has not left any place; in actuality, the place where she lives is where she was born. What does, then, this sense of leaving signify here? It is not just the loss of homeland as a physical place. It is rather the deep sense of loss exiles, refugees or immigrants harbour in their heart and mind. This sense of loss and displacement seems to be inherited to next generations because they also harbour a deep sense of loss and a longing for homeland or motherland.

Cha further describes this mixed feeling of loss and longing by representing how her mother (and other displaced Koreans) are forced to speak in foreign and imposed tongue(s). Cha writes:

You speak the tongue the mandatory tongue like the others. It is not your own. Even if it is not you know you must. You are Bi-lingual. You are Tri-lingual. The tongue that is forbidden is your own mother tongue. You speak in the dark. In the secret. The one that is yours. Your own. You speak very softly, you speak in a whisper. In the dark, in secret. Mother tongue is your refuge. It is being home. Being who you are. (*Dictée* 45-46)

The loss of the motherland and the mother tongue evokes a strong sense of

longing for home. The mother tongue that is forbidden can only be spoken in the dark and in secret. So the mother tongue is the refuge and home in which one can find and fulfill a sense of one's true being. The Korean words placed at the beginning of *Dictee* serve in a similar way. However, that home where Cha's mother can feel at home is dispossessed. In the situation where the motherland is lost and the use of mother tongue is suppressed, "to speak makes you sad. Yearning. To utter each word is a privilege you risk by death. Not only for you but for all. All of you who are one, who by law tongue tied forbidden of tongue" (*Dictee* 46).

In the midst of such a deep sense of displacement, that which sustains Cha's mother is her MAH-UHM, her spirit-heart. Cha writes:

But your MAH-UHM, spirit has not left. Never shall have and never shall will.  
 Not now. Not even now. It is burned into your ever-present memory. Memory less.  
 Because it is not in the past. It cannot be. Not in the least of all pasts. It burns. Fire  
 alight enflame. ... You carry at the center the mark of the red above and the mark  
 of blue below, heaven and earth, tai-geuk; t'ai-chi. It is the mark. The mark of  
 belonging. Mark of cause. Mark of retrieval. By birth. By death. By blood. You  
 carry the mark in your chest, in your MAH-UHM, in your MAH-UHM, in your  
 spirit-heart. (*Dictee* 45-46)

The mark of the red above and the mark of blue below, heaven and earth, *tai-geuk* refers to the centerpiece of the Korean national flag. This is the mark of belonging cherished in the hearts of colonized people despite the fact that two of the essential components of belonging—the land and the language—are dispossessed. MAH-UHM is the place where one's sense of belonging can be kept aflame against the strong force of colonial erasure because it is burned into one's ever-present memory.

Cha's mother does not just keep the burning fire of her MAH-UHM within the boundary of her spirit-heart. She expresses herself through writing.

You write. You write you speak voices hidden masked you plant words to the moon you send word through the wind. Through the passing of seasons. By sky and by water the words are given birth given discretion. From one mouth to another, from one reading to the next the words are realized in their full meaning. The wind. The dawn or dusk the clay earth and traveling birds south bound birds are mouth pieces wear the ghost veil for the seed of message. Correspondence. To scatter the words. (*Dictée* 48)

Here Cha points out the way in which words disseminate from one place to another horizontally. Interestingly, according to Cha, such words are realized in their full meaning from one mouth to another and from one reading to the next. Cha also relates

this dissemination of words from one generation to the next vertically by showing how her mother's story is connected to her own story at the present time through the medium of writing. Cha says: "I write. I write you. Daily. From here. If I am not writing, I am thinking about writing. I am composing. Recording movements" (56). Cha tries to correspond with her mother by means of writing. The seed of message and scattered words by her mother seem to have been delivered to her.

In particular, Cha relates the story of her mother's life in Manchuria under the Japanese colonial rule to her own story in the United States, focusing on the theme of identity crisis. Just as displaced Koreans have to feel a deep sense of displacement linguistically, physically, and psychologically in the situation where they are forced to live in another language and in another place, so does Cha as an immigrant feel similarly displaced in a new land and in a new language. She writes:

I have the documents. Documents, proof, evidence, photograph, signature. One day you raise the right hand and you are American. They give you an American Pass port. The United States of America. Somewhere someone has taken my identity and replaced it with their photograph. The other one. Their signature their seals. Their own image. And you learn the executive branch the legislative branch and the third. Justice. Judicial branch. It makes the difference. The rest is past.



*(Dictee 56)*

Identity is something that cannot necessarily be established and guaranteed by obtaining required documents because the new identity leads Cha to a sense of loss rather than to a sense of belonging. Interestingly, the pronoun quickly changes from “I” to “you,” thus making the story one that can be widely applied to immigrants in the United States. Cha extends her personal experience to the collective experience of immigrants in the United States.

Even when the speaker returns to his/her home country, he/she has rather to experience not a sense of belonging but a sense of alienation there, too. Cha writes:

You return and you are not one of them, they treat you with indifference. All the time you understand what they are saying. But the papers give you away. Every ten feet. They ask you identity. They comment upon your inability or ability to speak. Whether you are telling the truth or not about your nationality. They say you look other than you say. As if you didn't know who you were. You say who you are but you begin to doubt. They search you. ... Every ten feet they demand to know who and what you are, who is represented. The eyes gather towards the appropriate proof. Towards the face then again to the papers, when did you leave the country why did you leave this country why are you returning to the country.

(*Dictee* 56-57)

The speaker gets confused because what he/she has to go through makes him/her feel that he/she does not belong to either here or there. The speaker even cannot have confidence in his/her identity: “They say you look other than you say. As if you didn’t know who you were. You say who you are but you begin to doubt.” The things—the papers, the speaker’s ability to understand his/her language, and his/her outward appearance—that should help identify himself/herself undoubtedly are rather considered the ones that make things confused and uncertain. In “Melpomene: Tragedy,” Cha narrates a similar experience:

Eighteen years pass. I am here for the first time in eighteen years, Mother. We left here in this memory still fresh, still new. I speak another tongue, a second tongue. This is how distant I am. From that time. They take me back they have taken me back so precisely now exact to the hour to the day to the season in the smoke mist in the drizzle I turn the corner and there is no one. (*Dictee* 85)

This homecoming in eighteen years is not like what she expected. Instead of feeling at home there, she rather feels alienated. Cha puts this journey of homecoming in an interesting way: “You are one same particle. You leave you come back to the shell left empty all this time. To claim to reclaim, the space” (*Dictee* 57). Even though Cha is taken

back exactly to the hour, to the day, to the season in which her memory is fixed, the space where she now stands is not the same one as before. Homecoming is not simply like just reclaiming the space she left eighteen years ago because home is not just out there to be (re)claimed and she cannot belong to either here or there. Instead, where she belongs is a kind of a third space or an exile space (Elaine Kim 8). Cha describes this in-betweenness in the following poem.

From A Far

What nationality

or what kindred and relation

what blood relation

what blood ties of blood

what ancestry

what race generation

what house clan tribe stock strain

what lineage extraction

what breed sect gender denomination caste

what stray ejection misplaced

*Tertium Quid neither one thing nor the other*

Tombe des nues de naturalized

What transplant to dispel upon (*Dictée* 20, my emphases)

This poem describes the common theme of Cha's and her mother's experience of displacement. All the words that indicate one's belonging and identity, such as nationality, kindred, blood, lineage, and so on, do not settle one's belonging and identity. Instead, these words end up with a sense of displacement, as the line "what stray ejection misplaced" describes. The displacement Cha and her mother experience is a deep sense of being lost in another tongue and in another place because they are transplanted physically, linguistically, and psychologically and thus their sense of being is threatened.

What Cha describes above as "Tertium Quid neither one thing nor the other" provides a point through which to further think about and analyze Cha's way of marking Koreanness against colonial erasure. Tertium quid, according to *OED*, is "something (indefinite or left undefined) related in some way to two (definite or known) things, but distinct from both" and was used by alchemists, meaning "the result of the mixture of some two things, which forms something very different from both." The concept of tertium quid is intriguing in that it provides the language that can help make sense of and articulate Cha's way of marking Korean and Korean American identities and histories in her text. This concept is related to notions of hybridity in postcolonial theory in the sense

that it helps us to overcome the limited thinking of the binary opposition and is also related to Bhabha's notion of the Third Space in particular because it provides us a discursive space, which is an "indeterminate space of the subject(s) of enunciation" (37), from which to think about (an)other possibilities of national culture. As Bhabha argues, "it makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people.' And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (38-39).

Just as Korean identity and history were laid under colonial erasure during the first half of the twentieth century in which Korea was under the colonial rule by the Japanese Empire, so are Koreans (and Korean culture) in the United States situated similarly because "historically, the dominant culture in the U.S. has offered people of color only a mutually exclusive choice between inferior difference and invisible sameness" (Elaine Kim 22). Koreans' belonging to the United States is often measured by the degree of their "whiteness," that is, the degree of their strenuous efforts to integrate into American society. However, they are often regarded as "almost the same but not quite white" (Bhabha 89). At the same time, their Koreanness is regarded in a similar way as something almost the same but not quite by those who remain in Korea. Furthermore, Koreans and their culture in the United States are often regarded either as Japanese or as

Chinese. Thus Koreanness is often measured against Japaneseness or Chineseness as something that is “almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha 89). This state of in-betweenness—the state of being given only a mutually exclusive choice between inferior difference and invisible sameness—characterizes Korean identity and history not only in East Asia as a small country located in between the two powerful countries, China and Japan, but also in the United States where unique and specific Korean history and identity are not often recognized in a particular and different way. Elaine Kim’s personal experience as a Korean in the United States is illuminating. She writes:

Throughout my childhood and youth, the people who continually asked, “What are you?” knew nothing of Korea or Koreans. “Are you Chinese or Japanese?” they would ask confidently, as if there were no other possibilities—certainly not Korean American, let alone Korean. The “world” history courses I took started with Greece and Rome; China and Japan were barely mentioned, and Korea never was. (4)

This situation has not improved noticeably during Cha’s life in the United States (in the late 60s to the early 80s) because even now Korean identity in the United States does not seem to be established as clearly as that of Japanese or Chinese. Cha’s way of marking Koreanness in the United States is to narrate a Korean American difference (in a

positive sense) in the course of struggling to overcome only a mutually exclusive choice between inferior difference and invisible sameness. Instead of clearly articulating how Korean American is different from other Asian Americans, such as Chinese American or Japanese American, she argues that despite colonial erasure “the trace of ... Korean identity ... is indelible,” that is, “threatened by extinction and yet nonerasable,” just like “vestiges of words [that] are visible through their deletions” (Mukherjee 199; see *Dictee* 40-41) or the Korean words inscribed on the wall of a coal mine.

Furthermore, the structure and formation of Cha’s writing in *Dictee* contributes to the unique way in which a language of difference and resistance can be marked. “The nonlinear and nondevelopmental narrative of *Dictee* refuses closure and totalization” (Lowe 54). In addition, the complicated mixture of diverse materials (many of which are unfamiliar to those who do not know Korean history and culture) throughout the text, often arranged without any specific contexts or explanatory notes, thwarts readers’ attempts to make sense of Cha’s text. Reading and comprehending her text thus requires an agonizing process of puzzling things out.

Critics such as Elaine H. Kim and L. Hyun Yi Kang also touch upon similar, difficult experiences with Cha’s *Dictee*. They acknowledge that the textual complexity of *Dictee* at first made them rather disengaged from the text itself and led them to

experience frustrations as they tried to make sense of it. Quite interestingly, however, they add, these agonizing struggles ended up with eye-opening experiences of a new kind of Asian American text in *Dictee*. As Kim argues, “Cha creates and celebrates a kind of third space, an exile space that becomes a source of individual vision and power” (8). Kim further argues that such an exile space, or a third space, turns out to be a space from which a different imagining of identity, community, and history can be explored. Hence, according to Kim, the literary space in Cha’s text can serve as a source of the creative imagining not only of her own individual power and vision but also readers’ by efficiently enabling them to participate in the process of generating literary and cultural implications of the text. “The brilliance of *Dictee*,” as Kang points out, “lies in the seemingly inexhaustible and diverse ways in which it continues to open itself up to provocative and meaningful readings” (75).

Both Kim’s and Kang’s remarks emphasize the potential of *Dictee* as a text that can bring about creative imaginings on the part of readers, in spite of its seeming inaccessibility. They argue how Cha’s way of representing otherwise can generate imagining otherwise by readers. This can be made possible because “what is difficult ... about Cha’s *Dictee* ... turns out not to be its lack of rhetorical coherence or even its narrative opacity, but rather that it implicates us in our very desire to know and see



through reading—implicates, in fact, our positions as private, historical, or literary witnesses” (Cheng 1998: 131). The unique textual structure and formation of *Dictee* can enable readers to be active participants in construing and constructing the textual meanings of *Dictee*. This is a politics of reading in *Dictee*. Terry Dehay illuminates this point:

Writing against established narrative patterns becomes a way of questioning the way in which these master narratives shape our way of seeing. Remembering is the process of reclaiming and protecting a past often suppressed by the dominant culture, and in this sense, as re-visioning, it is essential in the process of gaining control over one’s life. ... [I]t is an act of survival. (43-44)

In *Dictee*, Cha’s way of re-visioning is articulated as being unfaithful to the form of a normal narrative pattern by telling history slantingly in order to mark a language of difference: *resisting and rewriting against dictation*. This kind of writing formation offers us a new, critical perspective from which to see reality differently. An act of survival as a way of marking a language of resistance is also articulated in *Dictee* by showing how the identity and history of colonized people can survive colonial erasure. Marking a language of difference and resistance as a form of re-visioning and survival is Cha’s way of postcolonial engagement with the project of revisiting, remembering, and interrogating

the colonial past.

### **Conclusion: Postcolonial Histories in Dialogue**

In spite of textual differences, both Friel's *Translations* and Cha's *Dictee* are uniquely postcolonial in the sense that both texts attempt to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own, if in very different ways. By "postcolonial" I mean what Ashcroft, et al. describe as a fundamental characteristic of postcolonial literatures: "What each of these literatures has in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the *tension* with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their *differences* from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial" (2, my emphases). Both texts also successfully undertake the project of decolonization which is "remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification" that can serve as counter discourses against the force of "being obliged to forget" colonial history (Bhabha, "DissemiNation," 311).

I engaged a cross-cultural postcolonial comparative study in this chapter by putting Cha's and Friel's works in dialogue. I argued that although these two works deal

with a similar colonial experience of linguistic imperialism they show different reactions to that colonial policy. In particular, I wanted to show the ways in which Cha and Friel represent the postcolonial struggles of (formerly) colonized people by trying to find voices of difference and resistance in a language not their own. In this postcolonial struggle, I would argue, the “polyphony as a challenge to the universalizing impetus of imperialism and to the homogenizing drive of nationalism in its dominant form” (Brydon and Tiffin 20) can be generated.

Furthermore, my cross-cultural comparative study on postcolonialities in Ireland and Korea lies in relation to the recent postcolonial theoretical turn to globalization. Although recently growing number of scholars talk about the “end” of postcolonial theory as a viable paradigm, scholars in “Editor’s Column: The End of Postcolonial Theory?” propose some useful arguments for anyone in postcolonial theory to further think about retooling postcolonial theory for tackling fresh and continuing colonialisms and imperialisms in the twenty-first century. In particular, they focus on “connecting knowledge and the world” (Yeager 637), arguing that “postcolonial thought should be considered a response to a historical condition as much as a system of thought, while a particular focus on the *worldliness* of the text” (Yeager 638, original emphasis). This is one of the main arguments they suggest in order to make postcolonial theory a still viable

paradigm. Throughout my thesis, I also have kept this in mind sometimes directly and other times indirectly. This is an important issue that deserves a complete, independent research. There is another point I want to draw attention to here in relation to connecting knowledge and the world.

As Mamadou Diouf suggests,

My problem is that postcolonial studies is concerned more with the expansion of Europe than with (dis)connections among colonized societies, groups, and individuals. How does the general process—the expansion of Europe—relate to specific histories, which are more locally determined and framed in the context of the encounter? How do we place these histories and their languages and structures into the global design of imperialism and colonial rule? (Yeager 646)

In this chapter, I undertook to examine the ways in which the global process of imperialism is related to specific histories on local levels by putting two types of imperialisms—British and Japanese—in dialogue. As Gaurav Desai points out, this kind of a postcolonial comparative study leads us to think about how we can engage it pedagogically (Yeager 647), of which I am going to further discuss in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The National, the Global, and Transnational Literacy**

In my thesis I discussed the ways in which particular national issues in India, Ireland, and Korea are related to global issues such as colonialism, postcolonialism, imperialism, global capitalism, and transnationalism. In chapter two, I showed how the process of decolonization and nation building in postcolonial India turned out to be another form of colonization that completely marginalized and exploited the Indian tribals (particularly women). The postcolonial condition in which the Indian tribals are situated is the one which requires them to engage in an extremely difficult struggle for survival.

In order to deal with Japanese imperialism in relation to Western imperialism, I took up the comfort women issue in chapter three of my study. I did not just focus on this issue as a Korean national issue, even though the absolute majority of the former comfort women were drafted from colonized Korea. I argued that this predominantly national (and furthermore East Asian) issue has become a transnational and global issue that has prompted a global engagement on behalf of former comfort women's unfulfilled justice.

I related the Indian tribals—particularly tribal women's marginalization and

exploitation in the process of nation building—to Korean comfort women who have also gone through a similar experience of exploitation and marginalization during both the colonial and postcolonial period. I examined the possibilities (and limitations) of the literary representations of these colonial histories in India and Korea which might contribute to the project of decolonizing the mind by offering other possibilities of imagining colonial histories and engaging postcolonial struggles.

Chapter four tackled the question of the influence and significance of language on culture and writing in order to explore further the decolonization of the mind, that is, what the literary imagination can contribute to decolonization as a cultural project. By undertaking a comparative study of two seemingly unrelated regions—Ireland and Korea—I expanded the topography of colonialism and postcolonialism as a global process.

All in all, my thesis mapped a literary geography of colonialism and postcolonialism connecting India, Korea, and Ireland. This project constitutes my attempt to engage in a transnational literacy—the reading of the postcolonial world through literary texts—which needs a further and extensive investigation in order to make sense of the complicated ways in which culture in this age of postcolonial globalization is rapidly produced at the intersection of national and global forces. I argue that in order to

properly grasp the fluid culture that goes across national boundaries, we need to develop a research imagination or paradigm adequate to the cultural changes prompted by globalization.<sup>90</sup> My thesis thus leads to the project of establishing a theoretical frame of transnational literacy which posits a responsible form of cultural explanation, one that can further the project of decolonization and serve to delineate the complicated place of the nation-state in contemporary globalization debates.

The concept of transnational literacy is first suggested and elaborated by Gayatri Spivak in her article “Teaching for the Times.”<sup>91</sup> Her suggestion in this article and the development of her idea in other writing, I find, is very useful for the development of my own concept of and engagement with transnational literacy. A major question I tackled throughout my thesis is how to relate a literary and textual engagement with a social engagement. Although my study was focused on the literary representations of such postcolonial issues as the marginalization and exploitation of the tribals in India, the unfulfilled justice of former comfort women in Korea, and postcolonial legacies in

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<sup>90</sup> With regard to the need of a new research imagination in this age of globalization, see, for example, Arjun Appadurai’s “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination.” Unless marked otherwise, all the quotations from Spivak afterward are from this article.

<sup>91</sup> Spivak’s concept of transnational literacy is further developed and engaged in her later books such as *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* and *Death of A Discipline*. In the former, Spivak engages an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary study by tackling such issues as philosophy, literature, history, and culture in each chapter. In the latter, she suggests a new comparative literature that works together with areas studies in order to foster understanding “not only of national literatures of the global South but also of the writing of countless indigenous languages in the world that were programmed to vanish when the maps were made” (15).

Northern Ireland (particularly, the social division that goes back to the colonial history in Ireland), these issues have also led me to further think about the broad relation between literature (or aesthetics) and politics (or society). In brief, the question I would like to further engage with is how to connect the reading of a literary text to reading the (postcolonial, global) world.<sup>92</sup>

Spivak's transnational literacy is a critical methodology through which I might further develop both a reading and a pedagogical strategy to connect a literary and textual engagement to a social engagement. I am particularly interested in the way in which her conceptualization of transnational literacy can contribute to my own conceptualization and development of a politics of connection (or comparison) which can further a decolonization of the mind.

Spivak clarifies the reason why she proposes the need of transnational literacy:

*We* [critics and scholars originally from the so-called Third World countries] are caught in a larger struggle where one side soldiers to exploit transnationality

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<sup>92</sup> In terms of texts and the role of critics in close relation to the world where texts and critics are situated, I completely agree with that which Said argues in his chapter "The World, the Text, and the Critic." As he argues, "the point is that texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly. Whether a text is preserved or put aside for a period, whether it is on a library shelf or not, whether it is considered dangerous or not: these matters have to do with a text's being in the world, which is a more complicated matter than the private process of reading. The same implications are undoubtedly true of critics in their capacities as readers and writers in the world" (35).



through a distorting culturalism and the other knows rather little what script drives, writes, and operates it. It is within this ignorant clash that we have to find and locate our agency, and attempt, again and again, to throw the clashing machinery out of joint. (1992: 7, original emphasis)

In this situation, Spivak believes that the critics and scholars originally from the so-called Third World countries can play an important role in order to find a better way of reading the so-called Third World literatures within the U.S. academy. She writes: “indeed it is the new immigrant intellectual’s negotiable nationality that might act as a lever to undo the nation-based conflict that killed the Second International” (18). In brief, she suggests that the change of the new immigrant intellectual’s position “from opposition to the perceived dominant” (3) serves as a great advantage for a better change. Their position of transnationality can be an advantageous point from which to read “transnational” literary texts situated in between the national and the global.<sup>93</sup>

With regard to transnational literacy as a reading and pedagogical strategy, Spivak calls attention to the following two points so that they may be further encouraged inside and outside of the classroom. First, how to properly read a variety of voices and texts

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<sup>93</sup> Here I find that this concept of transnational literacy is quite similar to the concept of world literature advanced by David Damrosch. Among his threefold definition of the concept of world literature, the third one is that “world literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time” (281). This is an issue that needs a further investigation in my future project.

created on both a national and a global level. Spivak writes:

Learning this praxis, that may produce interruptions to capitalism from within, requires us to make future educators in the humanities transnationally literate, so that they can distinguish between the varieties of decolonization on the agenda, rather than collapse them as “post-coloniality.” ... Literacy produces the skill to differentiate between letters, so that an articulated script can be read, re-read, written, re-written. ... It allows us to sense that other is not just a voice, but that others produce articulated texts, even as they, like us, are written in and by a text not of our own making. It is through transnational literacy that we can invent ground for an interruptive praxis from within our hope in justice under capitalism.

(16)

She believes that this acquired transnational literacy can help us to read not only well-recognized literatures by the Western academy but also many other less known literatures—for example, literature from Bangladesh and works produced by a non-Christian tribal Indo-Anglian fiction writer in English—unknown to us in the West. “Transnational literacy,” Spivak writes, “allows us to recognize that we hear a different *kind* of voice from these countries, especially from singular women, from Mahasweta, from Assia Djebar” (19, original emphasis).

Second, in engaging such transnational literacy, ethical and political responsibility is demanded in order not to fall into the fallacy of either a distorting culturalism or a complete misapprehension of others due to the lack of the proper knowledge of others and their culture. The reading that leads to a responsible global literacy can help us to “expand the definition of literature to include social inscription” (18) because reading others’ texts requires not only a textual but also a social engagement.

As suggested in the quotation above, transnational literacy as both a reading and pedagogical strategy is not a separate but rather a closely interconnected concept. As Spivak repeatedly points out in her article, making future educators of the emerging dominant field transnationally literate is the ultimate goal her transnational literacy seeks to achieve. In her article, she briefly mentions what kind of texts need to be included yet she does not go further into specific pedagogical issues in relation to adopting the methodology of transnational literacy in the classroom except that “we have to *learn* inter-disciplinary teaching by supplementing our work with the social sciences and supplementing theirs with ours” (14, original emphasis). This suggestion of inter-disciplinary teaching is also related to the issue of connecting literature (aesthetics) to society (politics), for example, just as Masao Miyoshi argues in his article “Turn to the Planet: Literature, Diversity, and Totality”: “Literary and cultural critics must look out at

the world and interconnect all the workings of political economy and artistic and cultural productions. We must keep reminding ourselves that the ‘global’ economy is not global at all, but an exclusionist economy. We must discover the sense of true totality that includes everyone in the world” (295).

Diana Brydon elaborates her postcolonial pedagogy in relation to transnational literacy in her article “Cross-Talk, Postcolonial Pedagogy, and Transnational Literacy.” Although her postcolonial pedagogy is developed in the context of the Canadian academy, her specific and detailed arguments are extremely helpful for me to further think about adopting, developing, and practicing transnational literacy in the classroom. On the basis of her own practical experience of practicing the postcolonial pedagogy of transnational literacy in Canadian universities, she also warns that

It is hard to write about teaching. Each classroom dynamic is different; each class creates its own community. What works with one group fails with another. What works one day may fail another. The teacher must always be prepared to shift strategies, reconsider goals, adapt to the demands of an ever-changing present.  
(79)

Indeed, this quotation reveals a fundamental characteristic of transnational literacy. “Transnational literacy,” Brydon adds, “involves thinking against the grain of what we

think we know and don't know; it demands alertness to the changing function of what it means to take certain positions within local and global contexts" (83). In this respect, *what* transnational literacy is and *how* we should engage with it are both equally important questions.

As the title—teaching for the times—of Spivak's article implies, transnational literacy is a critical literacy for our age of postcolonial globalization that can help us to critically engage a reading of the world in and through literary texts. This transnational literacy will also help us in the humanities to critically engage globalization, particularly what Fanon calls the two-fold emerging of culture: "it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the source of all culture" (199). Fanon's insight is considering the global from the national. Brydon's conclusion is similar and worth quoting at length here:

Part of the task before those of us engaged in bringing postcolonial pedagogies into Canadian literature classrooms will be to specify what transnational literacy might mean for Canadians. How can we begin to rethink globality away from our own forms of sanctioned ignorance and reground it through postcolonial pedagogies that address our here and now? ... [C]omparative postcolonial contexts as well as pedagogical strategies may be employed to begin engaging in

such work, but the task of elaborating the many dimensions of this challenge remains before us. (83-84)

Her suggestion with regard to the Canadian context can be applied broadly to the postcolonial world. As she points out, how to engage the task of postcolonial pedagogy of transnational literacy is varied. Yet one clear thing is that it should consider the global from the national yet not vice versa because that is the way in which to take a variety of literatures (i.e., specific national literatures) into consideration without easily categorizing them into certain notions conceptualized by the Western academy. This transnational literacy will also contribute further to the project of decolonizing the mind by enabling us “to rethink globality away from the U.S. melting pot” (Spivak, 1999: 402).

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