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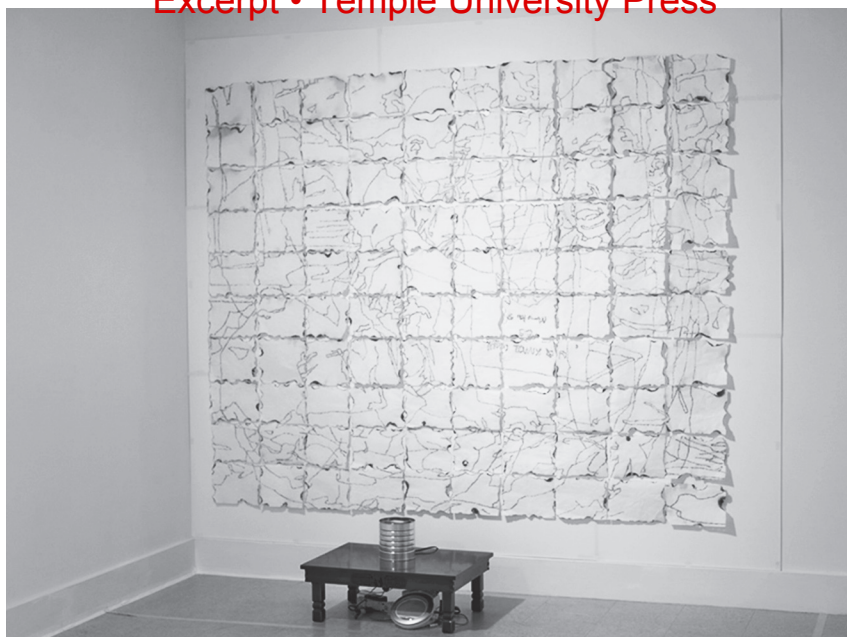
The Delicious Taste of
Army Base Stew

An Introduction

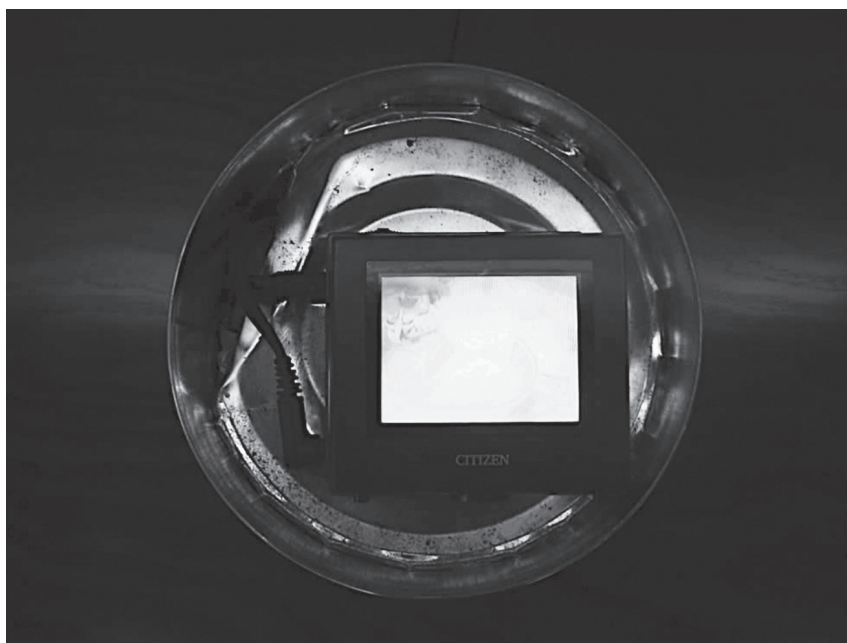
In the corner of a gallery room is a small video monitor placed inside a U.S. military C-ration can. Since the video installation is propped on top of a low eating table, viewers must squat, kneel, or sit to peek into the can's metallic interior. As the audience looks on, a time-lapse scene glows on the screen: American cheese, Spam, and Campbell's Pork and Beans appear neatly arranged across a table covered with a green-and-blue checkered cloth. While fragmented comments in English and Korean are heard throughout the video, a pair of hands dexterously deposits the food into a large pot simmering with tofu, *kimchi* (pickled cabbage), and water. Through a rapid sequence of close-up shots, the camera captures the softening of the foods as they melt and disappear into the bubbling red mixture. Abruptly, the cooking demonstration ends, only to be looped again and again for passing spectators.

Titled *BooDaeChiGae* (2005), this video installation by Ji-Young Yoo hints at the beginnings of the Korean War, as well as its indiscernible implications in contemporary social life.¹ *Budae jjigae* (a word that translates as "army base stew" in English) first surfaced in Uijeongbu, a city north of Seoul and home to an installment of the U.S. Second Infantry Division. Following the outbreak of full-scale combat fighting on the Korean Peninsula in 1950, starving Korean civilians scavenged military bases for leftovers, excising Spam and other processed meat from heaps of garbage and mixing their coveted findings with vegetables, noodles, and water to create filling stews. As the number of American soldiers stationed in Korea soared during the next two decades,

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View of *BooDaeChiGae* (video monitor, Korean rice paper, table, C-ration cans, 2005).
(Courtesy of artist Ji-Young Yoo. Photograph by Ramsay Liem.)



Inside the C-ration can in *BooDaeChiGae*.
(Courtesy of artist Ji-Young Yoo. Photograph by Ramsay Liem.)

the popularity of budae jjigae also grew. Symbolizing American abundance in the face of scarcity among Koreans, canned meats became sought-after commodities in the black market, so much so that the South Korean government deemed the smuggling of Spam a crime punishable by imprisonment or even death. As Grace Cho notes, American products such as Spam also hint at a sexualized web of taboo relations, given that Korean women romantically associated with U.S. soldiers gained access to food exclusively sold at military retail stores or the Postal Exchange (PX).² To support their families, some resold tins of Spam for lucrative profit in Seoul's wealthiest districts, while others crafted makeshift versions of army base stew following their migrations to the United States as the married partners of U.S. servicemen.³ In the ensuing decades, these very same women would become the primary visa sponsors of family members attempting to settle in the United States. While these fragmented stories of deracination, displacement, and migration resist forming a single or coherent narrative, budae jjigae's racialized and gendered origins index the diversified ramifications of an unfinished, transnational war. Enduring and traversing borders, budae jjigae embodies militarized occupation and precarity, as well as improvised survival. Paradoxically, it has morphed into what some now describe as a delectable "East-West fusion dish" served at late-night dive bars, trendy restaurants, and homes across the United States and South Korea.

I open *Reencounters: On the Korean War and Diasporic Memory Critique* with a description of *BooDaeChiGae* because Yoo's work poignantly captures a juxtaposition of diffused consequences taken up in the pages that follow. Namely, by moving away from spectacular forms of militarized violence solely affixed to combat warfare, this book concerns itself with a more complex range of conditions characteristic of a suspended seventy-year conflict. This analytical shift from the extraordinary to the ordinary is crucial, given that the Korean War's extended life engenders diasporic repercussions that are integral rather than exceptional to daily life: while armed fighting on the peninsula was halted by a 1953 armistice, efforts to definitively end the war with a finalized peace treaty co-signed by North Korea, China, and the United Nations Command (led by the United States) never came to fruition.⁴ Reflective, then, of the war's status as to-be-concluded, Yoo's *BooDaeChiGae* gestures to how the militarized origins of mundane objects, everyday relations, and social phenomena remain murky, if not unintelligible, to contemporary audiences. As expressed by Sarah Park on the online commentary board for *Still Present Pasts*, Yoo's installation performs a disturbing disjuncture between the habitual ways we casually perceive and consume everyday commodities and the devastating histories of violence, loss, and survival embodied by those very objects: "Among my Korean American friends, this dish is really popular because

it is both easy to make and delicious. Until I saw this exhibit, I never realized how this dish is a symbol of the Korean War.”⁵ Attending to the sedimented consequences of the Korean War, this book examines how accumulated forms of racialized, gendered, and sexual violence are recodified, across space and time, into bureaucratic immigration policy, multigenerational familial relations, and profitable enterprises removed from the immediacy of warfare. As the visual artist and writer Sukjong Hong discusses in Chapter 2, the Korean War is no longer just a “bomber jet,” but surfaces as the foods we consume, the spaces we inhabit, the immobilities that mark our lives, the personal histories we are unable to access, and the people we are forbidden to or cannot name.

To both track and trouble these muddled distinctions between “wartime” and “peacetime” (as Mary Dudziak might put it), this book pulls together an interdisciplinary archive of diasporic memory works, including oral history projects, time-based performances, and video installations that activate *reencounters* with the Korean War.⁶ Here, reencounters as a concept captures how diasporic memory works catalyze moments of return and remembering that denaturalize naturalized temporalities, solidified presumptions, and historical knowledges. More specifically, diasporic memory works mediate epistemological openings by gesturing to radically different memories of survival, refusal, and resurgence that exceed Cold War historical narrations of the United States as the benevolent liberator of Korea. Indeed, in the twenty-first century, the Korean War’s protracted entanglements are irrefutably linked to a globalized Cold War logic that banalizes the Korean conflict as an altruistic action that only U.S.-centered diplomacy can resolve. As we shall see, this naturalized telos and temporality of the Korean War—as a drawn-out “action” that, nevertheless, is slowly inching toward a conclusion punctuated by U.S. victory—assumes that militarized division is essential for rather than oppositional to American hegemony in the North Pacific. In response to this damaging logic, reencounters actuate subversive memories of recalcitrance and insurgency that discompose the Cold War façade of American benevolence.

These “othered” memories, then, pave the way for potential moments of accountability necessary for healing among affected subjects. In this context, healing is incommensurate with a curative stance solely dependent on a politics of (inter)national recuperation and definitive resolution. Rather, I argue that profound healing germinates when the subjects of war are able to explicitly name, work through, and account for a concatenation of violent consequences while reckoning with irretrievable losses that (inter)national politics can never fully rectify. While this process of “working through” is informed by confrontations with militarized colonial violence, it also provides the foundational means for what Dorinne Kondo describes as reparative creativity.⁷

Kondo begins with Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic focus on the individual subject's "depressive position," a stance that registers the graduated phases an infant must navigate to come to terms with the "real of separation" from the mother. Extending beyond the insulated realm of mother-child relationships, reparative creativity, writes Kondo, is a social process of "working through" that materializes through intentional acts of artistic imagination. Yet while these acts encompass difficult if not painful reckonings with structural inequities, they also catalyze healing among impacted subjects.⁸ More precisely, Kondo argues that it is this arduous and fraught labor of "working through" that provides the groundwork for the reparative. In light of Kondo's astute observations, this book considers the multitude of ways in which healing commences when subjects, through re-memberings mediated vis-à-vis diasporic memory works, refuse *and* insist beyond the U.S. state's narrative concerning the Korean War. *Reencounters* therefore catalogues a resignification process insofar as cultural workers and transnational audiences are moved to reconsider what they are seeing, hearing, and touching. By facilitating these moments of uncertainty, even of unknowing, diasporic cultural works underscore the blatant contradictions of American liberalism while activating other mnemonic potentialities that exist in tension with and against the militarized "division system" in Korea.⁹

As detailed later in this Introduction, reencounters as a concept offers three core considerations that deepen existing studies of the Korean War in transnational American scholarship. First and foremost, this book moves away from generalizable trauma-based approaches that dominate much of Asian/American cultural studies on the Korean militarized conflict. While in dialogue with productive terms such as "intergenerational hauntings" and "postmemory," trauma-based framings, I argue, at times obscure the specific conditions of the ongoing Korean War. Second, while state-facilitated arbitrations for Korean peace are centered on the United States, genuine peace, security, and healing cannot be premised on the United States' continued presence in the peninsula, a provision demanded by the U.S. government to end the Korean War. Rather, by turning to the everyday as a vital terrain of mnemonic intervention and remembering otherwise, this book demonstrates the prominent role played by the United States as the chief architect of violence and insecurity in Korea and the North Pacific. Relatedly, as Lisa Yoneyama discusses in her work, I assert that Korean decolonization and true justice exceed the delimited realm of high-stakes (inter)national political negotiations overwhelmingly dominated by a small circle of patriarchal state actors.¹⁰

Third, by conversing with a rich genealogy of transnational American scholarship that addresses the machinery of U.S. militarized governance and colonial ambitions in Asia, this book draws on the cultural as a generative

arena for political critique. The cultural, as Raymond Williams reminds us, cannot be reduced to “finished products and activities” indicative of isolated positions; nor is it shorthand for mimetic practices of poetics and representation.¹¹ On the contrary, the cultural is a vibrant politicized realm shaped by contemporary relations of power and social conditions, even while it encompasses a confluence of vestigial and emergent formations. In conversation with Williams’s commentary, scholars such as Sarita See, Mimi Thi Nguyen, and Cathy Schlund-Vials insightfully mobilize cultural forms and practices to identify the collateral damage inflicted by U.S. intervention in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Cambodia, respectively.¹² See, for instance, deploys the concept of disarticulation to describe how Filipinx artists produce a “visual and rhetorical grammar” to eviscerate the logic of American militarized colonialism in the Philippines.¹³

Nuancing such an argumentation, this book examines how U.S. militarized occupation generates its own seeds of demise, so to speak, by paradoxically producing *diasporic excesses*, or non-normative subjectivities and spaces deemed expendable to the U.S. and South Korean national agendas. Diasporic excesses activate cultural practices of resistance and regeneration that refuse to be narrowly confined to the arena of militarized security and state-adjudicated justice. This book’s diasporic memory works therefore do not merely attend to the violent foreclosures or impossibilities of U.S. militarized empire—a rhetorical move that tends to treat U.S. governance as a stable or homogeneous “thing” that is all encompassing and exacting in its formidable power. Instead, I underscore how political, cultural, and social alterities always already exist in relation to and alongside dominant forms of power, which resonates with Macarena Gómez-Barris’s description of the smaller gestures or micro-spaces of resistance submerged within, against, and beyond (settler) colonial infrastructures.¹⁴

In part, the capacity of diasporic memory works to facilitate reencounters relies on their characteristics as *aesthetic mediations*. While this book’s selection of diasporic memory works is quite eclectic in form, praxis, and medium, these cultural sources share an overarching set of qualities: they are multisensorial multimedia projects that crystallize through dissolving lines, cacophonous sounds, and divergent temporalities. Emerging more as experiential processes than as inanimate artifacts, diasporic memory works demonstrate how the aesthetic, or *aisthesis*, encompasses the expansive realm of the senses, embodiment, and perception.¹⁵ My interdisciplinary use of this concept is informed not by the Kantian discourse of beauty or the disciplined bounds of art history, but by a much more capacious engagement that segues with Sylvia Wynter’s theorization of cultural forms as “deciphering practices”: through perceptual means, aesthetic mediations facilitate reappraisals of

surrounding phenomena and codified knowledges.¹⁶ In this way, *Reencounters* underlines the disconnections between how war's structural elements are commonly perceived and the "bodily ontologies" that constitute their becoming in the world.¹⁷ To be clear, my focus on the ontological does not oppose epistemological concerns. Instead, the ontological and epistemological are interrelated, since the former is accessible only through a preexisting matrix of organizing principles. After all, the ways in which subjects, phenomena, and histories are seen, touched, and encountered in the world—or the "traditional patterns of assigning meaning to that which appears to our senses"—rely on a prevailing nexus of power, knowledge, and meaning making.¹⁸

In conceptualizing diasporic memory works as aesthetic mediations that enable self-conscious reckonings with Cold War dominant history, I find Jill Bennett's articulation of *casus* a generative starting point to challenge the assumed links between perception and signification. I am drawn to Bennett's incisive commentary precisely because her expansive scholarship takes cues from varied (inter)disciplines—ranging from art history and critical theory to affect studies, visual culture studies, sociology, and performance studies—only to theorize *beyond* the discrete bounds of such knowledge regimes. In attending to aesthetics as the dynamics of form, Bennett draws on the *casus*, or "the case, happening, instance," as a methodological approach to examining a "concrete problem" through expressive culture.¹⁹ Using an inductive process, Bennett insists that cultural works are characterized by their capacity to convey the "nature of experience and presumption," rather than their "subsuming experience" under a calcified theory "imported from the outside."²⁰ Cultural works as aesthetic mediations, then, "bring experience to bear" to produce "different material and immaterial ways of connecting."²¹ At their most dynamic, aesthetic formations induce enlivened, if not confounding, encounters that unmoor normalized assumptions. Consequently, by treating these interactive moments as the driving engine for epistemological openings, Bennett insists that we are able to ask what "art and imagery *does*—what it *becomes*—in its very particular relationship to events."²²

Yet Bennett refrains from equating aesthetics to a "single ideal of 'activist art'" or rendering cultural production as a serviceable action that fulfills an insular political objective.²³ On the contrary, aesthetic mediations are "points of orientation" because the focus of study is not the artworks per se but how they direct audiences toward a cascading of divergent memories and interpretations.²⁴ In this way, it is the activated space of encounter that foregrounds the contradictory elements of hegemonic discourse. To demonstrate this condition, I return to an earlier observation regarding Sarah Park's interaction with *BooDaeChiGae*. In her response to Yoo's video installation, Park's expressed memories are less about the nostalgic particularities of cooking army

base stew than about the perceptual dissonance that surfaces as she reconciles the pleasurable experiences of eating budae jjigae with its links to warfare. By defamiliarizing the familiar, *BooDaeChiGae* intimates how popular narrations of war, including heroic depictions of American soldiers and liberal stories of multiracial love, are interlaced with discordant memories of continued military presence, peninsular division, racial and sexual violence, and fugitive survival. This montage of historical fragments foregrounds the incongruent memories and dissident elements that bleed into the here and now. Park's reencounter with army base stew resonates with Bennett's commentary by reflecting the multifaceted, multitemporal dynamisms at play within a cultural work: aesthetic mediations function less as a preserved record or flashback of a fossilized past than as an experiential means of reinhabiting a past that fuses into the present. In this way, reencounters do not necessarily "restore subjective experience to history" but "[generate] new ways of being in the event."²⁵

Extending Bennett's consideration of aesthetics in relation to history, memory, and temporality, I underscore that reencounters do not merely destabilize the everyday through modes of rupture and deconstruction. What emerges in the wake of such unsettling moments instead are *alternative* iterations of historical time and political possibility that exist relationally with and against Cold War historiography. Here alterity refers less to wholly imagined pasts or futures untethered from the lifeworlds we inhabit than to how radically different renderings of the past(s) and present(s) already dwell within the embodied realm of lived experience. Such memories, however, remain illegible to the dominant language and framing logics of Cold War historiography. Diasporic memory works, therefore, draw our attention to contradictions and critical oppositional memories that trouble the Cold War temporalization and prolongation of the Korean War as a good and just project.

As Yoneyama, Jodi Kim, and Heonik Kwon remind us, the Cold War *should not* be treated as a congealed period that commenced with the end of World War II and culminated with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.²⁶ Indeed, given the protraction of Korean division and the absence of peace treaties among Japan, Russia, and North Korea, the very suggestion that we live in a "post"–Cold War moment reflects what Yoneyama describes as a "geographical provincialism" associated with the Western Hemisphere.²⁷ Emerging instead as an assemblage of epistemes, nationalistic feelings, and geopolitical relations of power, the Cold War is a shape-shifting system of governance and knowledge production that situates the United States as the noble defender of global capitalist freedom, democracy, and autonomy. In a related sense, the Cold War positioning of the United States as an altruistic power is associated with a conceptualization of modern time that idealizes the U.S. state as

a paternalistic anticolonial power devoted to rehabilitating “less developed” nations in desperate need of political tutelage.

Far from functioning as an abstraction removed from the grist of contemporary life, the liberal logic of Cold War American exceptionalism is deployed by the U.S. state to rationalize the devastating costs paid by civilians who must live alongside the U.S. military for their own “security” and “protection.” Consequently, the United States’ prolonged presence in sovereign spaces, including South Korea, naturalizes an incremental timeline in which American occupation is recoded as a transitive move necessary for the maturation of “developing” nations. Relatedly, American militarized excursions into sovereign territories provide necessary security for allies partnering with the United States against the global “War on Terror.”²⁸ Through this circuitous reasoning, the entrenched Cold War discourse of American goodness and its implied matrix of positive effects and affects—or as Mimi Thi Nguyen describes it, the feelings of love, gratitude, and indebtedness associated with America’s “gift of freedom” to the world—are used to further bolster the U.S. military’s geopolitical investments in South Korea and elsewhere.²⁹

While the U.S. state has stood by this lofty tale of altruism for the past seven decades, these imperatives are blatantly upended by contradictions that tell us otherwise. As Inderpal Grewal states, many within and beyond U.S. territorial borders criticize America’s “legitimacy as a proponent of freedom and democracy given its history of wars and colonialism, [and] of being a racial settler state.”³⁰ Certainly, in relation to Asia, glaring conflicts emerge as one barely scratches the surface of Cold War historical discourse. In Korea, the U.S. military’s on-the-ground practices repudiate the state’s justification of its presence on the peninsula to protect South Koreans against vicious attacks by the communist Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). The United States, in fact, indiscriminately perpetrates racial, sexual, and gender violence against Koreans under the guise of benevolence and protection. Manifestations appear when one knows where to look—for example, in the inequitable terms of the U.S.–South Korean Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which dictates the conditions of U.S. occupation; in the all-too-common incidences such as the 1992 murder of the military sex worker Yun Kumi by an American soldier; or in the evictions of farmers to allow for the construction of military bases. In each of these instances, it is imperative to inquire into the valence of meanings associated with “peace” and “security”—and more precisely, *whose* interests and safety are prioritized and protected and *who* or *what* is deemed expendable to American global securitization. As Chandan Reddy puts it, the United States’ grandiose vision of Cold War security is built on and “with violence,” since U.S. governance shares a symbiotic relationship with modes of racial

and sexual brutality perpetrated against subjects deemed dispensable to U.S. geopolitical interests.³¹

In a conjunctive sense, I also point to how Cold War geopolitics has failed to produce an outcome long prophesized by the United States: North Korea's total collapse and its unequivocal absorption into a global capitalist infrastructure. Exemplified by the belabored history of triangulated negotiations between the two Koreas and the United States, as well as vociferous civilian protests against U.S. military interests, the thwarting of an idealized Cold War trajectory is underscored by feelings of exhaustive wariness, postponement, and *déjà vu*. To illustrate this chronicity, we might briefly sketch out the repeated cycle of diplomatic arbitrations among South Korea, North Korea, and the United States in the past twenty-five years. In 1991, the two Korean states signed an inter-Korean agreement on reconciliation and nonaggression; however, the agreement was undermined by U.S. concerns over the DPRK's nuclear arms program. In 2000, North Korean and South Korean leaders met during a historic inter-Korean summit to jointly sign an eight-point peace declaration that the Bush administration eventually rejected. In 2002 and under the banner of the global War on Terror, the U.S. government recognized North Korea as part of the "axis of evil," along with Iran and Iraq. More recently, the April 2018 meeting between DPRK leader Kim Jong-un and South Korea's President Moon Jae-in reaffirmed a two-state commitment to establishing peace on the peninsula, despite the Trump administration's constant threats against North Korea. In each of these instances, the United States has *deterred* rather than *facilitated* direct North Korean–South Korean negotiations for peace.

This chronic cycle of negotiations alternates between the threat of resuscitated armed conflict and peace, serving as a sobering reminder of the United States' tenacious hold on Korea. It also accentuates how Korean and Korean diasporic refusals discompose such hegemonic relations of power. That is, the inherent contradictions of Cold War telos and temporality, as sharply foregrounded by Korean and Korean diasporic critiques, demonstrate how the vital terrain of cultural and social life coheres as fertile ground to enact critical memory interventions. When we return, again and again, to a range of obscured subjectivities, militarized bodies, and occupied spaces with a renewed commitment to remembering otherwise, we receive opportunities to "sever any simple connection between seeing and revealing."³² Consequently, as points of *disorientation*, diasporic cultural works mediate, as Walter Benjamin might suggest, vexed memories that contravene Cold War political discourse's cemented portrayals of a foregone past and inevitable future.³³ Conjuring contradictory memories precluded from dominant historiography, this reinterpretation of the past as plural transforms one's ori-

entation toward the future insofar as the present moment embodies a pressing sense of multiplicity that cannot be easily pacified. For Yoneyama, this dialectical approach to history, so characteristic of Benjamin's perceptions of historiography, "reclaims missed opportunities and unfilled promises in history" so that "historical knowledge [will] remain critically germane to present struggles for social change."³⁴ Just as *BooDaeChiGae* registers enduring histories that exceed how the Korean War is popularly scripted for an American public, this book is attuned to a curation of memories that provide complex portrayals of how diasporic subjects survive, live, and create beyond the devastating ruination of war. I argue that when it is performed enough, the Cold War's rhetoric of American exceptionalism—no matter how uniform, polished, or natural it may seem—reveals its own confused gaps that permit us to remember otherwise.³⁵

Reencounters and Trauma-Based Frameworks

Throughout this book, I treat the Korean War's calamities less as exceptional aftereffects than as structuring conditions of contemporary life. This approach reflects how the systematization of accrued impacts, or what Lauren Berlant describes as crisis ordinariness, produces an arresting juxtaposition between explicit forms of militarized brutality and more muted expressions of violence that reflect the Korean War's paradoxical status as ever present *and* forgotten, as a political entanglement *and* an anticommunist victory, and as continuing *and* to be ended.³⁶ In other words, this book does not catalogue how subjects of war move on following the shock of a single event. Instead, *Reencounters* attests to the complicated ways in which the protracted Korean War contributes to the forging of social life in South Korea and North Korea, the United States, and other spaces. As Marisol de la Cadena states, to "speak conceptually" is to "speak *with* the empirical and at times, with what escapes the empirical."³⁷ Along the same vein, my conceptual use of reencounters gestures to how seemingly soft or mitigated forms of violence, including political economic conditions and social formations, are anchored in militarized histories that are difficult to initially diagnose or recognize.

Addressing the Korean War's effects through the prism of reencounters provides a key contribution to transnational American studies—and, in a narrower sense, to Korean War memory studies—by moving beyond a singular focus on trauma-related concepts such as intergenerational hauntings and postmemory. In choosing this approach, I do not intend to deny or obscure the irreparable harm produced by the Korean War across time and space. Reencounters as a concept, in fact, indexes the damaging consequences of a conflict that continues to affect millions of lives on and beyond the Korean

Peninsula. Rather, in suggesting this shift in foci, I underscore how trauma-based framings that foreground the psychic afterlife or “postmemory” of a catastrophic event do not fully capture the historical, social, and political complexities that characterize the contemporaneity of the Korean War.

To elaborate on this observation, I briefly refer to how trauma-based concepts are dominantly deployed within Korean War memory scholarship. As further unpacked in Chapters 2–4, cultural studies of the Korean War primarily address the conflict’s repercussions as spectral traces that evade sociological instruments of ethnographic documentation (or hauntings) or as hidden imprints energetically inherited by younger generations (or postmemory).³⁸ For scholars, including Grace Cho, the ghostly ramifications of the Korean War do not simply reference missing or deceased bodies; they also register the “unexamined irregularities of everyday life.”³⁹ More precisely, Cho’s compelling use of hauntings accentuates how the fragmented remnants of imperialism and war, including the experiences of Korean “comfort women” and military sex workers, remain ever present in our daily orbits as invisible or barely discernible traces.⁴⁰ In another critical scholarly work, Daniel Kim draws on the concept of postmemory (which I expand on shortly) to track how the horrifying experiences of the Korean War are vicariously felt by second-generation Korean/American narrators. Due to their own temporal and geographical distance from the Korean armed conflict, these young narrators can “map” the war’s lingering effects only through tentative acts of imagined approximation.⁴¹ In effect, these distinct yet related concepts of hauntings and postmemory push against the oft-cited portrayal of the Korean War as “over” or “forgotten” by challenging the rational ordering of linear time into discrete epochs of past, present, and future.

In fruitful conversation with these key analyses, this book provides a different entry point to examining the Korean War’s persisting effects and affects. Namely, I attend to durable repercussions that are readily seen, heard, and felt by different publics but are intuited or named as something else altogether. My focus, therefore, is not so much on the invisible or lingering remnants of war that exist beyond an ocular scope or the traumatic secrets vertically passed down from one generation to another. As Ruth Leys attests, generalizable descriptions of unresolved pain seamlessly transferred to younger generations reproduce ahistorical accounts that essentialize trauma as a “timeless entity with an intrinsic quality.”⁴² Instead, by foregrounding the messy vicissitudes of the Korean War, I investigate the morphing conditions and causal effects that continuously transfigure militarized subjects, spaces, and phenomena into seen yet illegible manifestations of war in the first place. As Judith Butler suggests, the question of recognizability, or how we comprehend things as they are, registers the “general terms, conventions and norms”

that “prepare a subject for recognition.”⁴³ Consequently, to be recognizable is not a self-evident or an a priori status but a position that is historically, socially, and politically constituted. A central point of this book, then, is to scrutinize how the by-products of war are alchemically transfigured through the bureaucratic language and beautifying practices of contemporary governance and political subjectivity.

Chapters 1 and 2, for instance, discuss how post-1950 Korean militarized migrations are repackaged into successful U.S. immigration histories, while Chapter 3 addresses how the Korean War’s racialized gendered subjects, including transnational adoptees, are reclaimed by the South Korean state as welcomed “returnees” and vibrant contributors to the country’s economy. Chapter 4 considers how militarized colonial outposts such as Jeju Island are recalibrated into desirable tourist destinations, and the book’s concluding chapter problematizes the ways in which North Korea is portrayed as both an abstracted sign of communist evil *and* a popular object of comedic relief gleefully consumed by Americans. These discussions elucidate the structural processes that sublimate the Korean War’s manifestations into commonplace knowledges, desired commodities, and economic returns, and these chapters deploy a range of diasporic memories to contest such logics.⁴⁴ In prioritizing legibility and recognition rather than visibility and invisibility, *Reencounters* wrestles with a profound question posed by Simone Browne in reference to the nature of war, racial and sexual violence, and neoliberal surveillance in the twenty-first century: “Is [something] really invisible or is it rather unseen and unperceived by many?”⁴⁵

Located within a broader discursive context, the prevalence of trauma in Korean War memory studies reflects the significant impact of European Holocaust studies in the United States since the late twentieth century.⁴⁶ In this lineage of scholarship, which includes interdisciplinary works by Giorgio Agamben, Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Marianne Hirsch, and Primo Levi (to name a few), the Holocaust is explicitly identified or intimated as the paradigmatic experience of catastrophe in the modern era.⁴⁷ Consequently, these works situate the difficult work of remembering, or memory work, within the context of the Holocaust. For instance, Hirsch uses the medium of photography and the family album to relay the belated quality of trauma as it relates to the Holocaust. As Hirsch explains, the circulation of Holocaust family photographs as “trace” or “fetish” signify how these visual objects paradoxically embody elements of life and death.⁴⁸ Here she draws on Roland Barthes’s description of the photograph as a “carnal medium” that serves as a material connection to a loved one who has passed—and, more specifically, the portrayal of a disappeared family member in a domestic setting far removed from the Nazi concentration camp. Hirsch portrays the

Holocaust family photograph as a document that “capture[s] that which no longer exists,” as well as “the desire and the necessity, and at the same time, the difficulty, the impossibility, of mourning.”⁴⁹

In part, this perceived difference between what is depicted in the photograph as a relic of the past (a portrait of a loved one) and what the photograph signifies in the here and now (the annihilation of that very person) is conditioned by the temporal distance that marks the entwined acts of looking and remembering. Coining the term “postmemory” to signify such a process, Hirsch underscores how this concept “characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their births” and “whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated.”⁵⁰ Put differently, postmemory captures the deferred quality of a past trauma that is psychically passed onto and vicariously felt by younger subjects. These younger generations therefore bear the ethical brunt of parsing through a traumatic collection of disruptive memories, or mnemonic “leftovers,” that preceded their own births and consciousness.

In the past twenty years, Hirsch’s conceptualization has been taken up by scholars concerned with conflicts beyond the Holocaust, including the Korean War. Such interdisciplinary leaps attest to the important insights that postmemory offers. Yet I suggest that applying postmemory from one historical and disciplinary context to another ineluctably produces discursive gaps that obfuscate the particularities of the Korean conflict in at least two crucial ways. First and foremost, the Korean War is *not* a hidden afterlife that dwells in the contemporary moment solely through psychic and emotional traces. The Korean War remains a tinderbox with life-threatening implications, as clearly demonstrated by the Trump administration’s renewed threat of nuclear warfare in 2017 and 2018, and preceded more specifically by Donald Trump’s assertion that the United States would “totally destroy” North Korea if tested or pushed.⁵¹ While it is true that younger Koreans did not directly experience the armed conflict waged between 1950 and 1953, trauma-based frameworks assume that it is primarily the psychic and emotional traces of a “past” violence that gnaw at the seams of daily life. In contrast, I explore the radically different and divergent relations that multigenerational Korean and Korean diasporic subjects share with the unfinished war, which *cannot and should not* be limited to the period between 1950 and 1953. Refraining from describing the Korean War as an event that can be accessed or “known” only through its invisible residues, I examine diverse manifestations that congeal as political, social, and affective formations seemingly removed from the context of war.

Second, by exploring how the Korean War inhabits and habituates the everyday, *Reencounters* contends with how war functions as a normative element

rather than a disruptive force of neoliberal life. Certainly, this observation is not unique to the Korean War but intimates the state of permanent war in which the world finds itself, albeit with uneven implications for differently racialized populations. For Catherine Lutz, militarization in the United States, or the “contradictory and tense social processes in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence,” entails more than the allocation of resources toward brute violence.⁵² As an administrative process, it also encompasses the most bureaucratic of tasks, spanning from the crafting of sizable defense budgets and the hammering out of national policy agendas to the robust build-out of public health, educational, and economic infrastructures, which consolidate the territorial interests and political stakes of the United States. In fact, the U.S. military-industrial complex commenced with the beginnings of the Korean War and expanded during America’s intensive involvement in Southeast Asia from the 1950s to the 1970s.⁵³ In the twenty-first century, warmongering and war making in all of its variable forms are complicit with the formulation of political and economic affairs, ranging from resource extraction, land speculation, and tourist industries to corporate production, commodity consumption, and the technocratic logistics of circulating goods across the globe.⁵⁴ Because war is so thoroughly “threaded through the fabric of contemporary life,” the effects of militarized intervention, occupation, and conflict are seemingly “everywhere and nowhere at all.”⁵⁵

This book thus foregrounds the destructive ways in which the *longue durée* of the Korean War embeds itself within the “non-militarized” systems of international migrations, political partnerships, and national economies. In particular, by underscoring the collapse between militarized and civilian life, *Reencounters* recounts the tragedy of the Korean War less as a cataclysmic trauma that breaks from the status quo of American (inter)national policy than as a damaging node within a much longer trajectory of governance that traces back to the U.S. state’s duplicitous role as both adjudicator of formal justice *and* propagator of violence. Given this context, I posit that trauma-based concepts inadequately account for U.S. militarized empire and its continual enactments that exceed the normative temporal delineations around the Korean War.

Cold War Historical Discourse and Critical Revisionisms

Before elaborating on my selection of cultural memory works through the feminist analytic of the diasporic, I would like to sketch out the dynamisms of knowledge production underpinning Cold War and Korean War memory scholarship in the past thirty-five years. To clarify, this overview does not

comprehensively survey Korean War memory studies in the United States. Instead, it situates this book's diasporic memory archive within a transnational and interdisciplinary field of intellectual, activist, and cultural production that challenges the core tenets of Cold War political discourse and historical narration. In particular, it elaborates on the logic of militarized security and peace as it relates to the United States' intervention in and occupation of Korea.

As astutely observed by Christine Hong, the Korean War is remembered in the United States through a Cold War historical lens.⁵⁶ In short, this narratology recognizes the Korean War as a necessary "police action" taken by a benevolent U.S. military to safeguard the freedom, self-determination, and liberty of the Korean people against the evils of communism.⁵⁷ During the past seven decades, popular media has reified and reproduced these perceptions in productions such as American television shows (*The Big Picture*, *M*A*S*H*), a bevy of studio-produced films (*Battle Hymn* [1957]; *War Hunt* [1962]; *The Manchurian Candidate* [1962]; *Inchon* [1982]), and dozens of comic book series.⁵⁸ The Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, however, may best exemplify these sentiments. Opened to the public in July 1995 and located on the far western edge of the National Mall, the memorial includes nineteen stainless steel statues of male soldiers; a mural wall consisting of black granite panels with more than 2,400 overlaid photographs of Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard personnel; and a small pool hugged by a semicircular wall inscribed with the phrase "Freedom Is Not Free."

Other inscriptions include one stating that America's "sons and daughters" were sent to Korea to "defend a country they never knew and a people they never met." Justified by a diligent desire to remember—or, more precisely, to *not* forget—the Washington, DC, memorial suggests that the clichéd discourse of the Korean War as forgotten is not so much about the absolute erasure of the conflict from public culture and memory. Instead, the incessant desire to selectively remember indexes the instrumentalized ways in which the contentious discourse of the Korean War as forgotten reconstitutes itself as a recuperative mode of remembering. This mode of remembering, then, atones for and reclaims American soldiers as heroic subjects worthy of National Remembering. Thus, for the American public, remembering the Korean War links to the sacrifices made by American soldiers on the behalf of a weaker nation unable to protect itself against the horrors and violence of communism.

Yet, as Hong puts it, two competing historical framings since the 1980s have challenged the sanctity of this Cold War discourse: (1) the emergence of critical revisionist accounts during the 1980s, which reexamine the complex



A view of the Korean War Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, July 2016.

(Photograph by the author.)

origins of the Korean War in relation to U.S. global ambitions, and (2) the testimonial turn of the 1990s, which centers on the eclipsed experiences of Korean civilians who survived the armed conflict and continue to live with the precarious consequences of U.S. military occupation. These overarching perspectives, of course, are not catchall categories belonging to a logical telos; nor do they supplant preceding interpretations, as attested to by the Cold War's tenacity in the contemporary moment. Instead, these alternative framings reengage the dialectics of knowledge production in relation to the Korean War and accentuate the social and political factors that led to the diversification of war memories since the 1980s.

In particular, while Cold War historiography narrates the Korean War as a Manichaean struggle between the good (the United States and the West) and the evil (the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea), the sweeping social movements and critical revisionist scholarship of the 1980s in Korea and Asia destabilized this dominant narration by questioning the implied asymmetrical power conditions between South Korea and the United States. In South Korea, the 1980s was a crucial decade of political activism and radical knowledge production that called for systemic changes within state governance and society as a whole. Galvanized by the South Korean military state's massacre of up to two thousand civilians in the Gwangju Uprising of May 1980, civilians organized a popular democratic uprising, the *Minjung*

(People's) movement, which agitated for the end of dictatorial rule and the ousting of the American military presence from the country. As Namhee Lee observes, the Minjung movement encompassed an intellectual dimension by reevaluating the normative logics of the state, including South Korea's beneficiary relationship with the United States, the privileging of economic development over distributive justice, and the statist anticommunist justifications leading to national division.⁵⁹ Eventually culminating in the first open presidential elections (1987) held in South Korea in nearly three decades, the procedural democratization of the country dovetailed with multiple calls by nongovernmental organizations, intellectuals, and activists to reassess unresolved matters related to Japan's colonial rule in Korea (1910–1945), including the unsettled plight of Korean “comfort women” forced into military sexual servitude by the Japanese Imperial Army during the Asia-Pacific War (1931–1945).⁶⁰

In his groundbreaking U.S.-based scholarship published in 1981, Bruce Cumings also explores the multiple beginnings of the Korean War and the political stakes associated with the United States' military security presence in Korea.⁶¹ Cumings argues that the long-standing history of American military occupation of Korea is anything but liberating or benevolent: motivated by the desire for global economic and political power through the brutal containment of communism, the U.S. Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK [1945–1948]) preserved rather than dismantled integral components of Japanese colonial rule in Korea, ranging from the centralized modes of governance and social organization (e.g., the family registration system) to a preexisting military sex economy.⁶² Furthermore, Cumings gestures to the Cold War complicity of U.S. occupation and Japanese rule, or what Naoki Sakai and Keith Camacho and Setsu Shigematsu refer to as the “trans-Pacific arrangement” between the United States and Japan. The two countries collude through their competing *and* collaborative visions of militarized conquest, the mutual disavowal of colonial violence, and the forging of a neoliberal economy characterized by an imbalance of power relations among different nation-states.⁶³

Spurred by this vital ground of social mobilization and engaged scholarship, the 1990s and early 2000s witnessed a burgeoning of divergent worldviews and historical narratives that further challenged the dictating bounds of Cold War knowledge production. These changes not only placed pressure on the prevailing presumptions of existing war historiography in South Korea and the United States. They also produced, as Yoneyama articulates, oppositional knowledges, activist practices, and memories that destabilized the foundational tenets of transitional justice formulated by international juridical establishments, including the United Nations, after World War II.⁶⁴

Inspired by the intellectual work of the social historian Dong-choon Kim and the investigatory research conducted by the South Korean Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2003–2008), a decentralized web of personal memories, political investigations, and oral history projects centering on the experiences of Korean civilians, as well as public reports exposing U.S.–South Korean joint military atrocities, surfaced in Korea, Japan, and the United States.⁶⁵

Within the transnational political sphere, these formal processes segued with the momentous, albeit temporary, thawing of inter-Korean diplomatic relationships at the turn of the twenty-first century. Encapsulated as part of South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine Policy," the revitalization of South Korean–North Korean relations during the early 2000s culminated in the first inter-Korean meeting in nearly forty years and the subsequent signing of the June 15 North-South Joint Declaration. In this declaration, the leaders of the South Korean and North Korean states (Kim Dae-jung and Kim Jong-il, respectively) agreed to "resolve the question of reunification independently" through the collaborative "efforts of the Korean people, who are the masters of the country."⁶⁶ Insinuated as a rebuking of U.S.–Soviet intervention on the peninsula, the declaration paved the way for more than two hundred inter-Korean family reunions coordinated by the North and South regimes in August 2000, half of which were held in Seoul and the other half in Pyongyang.⁶⁷ More recently, Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un, the leaders of South Korea and North Korea, respectively, met in April 2018 without the presence of a U.S. representative to pave a diplomatic pathway toward ending the Korean War. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 regarding Korean diasporic oral history projects that surfaced at the wake of the 2000 reunions, I refrain from designating these diversified accounts of the Korean War as "intact," "raw," or "objectively truthful" mnemonic records removed from political, social, and cultural contexts. Memories, after all, are always already mediated processes that reflect the conditions of a historical moment. Yet the multiplication of pluralistic memories of the Korean War in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century undoubtedly exposes the political stakes associated with the maintenance and manufacturing of Cold War political discourse in the United States and South Korea.

While Hong refers to this last discursive shift as the testimonial turn, Yoneyama addresses the changes as part of the "post-redress moment."⁶⁸ Invoking the formal redress protocols pursued by the United States and the United Nations after 1945, Yoneyama is keen on addressing the unfinished business left in the wake of such formal arbitration processes, especially as the U.S. state's legislative, juridical, and political channels amplified the inequities it sought to reconcile and resolve. For example, the United Nations as an international

institution historically has worked to protect and expand a global capitalist economic infrastructure and (neo)liberal modes of governance.⁶⁹ In the case of Korea, American and UN policies of intervention not only contained the spread of communism; they also knowingly suspended internal decolonization efforts spearheaded by leftist grassroots organizations, such as the Committee for Preparation of Korean Independence, set into motion at least a month before the U.S. military's arrival on the peninsula in September 1945.⁷⁰

In light of these restitutive measures promulgated under the Cold War international regime, Yoneyama insists that scholars and activists alike must reevaluate the very meaning of true justice in opposition to the post–World War II's international nexus of governing rules and formal adjudicating processes. True justice, in other words, remains beyond the “force of law” in the Derridean sense, or outside of the extant system of juridical and legislative measures conceived by Cold War international institutions such as the United Nations and the U.S. nation-state.⁷¹ Reassessing the relationship between the sovereign state and justice, Yoneyama reiterates that (inter)national modes of formal governance are unable to accommodate the unsettled grievances of transnational conflicts. They are unable to do so because the diasporic subjects of war are *transborder* figures who embody “insurgent memories, counter-knowledges, and inauthentic identities” antagonistic to “hegemonic post–World War II/Cold War epistemic and material formations.”⁷²

The remainder of this Introduction draws on Hong's and Yoneyama's crucial observations to parse out the diasporic underpinnings of this book's archive of cultural memory works. Foregrounding the linkages that bind the diasporic to the question of true justice, I consider how this book's memory works contend with the present- and future-oriented project(s) of Korean decolonization *beyond* the finite sphere of (inter)national state politics.