

**Aftermaths of Empires: Cold War Narratives of the Black Pacific**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2023

“Aftermaths of Empires: Cold War Narratives of the Black Pacific” examines the *aftermaths* of militarism, occupation, and settler colonialism in the making of Cold War security as sites of contested meaning-making. The aftermaths generate competing narratives of empires in Asia and the Pacific, emerging at critical periods when the United States seeks to distance itself from its image as a colonial power while expanding its empire of overseas bases. This dissertation joins recent scholarship in Asian American and transpacific studies, which have shown that Cold War epistemes produced logics of Asian disposability and invisibility within dominant historical framings of the Cold War. By bringing these fields into conversation with Black Pacific studies, this dissertation argues that underlying the Cold War security formations that expanded US militarism were not only the entangled structures of European and Japanese settler colonialisms but also the reproduction of their racial logics of anti-Blackness and Indigenous erasure. The critical literature that illustrates the entanglements of Black, Pacific Islander, and Asian racializations in articulating the aftermaths of militarism constitute the Cold War narratives of the Black Pacific. Each chapter of the dissertation takes up a denotation of the “aftermaths” as an analytic frame, examining the ecological aftermaths of US militarism and European settler colonialism in Pacific Island poetics; the carceral aftermaths of US militarism and policing in Black feminist literature; and racial representations of Amerasians as children of the aftermaths in Asian American literature and US legislation. The “aftermath” in archaic uses stems from agriculture, referring to the “second crop or new growth” that emerges after a mowing (math). Chapter five examines the “new growths” of a Black Okinawan culture in Teruya that emerged after the US military mowed indigenous Okinawan farmlands, tracing the signs of Indigenous persistence in Okinawan literature and landscape. By analyzing the aftermaths of empires within a constellation of transpacific archives and literatures, I show how the aftermaths helps theorize the struggle for meaning and the demands for demilitarization and decolonization in ways that continue to inform our perspectives of settler security in Asia and the Pacific.

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## Preface

This project started and ends with Okinawa, so it seems fitting that is where I begin this discussion. Okinawa offers a unique standpoint for about the prolonged impact of Cold War security. It was first colonized in 1879, when Japan forcibly annexed the Ryukyu Kingdom and incorporated it as Okinawan Prefecture. Okinawa later became the site of intensive fighting during World War II, when the Battle of Okinawa led to the deaths of one quarter of the civilian population and destroyed the islands' agrarian, fishing, and trade economies. In the immediate aftermath of the war, US troops began the *jyūken to būrūdoza* (bayonets and bulldozers) campaign, expropriating 18,000 hectares of farmlands from 40,000 Okinawan farmers and displacing 12,000 households in the process.<sup>1</sup> During the years of official occupation from 1951-1972, Okinawa was governed by the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR). During that time, the US developed a robust network of military bases, transforming Okinawa into a “keystone” of US security in the Pacific. In 1972, Okinawa was reverted to Japan, but the military base construction continued and today is contested and protested by Okinawans calling for demilitarization and their rights for self-determination.

The situation on Okinawa is what many Okinawan scholars call a situation of dual colonization. As Okinawan feminist scholar Ayano Ginoza writes, “The dual empires of the United States and Japan constitute a raced, gendered, and sexualized narrative of postcolonial Okinawans’

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<sup>1</sup> Gavan McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 78.



lives and social landscapes.”<sup>2</sup> The annexation by Japan served as a pre-condition of Okinawa’s sacrifice during and after World War II, and the subsequent military development by the United States continued its subjugation, with the base situation serving the interests of the governments of Japan and the United States. As Navy veteran and policy historian Chalmers Johnson notes, the military bases maintain a structural inequity, where “America’s foreign military enclaves, though structurally, legally, and conceptually different from colonies, are themselves beyond the jurisdiction of the occupied nation.”<sup>3</sup> Status of forces agreements allow the US military to abide by its own set of laws, which take precedence over local, Japanese laws. These “military zones within territories” create a situation not of an empire of colonies but an “empire of bases,” that in the years after World War II and throughout the Cold War era become the foundations for expanding US military presence throughout Asia and the Pacific.<sup>4</sup>

Yet this history is often told in different ways, shaping the dominant conversation about what we understand to be the role of US military force in the aftermaths of World War II, which is often portrayed as a benevolent power responsible for post-war rebuilding and modernization of Japan, in addition to being a stalwart buffer against the spread of Soviet communism. What generates these conflicting stories about the aftermaths of war and occupation? What is the ideological work being done in shaping what we perceive as the aftermaths, both in dominant narratives and counter-hegemonic narratives of struggle?

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<sup>2</sup> Ayano Ginoza, “R&R at the Intersection of US and Japanese Dual Empire: Okinawan Women and Decolonizing Militarized Heterosexuality.” *American Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2016), 583.

<sup>3</sup> Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan Books, 2004), 35.

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire*, 23.

These questions became the premise of my dissertation, “Aftermaths of Empires: Cold War Narratives of the Black Pacific,” in which I examine the aftermaths of US militarism and imperialism and their convergencies with Japanese and European settler colonialisms as critical sites for contesting hegemonic power. The dissertation draws from my training in literary studies and Asian American critique, two fields of study that have taught me to read between the lines, and to understand that narrative and literature are not just tools of power but indeed produce the image of where power lies. As Arif Dirlik notes, the language we use to name places like “Asia,” the “Pacific Rim,” the “Pacific Basin,” and many others shapes our understanding of those places in producing knowledge about them.<sup>5</sup> Asian American critique has shown how literature is part of this Cold War production of knowledge, both obscuring and exposing the violence of wars in Asia that has left millions dead and millions more to live with the generational traumas borne of that violence. The fictions of benevolence that characterize US colonial rule as liberation obscure how this violence bears out in everyday lives, in overwhelming silences, disrupted familial ties, and often, in the very landscapes we inhabit. Asian American critique also has demonstrated the continuities between US military expansion and settler colonialism, where the imagining of Asia and the Pacific Islands as new frontiers has driven the nation’s leaders to greenlight wars of conquest and territorial acquisition. My dissertation aligns with this scholarship, but I shift the analytical focus to the Black Pacific, as a field of study and as a site of cultural and critical knowledge production. As a regionalizing construct, the Black Pacific turns the analytical lens from the continental United States to the Pacific, where it is not only the legacies of US militarism

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<sup>5</sup> Arif Dirlik, “The Asia-Pacific Idea: Reality and Representation in the Invention of a Regional Structure,” *What Is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, edited by Arif Dirlik (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 15-36.

and imperialism but also those of Japanese and European settler colonialisms that shape the region's (mal)development and futures. As a critical framework, the Black Pacific also requires Asian Americanists and scholars of Asian and transpacific studies to take seriously how anti-Blackness and Indigenous erasure become entangled with Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander racialization in the making of Cold War security. This dissertation in many ways is just one of several entry points for that cross-disciplinary undertaking.

This dissertation required reading in several fields outside of my own disciplinary homes literary and Asian American studies, and I wouldn't have achieved the breadth and depth that I believe I have without the mentorship and input from so many who helped me to reach this point. Any fault in the interpretation or argument are mine and mine alone. But what this dissertation does well wouldn't have been possible without the support of the many professors, mentors, colleagues, friends, and family who stood by me along the way.

My committee has my deepest appreciation: Dr. Shalini Puri, whose seminar, Interdisciplinary Methods in Humanities, was the first graduate course in which I was able to look beyond my disciplinary roots to research Okinawa, and without which this project would never have come to fruition; Dr. Shaun Myers, who introduced me to Toni Cade Bambara's *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive*, and whose work on Black and Third World feminisms has been illuminating for my own thinking about what possibilities feminists of color have dared to imagine; Dr. Piotr Gwiazda, whose seminar on World Literature and Translation is where I first tried my hand at translation, slowly working through Higa Tomiko's *Shira-hata no shōjo (The Girl with the White Flag)*, and whose persistent questions about language and translation have become a repeating refrain in my thinking and analysis; and Dr. Mitzi Uehara Carter, whose work on race, Blackness, and Indigeneity in Okinawa have profoundly influenced my own thinking in richly generative

ways and whose advice early on in my fieldwork nudged me to pay attention to the unexpected stories that ultimately shaped the form of my Okinawa chapter. The care and generosity that each of my committee members showed for my research is hard to overstate, and who I am as a scholar, educator, and researcher are better for it.

Among scholars and mentors, I am indebted to Dr. Ariko Ikehara, who accepted me to intern at Koza MiXtopia Research Center and Archive in Teruya. Her community-engaged research practice indelibly shaped my own approach to research and scholarship, and our *yuntaku* at the research center are among some of my most cherished memories from these past few years. Dr. Ikehara models the kind of ethical, honest, and community-oriented researcher I aspire to be.

Fellowships and grants from the following organizations and centers supported my work at various stages of the research and writing process: the Ford Foundation, the Mitsubishi Foundation, the University of Pittsburgh's Department of English, the University of Pittsburgh's Asian Studies Center and the Japan Studies Program, and the Nationality Rooms' Dr. and Mrs. Ryonosuke Shiono Scholarship.

There are so many others to thank from my time at Pitt, some of who have moved on to other places and opportunities but who made Pittsburgh feel like a home for the six years I've been here: Dr. Khirsten Lanese Scott for her mentoring, pedagogical excellence and advice early on for navigating the treacherous waters of academia as a woman of color; Dr. Elizabeth Rodriguez Fielder for showing that it is possible to bring scholarly and creative pursuits together rather than as separate practices classroom and whose pedagogy showed me the classroom can be a site of radical and transformative politics; Gabby Benavente Hobart, Alyssa Quintanilla, Silpa Mukherjee, Yujin Jang, and Jonah Jeng for their friendship and collegiality. Silpa, Yujin, and Jonah also sat through hours of my mock job interviews and job talks, and Yujin helped me with

translation from the Korean. Special shoutout to Jesse Daugherty and LJ Woolcock-Srolovic for their labor, patience, and kindness as graduate administrators; without them, I would have fallen behind and lost out on reimbursement and funding opportunities. And a joyful thanks to the members of the Asian American Futures Collective, including Sritama Chatterjee, Jonah Jeng, Apala Kundu, Gabriela Lee, and Sandra Lee; without them, we wouldn't have been able to host the Boba and Books Reading Series and create a space for Asian American graduate students at Pitt.

A special thanks to those in Okinawa, in the diaspora, and in Okinawa studies, who continue to inspire and teach me: the members of the Lūchū Study Group, including Risako Sakai, Wesley Uenten, Sam Museus; Koza MiXtopia Working Group, namely Ariko Ikehara, Risako Sakai, and Futoshi Moromizato; and individual scholars, mentors, friends, and people I admire and respect deeply, including Alexyss McClellan-Ufugusuku, Sam Ikehara, Alice Kurima Newberry, Wendy Matsumura, and Sho Yamagushiku. The brilliance of these Okinawans is incomparable. In Okinawa, the librarians and staff of the Urasoe Library, Okinawa Prefectural Library, University of the Ryukyus Library, Okinawa City Office, and Teruya Community Center helped me locate various archives and collections that were central to my research. My heartfelt gratitude to Teruya residents, including Shiroma-san, owner of the Sanko Sozai shop, whose insights about farming taught me a different way of reading the landscape; Miyazato-san of the ladies clothing shop for sharing her heartwarming stories and iced tea; Shiroma Keiko-san, owner of the Ashibiba bar and eatery whose mozuku-tempura and vibrant spirit bring a smile to my face whenever I think of her; Gushiken Dai-san, owner of the hip coffee, music, and neighborhood hangout Café Noor; and many others who welcomed me with *yui-maru* by sharing their stories. *Ipee niffee deebiru.*

Many thanks to my partner, Thomas, for shouldering extra household chores throughout my years of graduate study, from cooking, laundry, cleaning, and making sure I didn't forget to eat, to raising our dog Kalti on my trips away from home. He took on so much emotional labor, supporting me through dissertating, losing my grandmother, and a grueling job application process.

My family is the reason I do this work, both the Shimojis on my maternal grandmother's side and the Nakaganekus on my maternal grandfather's side. The hope that my research would allow me extended time in Okinawa was what set me on this current path. My ojiichan developed Alzheimer's during the pandemic, so he was never able to realize that I had deliberately shaped my graduate study to come home and be near him. Still, he is the gravitational force that brings all the Nakaganekus together year after year, while the kindness of my aunts, uncle, and cousins is a reminder of where I come from and the communities to whom I am responsible. I could not have done any of this without my mother, who helped with translation, research, booking flights and car rentals. Thanks to her unwavering determination, I tracked down the original issue of *Ryudai Bungaku* in which Kishaba Jun published "Kurai hana" ("Dark Flowers"), the short story I analyze in my Okinawa chapter. Without her and my aunt, Sakura Mizukuchi, who also lent her hand in translation and suggested specific libraries and archives to visit, my research in Okinawa would have fallen short.

Finally, my grandmother, Kazuko Shimoji Fischer, who encouraged me to pursue graduate study and who passed in August 2020. I often feel her presence and know she is never far.

## **A Note on Names**

This dissertation includes Western, Japanese, and Okinawan names and texts. In-text citations for Western names and for the names of Japanese or Okinawan authors and scholars who published a cited source in English appear with their given name followed by surname, and in the bibliography with the surname followed by given name. For Japanese or Okinawan authors and scholars whose work originally appeared in Japanese but was later translated, in-text mentions cite their surname followed by given name. The bibliography maintains the same order throughout of surname followed by a given name.

## 1.0 Introduction: What Remains After Empire?

*Aftermath* \æftər,mæθ\

*figurative*

- a. A period or state of affairs following a significant event, esp. when that event is destructive or harmful.
- b. A (usually undesired) thing remaining or left after the end or exit of something; an unwelcome consequence or effect.

*agriculture*

A second crop or new growth of grass (or occasionally another plant used as feed) after the first has been mown or harvested<sup>6</sup>

...

I am tired from this digging up of human bodies  
no one loved enough to save from death.

—June Jordan, “Aftermath”<sup>7</sup>

In 1983, Time-Life Magazine released a retrospective, titled *The Aftermath: Asia* as the final publication in its thirty-nine volume series on World War II. A companion tome to *The Aftermath: Europe*, the book overviewed the aftermath of the war throughout Asia, from the Japanese Empire’s failed campaign of ‘Asia for Asians’ to the United States’ ‘benign invasion’ of Japan, the British Empire’s decline and the Partition of India and Pakistan, the decline of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia the splintering of China between nationalist and communist factions; and the spread of communism spread in Korea and Vietnam.<sup>8</sup> Despite its putative intentions otherwise,

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<sup>6</sup> “Aftermath,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. June 2022. Oxford University Press. <https://www-oed-com.pitt.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/3696?redirectedFrom=aftermath> (accessed June 23, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> June Jordan, “Aftermath,” from *Naming Our Destiny* (1989), in *Directed by Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan*, edited by Jan Heller Levi and Sara Miles (Port Townsend, Washington: Copper Canyon Press, 2007), 416.

<sup>8</sup> *The Aftermath: Asia*. Edited by Time-Life Books. Chicago, IL: Time-Life Books, 1983.



the Cold War had “an enormous indirect effect in Asia.”<sup>9</sup> The turbulence in Asia was attributed to the growing demands for independence in Asian countries, who “despite the considerable technological benefits, including modern transportation and sanitation, that Europeans had introduced in Asia, ... resented the greed of white colonial masters, as well as their lordly exercise of power and their attitudes of racial superiority.”<sup>10</sup> Such discontent came as a “shock to the colonial powers of Europe,” who found themselves ill-equipped to deal with the growing demands for democratic rule and self-governance, an unpreparedness that saw them facing the “last days of colonialism.”<sup>11</sup> that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had predicted. In a memorandum to Harry. S. Truman, Roosevelt had cautioned that “dynamic forces leading toward self-government are growing in Asia; that the United States—as a great democracy—cannot and must not try to retard this development but rather act in harmony with it.”<sup>12</sup>

Whatever optimism Roosevelt may have had for the country, poised to become a democratic leader in Asia and ready to help unleash the dynamic forces of self-governance in Asia, the Cold War era saw a different unfolding of events. The United States expanded its territorial, political, and economic influence in Asia and the Pacific in ways that seemed to extend, rather than contract, pre-war colonial structures. The last days of colonialism, it seemed, had merely been prolonged to a half-century of territorial dispossession, political instability, wars that left millions

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<sup>9</sup> *The Aftermath: Asia*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 122.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

dead, ecological destruction, and countless other effects precipitated by US expansionism in the latter half of the twentieth century. In 1945, the end of World War II also marked the beginning of the Cold War with Truman's proclamation that the nation's coastal territories extended 200 miles out to sea. By 1947, Truman's annexation of Micronesia, a violation of international law, "actually tripled the size of the United States."<sup>13</sup> In Okinawa and parts of occupied Japan, the United States established a military government to manage the nation's surrender and its Westernization. The expanded military influence also led to the construction of military bases throughout Japan and Okinawa, where in the latter, the United States armed forces began a brutal campaign that later became known as the "bulldozers and bayonets" (*jyuuken to burudoza*). Soldiers forcibly took Okinawan farmlands at the point of the bayonet, requisitioning about eighteen-thousand hectares of land, or eight percent of the prefecture's land, and displacing forty thousand landowners and twelve thousand households. This mass-scale land appropriation violated the Hague Convention 1907 against the confiscation of private property and for Okinawans, meant the loss of their "homes, family graves, and sacred sites."<sup>14</sup> These appropriated lands eventually became the bases from which the United States expanded its military influence in the Asian-Pacific, with its militarization accelerating with its intervention and so-called police action in civil war in Korea. The beginnings of the Korean War saw the signing of the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty in

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 31.

<sup>14</sup> Gavan McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 78.

1950, which among other items, asserted its influence over not only Japan but the “maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East,” through the use by “land, air and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan.”<sup>15</sup>

The US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty reflects the rhetorical strategies by which the United States legitimized its territorial landgrabs and exercise of military power, drawing on a language of benevolence and liberation in the service of “international peace and security.” The US policy of containment of Soviet communism had largely been successful by 1949, according to its architect, historian and analyst George F. Kennan. Despite its success, the United States repeated again its interventions in a foreign civil war with Viet Nam in an almost mirror image. The Korean War erupted from a civil war that grew out of the post-colonial context of Japanese colonialism in Korea. It was a precursor to the events in Viet Nam that grew out of the unrest of Vietnamese anti-colonial uprisings against French colonialism. While expanding its military and political influence in foreign affairs, the United States also expanded its carceral program in domestic contexts, using strategies of surveillance, riot control, military weapons, interrogation, and torture in suppression anti-racist rebellions both at home and abroad. Looking back on the forty years of US military actions, Kennan himself expressed his grave concerns at a lecture for Grinnell College in 1984 about the “militarization not only of our thought but of our lives.”<sup>16</sup> From this retrospective of a

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<sup>15</sup> Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States of America. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html>. Accessed April 11, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020), 2.

half-century of increasing militarization, the aftermaths of World War II and US Cold War policy had not brought about the last days of colonialism in Asia and the Pacific but instead the dawn of a new era of increasing US military presence that maintained extant structures of settler colonial land appropriation, resource extraction, and economic influence.

This dissertation examines the aftermaths of Cold War militarism and settler colonialism in Asia and the Pacific. “Aftermaths of Empires: Cold War Narratives of the Black Pacific” focuses on the “aftermaths” as sites of contested meaning-making that, throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century have shaped both the hegemonic narratives of Cold War liberalism and the counter-hegemonic critiques of US militarism. I read the latter as counter-hegemonic critiques within the framework of the Black Pacific, bringing together writings by Pacific Islanders, Black feminists, Asian Americans, and Okinawans, who provide a different perspective of the Cold War and its prolonged aftermaths. Indeed, as Jodi Kim’s influential work has shown, the Cold War itself must be understood not only as a historical period but also a production of knowledge maintained through the “enduring temporality of Cold War racial grammars and epistemologies.”<sup>17</sup> Such modes of knowledge production continually articulate the threat in Asia, whose potential for violence and impingement on freedom must be maintained through what Kim elsewhere calls the “settler garrison.”<sup>18</sup> Within this structural form of racial and neoliberal governance, the US military bases extend the nation’s frontiers, showing the continuities between

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<sup>17</sup> Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press 2010), 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

settler colonialism and the settler garrison. Similarly, Amy Kaplan has argued, imperialism is a “network of power relations” rather than a “monolithic system of domination,” in which ideas of foreignness and domesticity are entangled as the United States expanded its frontiers.<sup>19</sup> My analysis turns to the periods of US militarized expansion after World War II, yet as the aftermaths of this infrastructure of violence reveal, much of Cold War settler security continues the racial logics of European and Japanese settler colonialisms in Asia and the Pacific. What distinguishes US militarism from these earlier modes of establishing economic liberalism, particularly in the Pacific, is that the United States reframes its expansionism as liberation from earlier colonial rule. It is colonialism by a new name.

The aftermaths show multiple ruptures within this network of domination. Put differently, while variously situated, these literatures counter the fictions of benevolence used to legitimize US militarism by showing its wake and the aftermaths of militarism, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism that comprise the foundations of Cold War settler security. The aftermaths make visible the prolonged impact of settler colonialism, carceral mechanisms of violence and control, racial governance, and capitalist extractions. In bringing these literatures together, I argue that the aftermaths reveal the racial logics of settler security in shaping the Cold War, which has not ended but continues in modified forms of carceral and racial governance. Throughout the dissertation, I employ the “aftermaths” as an analytic for theorizing the destructions left behind in the wake of these processes, at the same time that the literatures lumine the possibilities of world-making. The

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<sup>19</sup> Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 14.

literatures I analyze therefore imagine otherwise for ways to persist beyond mechanisms and regimes of violence.

### **1.1 Writing (in) the Aftermaths: Benevolence, Racial Liberalism, and (At)tendant Care**

The role of the United States as a keeper of the peace was a carefully crafted image that took shape as international attitudes increasingly disapproved of colonialism, largely in response to independence movements and struggles for decolonization swept the so-called Third World. Colonial powers, including Britain, France, Spain, Japan, and the Netherlands, faced a reckoning for their centuries of violence. Within this atmosphere of unrest, the United States had to carefully narrate its militarization of Asia and the Pacific in the language of “security and prosperity,” rhetoric enshrined in the US-Japan Mutual Security Agreement. The racial attitudes that had culminated in the white supremacist fascism and authoritarianism of the superpowers in World War II also required careful recalibration, as the United States reached for a rhetoric of racial liberalism, of equality for all and lofty ideals of peace, prosperity, and freedom emblemized in the ideology of American exceptionalism.

These seeming contradictions between racial liberalism and the realities of US expansions, including increased militaristic aggression and settler colonial land appropriation, were not contradictions at all but instead a reflection of the interlaced workings of American-style power in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries bolstered by fictions of benevolence. Indeed, as Ellen D. Wu has shown, discourses of racial liberalism obscured the realities of US expansionism, through

the figure of the Asian model minority, a figure whose economic mobility promoted the idea—if not the actuality—of American democratic and racial equality. Wu writes the entry of Asian Americans “bolstered the framing of US hegemony abroad as benevolent—an enterprise that mirrored the move toward racial integration at home.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Mary L. Dudziak has convincingly demonstrated that the granting of civil rights to African Americans was an effectual response to Cold War anxieties over communism and national security, with the Truman Administration adopting a “pro-civil rights posture as part of its international agenda to promote democracy and contain communism.”<sup>21</sup> Perceived attitudes toward racial inequality also informed the Kennedy Administration’s military activities in the Pacific Islands. On a nine-person task force sent to Micronesia to assess the possibilities of ensuring the region’s permanent dependence on the United States for economic and material aid, the head of the task force, Anthony M. Solomon noted expansion and development in the area would require a careful assessment since coerced dependence through use of force or colonial administration would position the United States “counter to the anti-colonial movement that has just about completed sweeping the world,” in addition to “breaching its own policy since World War I of not acquiring new territorial possessions.” Rather than overt colonial administration, therefore, Solomon suggested the “delicate problem of Micronesia” would require an exercise of soft power to make independence

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<sup>20</sup> Ellen D. Wu, *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, “Desegregation as Cold War Imperative,” *Stanford Law Review* 41, no. 1 (1988), 81.

as part of the trusteeship agreement seem “a dead issue.”<sup>22</sup> As Shaun Myers notes in another context, the “language of benevolence” appropriates the rhetoric of “cooperation,” “assistance,” and “aid” in order to mask the use of military and economic force as altruistic assistance meant to bring about equality, rather than domination.<sup>23</sup> Yet, as chapter one reveals, the slow violence resulting in the “ecological aftermaths” in Banaba and the Marshall Islands belies the utopian promises of development and benevolence, showing instead the material and generational traumas resulting from settler colonial resource extractions and land appropriation.

“Aftermaths of Empires” argues that the aftermaths of US expansionism are where the language of benevolence is both produced and contested as sites of meaning making. The promise of racial liberalism as the basis of equality falls apart when looking at sites of US expansionism in Korea and Vietnam (chapter three), or at sites of state carceral violence that used military weapons and tactics to quell rebellions against racism in the Black neighborhoods of Detroit and Los Angeles (chapter two). In a similar vein, the ecological aftermaths following US land appropriation and military base construction in the Marshall Islands (chapter one) and Okinawa (chapter four) also reveal the protracted devastation that results from US carceral and extractive economies. In Asia and the Pacific, the development of the US military infrastructure (through weapons arsenals,

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<sup>22</sup> *The Solomon Report: America's Ruthless Blueprint for the Assimilation of Micronesia* (Honolulu, HI: Friends of Micronesia, Micronesian Independent, Tia Belau, 1971), 4. <http://hdl.handle.net/10524/23167>. Accessed August 4, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Shaundra Myers, “Transnational Visions of Black Women Writing,” *African American Literature in Transition, 1980-1990*, eds. D. Quentin Miller and Rich Blint (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 223. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009179355.012>.



nuclear storage and testing facilities, and base construction) also mapped onto existing settler colonial structures introduced in prior decades by Britain, Australia, New Zealand, France, and Japan. Thus, what I call “aftermaths of empires” examines these entanglements of multiple and overlapping imperial formations, which both bolstered and were leveraged as evidence of American colonialism as an exceptional and different kind of empire.

Throughout this dissertation, I draw on the “aftermath” as an analytic that gets taken up in writings by Pacific Islander, Black, Asian American, and Okinawan writers in different ways. In modern usage, the ‘aftermath’ describes an ongoing destruction following a destructive event. Often used to describe the fallout from war, the aftermath is a prolongation of the destructiveness, one that casts a long shadow on what follows. Writing in the aftermath occurs in what Mary Louise Pratt conceptualizes as “contact zones,” those “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their *aftermaths*.” In the contact zone, writing and knowledge production in the aftermaths is itself a contested act in the struggle for meaning. “Aftermaths of Empires” similarly tracks these asymmetrical relations of power that throughout the twentieth century showed US power and security in the Asia-Pacific to be fundamentally unstable. Indeed, as I argue in chapter two, the debates over Amerasians as children of the aftermaths reflects a “politics of in/security” that exposes the insecurity and instability at the heart of the Cold War enterprise of securitization.

The archaic usage of the “aftermath” derives from agricultural practices, in which the mowing (math) of a crop would produce a new growth. Agricultural practices have long been tied to militarism in settler colonial contexts, as Seneca scholar John C. Mohawk explains. In the early

beginnings of agriculture, Mohawk writes, “civilizations sent armies in search of goods such as mineral deposits, fishing grounds, slaves, wood, agricultural produce, tribute, and any number of other sources of wealth.”<sup>24</sup> The aftermaths that emerge from these sites of militarized devastation reflect what Ann Laura Stoler calls the “aftershocks of empire,” which orients the reader not to ruins as memorialization of the past but instead its material and social remains:

This is not a turn to ruins as memorialized and large-scale monumental ‘leftovers’ or relics—although these come into our purview as well—but rather to what people are ‘left with’: to what remains, to the aftershocks of empire, to the material and social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things. Such effects reside in the corroded hollows of landscapes, in the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes and in the microecologies of matter and mind. The focus then is not on inert remains but on their vital refiguration.<sup>25</sup>

Like Stoler’s rumination, “Aftermaths of Empires” looks to the “vital refiguration” that endures despite loss, destruction, and carceral violence in the everyday and in expressive culture. The endurance of loss in the aftermaths complicates any clear demarcation of post/colonial historicity by making visible that which lingers and what people are left with—there is no “after” as a clear break from the past but instead a thereafter that holds space for new growths in the ruins of old violences and their maths. The vital refiguration of critical thought and the cultivation of new

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<sup>24</sup> John C. Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies: A History of Conquest and Oppression in the Western World* (Santa Fe, NM: Clearlight Publishers, 2000), 32.

<sup>25</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, “Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008), 194.

vibrant possibilities from the ruins of imperialism, settler colonialism and militarism therefore attests to the creative capacities of people living under occupation to invent new possibilities and survive.

Yet it is important not to let the “vital refiguration” or the new growth that emerges from sites of overwhelming violence be over-determined by the legacies of colonial traumas. (At)tending to the aftermath as an act of care can also alert us as readers to what persists and survives violence, to a future yet determined by it. June Jordan’s “Aftermath” models this type of attending to as the speaker labors in love for with/in the remains: “I am tired from this digging up of human bodies/ no one loved enough to save from death.”<sup>26</sup> In the hush of some unnamed and unspeakable violence that has produced mass death, the speaker nonetheless enters into this space, her toil an act of care. This care is what Shaundra Myers calls “Third World care,” an act of “intimately attending to ‘the shipped,’ to those rendered fungible yet indispensable within the processes of imperialism and modern statecraft.”<sup>27</sup> Such acts of care of embodied, physical, and present, as well as textual, cultivating through attentiveness “care in the voids created by empire.”<sup>28</sup> Such care becomes a labor of love in a zone of indifference, a toil and labor of remembering as care for the remains even if they could not be saved from death. The speaker and Jordan’s poetry as I further show in chapter two, is an exemplar of what Robbie Shilliam writes of as knowledge cultivation, where “to cultivate knowledge is to till, to turn matter around and fold

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<sup>26</sup> Jordan, “Aftermath,” 416.

<sup>27</sup> Myers, “Transnational Visions of Black Women Writing,” 224.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

back on itself so as to rebind and encourage growth.” “Decolonial science,” Shilliam observes, “*cultivates* knowledge, it does not *produce* knowledge.”<sup>29</sup> (At)tending the aftermath is part of this cultivation of knowledge against the project of empire, an act of caring and tending even and despite the indifference of those who did the mowing. These writings—by Pacific Islanders, Black feminists, Asian Americans, and Okinawans—cultivate the Black Pacific as a decolonial knowledge of the Cold War.

## 1.2 Racial (In)Formation, Relationality, and Narratives of the Black Pacific

Asian American studies has shown how Cold War security in Asia and the Pacific formed through the transpacific entanglements of Japanese and US imperialisms that profoundly shaped Asian American subjectivity and cultural productions throughout the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup> Scholars

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<sup>29</sup> Robbie Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 24-25.

<sup>30</sup> See Janet Hoskins and Viet Thang Nguyen, editors, *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2014); Daniel Y. Kim, *The Intimacies of Conflict: Cultural Memory and the Korean War* (New York: New York University Press, 2020); Jinah Kim, *Postcolonial Grief: The Afterlives of the Pacific Wars in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019); Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Culture and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho, editors, *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

whose work concerns US militarism in the Pacific, particularly in the wars in Korea and Vietnam have shown how critical Asia was to the project of US empire. Their contributions have shown that more than an “indirect effect,” as the editors of *Aftermath: The Asia* claim, the events in Asia were critical to the refashioning of US empire as a benevolent savior from Japanese and, to a lesser degree, European colonialisms. Jinah Kim notes that in his reflections on the “American Century,” the editor of *Time-Life* magazine Henry Luce failed to recognize that US empire could only be built “on the ruins of Japanese imperialism.”<sup>31</sup> The repeated figuration of the “Asian figure in distress” precipitated the articulation of a need for the US as paternal, benevolent savior, an ideological positioning that was itself “anchored to a racial-colonial logic and to structures of white supremacy.”<sup>32</sup> A more recent turn in Asian American and transpacific studies has begun to examine how this entanglement of empires and the racial-colonial underpinnings of US empire effectively extended the frontiers of its settler empire from the Pacific coast into Asia and the Pacific. What Jodi Kim calls the “settler garrison” underscores this continuity between US settler colonialism on the North American continent and the land grabs and dispossession of Indigenous people in Asia and the Pacific. While not permanent settler colonies meant for habitation, Kim observes there is “a permanence to the enduring spatial logic and architecture of military bases, camptowns, and facilities.”<sup>33</sup> The extensive network of military bases that the nation built in Asia

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<sup>31</sup> Jinah Kim, *Postcolonial Grief: The Afterlives of the Pacific Wars in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 7.

<sup>32</sup> Kim, *Postcolonial Grief*, 6-8.

<sup>33</sup> Kim, *Settler Garrison*, 82.

and the Pacific following the security agreement with Japan constituted an “empire of bases” that transformed the older forms of colonial outposts military bases and the institutions of the state. What distinguishes these military bases from older colonial outposts is that they’re “no longer needed to fight wars but are instead pure manifestations of militarism and imperialism.”<sup>34</sup>

This dissertation joins recent these scholars in transpacific and Asian American studies to examine the aftermaths of empires and the formation of Cold War security vis-à-vis US military bases but routes the engagement of those fields through the Black Pacific. This nascent field has emerged in the last twenty years and taken two directions. The one focuses on the “Black Pacific” as coined by Bernard Scott Lucious as a cultural and critical site of counter-hegemonic inquiry shaped by the experiences of African American military men, Asian women, and their Afro-Amerasian children.<sup>35</sup> Scholars working in these fields, including Lucious himself, as well as Vince Schleitwiler, Etsuko Taketani, and Yuichiro Onishi, have helped to lumine the ways that Black-Asian relationalities, migrations, and cultural enmeshments have shaped the transpacific circulations, namely between the United States and Asian countries of the Northern Pacific or the Pacific Rim.<sup>36</sup> The other route that studies of the Black Pacific have taken is to center the “Pacific

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<sup>34</sup> Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Bernard Scott Lucious, “In the Black Pacific: Testimonies of Vietnamese Afro-Amerasian Displacements,” in *Displacements and Diasporas: Asians in the Americas*, eds. Wanni W. Anderson and Robert G. Lee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2005), 122-155.

<sup>36</sup> See Yuichiro Onishi, *Transpacific Antiracism: Afro-Asian Solidarity in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Black America, Japan, and Okinawa* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Vince Schleitwiler, *Strange Fruit of the Black Pacific: Imperialism’s Racial Justice and Its Fugitives* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Etsuko Taketani, *The*

Question” in the field, namely by routing and rooting their analysis within Oceania. Gary Okihiro, Robbie Shilliam, Nitasha Tamar Sharma, Quito Swan, and Bernida Webb-Binder all lumine the complexities of Blackness and Indigeneity that surface when centering Oceania rather than treating it as a flyover expanse.<sup>37</sup> The conceptualizations of Blackness and Indigeneity decenter the dominance of US racial formations and, as Teresia Teaiwa notes, reminds readers and students that “America does not have all the answers for how to deal with race and racism.”<sup>38</sup> The histories of European and US settler colonialisms as well as the different ways that Blackness becomes entangled and differentiated from Indigeneity in the Pacific show some of the larger discursive considerations that come to the fore when centering Oceania in Black Pacific studies.

What I conceptualize as a Black Pacific framework is an attempt to theorize the crossroads of these fields to examine the entanglements of Black, Indigenous, and Asian racial form(ation)s

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*Black Pacific Narrative: Geographic Imaginings of Race and Empire Between the World Wars* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> See Gary Okihiro, “Toward a Black Pacific,” in *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, and Politics*, edited by Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 313-330; Nitasha Tamar Sharma, *Hawai‘i Is My Haven: Race and Indigeneity in the Black Pacific* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021); Robbie Shilliam, *The Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles and Oceanic Connections* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 24-25; Quito Swan, *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-Colonialism, and the African World* (New York: New York University Press, 2022); Bernida Webb-Binder, “Affinities and Affiliations: Black Pacific Art in the United States and Aotorea/New Zealand, 1948-2008,” PhD dissertation (Cornell University, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> Teresia Teaiwa, “Mela/Nesian Histories, Micro/Nesian Poetics,” *Black and Blue in the Pacific: Afro-Diasporic Women Artists on History and Blackness*, *Amerasia Journal* 43, no. 1 (2017): 169-178, <https://doi.org/10.17953/aj.43.1.169-178>, 177.

and the racial logics of anti-Blackness and Indigenous erasure that underpin Cold War settler security. The “Cold War narratives of the Black Pacific” are thus the counter-hegemonic literatures and critiques by Pacific Islanders, Black feminists, Asian and Asian American writers. As I discussed in the previous section, the Cold War is itself an organizing logic that produces ideas about Asia and extends the racial logics of the historical period well beyond the period indexed as the formal cold war between the United States and Soviet Union. Therefore, the Cold War narratives I study similarly span a broader historical period than the one circumscribed by US-Soviet relations. Indeed, chapters one and four especially show the structuring mechanisms of European and Japanese settler colonialisms, which shape and also precede US militarism and its security formation in the Asian-Pacific. All of the chapters also show that articulations of Blackness and Indigeneity were central to the US Cold War security formation. The incorporation of Blackness not only became a Cold War defense against charges of US white supremacy but also the constitutive element of US expansionism into Asia. Chapter three on representations of Black Amerasians underscores how racial (in)formation worked to position the United States as a (white) savior, where the vilification of the Asian Other was contingent on stressing both Asian anti-Black prejudice and racializing the Asian figure in distress as a Black Amerasian in need of rescuing. Such Cold War racial logics also emerge in the late twentieth century through the figure of the Asian model minority, such that emphasis on the Black Amerasian person’s potential industriousness and model behavior undergirded the immigration and reunification narratives that led to the Amerasian Immigration Act of 1982.

In theorizing the Black Pacific as a framework, what I am calling the “Black Pacific” does not circumscribe is not a definitive place. As Arif Dirlik has shown, names like “Pacific Rim,”



“Pacific,” or “Pacific Basin” are themselves productive terms that construct the idea of regions and areas they purportedly describe, whether for study, competition, economic development, trade, war, or militarization.<sup>39</sup> Such discourses of region rarely ever include the Pacific Islands, despite their critical role in the development of US security. The formation of area studies also came out of these regionalizing constructs as Cold War governmental concerns over security produced institutional disciplines devoted to understanding the “others” in these places.<sup>40</sup> The Black Pacific if theorized as a coherent and constricted place also may produce these ideas about otherness and the people in those places that, however inadvertently, become exclusionary or generate erasures in making boundaries. Such boundaries may lead to what Lisa Kahaleole Hall calls the “siloeing of knowledge,” where the rigid boundaries of disciplinary thought don’t allow us to hear how different disciplines may be in conversation. Writing from her position as a Kanaka Maoli scholar of Indigenous studies, Hall writes that reading the work of Black women writers such as Toni Cade Bambara taught her about relationality. It was their stories and storytelling that offered relationality against this siloeing: “Stories help us remember who we are and how we are related, but they also

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<sup>39</sup> Dirlik, “The Asia-Pacific Idea,” 16.

<sup>40</sup> For the Cold War basis of area studies, see Bruce Cumings, “Boundary Displacement: Area Studies and International Studies During and After the Cold War,” in *Universities and Empire: Money and Politics in the Social Sciences During the Cold War*, edited by Christopher Simpson (New York: The New Press, 1998), 159-188. For a reflection on how studying structuring processes—rather than places—by focusing on militarism, capitalism, and war may undo the boundary-making and disciplining of area studies, see Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho, editors, Introduction to *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv-xlvi.

create those relationships.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, this dissertation attempts to work around the siloing of fields and literary canons by bringing together writings by Pacific Islanders, Black feminists, and Asian/Americans in theorizing a Black Pacific framework. Together, their writings “of” the Black Pacific are what constitute the framework, rather than writings produced out of a distinct and defined area of analysis.

There are, of course, risks to this kind of comparative framework in treating literary canons as reflections of their racialized writers, rather than recognizing that literature, as Colleen Lye notes, is itself a “racial form” that produces ideas of race and racial formation.<sup>42</sup> Just as regionalization produces places and the values associated to those places in dominant discourse, racial forms produces and shapes ideas of racialization from the perspective of minoritized writers. Bringing various literary canons into conversation therefore requires understanding the complexities of how racial forms also generate ideas about racialized subjectivities. But literature’s radical capacity also lies in cultivating ways to “imagine otherwise,” as Kandice Chuh writes, by theorizing other ways of knowing and being that unsettle or at least come into productive friction with dominant discourses, the siloing of knowledge and anti-colonial, anti-racist critiques.<sup>43</sup> Bernida Webb-Binder notes that Black Pacific art allowed Pacific Black women to cultivate “affinities and affiliations” as a “catalyst for creativity and change.”<sup>44</sup> In my study, it may be that

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<sup>41</sup> Lisa Kahaleole Hall, “More than ‘Two Worlds’: Black Feminist Theories of Difference in Relation,” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 4, no. 1 (spring 2018), 67.

<sup>42</sup> Colleen Lye, “Racial Form,” *Representations* 104, no. 1 (2008): 92-101.

<sup>43</sup> Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Webb-Binder, “Affinities and Affiliations,” 16.

what emerges from these narratives of the Black Pacific are multiple Black Pacifics, their affinities and affiliations crafted through stories and poetry that give situated and partial views of the aftermaths of empires while acting as catalysts for imagining otherwise.

### **1.3 Chapter Overview**

The chapters in this dissertation are organized around the aftermath as an analytic, with each chapter taking up a denotation as a starting point for thinking about how the aftermaths of empires have shaped the buildup of US-dominated settler security. This formation of settler security required not only the buildup and testing of nuclear weapons but also the marshalling of racial logics of anti-Blackness and Indigenous erasure to legitimize land appropriation in Asia and the Pacific. At the same time, while examining the destruction following in the wake of US militarism and its entanglements with Japanese and European settler colonialisms, each chapter also looks for what emerges and persists in refusal of the death drive of empires, pointing us toward ways of knowing and being beyond violence.

Chapter one examines the “long period of destruction” following from US, European, and Japanese militarisms and settler colonialisms in the Pacific. These imperial entanglements laid the foundation for US settler security in the region. Centering Banaba and the Marshall Islands, this chapter shows that discourses of food security and national security converged in their rhetoric of a universal good that justified the displacement of Indigenous islanders. In Banaba, resource extraction and militarized eviscerations by the British Phosphate Commissioners established the

colonial structures of resource extraction in service of Britain, New Zealand, and Australia, but World War II and Japan's invasion of the Pacific Islands threatened to unseat these imperial powers. The post-World War II security landscape was shaped in part by the competing interests of European powers and Japan, with the United States's role in managing islands previously occupied by Japan helping to solidify its hegemony in the Pacific. The British Phosphate Commissioner's forcible displacement of Banabans for the "good of mankind" is echoed in the United States's coerced displacement of Marshallese from Bikini Atoll to end all wars for humankind, thus suggesting the continuities of European settler colonialism and US militarism: both hegemonic powers used a rhetoric of benevolence to excuse their land appropriation and resource extractions. These settler security enterprises betray a racial-colonial logic, premised on racializing Micronesians as black in order to promote dominant discourses of dependency that suggest a delayed modernity in the region. The writings of Teresia Teaiwa and Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner counter these racial logics by tracing the generational traumas that ensue from the forced displacement of Africans, Banabans, and Marshallese. Writing against the telos of settler security and its developmental narrative, both poets offer instead visions of a Black Pacific futurity, that through their poetry creates passages for the survivance of Black and Indigenous Pacific islanders beyond the violence of imperial forms.

The racial logic of US settler security underwent a change throughout the later years of the Cold War era, as white supremacy and racism within the nation ignited critiques of the nation's image as a democratic ruler. The incorporation of Blackness through state-building projects and the inclusion of Asians through rhetorics of racial liberalism and the figure of the model minority point not only to a national Cold War insecurity over the stability of its hegemony in Asia and the

Pacific but also masked the expansion of the carceral state through wars and policing. Chapters two and three take up the complex mechanisms of US anti-Black racism and Asian inclusion that are generated simultaneous to the robust expansion of US militarism. Chapter two examines the buildup of the carceral state through the lens of Black women's writings in the post-1968 and late Cold War years. Audre Lorde, June Jordan, and Toni Cade Bambara expose the continuities in the mechanisms of violence between US policing of African American communities and the militarization and racial terror against Pacific Islanders and Asians. The aftermath as a Black feminist analytic shows how these writers anticipated the "unwanted consequences" of the state's racial violence by grounding their analysis in a critique of its racial-gendered calculus. At the same time, their writings also open up possibilities for relationalities and affinities between marginalized and oppressed groups, allowing their poetry and prose to create networks of care.

Chapter three complicates the terms of solidarity, however, by examining representations of Black Amerasians in US legislative texts and Asian and Asian American art and literature. The emphasis on Asian anti-Blackness bolstered US claims to benevolent goodwill in Asia at a critical moment for the United States and its position in Asia and the Pacific. Following the devastating violence inflicted on Vietnamese during the American War in Viet Nam, the United States sought to recuperate its international image by creating a policy of fast-tracked immigration for Amerasians, often characterized as the children of the aftermath "left behind" after the exit of US troops. Yet the Amerasian Immigration Proposal of 1982 in its textual history shows this proposal was as strategic as it was humanitarian, with a clear aim to continue to station US troops and ameliorate US relations in Indochina. The success of the bill depended not only on the vilification of Asians as inherently anti-Black but also on ignoring the reality of anti-Blackness within the

United States, bolstered by the image of the Asian model minority as evidence of Asian racial capital. Asian American literature of the 1990s responds to these historical events with ambivalence, on the one hand turning a critical lens on anti-Blackness in Asia, and on the other, disavowing the promises of assimilation and entry into the US national citizenry as false hopes that use the rhetoric of racial liberalism while withholding the actual gains it offers. Asian American representations of Black Amerasians also respond to internal race relations to make this critique, thereby nuancing the critique of US Cold War in/securities, which are as much about foreign threats as they are domestic race relations.

The last chapter focuses on one area of ongoing US militarization to examine how anti-Blackness and Indigenous erasure become the architectures of settler security in Okinawa's Black District. Here, I draw on fieldwork, oral histories, and literary close reading methods to trace what persists of Indigenous Okinawan culture throughout the histories of Japanese settler colonialism and US militarism. Okinawa's position at the crux of dual empires and its role as the seat of US militarism starting in 1945 and continuing with the establishment of the United States Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands that formally lasted from 1950-1972 reveals how the settler structure of the US military base has transformed Okinawan relations to land and their Indigenous relationalities with other Okinawans. By focusing on the "Black District" as the "new growth" that emerged after the mowing of Indigenous Okinawan farmlands, this chapter also examines how Blackness itself becomes a constitutive element of spatializing US power and is used to erase Okinawan Indigeneity. In the ruins of a former concentration camp turned camp town turned city after Reversion to Japan in 1972, I trace how the landscape itself has been racialized and gendered in service of this US-Japan settler security structure while drawing on an Indigenous feminist

reading method to read the landscape otherwise, not only for violence but for Indigenous persistence and to find what remains, there, after the mowing.

In mapping a Black Pacific framework through various literary representations, legal histories, oral histories, and place-based fieldwork, this dissertation does not claim to be comprehensive. There are many more stories that have not been included here that could further deepen our understanding of the Black Pacific as a wide field of anti-colonial and anti-racist critique and Black-Indigenous-Asian relationalities. The impact of US and French militarism in the Cold War era in Melanesia, in places like Vanuatu, for example, is not included in this dissertation;<sup>45</sup> nor is there a discussion of the ways that transpacific racial and imperial logics factored into the explosive conflicts of Black-Korean relations in the Los Angeles uprisings of 1992. The Black-Indigenous archipelagic relations in Hawai'i or the Philippines are also of interest, and it is my hope this project points other researchers to enrich our understanding of those connections. Kaplan's cogent conceptualization of imperialism as a network of power relations means that there are multiple nodes in which we might examine the aftermaths of empires while finding ways to imagine otherwise and beyond destruction.

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<sup>45</sup> An essay in which I argue that the focus on Asia has obscured the racial-colonial logics of settler security in Melanesia is currently under review at *Amerasia Journal*.

## 2.0 Ecological Aftermaths: The Cold War, Global Warming, and Black Pacific Futures in the Pacific Islands

*Aftermath* \æftər,mæθ\  
*figurative*

A period or state of affairs following a significant event, esp. when that event is destructive or harmful.

...

That land is mine land,  
It used to be our land,  
But now we're living in the Fiji Islands.  
And though we've had our fair share of problems,  
Our future's full of possibilities.

—Teresia Teaiwa, “Mine Land: An Anthem  
(To the Tune of ‘This Land Is My Land’)”<sup>46</sup>

Teresia Teaiwa’s “Mine Land: An Anthem” revises the settler fantasies of Woodie Guthrie’s American popular song “This Land is Your Land” into a critique of British and European settler colonialisms. Focusing on the aftermaths of phosphate mining on Banaba, the poem traces the ecological devastation and the ensuing displacement of Indigenous Banabans, as the British authorities regulating phosphate mining relocated them from Banaba after World War II to the Kiribati and Fiji islands.<sup>47</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, the British Phosphate Commission—a multi-national corporation comprised of the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand—

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<sup>46</sup> Teresia Teaiwa, “Mine Land: An Anthem (To the Tune of ‘This Land Is My Land’),” in *Searching for Nei Nim’anoa* (Suva, Fiji: Mana Publications, 1995), 5.

<sup>47</sup> Banaba is the Indigenous name for the place that the British would rename Ocean Island during their settler colonial occupation of the Indigenous Pacific island.



mined Banaba (Ocean Island) for its phosphate, a key ingredient in fertilizer for mass agriculture. In revising an American popular song to critique the settler extractions of the British Phosphate Commission, the song's sonic registers map the entanglements of European and US settler colonialisms in the making of Cold War security in the Pacific.

Asian American studies has shown how Cold War security in Asia and the Pacific formed through the transpacific entanglements of Japanese and US imperialisms that profoundly shaped Asian American subjectivity and cultural productions throughout the twentieth century. A more recent turn within Asian American studies has examined these developments within the framework of settler colonial studies, showing how Cold War security formations mapped onto the existing structures and expansions of European and US settler colonialisms, driven by settler capitalist extractions of resources, expanded militarism, and territorial acquisitions that have accelerated climate change.<sup>48</sup> As Jodi Kim has cogently argued, US militarization in Asia and the Pacific expanded its frontiers, forming a “settler garrison” that continued its settler acquisitions of territory through highly mobile garrison units. The Pacific Islands were central to these settler expansions, where in Micronesia after World War II, the United States nearly tripled its territorial holdings in expanding its “continental shelf.”<sup>49</sup> Territorial acquisition was driven by the demands of military weapons development in the arms race against the Soviet Union, with the Pacific Islands becoming a primary testing ground for Operation Crossroads, during which the United States dropped 23

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<sup>48</sup> See Kim, *Settler Garrison*; Erin Suzuki, *Ocean Passages: Navigating Pacific Islander and Asian American Literatures* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2021).

<sup>49</sup> DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*, 31.

atom bombs on Bikini Atoll between 1946-1958. These military campaigns went hand-in-hand with bulking up other forms security, such as global food security, that prior to and throughout World War II had been one of the primary reasons for British and Japanese interests in the phosphate-rich islands of the Pacific, and their effects persist today in the escalation of climate threat in the Pacific. As Katerina Martina Teaiwa wrote in a recent op-ed, “fertiliser prices are soaring. Phosphate is commercially valuable and still critical to mass agriculture. This is the global agriculture we all depend on that has transformed Pacific diets for the worse, and is significantly contributing to climate change.”<sup>50</sup>

The history of militarized security in the Pacific and its environmental impact is more visible and widely known in scholarship on the Cold War, but what has received less attention is the logic of anti-Blackness and Indigenous erasure driving these processes of settler securitization, an elision produced in part by the limited understanding of Blackness in the Pacific through the figure of the Black soldier. As Tiffany Lethabo King notes, Blackness is not a “mere tool of settlement... [but] a constitutive element of settler colonialism’s conceptual order.”<sup>51</sup> It is not only the instrumentalization of Black soldiers in expanding the US settler garrison but rather white

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<sup>50</sup> Katerina Teaiwa, “No More Drinking Water, Little Food: Our Island is a Field of Bones,” *The Guardian*, November 3, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/03/no-more-drinking-water-little-food-our-island-is-a-field-of-bones>. Accessed December 8, 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Tiffany Lethabo King, “Labor’s Aphasia: Toward Antblackness as Constitutive to Settler Colonialism,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society*, June 10, 2014. <https://decolonization.wordpress.com/2014/06/10/labors-aphasia-toward-antblackness-as-constitutive-to-settler-colonialism/>. Accessed January 2, 2023.

supremacy conceptualized vis-à-vis anti-Blackness and Indigenous erasure that forms the racial logic of settler colonialism.

In this chapter, I interrogate the racial logics of settler security in the Pacific by examining these histories of Cold War militarization and resource extraction through the lens of the Black Pacific. As I explained in the introduction, within the still-emerging field of Black Pacific studies, scholarship engaging the transpacific framework has engaged Cold War security and militarism by focusing on the interactions between Asian, Black and Pacific people. In shifting the terrain of engagement in studies of the Cold War from the north Pacific to the south Pacific, scholars who approach Black Pacific studies by rooting their analyses within Oceania have shown how the transpacific approach may limit our understandings of the capaciousness, as well as the different meanings of political and embodied experiences, of Blackness in the Pacific. A more sustained engagement with the Pacific Islands shows how critical ideas of Blackness and Indigeneity were to the formation of Cold War security. In this chapter, I engage with the Black Pacific as a framework and critical convergence of Asian American, Black, and Indigenous Pacific studies. By analyzing the ecological aftermaths of military security and global food security in the Pacific Islands within a Black Pacific framework, I show that it was the logics of anti-Blackness and Indigenous erasure that drove Cold War security formations, even as the military build-up after World War II concerned itself with a policy of containing communism in Asia. To this end, I turn to Pacific Island poets and their depictions of the ecological aftermaths, focusing specifically on Teresia Teaiwa's *Searching for Nei Nim'anoa* and Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*. The juxtaposition of these two collections—the one focused on the lived experience of Blackness in the Pacific and the dispossession of Indigenous Banabans and the other

focused on the racialization of Micronesians as Black and the dispossession of the Indigenous Marshallese—offer two anchor points from which to interrogate the racial logics of settler security while luminizing the Black Pacific as a site not only of critique but also creative productivity shaped by the oceanic rhythms of the “sea of islands.”<sup>52</sup>

By bringing together Black Pacific and Asian American studies, this essay also attempts to confront what Asian Americanists have theorized as the ambivalence of Asian American subjectivity, conditioned as it is by the legacies of wars, militarism, and the repressed “fear of a future return of violence.”<sup>53</sup> Such fears are not unfounded, with recent (and ongoing) developments in expanded US and Japanese militarisms in the Pacific, and the increasingly alarming effects of global warming in the form of rising sea levels, indicating that the future return of violence is likely to occur sooner than later. The stakes are high, and poetry may not offer a singular solution, but the task of persisting in spite of these histories of violence is no less urgent. In conceptualizing a Black Pacific futurity, one that follows Teaiwa in holding space for a “future [that]’s full of possibilities” and what Jetñil-Kijiner’s vision of a horizon not-yet determined by settler capitalist ventures, I hope to offer a generative invitation to think about the confluences between Asian American, Black, and Indigenous Pacific studies to address that future return of violence. Conceptualizing other ways of knowing and being is critical to the task of confronting the very real legacies of the Cold War and the challenges of global warming.

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<sup>52</sup> Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, edited by Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau’ofa (Suva, Fiji: The University of the South Pacific, 1993), 2-16.

<sup>53</sup> Kim, *Postcolonial Grief*, 10.

## 2.1 “Living and Dying”: Navigating Phosphate Pasts and Black Pacific Futures

Teresia Teaiwa’s poetry collection *Searching for Nei Nim’Anoa* draws on her African American, Banaban, and Kiribati heritages to theorize the Black Pacific. A precursor to Bernard Scott Lucious’s influential work on the Black Pacific, Teaiwa positions the collection as a response to Paul Gilroy’s work on the Black Atlantic in which “to search for roots is to discover routes.”<sup>54</sup> Charting the encounters between African and Pacific people within the context of European and US settler colonialisms and chattel slavery, Teaiwa examines what it means to live and create art for Black people in the Pacific who are the “heirs of two oceanic histories.”<sup>55</sup> The Black Pacific she theorizes is both a site of Black and Indigenous encounters in the Pacific conditioned by racial capitalism and settler colonialism as it is a site of critical and cultural production that exceeds these violent histories. Afro-diasporic women artists in the Pacific are “committed to nurturing and growing the techniques of survivance.”<sup>56</sup> *Searching for Nei Nim’Anoa* looks to strategies for nurturing and surviving, for Black Pacific Islanders and for Banabans and i-Kiribati dispossessed by phosphate mining.

Phosphate rock contains phosphorous, which in processed form produces fertilizer. Phosphate and guano were the two primary sources of fertilizer throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Phosphate extraction on Banaba began in 1900, when the Pacific Islands

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<sup>54</sup> Teresia Teaiwa, Preface to *Searching for Nei Nim’anoa*, ix.

<sup>55</sup> Teresia Teaiwa, Introduction to “Black and Blue in the Pacific: Afro-Diasporic Women Artists on History and Blackness,” *Amerasia Journal* 43, no. 1 (2017): 145-193, DOI: 10.17953/aj.43.1.145-192, 146.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Company, a London-based agricultural and fertilizer firm, began prospecting the region for phosphate. With competing settler interests in the region at the time, including Germany, which administered Nauru, Sir Albert Ellis and Henry Denson at the Sydney office scouted Banaba, believing it might have phosphate bedrock. A prospecting trip confirmed their speculations, and on May 3, they drew up a contract with a person they believed to be the Banaban king, binding the Banabans to a one-sided agreement that allowed the Company to mine the atoll for phosphate for nine-hundred ninety-nine years. The British annexed Banaba that same year and incorporated it in 1901 into the British Protectorate, which administered the Kiribati (Gilbert) Islands and the Ellice Islands.<sup>57</sup> When in 1909 Banabans held up phosphate mining for three years by refusing to lease any more of their lands, an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* lamented that “less than 500 Ocean Island-born natives can be allowed to prevent the mining and export of a produc[t] of such immense value to all *the rest of mankind*.”<sup>58</sup> Unconcerned with the impact of phosphate mining on the land and the Banabans, the Company ramped up phosphate extraction and export at an astronomical scale to meet the demands of global food supply. Australia, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand eventually formed the British Phosphate Commission in 1920, and extraction continued at a steady pace until World War II.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Katerina Martina Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 42-47.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island*, 17, emphasis added.

<sup>59</sup> Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island*, 42-47.

Facing the threat of Japanese invasion of Banaba, the Commission abandoned the Banabans, believing they would receive less brutal treatment being “non-white” natives.<sup>60</sup> After the war, repossession of the islands became a central concern, not only to reestablish the mining industry but to assure the security of the Pacific overall. Two days after the Japanese surrender brought a close to World War II, the Directors of Intelligence of the British Government convened the chiefs of staff from the Royal Air Force, the Naval Fleet, the War Office, and Air Marshall to address the administrative control of the Pacific trust territories. A key item on their agenda was the administrative control of the phosphate-rich islands of Nauru and Ocean Island:

The committee expressed their agreement with the terms of a draft telegram to the Joint Staff Mission prepared by the Dominion Office agreeing to the proposal contained in a Joint Staff Mission telegram for the acceptance of surrender in Nauru and Ocean Islands on the understanding that the Australian Commander signal on behalf of the theatre commander and also on behalf of the United Kingdom in the case of Ocean Island, and on behalf of the theatre commander and also on behalf of Australia in the case of Nauru Island, and instructed the Secretary to arrange for its dispatch.<sup>61</sup>

The note on the surrender of Nauru and Ocean Island is perhaps unremarkable, but when read in the context of a meeting of British intelligence officers, the centrality of global food production to

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> “CAB 79/38/12.” CAB – Records of the Cabinet Office. The National Archives, Kew. September 4, 1945. <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C9191746>. Accessed 7 July 2022.

the region's security comes into sharp focus. Two islands on the "empires' edge" had become a central concern of European and American powers.<sup>62</sup> Even before the war, it was understood that phosphate was a critical element in food and military security. In an appeal to Congress for a national policy concerning phosphorus production, President Roosevelt stated, "I cannot overemphasize the importance of phosphorous not only to agriculture and soil conservation but also the physical health and economic security of the people of the Nation."<sup>63</sup> The urgency became greater still in the post-World War II building up Cold War security, as the United States, Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand wrestled for control of phosphate islands that Japan had occupied during the war. When it came to light that under Supreme Commander Douglas MacArthur's order, the United States had continued employing Japanese laborers along with American contractors in mining phosphate on Anguar Island, the Australian Embassy shot off an aide-mémoire to the office of Dean Acheson, US Under Secretary of State, demanding an explanation. Three years out from a peace settlement with Japan, when developments for its occupation and control were still under way, "the existence and penetration of Japanese in the area under United States' trusteeship" raised alarm about a situation that "was counter to the trusteeship agreement and threatened the future security of the region."<sup>64</sup> In implementing its own phosphate

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<sup>62</sup> Sasha Davis, *The Empires' Edge: Militarization, Resistance, and Transcending Hegemony in the Pacific* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2015).

<sup>63</sup> Quoted in Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island*, 28.

<sup>64</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of Northeast Asian Affairs (Borton)," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947, The Far East, Volume VI*, Office of the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1947v06/d215>. Accessed July 13, 2022.



extraction in the region based on infrastructure that Japan had established in Micronesia during its occupation prior to and during the war, the administration of phosphate islands brought US Cold War policy in conflict with competing European settler extractions. More than mere fertilizer, phosphate would play a central role in food and political security in the region.

The ecological aftermaths of these settler security formations that comprised the Cold War policies in the Pacific reveal how profoundly resource extraction and militarization altered the living relationship of Pacific Islanders and their ancestral lands. An “ecology” is a “study of the relationships between people, social groups, and their environment,” and while the “aftermath” captures the prolonged “period of destruction” that ensues from a “destructive or harmful event.”<sup>65</sup> The ecological aftermaths are thus not only environmental but social, registering the material relation between the body and the land, where environmental evisceration accumulates in “untidy attritional lethality that moves through the tissue, blood and bones...moving through as well the living body of the land itself.”<sup>66</sup> In the context of settler security, the ecological aftermaths not only prove the assertion that “land is life”—because the land provides the very means of living—but also register the material connection of Indigenous living that is often directly tied to the health of the land. Disrupting that relationship through displacement of Indigenous islanders and the evisceration of their islands and atolls produced ontological and epistemological ruptures, the effects from which would bear out across generations.

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<sup>65</sup> “Ecology,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press. Accessed June 2022.

<sup>66</sup> Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 200.

Teresia Teaiwa's "Mine Land" discussed earlier shows these ruptures and the generational effects that followed from the British Phosphate Commission's mining of Banaba and the forced relocation of Banabans from their home. The poem starts:

This land is mine land,  
It used to be our land,  
From Tabiang to Tabwewa,  
From Buakonikai, to Uma,  
Birds made this land for posterity.<sup>67</sup>

Once the Pacific Islands Company commended mining in 1900, they quickly changed the traditional land ownership system on Banaba and consolidated Banabans into districts: Tabiang, Tabwewa, Buakonikai, and Uma. British colonial restructuring introduced a wide set of transformations in Banaban political structures, social norms, land and cultural practices, and ultimately, Banabans ways of being, knowing, and living in relation to land and sea.<sup>68</sup> As her sister Katerina Martina Teaiwa writes, in Gilbertese (the language of Kiribati), "Te aba' thus means both the land and the people simultaneously; there is a critical ontological unity. When speaking of land, one does not say *au aba*, 'my land,' but *abau*, 'me-land.' Te aba is thus an integrated epistemological and ontological complex linking people in deep corporeal and psychic ways to each other, to their ancestors, to their history, and to their physical environment."<sup>69</sup> In Teresia

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<sup>67</sup> Teaiwa, "Mine Land," 5.

<sup>68</sup> Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island*, 12-19.

<sup>69</sup> Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island*, 7-8.

Teaiwa's poem, referring to Banaba as "mine land" indexes an ontological shift that has already taken place. "Mine land" can be read in two ways, registering the colonial gaze of the land as a land of phosphate mines and the Indigenous Banaban perspective in which the "me land" expressed in the Kiribati *abau* has become "mine land." In both readings, "mine land" articulates a disruption of the ontological unity between Banabans and their land, ancestors, and history.

The poem's four stanzas traverse time and space, showing the different scales at which phosphate mining has disrupted Indigenous relations to land. While the formation of districts on Banaba occurred after the arrival of the Pacific Islands Company, Teaiwa maintains the Kiribati spelling rather than the Anglicized spellings used in the British Phosphate Commissioners archives (e.g. "Uma" is Anglicized as "Ooma" and "Tabwewa" as "Tapiwa").<sup>70</sup> The Kiribati spelling foregrounds the ongoing presence of Indigenous epistemes at the linguistic level. However, this epistemological unity becomes distanced the further the poem's viewpoint—and therefore the Banabans—moves from Banaba to Kiribati and later Fiji Island. This spatial distancing is mirrored in the temporal distancing, as the prolonged displacement impacts generations of Banabans: "And now Ocean Island fertilizes their land/ And though they gave us a bit of their money,/ They left us with all kinds of poverty."<sup>71</sup> Here, Ocean Island has been annexed into the settler grammar as the British Phosphate Commission has systematically stripped the island of phosphate and dispossessed Banabans of the land that once sustained their ancestors and generations before them, thus resulting in generational poverty.

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<sup>70</sup> Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island*, xix.

<sup>71</sup> Teaiwa, "Mine Land," 5.

This history of Indigenous elimination under settler colonialism is entangled with the histories of chattel slavery in “Traveller,” where Teaiwa maps these historical processes that have structured the Black Pacific:

Banabans  
deprived  
of their land  
and  
spirited  
across the sea  
to  
a foreign country

Africans  
deprived  
of their blood  
and  
spirited  
across the sea  
to  
a foreign country.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Teresia Teaiwa, “Travellers,” *Searching for Nei Nim’anoa*, 4.

“Travellers” traces the *longue durée* of European and US settler extractions and racial capitalism and the oceanic histories that have shaped the Black Atlantic and the Black Pacific. The poem begins by examining the historical forced displacement of Banabans and Africans respectively, depriving Banabans “of their land” and Africans “of their blood.” The parallel structure of each stanza and the repetition of “spirited across the sea” connect their oceanic histories while illustrating the specific material and ontological ruptures—of land, of blood—that are the roots of Banaban and African dispossession.

Both Black and Native studies scholars have articulated that the legacies of slavery and settler colonialism continue to bear out across generations because these are structures, rather than events. Saidiya Hartman writes “black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.”<sup>73</sup> Both living and dying are simultaneously produced by the racial calculus that devalues Black life as property and disposable in the racial calculus of anti-Blackness. Christina Sharpe explains that this racial calculus is so totalizing it constitutes a weather: “antiblackness is pervasive *as* climate...it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies.”<sup>74</sup> Sharpe continues, “when the only certainty is the weather that produces a pervasive climate of antiblackness, what must we know in order to move through these environments in

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<sup>73</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 6.

<sup>74</sup> Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 106.

which the push is always toward Black death?”<sup>75</sup> Native feminists write succinctly that “settler colonialism is a structure, and not an event, that continues to shape the everyday lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.”<sup>76</sup> The contemporariness of settler colonialism has been invisibilized to further settler claims of being “native” to a place while systematically denying Indigenous people futurity. Placing Indigenous people at the center of theorizing futurity further reveals that against the genocidal logics of Indigenous erasure through eugenics, forced, sterilization, and forced assimilation, “proposing to invest in ‘no future’ seems not only irrelevant to Indigenous peoples, but a rehashing of previous settler colonial tactics.”<sup>77</sup> Within the ongoing and persistent structures of settle colonialism and racial capitalism, an insistence on futurity is a necessary response to the totalizing atmosphere of anti-Blackness and Indigenous erasure.

Teaiwa’s “Travellers” maps this futurity, i.e., a Black Pacific futurity, first by the structures that reproduce slavery’s afterlives and genocidal drive of settler colonialism. The “travellers” generations still endure these structures, as the dispossession and displacement of the their ancestors generations before continues to imperil their lives in the twentieth century:

Banabans  
living and dying  
on

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, “Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy,” *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (spring 2013), 27.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 24.

canned protein, white starch and  
phosphate money

African-Americans

living and dying

on synthetic protein, white powder

and credit cards—and TELEVISION.<sup>78</sup>

The consumption of “canned protein, white starch and/ phosphate money” among Banabans and the “synthetic protein, white power/ and credit cards—and TELEVISION” among African Americans are the results of a produced dependency. These cycles of consumption reflect what Katerina Martina Teaiwa notes has been the long-term devastation of the phosphate industry on Ocean Island, where phosphate produced the fertilizer necessary for global food consumption at the same time that it “consumed” the island and its people, producing dependency among “Banabans [who] came to rely upon phosphate royalties and imported water, rice, canned goods, and other productions.”<sup>79</sup> The means to acquire the “good life” under late capitalism (phosphate money, credit cards) feed into the dependency cycles of Banabans and African Americans, who rely on these means to consume canned or synthetic protein, white starch, white powder. Here, the very products of living and the material means to sustain that life are bound up with the very sources of Black and Indigenous dying. This inseparability of living and dying produces

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<sup>78</sup> Teaiwa, “Travellers,” 4.

<sup>79</sup> Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island*, 19.

generational trauma in the habits of everyday life, distilling the structures of settler colonialism and slavery's afterlives into activities of consumption, addiction, and debt.

Futurity in the wake of slavery and settler colonialism living with the constant “future return of violence,” and yet holding space for a future of possibilities in spite of that brutal structure. The generational traumas that bear out in the consumptive habits of Banabans and descendants of Africans repeats the cycle of violence, producing futures seemingly overdetermined by an unrelenting racial calculus. But the poem shifts that racial grammar, moving from descriptors of Banabans and Africans caught in an endless cycle of living and dying to agential and persistent people “surviving/laughing.” The final lines hold space for the present and a not-yet determined future as the speaker sees Banabans and Africans:

Before me

Behind me<sup>80</sup>

The line break is the space of the present, where people whose lives have been shaped by histories of racial capitalism and settler colonialism still have the space to move toward a futurity not constrained by these pasts.

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<sup>80</sup> Teaiwa, “Travellers,” 4.



## 2.2 “Not Yet Under Water”: Temporality and Indeterminacy in the Marshall Islands

If in Teaiwa’s conceptualization of the Black Pacific, the contemporary dispossession and displacement of Banabans and African Americans revealed the racial logics and structure of European and US settler colonialisms, that same racial logic linking Blackness and Indigeneity would also come to determine US interventions in Micronesia’s development throughout the Cold War. A 1977 article in the *New York Times* exemplifies this viewpoint, warning that the “massive infusion of United States funds into Micronesia has brought problems more reminiscent of inner-city ghettos than of lush tropical islands” (see figure 1).<sup>81</sup> Although within the European racial schematization of the Pacific Islands, it was Melanesians who were racialized as black, the discourses of dependence and delayed modernity used to characterize Micronesian disenfranchisement drew on a similar logic of racial inferiority leveraged against Black and Indigenous populations within the United States. In turning “these islands into an improbable welfare state,” the writer suggested that the United States had created a situation where Micronesians were unwilling or unable “to sever their financial umbilical cord to Washington.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Fox Butterfield, “The Improbable Welfare State,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

# THE IMPROBABLE WELFARE STATE

The massive infusion of United States funds into Micronesia has brought problems more reminiscent of inner-city ghettos than of lush tropical islands.



Perhaps the most telling case of do-goodism gone awry has been the trust territory's American-style liberal arts education, one that prepares high school graduates for white-collar jobs, which exist only in government. Unemployment is high and suicide has become the number one cause of death for the islands' young people.

By Fox Butterfield

**D**COLONIA, Yap. During the early days of the Vietnam War, there used to be a joke in the Pentagon that the best way to defeat the Communists would be to drop Sears catalogues over North and South Vietnam and then

about the same area as the United States, though the actual land mass of the trust territory is only half that of Rhode Island.

Thirty years after officially assuming responsibility for the trust territory from the United Nations in 1947, the United States has turned these islands into an improbable welfare state, the most expensive in the Federal budget. Although in the 60's and early 70's island leaders demanded independence

grass skirts, and men hold council in the District Legislature clad in jainclothes, there are over 1,200 Federal programs available — everything from Head Start and Aid to Dependent Children to care centers for the elderly and free school breakfasts and lunches. There is so much food, in fact, that some parents have gotten into the habit of wandering over to school at meal-time so their children can bring out

extra plates for them.

With their Federal funds, Yap's 8,000 people imported \$1.3 million worth of beer last year, or \$162 worth of beer per person, on an island where the annual per capita income is only \$974. Colonia, a dusty, ramshackle settlement with no visible industry, has 500 new cars, one for every three of its inhabitants — they were bought with part of \$7 million in World War II damage claims which the

Figure 1. "The Improbable Welfare State," *New York Times*, November 27, 1977.

Erin Suzuki explains that discourses of modernity impose a progressive telos of capitalist development that “render Indigenous communities, cultures, and forms of knowledge production as perpetually belated phenomena.”<sup>83</sup> Within these development discourses, “settler colonial projects are premised not only on the management of *territory* and its resources, but also on the

<sup>83</sup> Suzuki, *Ocean Passages*, 165-166.

management of *time*.”<sup>84</sup> Time itself is tethered to capitalist development, and the closer a “civilization” is to the forms of industrialization and racial capitalism against which the settler states defined progress, the more modern and mature it is. In characterizing the forced dependency of Micronesians and the limited compensation they received as an “umbilical cord,” the writer infantilizes Micronesians while simultaneously producing a racializing narrative of Black and Indigenous primitivism and inferiority by comparing Micronesia to inner-city ghettos. The rhetoric of the ‘welfare state’ further ignored that in the same way the racial calculus of the US state enforced the disenfranchisement of African Americans through policies of segregation, redlining, and the ghettoizing of Black neighborhoods, the US state had caused the issue of Micronesian dispossession by removing them from their islands and then airdropping foods and government relief funds to the people it had displaced. The performance of concern in bemoaning the loss of “once lush islands” instead effectively obscures the role of US militarization in producing the dependency in the islands. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey argues, narratives of “romanticized ecology and conservation discourse” fetishize that which militarism has destroyed as a result of “increased maritime territorialism.”<sup>85</sup> The language of “lush tropical islands” romanticizes the islands as fertile, exotic locations, rather than the site of extensive nuclear weapons testing that rendered their ancestral homes uninhabitable.

Micronesian dependence on the US state was a direct consequence of their displacement in service of the US nuclear weapons program and its expansion of settler security. As Georgina

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<sup>84</sup> Suzuki, *Ocean Passages*, 165.

<sup>85</sup> DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*, 30.

Ramsay notes, “displacement is not simply an experience of being disconnected from place...but is also an experience of being disconnected from temporal rhythms of ordinary life.”<sup>86</sup> The displacement from Bikini Atoll to make way for the US Navy’s nuclear weapons testing instantiated the first of several displacements and ruptures to the “rhythms of ordinary life” for the Bikinians. In 1946, the US Navy relocated the Bikinians to Rongerik Atoll, which Bikinian cosmology portrayed “as a form of hell where a demon named Litobora left the fish, coconuts, and pandanus trees poisoned.”<sup>87</sup> These Indigenous stories proved accurate, as within two months of their relocation, Bikinians began suffering from starvation due to inadequate food and water supply and “symptoms matching ciguatera (a type of poisoning from contaminated fish).”<sup>88</sup> In 1948, the U.S. government relocated the Bikinians again to an airstrip on Kwajalein, an atoll that the US Navy still uses as an active military base. One year later, the US government relocated them once more to Kili Island, which was not only smaller than Bikini but also lacked natural lagoons and was surrounded by 10-20 foot waves that made growing food or fishing all but impossible. The Bikinians referred to Kili “as a ‘prison’ island.”<sup>89</sup> The un-livability of the island made it necessary for the US Department of Agriculture to import canned goods and rice for their survival.

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<sup>86</sup> Georgina Ramsay, *Impossible Refuge: The Control and Constraint of Refugee Futures* (Routledge: New York City, 2017), 18.

<sup>87</sup> Davis, *The Empires’ Edge*, 65.

<sup>88</sup> Davis, *The Empires’ Edge*, 65.

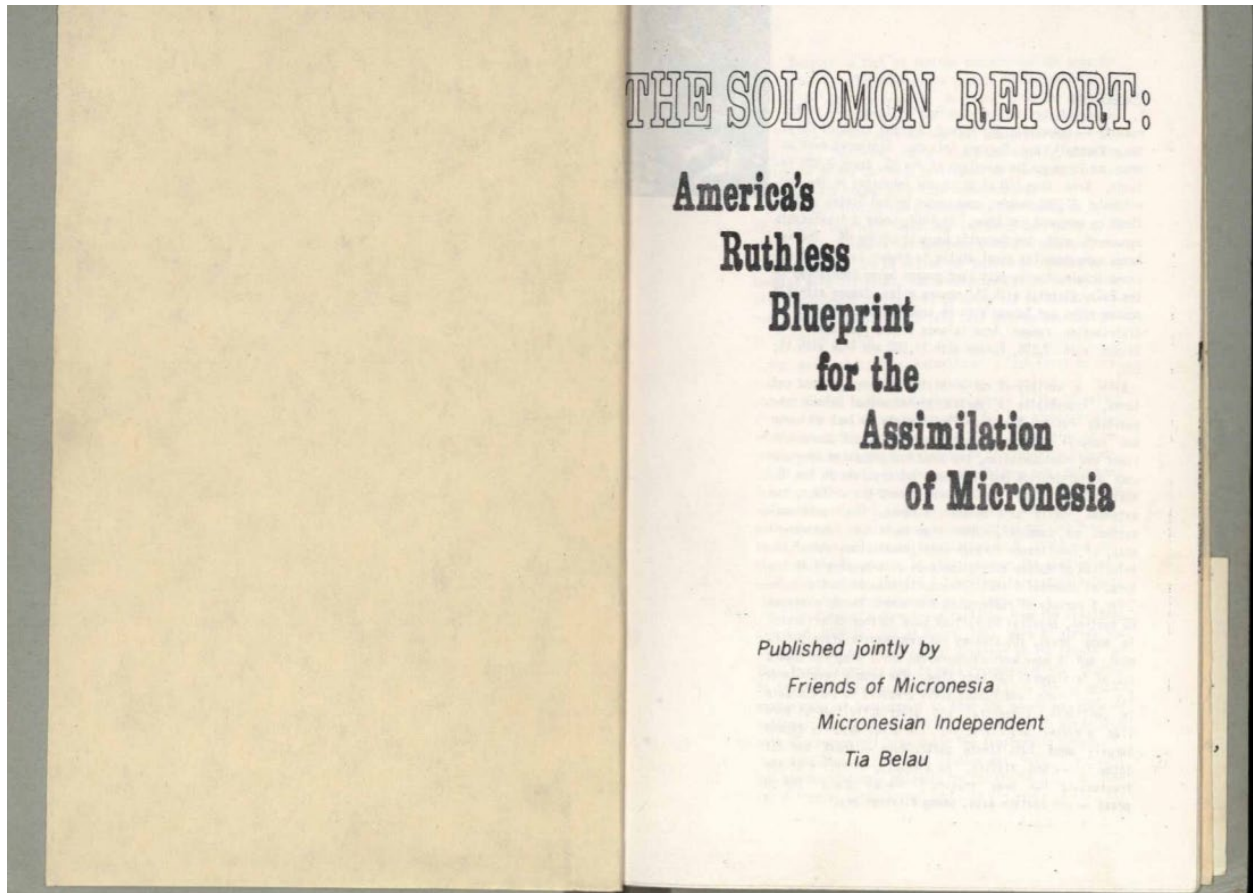
<sup>89</sup> Jack Niedenthal, *For the Good of Mankind: A History of the People of Bikini and Their Islands*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Bravo Book, 2001), 8.

While the Bikinians suffered the direct consequences of displacement and nuclear contamination of their ancestral atoll, Micronesian dependency as a whole was no accident, but part of a calculated effort to further US settler security in the Pacific. The Friends of Micronesia—a group of Micronesian activists seeking independence for the region—brought these machinations to surface seven years before the *New York Times* article when they published the declassified “The Solomon Report: America’s Ruthless Blueprint for the Assimilation of Micronesia” (see figures 2 and 3). In his report, Anthony M. Solomon revealed that under President John F. Kennedy’s National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 145, he had led a task force to Micronesia to assess what policies would be necessary to realize “as US policy the movement of Micronesia into a *permanent* relationship with the US...the memorandum called for accelerated development of the area to bring its political, economic and social standards into line with eventual *permanent* association.”<sup>90</sup> Recognizing that permanent dependence ran contrary to the assigned role of the United States as Protector of Micronesia as a United Nations Strategic Trust Territory to support the region’s eventual independence, in addition to contradicting the nation’s own policy since World War I of not acquiring new territories, Solomon advised, “the US might have to decide to proceed with a series of actions that would make the trusteeship agreement a dead issue, at least from the Micronesian standpoint.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *The Solomon Report*, 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



**Figure 2.** *The Solomon Report: America's Ruthless Blueprint for the Assimilation of Micronesia.* Honolulu, HI: Friends of Micronesia, Micronesia Independent, Tia Belau, 1971.

As Tongan scholar Epeli Hau'ofa explains, at the core of the victimizing narrative of Micronesian dependence is a violent logic of scale. The Western telos links territorial size to development, power, and the capacity of self-governance, leading to the corollary view that the Pacific Islands were “much too small, too poorly endowed with resources and too isolated from the centres of economic growth for their inhabitants ever to be able to rise above their present condition of

dependence on the largesse of wealthy nations.”<sup>92</sup> This logic tying scale to development and land size to value was captured in that callous statement by Henry Kissinger that “There are only 90,000 people out there. Who gives a damn?”<sup>93</sup> Having been confronted with the demands for Micronesian self-governance, Kissinger’s dismissal of their demands and the damning report released by the Friends of Micronesia suggests just how much economic independence in Micronesia ran counter to the concerns of the US settler state. The same rhetoric of development used to highlight Micronesian primitivity and ghettoization effectively served as a mask for a manufactured dependence that stalled development and independence at every turn.

These issues of settler temporality, manufactured Micronesian dependence, and the ongoing displacement of Micronesians from their islands and atolls rupture the rhythms of ordinary life for many Micronesians, and they are some of the central themes in Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*. Jetñil-Kijiner was born in the Marshall Islands and raised in Honolulu, where she joined the Hawaiian Oceanic arts organization Pacific Tongues. Her spoken word and slam poetry and activism draws attention to the legacy of US nuclear imperialism and the impact of climate change in the Marshall Islands, and articulate demands for Marshallese rights and climate justice. *Iep Jāltok* reveals how aid and development have transfigured the Indigenous Marshallese relationship to their islands, the ruptures to the “temporal rhythms of ordinary life” bearing out in the everyday and embodied practices of her people. Against the

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<sup>92</sup> Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” 4.

<sup>93</sup> Walter J. Hickel, *Who Owns America?* (New York: Paperback Library, 1972), 191.

genocidal logic of settler temporality, her poetry holds space for indeterminacy and possibility, in spite of and beyond the violence of militarism and settler colonialism.

In “Hooked,” Jetñil-Kijiner shows the entanglements of US Cold War militarization and Japanese militarism and settler colonialism in the Marshall Islands. Japanese settlers arrived in the Marshall Islands in the late 1800s, establishing a colonial administration, creating schools and employing Bikinians as laborers. As Jack Niedenthal notes, “this domination later resulted in a military build up throughout the islands in anticipation of World War II.”<sup>94</sup> A watchtower erected on Bikini Atoll made it a target for US military invasion during the war. “Hooked” tracks the ecological aftermaths of these military and settler entanglements through the life of one Marshallese survivor:

After he felt the rain of bombs / That left puddles of silver shrapnel, slivers of / splinters  
where houses once stood and charred/ bodies—both Japanese and Marshallese

After he watched his chief, strung up/ by his ankles, beaten raw for stealing / from a  
dwindling supply of coconuts

After fugitive nights, when fishing was banned,/ [...] the outlawed fishhook, gripped  
tight/between his fingers

After the children/ stopped asking for his stolen catch of fish,/ after even they had withered  
away,/ rows of ribs smiling.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Niedenthal, *For the Good of Mankind*, 1.

<sup>95</sup> Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, “Hooked,” *Iep Jältok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2017), 14-18.



The distortion of ecological language so often used to romanticize and obscure settler theft and militarized contamination here shows natural world made unnatural. The “rain of bombs,” the “puddles of silver shrapnel” show how the natural environment, and the children made grotesque with their “rows of ribs smiling” due to the starvation imposed by the Japanese soldiers. As Jetñil-Kijiner writes on her blog, the Japanese settlers outlawed the fishhook and control access to the island’s coconut supply, fearing that the Marshallese would betray them and thus prevented Marshallese from fishing or leaving the atoll.<sup>96</sup> Thus while the US bombing of the atoll is indiscriminate in its destruction, leaving scattered the charred bodies of the Japanese and Marshallese, it is the Marshallese who bear the consequences.

In the ecological aftermaths, it is not only the first devastation of Japanese settler colonialism and military occupation, but the ruptures induced by these initial traumas to the life lived after that prolong the devastation. The man lives through starvation, the trauma of seeing his chief beaten and his people starving, the air strikes by American troops fighting the Japanese for control of the islands, and the subsequent period of US aid in the form of canned foods:

After all of that  
It must have seemed  
heaven sent  
a gift from God  
this gift from the Americans,

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<sup>96</sup> Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner, “Diabetes, World War II, and Poem,” <https://jkijiner.wordpress.com/2013/12/17/diabetes-world-war-ii-and-a-new-poem/>.

this shining tower  
of food  
placed before him  
box after box after box

[...]

Even after

The doctors

Told him the leg

Would have to go,

Even then

He never

Stopped

Licking the grease

From his fingers

That still felt haunted

By the outlawed

Hook.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Jetñil-Kijiner, "Hooked," 14, 15.

Each section of the poem focuses on the aftermaths of these events in his life, the repetitions of “after” throughout the poem tracking the initial trauma through to the consequences of dependence and habits that follow. The discrete violence he endures makes US aid seem appealing and even divine, a “gift from God/ this gift from the Americans.” Yet rather than lifesaving aid, this imported and processed food leads to the man becoming hooked and ultimately having his leg amputated as a result of diabetes. Here again, the habits of living and dying are co-constitutive for survivors of trauma, producing the the “slow death” of the body in the form of diabetes and obesity.<sup>98</sup> Jetñil-Kijiner’s use of Christian rhetoric (“heaven sent/ a gift from God/ this gift from the Americans”) casts a benevolent glow over what would prove to be strategic aid to further US hegemony in the region. Indeed, in the US invasion of Grenada, Shaun Myers notes the “language of benevolence” deployed by the state relied on a rhetorical arsenal of “cooperation,” “assistance,” and “aid” to narrate its armed invasion in the language of aid and rescue.<sup>99</sup> The invasion of the Marshall Islands characterized as rescue from Japanese occupation and the subsequent aid offered as relief soften the blow of what is nonetheless an invasion of Marshall Islands. That this same aid in the form of imported processed foods to compensate Bikinians displaced from Bikini Atoll to Rongerik, Kwajalein, and Kili Island would also be used to characterize Micronesians as “welfare dependents” in the anti-Black and anti-Indigenous rhetoric of the settler state is revealing: the language of benevolence, like the language of romanticized island ecologies, obscures the sources of settler violence, militarized takeover, and environmental evisceration.

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<sup>98</sup> Lauren Berlant, “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency),” *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4: 754-780.

<sup>99</sup> Myers, “Transnational Visions of Black Women Writing,” 223.

In “Two Degrees,” Jetñil-Kijiner connects the ecological aftermaths of war and military occupation to the rising sea levels and the climate catastrophe created by capitalist countries in the global North. Two degrees is the planetary temperature rise first proposed by Yale economist William Norhaus in 1977 as the threshold for global warming, and Jetñil-Kijiner draws on an embodied Indigenous understanding of environmental change to argue that two degrees is a half-degree too high: “at 2 degrees my islands, the Marshall Islands/ will already be under water/this is why our leaders push/for 1.5.”<sup>100</sup> The continuities that the poem traces between the environmental destruction from the US nuclear weapons program and the environmental destruction caused by countries in the global North show that both events are part of the *longue durée* of settler colonialism and racial capitalism:

On Kili atoll

the tides were underestimated

patients with a nuclear history threaded

into their bloodlines, sleeping

in the only clinic on island woke

to a wild water world

a rushing rapid of salt

closing in around them

a sewage of syringes and gauze.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Jetñil-Kijiner, “Two Degrees,” *Iep Jāltok*, 77.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

As Michelle Keown notes, the marine language evokes “the successive waves of environmental and corporeal damage visited upon the people of Bikini Atoll.”<sup>102</sup> These successive waves of violence captured in the rhythmic structuring of the poem—the line lengths mirroring the ebb and recession of rising tides—show the waves of nuclear history and rising sea levels bleeding together. In other words, the formal structure of the poems is shaped by Fernand Braudel’s *longue durée*, an oceanic model of history as a “structure” that has kept “man...a prisoner for long centuries of climates.”<sup>103</sup> This climate—the weather that is anti-Black, the structure that generates Indigenous death—has imprisoned the patients on Kili atoll, the same place that Bikinians would later call a “‘prison’ island.”<sup>104</sup> Relocated to Kili Atoll by the US military, the Marshallese have become prisoners of nuclear contamination and environmental threat, powerful forces “closing in around them.” The patients with a “nuclear history threaded/into their bloodlines” are awash in a “sewage of syringes and gauze.” Their bodies submerged in a contaminated sea embodying that “untidy attritional lethality that moves through the tissue, blood and bones...moving through as well the living body of the land [and sea] itself.”<sup>105</sup>

Like Teaiwa, Jetñil-Kijiner turns to poetry to imagine a futurity, even against the impending future return of violence. Such a futurity holds space for the not-yet determined as a

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<sup>102</sup> Michelle Keown, “Waves of Destruction: Nuclear Imperialism and Anti-Nuclear Protest in the Indigenous Literatures of the Pacific,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 54, no. 5 (2018), 585.

<sup>103</sup> Fernand Braudel, “History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée,” translated by Immanuel Wallerstein, *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 32, no. 2 (2009), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40647704>, 178-179.

<sup>104</sup> Niedenthal, *For the Good of Mankind*, 8.

<sup>105</sup> Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 200.

way to open up for multiple possibilities rather than foreclose other possible futures. Indeterminacy is also a refusal of modernity's telos that ties the value of a life or an island to scale and development and in doing so insists on the non-future of Black and Indigenous lives. Against what Rebecca Oh calls "Pacific extinction narratives," which are "only the latest version of the genre" of Indigenous disappearance, Jetñil-Kijiner moves toward futurity through indeterminacy.<sup>106</sup> Put differently, indeterminacy counters erasure by insisting on "the possibility, indeed the past guarantee, of Pacific worlds in spite of Western temporal closures."<sup>107</sup>

For Jetñil-Kijiner, that possibility exists in the "not yet" as a horizon of possibility in spite of rising sea levels closing in around the islands and the islanders. The invitation to think with land and sea isn't a romanticization of the natural world but a way to seek balance with it:

My father told me that idik  
—when the tide is nearest an equilibrium  
Is the best time for fishing

Maybe I'm  
Writing the tide towards  
An equilibrium  
Willing the world

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<sup>106</sup> Rebecca Oh, "Making Time: Pacific Futures in Kiribati's Migration with Dignity, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jaltok*, and Keri Hulme's *Stonefish*," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 66, no. 4 (Winter 2020): 597-619.

<sup>107</sup> Oh, "Making Time," 603.

To find its balance

So that people

Remember

That beyond

The discussions

Numbers

And statistics

There are faces

All the way out here

There is

A toddler

Stomping squeaky

Yellow light up shoes

Across the edge of a reef

Not yet

Under water.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Jetnil-Kijiner, "Two Degrees," *Iep Jältok*, 78-79.

Thinking with the tide, the poem's speaker draws on the concept of *idik* to gesture toward an Indigenous temporality that understands time in relation to the rhythms of sea and land, rather than in terms of capital and development. Writing invites the reader to think and be in closer relation with the temporal rhythms of ordinary, oceanic life, to see Micronesians not as people "90,000 people out there" but rather "faces/all the way out here" among whom is a toddler on a reef "not yet/under water." The formal qualities of the poem—the balance in the line length—echo this sense of equilibrium as the languages moves with the oceanic rhythm yet is not overwhelmed by it. The space between the edge of the reef and the temporal possibility of it being "not yet/under water" is another space for possibility, another place to articulate the urgency of responding to climate change in the present so that the future is a horizon we can still hope to see.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

The ecological aftermaths of settler security in the Pacific Islands reveals the entangled legacies and ongoing structures of Japanese, European, and US settler colonialisms and racial capitalisms. The effects of phosphate mining in Banaba and nuclear weapons testing on Bikini Atoll have rendered the islands largely uninhabitable. The devastation of the islands went hand in hand with the prolonged displacement of Banabans and Marshallese from their ancestral homes, which are now facing an accumulation of threats from the Cold War settler security and extractions and the persistent and escalating threat of climate change.



The logics of anti-Blackness and Indigenous erasure at the heart of settler security drove these processes of extraction and environmental evisceration. In Teiawa and Jetñil-Kijiner's poetry, I've traced the gestures toward survivance and futurity, reading their politics within a Black Pacific framework to theorize the convergences, the ebbs and flow of thought and possibility, theorized by scholars and artists of Black, Indigenous, and Asian American critique. But it is hard not to feel that these efforts may be futile, as the Pacific Islands so central to the Cold War network of securitization are now facing new catastrophes, or perhaps a new iteration of old catastrophes, in contending with issues of global warming. With the increasing securitization of the Pacific into the twenty-first century, it is clear that there is an ongoing need to interrogate what security means and who will bear the costs. A Black Pacific futurity offers one horizon of possibility and indeterminacy, not meant to be prescriptive nor even conclusive, but instead inviting conversation so that we might navigate toward a different futurity not yet determined by the aftermaths of empires.

### 3.0 Carceral Aftermaths: Transpacific Currents of Black Feminist Thought and Insurgency Against Settler Security

Aftermath \æftər, mæθ\ *figurative*:  
An unwelcome consequence or effect.<sup>109</sup>

...

Morning sun heats up the young beech tree  
leaves and almost lights them into fireflies

I wish I could dig up the earth to plant apples  
pears or peaches on a lazy dandelion lawn

I am tired from this digging up of human bodies  
no one loved enough to save from death

—June Jordan, “Aftermath”<sup>110</sup>

...

the aftermath is always there from  
the beginning. after all [...]

water this part

of the world was supposed to swirl

the other direction. arrows pointed

and shot. Stock optioned and

dropped. a funny smell had you

giggling for days. In long final

division, something’s always left

over. you could have done the math

before.

—Evie Shockley, “Aftermath”<sup>111</sup>

In her poem “Aftermath,” published in the collection, *Naming Our Destiny* (1989), June Jordan begins with a quiet moment of hushed anticipation in the image of the sun heating a young

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<sup>109</sup> “Aftermath,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

<sup>110</sup> Jordan, “Aftermath,” 416.

<sup>111</sup> Evie Shockley, “Aftermath,” in *A Half-Red Sea* (Durham, NC: Carolina Wren Press, 2006), 71.

beech tree's leaves so that they "almost" become fireflies. In that one word hangs suspended a world of possibilities deferred and foreclosed as the speaker's gaze sweeps down to the terrestrial toil to show that what lies in that subterranean depth is not life but death. The possibilities of cultivating life—tilling the soil and planting apples, pears, or peaches, fruit that is sweet as the summer sun—are themselves foreclosed for the speaker who toils in death. This is not the morning of a new day pregnant with hope and possibility but a day marked by death and loss. The corpses that emerge from the soil are victims of an unnamed violence that has produced mass graves and no one to tend them.

The aftermath that Jordan's poem names could have applied to any number of acts of mass horror and violence that occurred in 1989 or any of the preceding years. *Naming Our Destiny* is full of poems documenting state violence and racial terror, as well as the anti-colonial, insurgent actions of people throughout the Third World to survive these genocidal acts. From the concentration camps in "Intifada" out of which Palestinian rebellion arose in 1987 to the Indigenous lands and scenes of genocidal violence in "Ghazal at Full Moon"; from the aftermath of Nelson Mandela's imprisonment by the South African apartheid state in "To Free Nelson Mandela" to the pueblos of revolutionary people's rebellions in "Dance: Nicaragua"; from scenes of "unrest in the Philippines" in "Poem Instead of a Columbus Day Parade" to the scenes of Kanaka Maoli survivance in "An Always Lei of Ginger Blossoms for the First Lady of Hawai'i: Queen Lili'uokalani," *Naming Our Destiny* engages the Black, Indigenous, and Asian rebellions that defined decolonization movements throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. But what makes "Aftermath" so familiar in many ways is that it describes a structural violence that continues today. As Trimiko Melancon observes, Jordan's poem "could have been written today [in 2016]

in its linking human oppression and death to the need for advocacy, activism, and justice for black lives.”<sup>112</sup> Shockley’s poem “Aftermath” attests to the recurrent violence and enduring exigency of Jordan’s poem, tracing another historical moment that links human oppression and death in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, a natural disaster that predominantly displaced low-income Black residents. Nikhil Singh writes, Singh: “In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina, scenes of black bodies adrift, shivering in ship holds and herded into stadiums, brought the contradictions of the inner and outer wars to a head.”<sup>113</sup> The delayed response by the Bush administration was criticized by many as revealing of the state’s racist policies neglect, evidence in the lack of investment in city infrastructure and the delayed response by the National Guard to help the victims of the hurricane. In Shockley’s poem, the aftermath makes visible the racial calculus of state governance: “the aftermath is always there from/the beginning.” Starting with the transatlantic slave trade, the trafficking and enslavement of Africans and the brutality of slavery and its afterlives continues in the devaluation of Black lives through state-sanctioned policies of segregation, policing, and incarceration. The racial calculus is thus there from the beginning so that “you could have done the math/before.”

I read Jordan’s “Aftermath” alongside Shockley’s poem of the same name as articulations of a Black feminist analytic, one in which the “aftermath” anticipates the “unwanted consequences” of the carceral state and its mechanisms of militarism, policing, and racial terror.

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<sup>112</sup> Trimiko Melancon, “‘Have Loved You Assiduously,’ June Jordan by Trimiko Melancon,” *The Black Scholar*, June 14, 2016, <https://www.theblackscholar.org/loved-assiduously-june-jordan/>. Accessed May 17, 2022.

<sup>113</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and America’s Long War*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 19.

In Shockley's poem, Hurricane Katrina may have been a natural disaster, but its aftermath of death and displacement were the result of state neglect and a racial calculus that speaks to the longer history of the settler state's devaluing of Black lives. I suggest the poetics and politics of Jordan's and Shockley's respective poems are expressive of the Black feminist politics of the post-1968 era, which in turn drew on a longer history of Black liberation struggles. Indeed, what Christina Sharpe calls "wake work" has shaped Black political consciousness in the wake of slavery as a way of seeking to "imagine otherwise from what we know *now*."<sup>114</sup> That *now*, as Kimberly Springer notes, is part of a Black feminist "continuum of participants' efforts from the arrival of black women on the continent to the present."<sup>115</sup> The continuities between Jordan's and Shockley's respective poems thus attest not only to the enduring capacious and analytical power of Black feminist thought but also their continued exigency in identifying and naming acts of state violence still unfolding now in slavery's afterlife through two instruments of the carceral state: militarism and policing.

Throughout the late 1960s-1980s, as the United States was escalating its war in Vietnam, it was simultaneously expanding its militarization of policing, a mutuality that according to Nikhil Singh, made the connection that Black radicals made between their targeting by domestic policies and the state's targeting of Third World and particularly Vietnamese via foreign policies not only cogent but grounded in an understanding of the state's obscured mechanisms of violence. Singh

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<sup>114</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 18.

<sup>115</sup> Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 8.

writes, it was “not an analogy between the black and Vietnamese situations, but a homology, that is, the recognition that a single mode of rule had been elaborated in different contexts.”<sup>116</sup> Police like Daryl Gates who was police chief of the Los Angeles Police Department at the time of the brutal beating of Rodney King, had in his early career taken methods of torturing suspects to Vietnam. At the same time, the tactics of riot control and the weapons used in war were increasingly used against Black populations to suppress rebellions in Detroit, Watts, and Los Angeles. The modes of racial governance within which the modern carceral state took shape go back to its foundations in the structures of racial capitalism and settler colonialism. The early origins of the police in the capture of runaway enslaved Africans as the property of white enslavers went hand-in-hand with the anxiety of white settlers concerning the need to protect stolen lands from the Indigenous inhabitants: both “slavery and settlement were defined by laws of property,” according to Singh.<sup>117</sup> The re-capture of slaves and the extermination of natives to protect settler frontiers were the origins of the modern police state that linked policing and war in both domestic and so-called frontier spaces. Racial governance enforced through surveillance, policing, and incarceration spiked in the latter half of the twentieth century, shaping the structural mechanisms of settler security through techniques of surveillance, riot control, torture, detention, and military responses used in the American War in Viet Nam and in Black urban centers in the United States.

Tracing the mutuality of policing and militarism shows a different aspect of Black feminist literature on Vietnam than has been explored in the scholarship, particularly from Asian

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<sup>116</sup> Singh, *Race and America's Long War*, 62.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

Americanist perspective, where the emphasis has been on the modes of what Judy Tzu-Chun Wu calls “radical Orientalism” evidenced in Black women’s writings and representations of revolutionaries in Viet Nam. Unlike the classical Orientalism that draws a line between East and West to underscore Asian alterity, over and against which (white) European liberal identity is constructed, the radical Orientalism of anti-war activists and leftists during the Vietnam War era insisted on similarity and kinship in ways that nonetheless reinforced an epistemological and ontological East-West difference.<sup>118</sup> Scholars have noted that Black women writers, too, who were US-based feminists participated in these discourses.<sup>119</sup> Yet when we look at the structural mechanisms used in policing and military action, the connections that emerge in Black feminist writings linking US policing tactics against racial rebellions within the nation-state and its military actions and wars used against decolonizing countries throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the material continuities went beyond the idealized, abstract images of revolutionary spirit. Black feminist writings of this period were shaped not only by the anti-war movements of the time but also by a long tradition of Black leftist and Communist radicalism that informed the specific freedom struggles of what Cheryl Higashida calls “Black internationalist feminism.”<sup>120</sup> Their politics were

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<sup>118</sup> Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism and Feminism During the Vietnam War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

<sup>119</sup> Grace Kyungwon Hong, “Intersectionality and Incommensurability: Third World Feminism and Asian Decolonization,” in *Asian American Feminisms and Women of Color Politics*, edited by Lynn Fujiwara and Shireen Roshanravan (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2018), 27-42.

<sup>120</sup> Cheryl Higashida, *Black Internationalist Feminism: Women Writers of the Black Left, 1945-1995* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

therefore concerned with championing self-determination not only within the context of Black nationalist liberation frameworks but also by “radical, often international or transnational movements.”<sup>121</sup> Such internationalism preceded the war in Vietnam and indeed drew from a history of Black freedom organizing, struggle, and intellectualism against the modes of statecraft.

In this chapter, I am interested in how Black feminist literature, particularly and specifically by Audre Lorde, June Jordan, and Toni Cade Bambara, connected the dots between US statecraft in domestic and foreign spaces and turned to writing to alert readers about the mutuality of state violence in policing and militarism. Their writings were one medium among many in which to disseminate what they anticipated as the consequences of the carceral state. Recent scholarship on Black feminist has amplified the many ways Black women of that period, including Fannie Lou Hamer, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, and others, shaped the Black Arts Movement and the Black Left. However, there has been less attention to the specific ways Black feminist writers theorized the connections between militarism and policing and sought ways of envisioning insurgent care in anticipation of the likely and devastating consequences. Drawing on the Black feminist understanding of state power and neglect, I argue that Lorde, Jordan, and Bambara turned to literature to expose the racial-gendered mechanisms of settler security through the militarized policing of Black communities, the policing of international struggles for decolonization, and the production of carceral geographies in the Third World. Black feminists made these connections between militarism and policing as two pillars of the state’s racial-gendered carceral regime, turning to writing as a way of raising political consciousness and demonstrating solidarity with

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<sup>121</sup> Higashida, *Black Internationalist Feminism*, 6.



women in countries affected by US militarism. While their writings stretched the expanse of the Third World, connecting women in Black urban and rural communities in the United States to women in Cuba, Nicaragua, Grenada, Viet Nam, Angola, and many other Third World places targeted by US counter-insurgency operations, this chapter will focus on the representations of Asia and the Pacific in writings by Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, and June Jordan. Their writings move across a wide expanse of carceral geographies, within and outside the borders of the US nation-state to track the circulations of capital, weapons, military personnel, and surveillance technologies that sustained US settler security. Put differently, if the Cold War saw the expansion of the US carceral state through regimes of racial governance, militarized policing, and surveillance, Black feminist writers responded and warned insurgent groups through writing. Their literary fugitivity offered a mode of counterveillance against the logic of containment that characterized US securitization in Asia and the Pacific. Literature allowed them to materialize—without giving away—the insurgent intelligence that connected the build-up of nuclear weapons, military bases, policing, and extractive capital and the impacts that these activities had on Black and Third World communities throughout the Cold War.

Black feminist literature was also a radical realm to envision ways to survive the violence. In pointing out the absence of institutional care, both Jordan's and Shockley's respective poems point to the need for other ways of caring. As Edwards notes, this is the capacity for survival that Black feminist writers drew upon "to imagine and enact a world without militarized and carceral

safety.”<sup>122</sup> In the absence of care, the “I” in Jordan’s poem enacts instead what Shaundra Myers calls “Third World care” constituted by the “acts of intimately attending to ‘the shipped,’ to those rendered fungible yet indispensable within the processes of imperialism and modern statecraft.”<sup>123</sup> Christina Sharpe delineates such “care from state-imposed regimes of surveillance.”<sup>124</sup> Programs of child removal and social services that often target low-income Black families are undertaken within frameworks of state care. Sharpe calls for instead “something like care as a way to feel and to feel for and with, a way to tend to the living and the dying.”<sup>125</sup> Such care is necessary to survive the carceral state and its mechanisms of policing, militarization and surveillance. Edwards explains, “Black literary feminism [functioned] as the radicalization of safety and as the code for urgent, insurgent care.”<sup>126</sup> Within the surveillance regime of the carceral state, Black feminist writings enacted modes of insurgent action and care by encoding in their writings not only warnings to heed the unwanted consequences to come from state violence and extraction but also to envision a world beyond this violence. Readers could glean their calls for revolution by reading between the lines and looking for care there.

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<sup>122</sup> Erica Edwards, *The Other Side of Terror: Black Women and the Culture of US Empire* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 23.

<sup>123</sup> Myers, “Transnational Visions of Black Women Writing,” 224.

<sup>124</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 20.

<sup>125</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 138 n.28.

<sup>126</sup> Edwards, *The Other Side of Terror*, 216.

### 3.1 ‘An Ocean of Oil’: The Militarization of Policing

On August 22, 1967, senior Army officers Lieutenant General John L. Throckmorton and Major General Charles P. Stone testified in court concerning their use of the National Guard against the Detroit riots. According to a report in the *New York Times*, Both Throckmorton and Stone testified that the National Guardsmen had been “trigger happy” and defied orders to unload their weapons and instead a level of violence that was disproportionate to the situation and unparalleled in the policing of American civilians. According to Throckmorton’s account of the situation, there was “nothing in that town which would justify bringing soldiers on the street with their weapons loaded,” leading him to order the soldiers to unload their guns. “I had no intention of seeing those soldiers shoot innocent civilians or children,” Throckmorton testified in his defense. Against his orders, the guardsmen fired anyway. Throckmorton suggested that the inordinate scale of violence was the fault of “trigger happy” guardsmen.<sup>127</sup> The head of the response force responsible for suppression the Detroit rioters, Lieutenant General John L. Throckmorton, at the time was serving as active commander of the 18<sup>th</sup> Airborne Corps and a former deputy commander in Vietnam. Under his command, the military sent in 4800 federal paratroopers and 2262 Michigan guardsmen into Detroit. The militarized response was devastating and disproportionate and included National Guardsmen entering the city on tanks mounted with 50-caliber machine guns, one of which fired into an apartment building and killed a four-year old African American girl. The *New York Times* report on the mobilization of the National Guard to

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<sup>127</sup> “Guard Criticized on Detroit Riots: Two Generals Say Men Were Trigger-Happy and Defied Orders to Unload Guns,” *New York Times*, August 23, 1967, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed February 28, 2023.

Detroit reveals the ways that military weapons and personnel shaped the response to the protestors, resulting in the deaths of 43 civilians, almost all of them Black Americans. Throckmorton's comments in court provoked criticism and outrage, not for his failure to take responsibility for the undue violence that the National Guard acted on under his command but instead for "needlessly risking the lives of the guardsmen," in the words of Representative Porter Hardy Jr.

It is worth pausing here to address the sensationalized outrage expressed over Throckmorton's orders to unload, an action characterized as "needlessly risking the lives of the guardsmen." Out of the over two-thousand National Guardsmen called into Detroit that day, five had been injured and one killed by another guardsmen while firing into a car, a police investigation revealed. However, that one (white) fatality overshadows the 38 deaths including a child of Detroit's Black residents. The outrage expressed at the trial wasn't over the fact that Throckmorton and Stone, whose Army background in Vietnam gave them military experience more befitting acts of warfare against a foreign populace rather than a domestic one, were in charge of commanding the National Guard troops against residents of an American city. Nor was there questioning of why President Lyndon B. Johnson deployed the National Guard to Detroit. A similar deployment of the National Guard during the Watts Rebellion in 1965 had already set a precedent. Instead, it was the idea that an Army officer would issue an order that weighed the lives of innocent, unarmed Black civilians and children against the safety of over 7,000 armed military personnel, not including the police.

The response to the trial and Throckmorton's testimony is telling of the care and concern that goes into protecting white innocence over and against a Black populace already presumed dangerous and criminalized. The racial calculus used in the devaluing of Black life depended on a

presumption of Black pathology that enabled the state to justify its mechanisms of incarceration, surveillance, and militarized response to movements for Black liberation. The events in Detroit leading up to the revolt, including the deindustrialization of “Motor City” after the war and the higher unemployment affecting the city’s Black workers were left out of the equation in framing the conditions that led to civil unrest. When tensions reached their peak, Detroit became a flashpoint of revolt in response to structural and systemic inequities against which public outcry expressed in the media and by state officials was to call for a militarized response. As Nikhil Singh notes “competing visions of counterinsurgency—hard and soft, outside and inside the nation—had by the late 1960s become increasingly difficult to separate.”<sup>128</sup> Singh cites the title of a 1967 *Life* magazine article to illustrate this point that juxtaposes counterinsurgency measures by the United States in Vietnam against “the ‘Other’ Pacification—to Cool U.S. Cities.”<sup>129</sup> Reportage on Detroit underscored the connection between civil disorder and warfare, impressing upon a horrified public that the situation was an incitement to a militarized response. National syndicates splashed images of burning buildings and reports on firebombings and lootings, with Michigan’s Governor George Romney to remark, “It looks like a city that has been bombed.”<sup>130</sup> Detroit Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh made the wartime connection more explicit, stating “It looks like Berlin in 1945.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Singh, *Race and America’s Long War*, 60.

<sup>129</sup> Singh, *Race and America’s Long War*, 60.

<sup>130</sup> “Detroit Is Swept by Rioting and Fires; Romney Calls In Guard; 700 Arrested,” *New York Times*, July 24, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed March 9, 2023.

<sup>131</sup> Gene Roberts, “U.S. Troops Sent into Detroit; 19 Dead; Johnson Decries Riots; New Outbreak in East Harlem,” *New York Times*, July 25, 1967. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed March 9, 2023.

These “competing visions”—the fires of rebellion vs. the “cooling” of counter-insurgency, the slippage between war on domestic turf and foreign soil, the militarized response to domestic revolt in Detroit and foreign insurgencies in Vietnam—form the backdrop to Audre Lorde’s poetry from the early 1970s, including *From a Land Where Other People Live* (1973) and *New York Head Shop and Museum* (1974). Higashida distinguishes between the nationalist internationalism that emerged in Lorde’s writing from the late 1980s following the US invasion of Grenada, from the “cultural nationalism” of earlier texts like *The Black Unicorn* (1978) and *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), in which Lorde’s Afrocentric feminism and emphasis on spiritual and mythical liberation are “largely unconnected to Third World struggles for national sovereignty.”<sup>132</sup> However, in Lorde’s anti-war and anti-colonial poetry from the 1970s, she already shows the different ways that she is already thinking about and indeed anticipating the proximity of Black freedom struggles to those of insurgent actions in the Third World. My point here is not to disprove Higashida’s claims, who herself acknowledges continuities between Lorde’s pre-invasion and post-invasion work, particularly in the recreation of Lorde’s Afrocentric cultural nationalism. Instead, I wish to extend Higashida’s insights to Lorde’s post-1968 poetry to examine the specific moments in which her analysis of race, class, gender, and colonialism foreshadowed the homologies of Black liberation and Third World liberation struggles. Reading these earlier moments of Lorde’s critique of the carceral state—ideas that are reworked in the writings by Bambara and Jordan respectively throughout the mid-1970s and 1980s—allows us to pick up some of the through-lines in Black feminist writing that have shaped subsequent writings and thinking

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<sup>132</sup> Higashida, *Black Internationalist Feminism*, 137.

about the carceral state and its mechanisms of policing and militarism, ideas that continue to shape critiques of modes of racial governance and statecraft today. As Erica Edwards suggests, Black feminists contributed to the analyses of militarism and policing “in ways that we are still trying to understand or that, with rebellions to police violence that swelled between 2012 and 2020 and privileged Black feminist critique, we are perhaps beginning to grasp.”<sup>133</sup>

In “Equinox,” published in *From a Land Where Other People Live* (1973), Lorde makes visible the mechanisms of the state’s racial calculus, cataloging scenes of incessant, spectacular violence that becomes normalized and mundane against the regular changing of the seasons.

My daughter marks the day that spring begins.  
I cannot celebrate spring without remembering  
how the bodies of unborn children  
bake in their mothers flesh like ovens  
consecrated to the flame that eats them  
lit by mobiloil and easternstandard  
Unborn children in their blasted mothers  
floating like monuments  
in an ocean of oil.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Edwards, *The Other Side of Terror*, 50.

<sup>134</sup> Audre Lorde, “Equinox,” *From a Land Where Other People Live* (1973) in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 63.

The celebration of spring comes too soon while the structures of oppression that produce that violence persist. Put differently, spring—the season of renewal, rebirth, hope—is an impossibility as the present continues to be haunted by images of children sacrificed for oil profiteering, their bodies a gruesome monument to the horrors of capitalist extraction. The poem marks instead the horrors of neoliberal governance and the state’s racial calculus that normalize gruesome deaths. The “unborn children in their blasted mothers/ floating like monuments/ in an ocean of oil” might be said to anticipate the damning question Christina Sharpe asks some forty years later: “[H]ow does one memorialize chattel slavery and its afterlives, which are unfolding still?” The wake encompasses those afterlives and terror enacted on Black lives in the everydayness of racism and state violence. The ocean of oil is but the latest iteration of this system of racial capitalism and neoliberal governance in the twentieth century as the expansion of the state became increasingly reliant on the extraction of oil and the use of military force to protect oil interests. Mobil Oil and Eastern Standard are the agents of this latest hideous catastrophe, but the racial calculus that undergirded the settler capitalism of the trans-Atlantic slave trade are its incessant structure.

This racial calculus that began with the destruction of Black life is tied explicitly to the racial calculus used by the United States and its regime of racial governance both within the United States and in its self-termed police action in Korea and Vietnam.

The year my daughter was born  
DuBois died in Accra while I  
marched into Washington  
to a death knell of dreaming  
which 250,000 others mistook for a hope



believing only Birmingham's black children  
were being pounded into mortar in churches  
that year  
some of us still thought  
Vietnam was a suburb of Korea.<sup>135</sup>

The imperiling of Black lives is a relentless force that connects the birth of the speaker's daughter to the death of W.E.B. DuBois. Sharpe writes that "racism, the engine that drives the ship of state's national and imperial projects" leaves in its wake a wake of another kind, a "watch or vigil held beside the body of someone who has died."<sup>136</sup> The speaker's daughter's birth is punctuated by the death of Du Bois on August 27, 1968 and the March on Washington on August 28 1968, the two events coalescing not into a moment of hope but instead a "death knell of dreaming." The racism that allows the state to sanction the assault on Black children is part of the same structure of white supremacy and imperialism used in the genocidal violence inflicted on Korea and Vietnam. In connecting the state's genocidal activities targeting not only Black children in Birmingham but also Korea and Vietnam, the poem tracks the multiple wakes of state-sanctioned racial terror.

The naming of the assault on Black life and its linkages to the assault on Korean and Vietnamese lives is more than analogical: Lorde's poem names the carceral state's response and use of militarized force against domestic and foreign populations during pivotal episodes of anti-racist and anti-imperial rebellion by people of the Third World:

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<sup>135</sup> Lorde, "Equinox," 63.

<sup>136</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 3, 10.

Then John Kennedy fell of the roof  
of Southeast Asia  
and shortly afterward my whole house burned down  
with nobody in it  
And on the following sunday my borrowed radio announced  
that Malcolm was shot dead  
and I ran to reread  
all that he had written  
because death was becoming such an excellent measure  
of prophecy  
As I read his words the dark mangled children  
came streaming out of the atlas  
Hanoi Angola Guinea-Bissau Mozambique Pnam-Phen  
merged into Bedford-Stuyvesant and Hazelhurst Mississippi  
haunting my New York tenement that terribly bright summer  
while Detroit and Watts and San Francisco were burning.<sup>137</sup>

Hanoi, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Pnam-Phen are placeholders for sites of anti-colonial struggles and independence movements as well as counterinsurgency strikes by the United States in the case of Hanoi, Vietnam and Phnom-Phen, Cambodia. These sites of anti-colonial rebellions against the state's imperialist and racial terror merge with Bedford-Stuyvesant and

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<sup>137</sup> Lorde, "Equinox," 63.

Hazelhurst, Mississippi, places known for the activism of Black civil rights figures such as Fannie Lou Hamer, who stated, “We have a long fight and this FIGHT is not mine alone. But you are not free whether you are white or black, until I am free. Because no man is an island to himself. And until I’m free in Mississippi, you are not free in Washington; you are not free in New York.”<sup>138</sup> In merging “Hanoi Angola Guinea-Bissau Mozambique Pnam Phen [sic]” with sites of US northern and southern Black civil rights movements, Lorde thus maps an alternate Third World anti-colonial geography. The passage also sets up a parallel structure between the Kennedy administration’s wars in Southeast Asia and the speaker’s house burning down with the burning of Detroit, Watts, and San Francisco, cities where historic racial uprisings clashed with the carceral state’s use of militarized force against civilian and domestic insurgencies: the 1967 Detroit Rebellion, the 1965 Watts Uprising, and the protests in San Francisco throughout the 1960s including the five-month strike by the Black Student Union at San Francisco State College. Each of these cities was not only the site of protests and rebellions in the struggle for racial equality but also protests in which state and federal governments mobilized the National Guard to quell a domestic situation, not against a foreign threat but the “enemy within” and its own civilian populations. What Erica Edwards terms the “long war on terror” is thus shown here as the racial terror of the state against Black civilians’ and Third World people’ demands for liberation.<sup>139</sup> Written in the aftermath of these events, the poem ultimately articulates the work that remains to be done: “I want to tell them we have no right

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<sup>138</sup> Quoted in Keisha N. Blain, *Until I Am Free: Fannie Lou Hamer’s Enduring Message to America* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2021), 11.

<sup>139</sup> Edwards, *The Other Side of Terror*, 8.

to spring/ because our sisters and brothers are burning/ because every year the oil grows thicker/  
and even the earth is crying/ because black is beautiful but currently/ going out of style.” The  
hopefulness of the 1960s proves difficult to maintain against the relentlessness of state terror and  
its unfolding in the present.

Lorde would return to these events of the 1960s throughout her writing career, exposing  
the ever-unfolding racial terror of the state and the limitations that insurgent groups had to  
overcome, not only externally but internally. In poems like “Viet-Nam Addenda,” published in  
*New York Head Shop and Museum* (1974), Lorde reflected on the racial-gendered violence of the  
state, noting that “genocide doesn’t only mean bombs/ at high noon [...] We are raped of our  
children / in silence.” The connections between state terror inflicted on Black Americans and  
Vietnamese were for Lorde evidence of the global regime of white supremacy. Confronting the  
state’s racial terror would require much more than hopeful promises of solidarity; it would require  
a real reckoning with the specific ways each of us can become complicit within the structures of  
racial capitalism and the carceral state: “Insight must illuminate the particulars of our lives: who  
labors to make the bread we waste, or the energy it takes to make nuclear poisons which will not  
biodegrade for one thousand years; or who goes blind assembling the microtransistors in our  
inexpensive calculators?”<sup>140</sup> This self-critique and awareness that oppressed people could also  
become beneficiaries of the state’s extractive and destructive policies was the critical lesson that  
Lorde emphasized in “Learning from the 60s.” The insistence examining the particularities of

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<sup>140</sup> Audre Lorde, “Learning from the 60s,” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*, revised edition  
(Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 2007), 141.

racism, heterosexism, and classism while viewing difference as the starting point for revolutionary change, (the aspects of Lorde's politics, as Higashida notes, most emphasized in scholarship on her writing, in other words), were grounded in her sense of the place of Black liberation within a global struggle against colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacist cisheteropatriarchy. Lorde writes:

We are Black people living in a time when the consciousness of our intended slaughter is all around us. People of Color are increasingly expendable, our government's policy both here and abroad. We are functioning under a government ready to repeat in El Salvador and Nicaragua the tragedy of Vietnam, a government which stands on the wrong side of every single battle for liberation taking place upon this globe; a government which has invaded and conquered (as I edit this piece) the fifty-three square mile sovereign state of Grenada, under the pretext that her 110,000 people pose a threat to the U.S. Our papers are filled with supposed concern for human rights in white communist Poland while we sanction by acceptance and military supply the systematic genocide of apartheid in South Africa, of murder and torture in Haiti and El Salvador. American advisory teams bolster repressive governments across Central and South America, and in Haiti, while *advisory* is only a code name preceding military aid. [...]

We who are Black are at an extraordinary point of choice within our lives. To refuse to participate in the shaping of our future is to give it up. Do not be misled into passivity either by false security (they don't mean me) or by despair (there's nothing we can do). Each of us must find our work and do it. Militancy no longer means guns at high noon, if

it ever did. It means actively working for change, sometimes in the absence of any surety that change is coming.<sup>141</sup>

Lorde understood the material and embodied consequences of this racial-gendered terror inflicted by the state, which ultimately sought the genocide of Black and Third World people while articulating these aims within the language of national security. Terms like “advisory” were part of the state’s code for inflicting this racial terror, couched in what Shaundra Myers calls the “language of benevolence” that ensured security for some and genocide for others.<sup>142</sup> Those who adopted a sense of false security or despair were actively being neutralized by a state bent on extinguishing any fires of rebellion.

The Reagan years produced this code that masked the language of militarization and state-sanctioned racial terror in terms like security, advisory, and the preservation of peace. Reagan’s 1964 speech, “A Time for Choosing” had earned him the moniker as the “law and order,” and he built his presidential career on the premise that increased militarization was necessary to preserve order on an international scale. In his “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security,” televised on March 23, 1983, Reagan assured the viewing American public: “The defense policy of the United States is based on a simple premise: The United States does not start fights. We will never be an aggressor. We maintain our strength in order to deter and defend against aggression—

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<sup>141</sup> Lorde, “Learning from the 60s,” 140-142.

<sup>142</sup> Myers, “Transnational Visions of Black Women Writing,” 223.

to preserve freedom and peace.”<sup>143</sup> While he campaigned on a platform of decreased Congressional spending, his presidency saw the massive increase in government spending on its armed forces. Using a series of linguistic gymnastics, Reagan promised to explain to the American people “what this defense debate is all about” by explaining “what the defense debate is not about”:

It is not about spending arithmetic. I know that in the last few weeks you’ve been bombarded with numbers and percentages. Some say we need only a 5-percent increase in defense spending. The so-called alternate budget backed by liberals in the House of Representatives would lower the figure to 2 to 3 percent, cutting our defense spending by \$163 billion over the next 5 years. The trouble with all these numbers is that they tell us little about the kind of defense program America needs or the benefits and security and freedom that our defense effort buys for us.<sup>144</sup>

This calculated speech and the repeated focus on defense, rather than offense and aggression, meant to distract from the actual spending arithmetic: the racial calculus that placed the United States time and again “on the wrong side of every single battle for liberation,” to borrow Lorde’s words. The language of “benefits and security and freedom” intended to distract from the Pentagon’s spending spree that by 1985 “hit \$294.7 billion (a doubling since 1980).”<sup>145</sup> While

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<sup>143</sup> Ronald Reagan, “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security,” March 23, 1983, Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, n.pag., <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/ronald-reagan/reagan-quotes-speeches/address-to-the-nation-on-defense-and-national-security/>. Accessed March 11, 2023.

<sup>144</sup> Reagan, “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security.”

<sup>145</sup> Craig and Logevall, *America’s Cold War*, 312.

aimed at improving national security and the defense systems of the nation, the Cold War animosity and influence of the Soviet Union occasioned the grounds on which to justify the use of national defense spending to involve the nation in foreign affairs. Reagan explained, “The Soviet-Cuban militarization of Grenada, in short, can only be seen as a power projection into the region. And it is in this important economic and strategic area that we’re trying to help the Governments of El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, and others in their struggles for democracy against guerillas supported through Cuba and Nicaragua.”<sup>146</sup> The wars abroad had finally become a concern for national defense, allowing the United States to imagine itself a benevolent superpower “trying to help” by intervening in the anti-colonial independence movements of other Third World nations. In Reagan’s mind, helping to protect freedom around the world required investment not only in tanks, jets, bombers, submarines, guns, and war ships, but also nuclear weapons. The American public was alert to the dangers of nuclear war, and calls for nuclear freezes had become more prevalent. To these concerns, Reagan responded “a freeze now would make us less, not more, secure and would raise, not reduce, the risks of war.”<sup>147</sup> The “simple arithmetic” used by those calling for reducing the defense budget would only make the nation more vulnerable.

The impact of this military buildup and nuclear armament by the carceral state within the United States is the backdrop to June Jordan’s poem, “From Sea to Shining Sea.” Like Teresia Teaiwa’s reconfiguring of “This Land Is My Land” discussed in chapter one, the title of Jordan’s “From Sea to Shining Sea” alludes to another patriotic anthem, this time a line from “America the

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<sup>146</sup> Reagan, “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security.”

<sup>147</sup> Reagan, “Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security.”



Beautiful.” Written by Katherine Lee Bates, the hymn draws on the colonial rhetoric of manifest destiny to celebrate the nation’s founding as divine right. The song naturalizes the settler colonization by portraying the very landscape of the nation itself, the “amber waves of grain,” the “purple mountain majesties,” and the “fruited plain,” as evidence of the goodness and brotherhood that made the nation worthy of divine blessing in expanding its reach “from sea to shining sea.” Through its natural imagery, the song naturalizes the settler concept of manifest destiny by projecting that ideology onto the order of the natural world. Jordan’s poem alludes to this song but highlights the numerous crises resulting as a “natural order is being restored”: the sowing of internal strife within marginalized communities, particularly amongst Black men and women and the ongoing genocide being waged through racist legislation, economic inequality; assaults on gay, Black, and low-income communities; the erosion of welfare programs; and the pervasive threat of nuclear explosion and contamination that put at risk the American people by their own military and government.<sup>148</sup> The language of “natural order” used by social Darwinists to naturalize racism and racial inequality is here shown as a “natural order” premised on white supremacy, capitalist exploitation, and heterosexism. Against the premises of Reagan’s “A Time for Choosing” speech that Americans faced a time for choosing law and order, Jordan’s poem shows that the “natural order” means it is not a good time for the majority of the nation who are poor, Black, gay, women, young, old, employed or unemployed.

Jordan’s poem maps the militarization of the land and the production of carceral landscapes, in which Black, rural, and Indigenous populations are at the highest risk.

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<sup>148</sup> June Jordan, “From Sea to Shining Sea,” from *Living Room* (1985), in *Directed by Desire*, 325-331.

*This was not a good time to live in Queens*

Trucks carrying explosive nuclear wastes will exit from the Long Island Expressway and then travel through the residential streets of Queens en route to the 59<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge, and so on.

*This was not a good time to live in Arkansas*

Occasional explosions caused by mystery nuclear missiles have been cited as cause for local alarm, among other things.

*This was not a good time to live in Grand Forks, North Dakota*

Given the presence of a United States nuclear missile base in Grand Forks North Dakota the non-military residents of the area feel that they are living only a day by day distance from certain

annihilation, etcetera.<sup>149</sup>

The trucks carrying nuclear waste through Queens visualize how normalized and routine the pervasive threat of nuclear contamination has become, the way it is part of the very process of the nation's militarization. Cynthia Enloe writes, "militarization creeps into ordinary daily routines... Militarization is such a pervasive process, and thus so hard to uproot, precisely because in its everyday forms it scarcely looks life threatening."<sup>150</sup> Such militarization in the US settler security regime is also inextricable from its racial calculus. As Barbara Smith explains, "militarism and nuclear proliferation can be seen as an inevitable outgrowth of a political system historically hostile to human life, one facet of a continuum of violence against us. Nuclear annihilation is not the sole threat we face, but one of a hundred possible bloody ends."<sup>151</sup> The movement of nuclear waste through the residential streets of predominantly Black and Brown neighborhoods underscores this process of militarization and who it burdens the most, yet the "and so on" suggests this is a reality rendered so mundane it hardly seems renumerating. Within the nation's militarized landscape, the occasional explosions of nuclear missiles in Arkansas enter a catalogue of other, mundane causes for "local alarm, among / other things." The explosion that Jordan cites likely refers to the explosion of the missile silo that killed one person and injured 21 others in Damascus,

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<sup>149</sup> Jordan, "From Sea to Shining Sea," 329-330.

<sup>150</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>151</sup> Barbara Smith, "'Fractious, Kicking, Messy, Free': Feminist Writers Confront the Nuclear Abyss," *New England Review and Bread Loaf Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (summer 1983): 581-592. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23016943>, 583.

Arkansas in 1980. This explosion, which occurred just 55 miles from Little Rock, Arkansas, heightens the likelihood of nuclear annihilation that places everyone at risk but is the result of the white supremacist racial calculus that imperils the lives of people of color for the security of the white and wealthy. The threat of nuclear annihilation as another weapon of the white supremacist settler state was why Black women activists including Fannie Lou Hamer, Coretta Scott King, Enola Maxwell, and many others viewed their work in the Civil Rights Movement as invested in the Peace Movement and calls for nuclear disarmament.<sup>152</sup> Jordan understood that nuclear disarmament and civil rights were both necessary in the anti-colonial struggle

Jordan's poetry also gestures toward certain Black and Indigenous relationalities that we can trace in the dread of certain annihilation experienced by the non-military residents of Grand Forks, North Dakota. West of the Grand Forks Air Force base is the Spirit Lake Reservation, comprised by Sisseton, Wahpeton, and the Cul-Head bands of Yanktonais.<sup>153</sup> Southwest of the

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<sup>152</sup> Leaders of the Civil Rights and Nuclear Disarmament movements did not always see their struggles as interrelated. Instead, both groups adjusted their arguments according to what they believed was the priority: the struggle for racial equality or the struggle for nuclear disarmament against the threat of total nuclear annihilation. However, prominent civil rights leaders including Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King made significant gains in connecting the concerns of the Civil Rights movement to the Peace Movement. Black women activists were also influential in this regard, with activists including Enola Maxwell and Fannie Lou Hamer being some of the most vocal critics of nuclearization. For an excellent history of this overlooked facet of civil rights organizing, see Vincent Intondi, *African Americans against the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons, Colonialism, and the Black Freedom Movement* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

<sup>153</sup> Spirit Lake Tribe, "History," <http://www.spiritlakenation.com/history/>. Accessed March 14, 2023.

base is White Earth Reservation, where the White Earth band of the Ojibwe tribe live.<sup>154</sup> While Jordan did not specify the settler state’s militarization and nuclear armament as harm inflicted on Indigenous people, as she would in later poems like “Ghazal at Full Moon,” (published in *Naming Our Destiny*, the same collection in which she published “Aftermath”), the naming of military bases bordering reservations identifies the function of the carceral state that justified the expropriation of Indigenous lands in the name of protecting power allows for an opening to contextualize Black and Indigenous relationality within carceral geographies. American Indian Reservations were the early sites of carceral geographies as settler colonizers committed genocide and pushed Indigenous people onto increasingly smaller and contained lands. Native reservations throughout the twentieth century also became dumping grounds for nuclear waste, in addition to being the source for all uranium mining.<sup>155</sup> Such activities put Natives at the highest risk. As Naiche Wolf Soldier and Robert Free explain: “The devastation and horror that would befall our Earth as experienced by victims of Nagasaki and Hiroshima is something we all must work to prevent from happening. However, there doesn’t have to be a bomb blast to kill people with nuclear technology nor a bomb blast to destroy vast areas of land. None know this better than the Indian Nations in North America whose resources have been misused to serve as the backbone and foundation of the nuclear establishment.”<sup>156</sup> The same technologies used in Japan and later in the

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<sup>154</sup> White Earth Nation, “History,” <https://whiteearth.com/history>. Accessed March 14, 2023.

<sup>155</sup> Naiche Wolf Soldier and Robert Free, “Targeted for Death: Native American Lives and Land Threatened by Uranium Mining,” *Akwesasne Notes*, April 1, 1984. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed March 4, 2023.

<sup>156</sup> Wolf Soldier and Free, “Targeted for Death.”

Pacific Islands were being turned for profit, with Native communities bearing the costs of the investment in militarization and nuclear defense that Reagan had called on Congress to approve. Industry proved just as critical in the militarization of the nation. Indeed, from 1978-1983, oil companies from 1978-1983 gained control of 76% of uranium reserves, suggesting the key resources that drove the interests of energy companies: oil and nuclear power. The effects of these extractive economies are nothing short of genocidal, with leaks and waste product contaminating water, air, and soil. Natives understood uranium extraction and radiation contamination “to be a continuation of centuries of Euro-American genocide practiced against Indian peoples.”<sup>157</sup> Black feminist writers understood that this same racial calculus of the state that justified its use of nuclear weapons in Japan and the Pacific Islands was the same that later turned those mechanisms inward toward Black and Indigenous populations. That Jordan’s poetry makes space within these carceral geographies to trace these connections through writing is an instance of what Lisa Kahaleole Hall writes is the capacious, non-hierarchical break that Black feminist writings offers for Indigenous, away from a siloing and hierarchy of knowledge toward “the lateral sharing of difference” through stories and writing.<sup>158</sup> The opening within carceral geographies in which to apprehend the different experiences of Black and Indigenous groups opens up for multiple ways to do what Christina

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<sup>157</sup> Marie Bolton and Nancy C. Unger, “Barren Lands and Barren Bodies in Navajo Nation: Indian Women WARN about Uranium, Genetics, and Sterilization,” in *Medicine and Health Care in the Countryside: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges* (New York: Peter Lang, 2019), 373-392.

<sup>158</sup> Hall, “More than ‘Two Worlds’,” 81.

Sharpe calls to rethink “care laterally, in the register of the intramural, in a different relation than that of the violence of the state.”<sup>159</sup>

Whether for oil or nuclear power, the use of the National Guard to suppress Black struggles for racial equality and the militarization of the nation that led to the expansion of policing and a massive buildup in nuclear weapons, the carceral geographies created during the height of the cold war in the 1970s and 1980s suggest how the mutuality of militarism and policing prop up the carceral state. Black feminist writers such as Audre Lorde and June Jordan understood the racial-gendered mechanisms of statecraft and turned to poetry to alert readers to ongoing processes of genocidal violence being used against Black communities. They understood, too, that the military techniques and weapons tested in Asia and the Pacific were being turned against Black American communities, particularly in the late cold war years. In the next section, Toni Cade Bambara’s writings demonstrate what the expanded carceral state meant for the revolutionary possibilities in Southeast Asia as a region of Third World struggle. Where Lorde and Jordan showed the military carceral buildup occurring within the United States, an unprecedented buildup that tied the wars in Korea and Vietnam to the militarization of policing and criminalization of Black communities, Bambara saw firsthand the effects of this buildup in Vietnam.

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<sup>159</sup> Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 20.

### 3.2 Letters for the Revolution: Writing Across Carceral Geographies in Toni Cade

#### Bambara, *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive*

In July 1975, Toni Cade Bambara arrived with a delegation of four women, including herself and three white anti-war activists. The group had been invited by the Viet Nam Women's Union, who had contacted group organizer Arlene Eisen following a previous trip to the country. During the course of her work for women's liberation, Eisen had read Bambara's *The Black Woman* and Bambara's trenchant critiques of racism and sexism. Eisen felt it necessary to include a "militant black woman" on the delegation.<sup>160</sup> For her part, Bambara viewed the trip as an opportunity to share with the people of Viet Nam the revolutionary struggle from a Black perspective, through letters, literature, and posters. She wrote, "[A]s most of us know, the White Left has a virtual monopoly on trips like this. All too often, we're not able to send papers abroad, to inform other people, our allies, as to what we are doing in this country as part of the worldwide anti-imperialist movement."<sup>161</sup> Bambara viewed the revolutionary struggles in Viet Nam and the United States as interconnected in their aims to dismantle the structures of racism, sexism, imperialism, and homophobia. She believed situating Black struggle within an international context showed "that aggressive revolutionary groups in the United States also faced highly

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<sup>160</sup> Quoted in Linda Janet Holmes, *A Joyous Revolt: Toni Cade Bambara, Writer and Activist*, Series, edited by Joanne M. Braxton (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014), 78.

<sup>161</sup> Toni Cade Bambara, "From The Vietnam Notebooks (1975)," in *Savoring the Salt: The Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara*, edited by Linda Janet Holmes and Cheryl A. Wall (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 105.



repressive tactics that included surveillance and violence.”<sup>162</sup> The writing born of that trip was the short story collection, *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive*.

Bambara’s *Sea Birds* maps an anti-colonial geography through the genre of the short story collection. The titular story is the key connecting all the parts of the collection, situating Black struggle within the broader struggles for decolonization. While her earlier collection, *Gorilla, My Love*, focused on stories of Black life and particularly Black girlhood, in *Sea Birds* the focus is on different sites of revolutionary struggle. Drawn from her trip in Viet Nam, with many of the unpublished stories written in anticipation of the trip, Bambara’s collection exerts what Shaundra Myers calls “*geographic potency*: the capacity to assert geographic desire toward the remaking of one’s relation to the world.”<sup>163</sup> Indeed, much of Bambara’s writing expressed this desire. Farah Jasmine Griffin notes, “In all of her stories, Bambara tries to imagine a new world.”<sup>164</sup> The new world that Bambara aims to map is the world that emerges after and in the midst of the state’s ongoing carceral violence, a world brought into being by young Black and Brown girls. Stories like “The Organizer’s Wife,” about a rural Black community about to be uprooted by developers and miners seeking the vast tracts of granite under their homes; or “The Long Night,” which shows the violence of a raid by riot police in a Black apartment complex; or “A Girl’s Story,” about a

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<sup>162</sup> Holmes, *A Joyous Revolt*, 81.

<sup>163</sup> Myers, “Transnational Visions of Black Women Writing,” 213.

<sup>164</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin, “How Do You Measure a Revolution? Lessons Learned from Toni Cade,” in *Savoring the Salt: The Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara*, edited by Linda Janet Holmes and Cheryl A. Wall (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 131.

young girl's coming-of-age and experiencing the menstrual pain but finding comfort in the co-op community of elders and revolutionary foremothers—these stories are connected and others are connected by the “The Sea Birds Are Still Alive.”

By the time she published *Sea Birds* in 1977, Bambara was perhaps one of the better known Black women writers in the national literary sphere. Her edited anthology, *The Black Woman* (1970), followed soon after by the short story collection, *Gorilla, My Love* (1972), had catapulted Bambara to the national literary scene. Both publications before *Sea Birds* also drew on visual cues to encode the texts as centering the experiences of Black women and girls. Thus the image of an Asian woman on the cover and the titular story focused on an unnamed Southeast Asian country set *Sea Birds* apart from her previous publications, or so it appeared. While set in an unfamiliar setting for many African Americans, the titular story's centrality to a collection of other stories distinctly focused on Black life are an attempt to write across carceral geographies and connect places of anti-colonial struggle. From the naming of revolutionary ancestors (Fannie Lou Hamer, Harriet Tubman, Malcolm) and insurgent, anti-colonial geographies (Guinea Bissau, Vietnam) that appear on the posters, the walls, and the writings in the schoolhouse in “The Organizer's Wife,” the box of contraband surveillance papers and intel gathered by Black Power activists in “The Long Night,” or the community center in “A Girl's Story,” the revolutionary letters and figures supply the rich texture of the revolutionary world in *Sea Birds*, connect geographies of liberation. Rather than a physical geography or racial community, then, Bambara's short story collection maps sites of carceral geographies and seeds of revolutionary possibility that grow in their aftermath.

“Sea Birds” takes place on a boat that follows a cast of characters. There are the various agents of empire (the man from the Defense Department, the French foreign correspondent, the colonial scholar, and the various Canadian, American, Australian, and European foreigners), the local actors who are complicit with maintaining the hegemony of this extant power structure (the landlord, the patriarch, the soldier), insurgent provocateurs (the boat’s pilot, the grandmother, the young girl and her mother), and those who are neither imperialists nor revolutionaries but instead regular people living on the fringe of society (refugees, vendors, the young man with a hard brown face displaced by the nuclear bombs dropped on his atoll). The story circles around a young girl who stands at the back of the boat throwing morsels of food to birds overhead, a seemingly wasteful action, the significance of which remains veiled until the story’s end.

Within this space, the agents of empire represent the modes of hegemonic knowledge production instrumentalized by the carceral state. The production of knowledge through various forms of intelligence is necessary to the functioning and operations of settler security. The presence of the man from the Defense Department, who worked previously for the Department of the Interior overseeing “Midwest Indians” and who was transferred to oversee the “refugees evacuated by the United States in its war against the Reds” in an instrument of the US carceral state that has used mechanisms of biological weapons, population control, and scientific testing to commit genocide against Indigenous people on its colonial frontiers that now extend to Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, and eventually, the entire rest of the world populated by people of color targeted by the greed and power hunger of an insatiable colonial power.<sup>165</sup> The refugee camp, like the

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<sup>165</sup> Bambara, “The Sea Birds Are Still Alive,” in *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 79.

reservation, makes visible the technologies that produce carceral geographies, but the racialization of “people indigenous to the Mekong, the Indian Ocean, the Pacific” as being indistinguishable to the man from “the Indians from Minnesota or the Hawaiians on TV or the Mexicans recently moved into his daughter’s neighborhood” suggests the construction of whiteness will not cease until colonizing the lands of all people identified as “Third world” whether in or outside the claimed national territory.<sup>166</sup>

The Defense Department man’s frustrated attempts to get honest answers to charges of germ and chemical warfare being conducted against native populations exemplifies how intelligence gathering serves militaristic and surveillance purposes. Bambara also pokes sly humor at the various modes of (un)intelligence that prop up hegemonic power but are not true knowledge at all. The newspapers swirling around on deck, ignored by all on deck who either don’t care or can’t read suggests the non-functionality of the censored press as a state apparatus. The foreign correspondent underscores the irrelevance of state-controlled knowledge production further, her scattered pages of endless notes revealing nothing about the actual moment of revolution. Instead, her self-interested, vulturistic urgency to get to the “mobilized city” because “she had missed Paris in the spring of ‘68” prevents her from seeing that the real revolutionaries are the regular people onboard the boat. Intelligence here meant to further the aims of the counter-insurgency is shown to be ill-equipped.

Bambara shows the homology of the policing and displacement of African Americans with the policing and displacement of Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders through coded language

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<sup>166</sup> Bambara, “Sea Birds,” 81.

that connects the stories in *Sea Birds*. As Farah Jasmine Griffin notes, Bambara's use of "a vocabulary familiar to African Americans, the loss of home, of language, of culture" that familiarizes the Southeast Asian setting.<sup>167</sup> The familiar vocabulary on the meanings of home and belonging deferred allow readers to draw out the parallels between the displacement of islanders in "Sea Birds" and the displacement of rural African Americans in "The Organizer's Wife," as both stories reflect on what home means for those who've had it taken from them. But what makes Bambara's writing so cogent in its critiques of racism, imperialism, and capitalism, and what drives home the parallels she brings to surface, are the precise mechanisms of state-driven capitalist militarist ventures that cause these displacements in the first place and the aftermaths that bear out across generations. In "Sea Birds," the young man with the brown face recalls "the lovely atoll that was home devastated by two decades of atomic, then hydrogen, blasts. For years, with no compensation money, they waited for an unseen needle on an unknown gauge to record the radiation level and announce it safe to return home. They waited, complied, were rerouted, resettled at this camp or that island, the old songs gone, the dances forgotten, the elders and the ancient wisdoms put aside, the memory of home scattered in the wind."<sup>168</sup> A clear critique of the US dropping of atomic bombs on the Marshall Islands throughout 1946-1958, this passage is both foreshadowed by and a precautionary warning for Black Americans about the unwanted consequences of land development and capitalist profiteering that will affect their communities for generations, while disconnecting them from ancestral knowledge and wisdom. Put differently,

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<sup>167</sup> Griffin, "How Do You Measure a Revolution?," 133.

<sup>168</sup> Bambara, "Sea Birds," 76.

Bambara understands the racial calculus that guided the US military's evisceration of the atolls and recognizes the same extractive and destructive aims being turned on Black areas of domestic life. Thus in "The Organizer's Wife," the first story in the collection, foreshadows this scene in "Sea Birds," as the protagonist looks out on the land being sold granite extraction companies: "Virginia wondered what the men in her ruined garden were telling themselves now about land as power and land and man tied to the future, not the past. And what would they tell the women when the bulldozers came to claim the earth, to maim it, rape it, plunder it all with that bone-deep hatred for all things natural?...Then stump wasting, no more money to give, blown up out of the earth, the iron claw digging deep and merciless to rip out the taproots, leaving for the children their legacy, an open grave."<sup>169</sup> Time and futurity here are measured by the aftermath of destruction undertaken in the name of progress and development, a legacy that strips away ancestral wisdoms and destroys the legacy for future generations.

Bambara's critique of statecraft exposes the interlocking mechanisms used to police and terrorize insurgent groups are also echoed throughout the collection. The mother of the girl in "Sea Birds" is occasionally overcome by fits of PTSD, "hands tight between her legs protecting what'd been violated. 'Nothing,' she'd moan. 'I'll tell you nothing,' her head jerking as though some unseen hand had her by the hair. 'You'll never break our spirits. We cannot be defeated.'"<sup>170</sup> The girl is also subjected to torture during interrogation "at the precinct bunker, [where] they'd stuff hoses up her nose and pumped in soapy water, fish brine, water from the district's sewer till her

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<sup>169</sup> Bambara, "The Organizer's Wife," in *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive*, 17.

<sup>170</sup> Bambara, "Sea Birds," 87.

belly swelled up, bloated to near bursting. Then they beat her with the poles, sticks, rods of bamboo, some iron till she vomited, nearly drowning. She told them nothing.”<sup>171</sup> The techniques of waterboarding and beating here are a reminder of the techniques of war used in domestic applications. As Singh notes, in the case of the US military, the “police intelligence gathering, violent interrogation methods, detention, torture, and assassination disseminated domestically by the late 1960s in police responses to urban riots and rebellions.”<sup>172</sup> The fact that this torture takes place at the precinct, and therefore within the national domestic space, drives home the connections between the war within and the war without: in both instances, they are actions of the state against resistance fighters. That this wartime torture, rape, and brutal interrogation might break her is what the woman fears in “The Long Night”: “She would tell. They would beat her and she would tell more. They would taunt and torture and she would tell all. They’d put a gun in her eye and she would tell even what there wasn’t to tell. Chant it. Sing it. Moan it. Shout it. Incriminate her neighbors. Sell her mama. Hawk her daddy. Trade her friends. Turn in everybody. Turn on everything. And never be the same. Dead or alive, never be the same. Blasted from her place.”<sup>173</sup> The descriptions of the raid evoke the surveillance and use of riot police that characterized the state’s racial terror against Black Power leadership and to quell the rebellions that occurred throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In this instance, despite her fears, the protagonist of “The Long

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<sup>171</sup> Bambara, “Sea Birds,” 91.

<sup>172</sup> Singh, *Race and America’s Long War*, 69.

<sup>173</sup> Bambara, “The Long Night,” in *The Sea Birds Are Still Alive*, 98.

Night” survives the raid, in much the same way that the young girl and her mother survive the numerous beatings, waterboarding, and torture in “Sea Birds.”

“Sea Birds” is the key to cracking the code hidden in between the stories of Bambara’s collection: the call for revolution. That this story is encoded is telling in its use of the disembodied point of view. As Shaundra Myers notes, the disembodied perspective in “Sea Birds” is unique to this singular story and stands out from an author who otherwise writes from an embodied perspective of Black womanhood or girlhood.<sup>174</sup> Within this space of heightened surveillance and knowledge production instrumentalized to strengthen the carceral state, a call for revolutionary action must be furtive and coded. Yet even within carceral geographies, care remains possible and necessary for collective survival. At the story’s end, as the girl disembarks from the boat and follows the hawker, the secrecy that has shrouded her presence under the guise of a servant girl that is almost threatened by the presence of the little boy hired to watch the docks. The woman who notices him, however, and suspects his surveillance, observes too that he is malnourished and is concerned. This then is part of that lateral, intramural care that counters the violence of the surveillance state, one that shows revolutionary possibility survives this violence.

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<sup>174</sup> Myers, “Transnational Visions of Black Women Writing,” 218.



### 3.3 Conclusion

Reading Bambara's writings today reminds readers of the infectious excitement for revolutionary possibility that characterized the late 1960s and 1970s, but for readers after 9/11, it is also hard not to feel some despair. The fatigue of the speaker in Jordan's "Aftermath," published just twelve years after Bambara's *Sea Birds*, suggests the toll of relentless state violence and racial terror. "I am tired of this digging up of human bodies," the speaker says in what one can imagine is a weary, defeated sigh. The United States may have withdrawn its troops from Viet Nam in 1975, but the modalities of state terror have expanded into civilian life. Indeed, the form of Shockley's poem, the contrapuntal, like in long division, directs the attention to what carries over: the remains of human bodies neglected by those who did not care to save them from death, the modalities of racial terror that carry over from foreign wars to domestic rebellions, the racial calculus of a nation-state founded on anti-Black slavery and Indigenous genocide. That the emotional heft of Jordan's "Aftermath" reverberates in the present and surfaces in Shockley's poem is a testament to what Black feminists of the post-1968 era anticipated would be the aftermath of the carceral state: not the realization of a post-racial and democratic society but instead the tightening stranglehold of the carceral state and its simultaneous expansion and production of violence and neglect of those left murdered, displaced, or incarcerated in its wake. "Genocide doesn't only mean bombs/at high noon," as Lorde's speaker reminds us.

While the hoped-for revolution has yet to come, the tools for revolution that Black feminists did leave behind shape their legacy. The interrogation of one's complicity within structures of domination, a wariness about the terms of inclusion when it means acquiescence to

statecraft and imperialism, and warnings about the co-opting of racial liberalism and multiculturalism as small gains in return for the seemingly ceaseless growth of US empire were touchstones of Black feminist theorizing that also had direct relevance for Asian and Asian Americans. The next chapter will show how in the state's zero-sum game, racial inclusion comes at a high cost for those left behind by US wars and occupations.

#### 4.0 Children of the Aftermaths: Amerasians and the Blood Logic of Cold War In/Securities

Aftermath \æftər,mæθ\ (*figurative*):

A (usually undesired) thing remaining or left after the end or exit of something.<sup>175</sup>

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“Shut up, you guys!” Lobetto snarled. “I am reading my father’s letter, and it says King, whoever he is, says we are—shit, now here’s a word I don’t know, but I think it means...leftovers. Or maybe outcasts. Yeah, my father says we’re outcasts in our own land.”

“Shit,” Chung Woo said, looking from Lobetto to Sookie. “He’s talking about us. He’s talking about America Town.”

—Nora Okja Keller, *Fox Girl*<sup>176</sup>

The epigraph from Nora Okja Keller’s *Fox Girl* (2002) takes place in a fictionalized South Korean military camp town called America Town, “where the GIs divided the streets into white section and black section.”<sup>177</sup> Within these camptowns, Amerasian children embody the intimacies between American soldiers and Asian women and the racial-gendered sexual economies that sustain US militarism. Lobetto is one of those children, his mother a military prostitute and his father, an African American GI who returned to the United States after his tour of duty in Korea. Lobetto learns from his father’s letter that despite the latter’s attempts to find a path to immigration for his son, such options are limited not only because of restrictive immigration policies but also because of domestic racial politics. Lobetto’s father writes, ““Bobby, I’ve been trying to find a place for you. My...fantasy, illusion, um...dream is that there will be a place for us in America. Dr. King [...] whoever he is, says we are—shit, now here’s a word I don’t know, but I think it

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<sup>175</sup> “Aftermath,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

<sup>176</sup> Nora Okja Keller, *Fox Girl* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 96.

<sup>177</sup> Keller, *Fox Girl*, 5.

means...leftovers. Or maybe outcasts. Yeah, my father says we're outcasts in our own land.'"<sup>178</sup>

In his attempts to translate his father's letter from the English to the Korean, the slippage between fantasy, illusion, and dream underscores the harsh reality that Black Amerasians' fantasies of immigrating may well prove illusory so long as the dream of Black civil rights and citizenship remains deferred. Caught in this complex entanglement of US domestic racial politics racialized foreign policies, Amerasians are figured as "leftovers" or "outcasts," left behind by American fathers who are themselves subject to the terms of domestic racial exclusion.

This scene from Keller's *Fox Girl* reflects what I call "Cold War in/securities," in which issues of domestic racial politics influence foreign policy regulating the militarized intimacies that form in sites of US military-led security in the Asian-Pacific. In their persuasive if self-consciously US-centric text, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity*, historians Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall argue that US domestic politics substantively shaped the nation's foreign policies during the Cold War, creating a "politics of insecurity" that determined the decisions of US policymakers, even when an actual threat to security had become non-existent."<sup>179</sup> As Craig and Logevall point out, the US policy of containment to restrict the sphere of Soviet influence had largely succeeded by 1949, but rather than scale back militarization, the next forty years saw the development and rapid expansion of what President Dwight D. Eisenhower famously referred to as the "military-industrial complex." Because American politicians knew that no direct threat to the nation's security persisted, military expansionism required the continual evocation of a threat

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<sup>178</sup> Keller, *Fox Girl*, 95-96.

<sup>179</sup> Craig and Logevall, *America's Cold War*, x.

through the specter of the nation's insecurity. While my use of "in/security" differs from their usage of "insecurity" because I attend to the influence of interimperial histories that impact national politics, I find their framework useful for thinking about the entanglement and indeed the influence of domestic politics on foreign policy decisions. However, one substantive factor that Craig and Logevall overlook in the enmeshment of domestic politics and US foreign policy is that of race and the civil rights movements, domestic issues that both influenced and were influenced by Cold War foreign policies. The international community had long criticized the United States' deferral of human and civil rights for Black Americans. By the mid- to late-twentieth-century, with the emergence of the ideology of racial liberalism—the belief in racial inclusion and civil rights for minority groups—policymakers and intellectuals recognized failures to include minority groups put at risk the position of the United States as a global leader. Such inclusive policies would further the global legitimacy of the United States, with the federal government orchestrating this social engineering. The rollout of policies of school desegregation and civil rights were thus a response to Cold War politics, intended to maintain the image of the United States as a multi-racial democracy, if not the actuality of it.<sup>180</sup> Thus, what I call Cold War in/securities directs attention to the entanglement of domestic and foreign racial politics that are themselves shaped within sites structured the enduring legacies of imperialism and militarism.

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<sup>180</sup> See Derrick A. Bell, Jr., "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma," Comment, *Harvard Law Review* (1980): 518-533; Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative"; Edwards, *The Other Side of Terror*.

Amerasians become caught in this complex nexus of Cold War in/securities shaped by imperialism, militarism, and racial-gendered power structures. The term “Amerasian” in the American lexicon refers to people of American and Asian parentage. In Asian countries, the terms used to describe Amerasians vary from American *mestizos* in the Philippines, to *konketsuji* in Japan, *honhyeolin* in Korea, and *con lai* in Vietnam.<sup>181</sup> The term as it is used in Asian countries more often means “mixed-blood,” revealing an underlying racial discourse rooted in imperial classifications, where “race” is understood not primarily in terms of skin color but instead in terms of blood. Thus, the term “Amerasian” is thus not universally used, but a distinctly Anglo-American term, one that was introduced to obscure the colonial implications of U.S. occupations and military presence. Pearl S. Buck, who is often attributed with coining the term “Amerasians,” makes this distinction between Eurasians and Amerasians in her memoir *Spacious Skies*:

I had seen them long ago in Asia, and they were called Eurasians. Then they had been the children of empire, their fathers English or European, their mothers Indian, Indo-Chinese or Indonesia. But these now were not the children of empire. They were and are

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<sup>181</sup> Nicholas Trajano Molnar, *American Mestizos, the Philippines, and the Malleability of Race: 1898-1961* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2017); Yukiko Koshiro, “Race as International Identity? ‘Miscegenation’ in the U.S. Occupation of Japan and Beyond,” *Internationalizing U.S. History, Amerikastudien/American Studies* 48, no. 1 (2003): 61-77; Onjung Yang, “State Responsibility toward a Perpetual Minority: Amerasians in South Korea,” *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 10, no. 3 (2018): 19-40, <https://doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v10.i3.6054>; and Thomas Bass, *Vietnam: The War Comes Home* (New York: Soho Press Inc., 1996).

the children of American men, and they are born not of imperial rules but of liberators. Let them be called Amerasians!<sup>182</sup>

Buck's neologism (a term she notes was first suggested to her by a man from the state department) gets at an underlying anxiety about the history of US imperialism and military colonialism in Asia, a history in which Amerasians deeply rooted.<sup>183</sup> Buck's use of the post-war rhetoric of "liberation" thus masked over the reality that the United States had and still maintained a form of colonialism in many parts of Asia. As the product of intimacies between American GIs and Asian women, Amerasians were thus seen by many as a living embodiment of imperial intimacies. My use of "intimacies" here is twofold, drawing first on what Ann Laura Stoler explains characterizes as the biopolitical management of colonial state power, in which domestic acts of intimacy constitute a "colonial point of transfer."<sup>184</sup> In areas where US military occupation created conditions of quasi-coloniality, the policies governing relations between American soldiers and Asian women enforced US colonial policies. In many countries and occupied areas of Asia, including Korea, Okinawa, the Philippines, and Vietnam, these sites of domestic intimacy were also embedded within longer

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<sup>182</sup> Quoted in Emily Cheng, "Pearl S. Buck's 'American Children': US Democracy, Adoption of the Amerasian Child, and the Occupation of Japan in *The Hidden Flower*," *Frontiers* 35, no. 1 (2014), 188.

<sup>183</sup> P.C. Kutschera, "Military Pan Amerasians and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Implications for Diasporic and Global Studies," *Asia Journal of Global Studies* 6, no. 1 (2014-15): 30-47. See also Thomas Bass, *Vietnam: The War Comes Home* (New York: Soho Press Inc., 1996), 121.

<sup>184</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, editor, "Intimidations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen," Introduction to *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 14.

histories of Asian, European, and American imperialisms. The interpersonal relations between American GIs and Asian women were also indicative of the economies and political agreements shaped by the intimacies of imperial powers. As Lisa Lowe writes, intimacies reveal the “often obscured connections between the emergence of European liberalism, settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic African slave trade, and the East Indies and China trades in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.”<sup>185</sup> During the Cold War, the interimperial intimacies of the United States and Japan persisted in ways that shaped the interpersonal, domestic intimacies between the American occupying forces, Asian women, and their Amerasian offspring. While hardly the only imperial or hegemonic powers in the region, the intimacies between the two imperial powers of Japan and the United States in particular produced the conditions of possibility and economies of desire in the military camptowns, where domestic arrangements between American soldiers and Asian women ultimately served as a transfer point for the enforcement of the US-JP Mutual Security Treaty and the militarization of the Asian-Pacific throughout the Cold War. Such intimacies and the policies governing them were grounded in the colonial logics of race that positioned African people and colonized Asian people within a hierarchy of Western white supremacy. But as the United States continued its pursuit of expansionism through what Jodi Kim calls the military structure of the “settler garrison,” the security of that regime required the promotion of a Euro-American racial liberalism, one that painted a benevolent face onto the brutal occupation of Asian countries, promoting the inclusion of mixed-race individuals and particularly Amerasians to legitimize the expansion of the US-JP security regime.

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<sup>185</sup> Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 1.



Mid- to late-twentieth century representations of Amerasians correspond with these entanglements of imperial pasts and colonial structures that persist in the form of military bases in the Asian-Pacific and the ways that this expansionism depended in part on the emergent ideology of racial liberalism. Because of their associations with imperial powers, war, militarism, and the often coerced sexual transactions between American GIs and Asian women, Amerasians are represented as the children of US militarism's aftermaths, tragic figures unwanted by their Asian mothers and left behind by their American fathers. Many representations of Amerasians portray them as being the children of American GIs and Asian women prostitutes, in ways that produce their abjection and reinforce the view of Amerasians as children of the aftermaths, unwanted, forgotten, and abandoned by both their American fathers and Asian mothers, and, in the case of Black Amerasians, subjected to both American and Asian anti-blackness.

Without dismissing the real hardships that Amerasians experience in their ostracization from social communities and, in some cases, their preclusion from the protection of citizenship, these characterizations can also reinforce a myth of racial purity that destines mixed-race or mixed-blood peoples for violence or death. This rhetoric pervades the discourse of Amerasians in both popular culture, policy, literature, and scholarship as well. For example, Bernard Scott Lucious writes that Afro-Amerasians in Vietnam experience high degrees of "racial displacement," being excluded from familial, social, and national communities.<sup>186</sup> Similarly, Thomas A. Bass explains the "studies all agree that Amerasians have less schooling, fewer skills, and lower opinions of themselves [...] Their mothers are castigated as whores. Their fathers are long gone. They are

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<sup>186</sup> Lucious, "In the Black Pacific," 130.

unloved, unwanted, the rotten fruit of bad seed.”<sup>187</sup> In legislation, debates over the status of Amerasians, particularly in Asia, served to further US Cold War interests and fuel anti-communist rhetoric. In Asian American literature, in which representations of Black Amerasians saw a spike after the 1990s, representations of Amerasians also confronted the anti-Blackness within Asian and Asian American communities. Such portrayals can be seen as a response to the rhetorics of color-blind racism and multiculturalism that sought to flatten difference and glossed over the interracial tensions between two minoritized groups. In this way, attention to the lived and represented experiences of Amerasians and their alienation from Asian and Asian American communities can be understood as an attempt to get to the heart of racial formation and Asian anti-Blackness.

At the same time, many of these same narratives portray Black Amerasians as destined to lives of tragedy, destitution, addiction, prostitution, and early death in ways that recall the tropes of the Tragic Mulatta. Such narratives, even as they attempt to confront the root cause of systemic forces—white supremacy, colonialism, and myths of racial purity—may also reify the very constructs they seek to interrogate. As Kimberly Snyder Manganelli notes, gendered narratives of mixed-race individuals often focus on mixed-race women, whose “racial difference rendered them spectacles of sexuality and desire.”<sup>188</sup> Racial ambiguity conflated with ideas of sexual availability or vulnerability generated “a narrative that offered only two choices—sexual violation or

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<sup>187</sup> Bass, *Vietnamerica*, 122.

<sup>188</sup> Kimberly Snyder Manganelli, *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race: The Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 9.

death.”<sup>189</sup> Narratives of Amerasians similarly present mixed-race individuals with two choices, either sexual violation through continuation in the system of sex trafficking surrounding military camptowns or death, whether literal or social. Amerasians represent a “crisis of visibility” that challenged myths of racial and national purity while reminding the public about the recent histories of militarism and imperialism. For this reason, much of the discourse on Amerasians emphasizes again and again the appearance of Amerasians, attesting to how the very function of race as a visualizing technology that produces ideas about what certain races should “look like” was being re-written because of these histories of imperialism and militarism. Such representations have a profound impact that in an era of globalization and continued increases to US military expansion may end up doing more harm than good by circulating the logics of white supremacy.

In an attempt to disentangle the ways that interimperial intimacies, militarism, and racial logics intersect in representations of Amerasians, I begin the chapter with an analysis of the interimperial entanglements and the colonial and neo-colonial discourses of race and domesticity that have shaped the rhetoric on Amerasians. A focus on intimacy in the analysis of the US-JP Mutual Security Treaty underscores how much the colonial management of domestic relations between American soldiers, Asian women, and Amerasian offspring was crucial in the transition from old colonialisms to new ones in the making of Cold War security. These interimperial intimacies surface in the legislative proceedings for the 1982 Amerasian Immigration Act. By reading representations of Amerasians within a transpacific framework, my analysis aims to perceive the broader picture of interimperial entanglements that shape the distinctions of the

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

domestic and the foreign in racialized figures. Tracing this figure's appearance across legislative and literary discourses reveals how Amerasians embody not only changing concepts of race, but also the contemporary expansion of US and Asian militarisms in the Asian-Pacific. The senate hearings for the Amerasian Immigration Act are revealing, too, for how they articulate racial liberalism as a domestic ideology guiding US foreign policy through Amerasian immigration programs.

Asian American ambivalence about the promises versus the realities of racial liberalism leads to the second and third sections of the chapter, in which I analyze how Asian American representations of Amerasians were a response to the "*protracted afterlife* of the Cold War."<sup>190</sup> Focusing on Nora Okja Keller's *Fox Girl* and Viet Thanh Nguyen's "The Americans," I analyze how Asian American literary production and critique has turned to representations of Amerasians to interrogate the intersections of US and Japanese imperialism and militarism in sites of intimacy. Representations of Black Amerasians are more common starting from the 1990s, suggesting the conflicted ambivalence embedded within Asian American critique about the myth of the model minority constructed over and against Black Americans. I focus on these two texts in particular, however, because of the explicit ties they make to the expanding network of securitization shaped by the context of the US-JP Mutual Security Treaty. Keller's *Fox Girl* portrays the racial-gendered contours of security that markets in the trafficking of women's bodies, drawing similarities between Black and Korean abjection. At the same time, Keller's and other Asian American novels that rely on tropes of Black Amerasian abjection recall nineteenth-century narratives of the Tragic

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<sup>190</sup> Kim, *Ends of Empire*, 4.

Mulatta in ways that may make Asian American cultural production complicit in circulating myths of racial purity and white supremacy. Nguyen's short story offers a counterpoint to these narratives of tragedy and abjection, nuancing Amerasian representation while reflecting on Asian American and Black American complicities with white power structures of security in the Asian-Pacific. What the circulation of these narratives tells us is the abiding ambivalence of the American public regarding the increasing militarization and securitization in the Pacific. Indeed, as I argue, it is no accident that representations of Amerasians continue to capture our imaginations because they tell us about the capricious and proliferating structures of security in a region shaped by powerful and hegemonic US, Asian, and European countries. The changing representations of Amerasians reflects our desires to contend with the geopolitical and contemporary landscape of increasing militarization and securitization in the Pacific into the twenty-first century.

#### **4.1 The Children of the Aftermaths: Cold War Intimacies, Interimperial Entanglements**

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, US occupation of Japan brought floods of American soldiers, stationed in the newly pacified country to help with reconstruction. Americans and Japanese worked together to repair war-torn buildings, bombed out roads, and participate in cross-cultural exchanges through social dances, bonsai classes, geisha performances, and more. But for both US and Japanese administrators, concerns arose about the extent to which such fraternization should be allowed. Beliefs in racial purity betrayed a profound fear on both sides about the implications of miscegenation between the people of two countries that had only just

entered a new era of uneasy partnership. Whatever the position of administrators, however, it was clear that fraternization would not be easy to prohibit, a fact that General Douglas MacArthur, at the time the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP), admitted as much when he reportedly stated, “They keep trying to get me to stop all this Madam Butterflying around. I won’t do it.”<sup>191</sup> MacArthur’s reference to the Orientalist trope of Madame Butterfly draws upon a discourse fetishizing Asian women and characterizing them as prostitutes, an association that would cast a shadow over not only the Asian women in question but also their offspring with American soldiers, in ways that would mark Amerasians as the children of Asian women prostitutes, regardless of their actual parentage.

MacArthur’s insistence on permitting fraternization among American soldiers and, in this case, Japanese women likely was concerned foremost with the logistical practicalities of enforcing non-fraternization, but his comment, too, was informed by an awareness that intimacies and partnerships on a national and interpersonal level had historically served both nations after the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, when U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt brokered a treaty that gave Korea to Japan and began a brutal 35-year colonization. Those earlier entanglements surfaced again in 1950, with the start of the Korean War, and informed the signing of the 1951 US-Japan Mutual Security Agreement. The security agreement formalized a political intimacy between the two nations, and with it, produced the conditions for other militarized intimacies to emerge. In the treaty, the two nations agreed to a “treaty of mutual cooperation and security” to serve a “common

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<sup>191</sup> Quoted in *The Aftermath: Asia*, 41.

concern in the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East.”<sup>192</sup> Although the agreement was strictly between the United States and Japan, it set the stage for the U.S. militarization and security policies in the Pacific. As the Cold War continued, that security became increasingly contingent on fostering more mutual relations between the two co-signed nations. In a telegram to Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in 1958, General Douglas MacArthur urged the Office of Foreign Affairs to consider a newly revised treaty to establish trust between the U.S. and Japan: “[W]e are in deadly earnest regarding the new era of true partnership ... to make the adjustments in our security arrangements based on the concept of full equality and partnership.”<sup>193</sup> Failure to do so, MacArthur cautioned, would mean “the very security alignment we want with Japan will be undermined; our relations with Japan envenomed; and at the same time we will be undermining the very leadership in Japan which holds the best promise for bringing Japan in the coming period into a long-term, durable alignment with the US and the free world.”<sup>194</sup> The need to protect the intimate relations between Japan and the United States betrays a deep anxiety about the stability of the US-Japan security alliance, which MacArthur saw as contingent on a mutuality he had worked so long to cultivate and even encourage in permitting fraternization between GIs and Asian women in sites of occupation.

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<sup>192</sup> *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States of America*. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html>.

<sup>193</sup> Douglas MacArthur, “Telegram From the Embassy in Japan to the Department of State,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958-1960, Japan, Korea, volume XVIII*, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v18/d15#fn:1.5.4.4.8.46.8.6>.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

Whatever MacArthur's personal reservations about non-fraternization policies, the governments of the United States, Japan, and Korea quickly passed legislation during the early years of the Cold War, prohibiting sexual and marital relations between American soldiers and Asian women and denying citizenship to their Amerasian offspring. The United States and Japan passed a policy of non-fraternization by the summer of 1946, with SCAP issuing instructions that all mixed-race babies born to an American father and Japanese mother were to be treated as Japanese unless the American father filed for paternity. As Yukiko Koshiro notes, "SCAP was reluctant to recognize the children's American identity" because of the understanding that "Eurasians of British, French, Dutch, and American paternity had grown into a 'problematic' minority."<sup>195</sup> However, rather than prevent intimacies between Japanese women and American soldiers and the births of Amerasians, the effect of these policies was to increase the numbers of illegitimate Amerasian children. On the Japanese side, the extant Nationality Law followed the rule of *jus sanguinis* through the father, thereby effectively precluding Amerasians from citizenship because of their American paternity. Post-war culture in Japan brought about more liberal attitudes toward racial mixing, as some came to believe that racial mixing could enhance the Americanization of Japan and contribute to a more progressive society. In 1950, a revision to the Japanese Nationality Law and the patrilineal rule of *jus sanguinis* created an exemption for illegitimate children to acquire Japanese nationality as long as they were born to a Japanese mother and could be listed on her family registry. An "enlightened" policy passed in 1951 further supported public education for mixed-race children. Despite these progressive policies, myths of

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<sup>195</sup> Koshiro, "'Race as International Identity?," 67-68.



racial purity persisted in long-held views that racial mixing would produce offspring with lower IQs, prompting various scientific studies of mixed-race children's intellectual capacities. The results were contradictory, but the Japanese Institute of Population Problems, Ministry of Welfare nonetheless concluded in 1954 it was best to discourage miscegenation in the future.

In Korea, policies over mixed-race children were also rooted in ideas of racial purity but were further complicated by the country's new post-colonial status as it emerged from the interimperial entanglements of Japan and the United States that first occasioned the creation of camptowns. Like Japan, Korean nationality laws followed *jus sanguinis* through patrilineal lines. The 1948 Korean Nationality Law established that a Korean national was anyone whose father was a national of the Republic of Korea. Because many Amerasians born in Korea were understood to have US military service men as fathers, the law prevented them from claiming Korean citizenship. Public perception was that Amerasians were the children of women who had worked as prostitutes, a profession rooted in the legacies of Japanese and US imperialisms. The 1905 agreement brokered by Truman that "gave" Korea to Japan began a brutal era of occupation and colonialism that lasted from 1910 to 1945. During World War II, the Japanese "comfort" system of sexual slavery trafficked women through military outposts, which were later repurposed for the US military after the end of the war.<sup>196</sup> The myriad intimacies that occurred between American soldiers and Korean women that produced Amerasian offspring were thus shaped not only within the local contexts of US militarism but also the interimperial entanglements between the United

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<sup>196</sup> Katharine H.S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

States and Japan. Amerasians, often seen as living embodiments of these histories of interimperial intimacies, would come to bear the weight for how these histories were represented and understood in different nation-building projects throughout the Cold War.

The prejudices and policies in Asian countries concerning Amerasians fed into broader discourses of racial liberalism within the United States, where anxieties about the role of the US state in upholding family values and the nation's responsibility for Amerasians became central to the debates of US foreign and immigration policy. While US discourse and policy in the early years of the Cold War operated on the myth of racial purity by excluding Amerasians, the rhetoric in the later years of the Cold War were influenced by two significant events: the Vietnam War and civil rights movements. In other words, the public ambivalence about US invasion in Vietnam were reflected in the shifting discourse of Amerasians that changed from a myth of racial purity to the myth of the model minority.

American support for adopting Amerasians and refugeeed Vietnamese children were shaped by a prevailing discourse about the cruelty of Communist Vietnam. Amerasians in the 1980s became "entangled in American ambivalence about the Vietnam War."<sup>197</sup> Portrayals of Amerasians focused on their mistreatment and victimhood, revealing this ambivalence and the desire to reshape the nation's identity by caring for the children of the aftermaths. For example, the year after the Amerasian Homecoming Act (1988), an article in the *Star Tribune* described the

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<sup>197</sup> Allison Varzally, *Children of Reunion: Vietnamese Adoptions and the Politics of Family Migrations* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 89.

“flood of adopted Korean babies” who entered the country as the “unwanted aftermath of war.”<sup>198</sup> *The Washington Post* lamented the plight of the Amerasians from Vietnam as a reflection of “our involvement with Vietnam and its long, sad aftermath.”<sup>199</sup> Another review in *Buffalo News* remarked upon the “long view of war’s aftermath victims,” many of whom were “unwanted and unloved by their mothers, most of them unwanted and unknown by their fathers.”<sup>200</sup> An article in *The Nation* concludes, “the Amerasians...reveal to us what that war of ours has always done: shown us what we look (and sound) like to others, shown us who — and what — we are.”<sup>201</sup> Unwanted, wounded, and borne in the aftermaths of the United States’ wars and occupations, Amerasians plucked at the heartstrings and brought to surface the unresolved guilt and conflicted feelings over the war in Vietnam for a public eager to prove to the world the compassion and democratic goodwill of Americans.

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<sup>198</sup> Kim Ode, “Flood of Adopted Korean Babies Ebbs—Thousands of Youngsters Were the Unwanted Aftermath of War,” *Star Tribune*, December 24, 1989. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed March 25, 2022.

<sup>199</sup> Wayne Karlin, “Amerasians: The War’s Sad Legacy,” *The Washington Post*, July 22, 1996. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1996/07/22/amerasians-the-wars-sad-legacy/03c47272-2107-4641-a026-f0e44e413470/>. Accessed March 23, 2022.

<sup>200</sup> Mark Shechner, “A Long View of War’s Aftermath Victims, Villains in Amerasian Saga,” *Buffalo News*, April 28, 1996. [https://buffalonews.com/news/a-long-view-of-wars-aftermath-victims-villains-in-amerasian-saga/article\\_626c12ce-4522-53c4-ad0f-1b4f8c9d8f08.html](https://buffalonews.com/news/a-long-view-of-wars-aftermath-victims-villains-in-amerasian-saga/article_626c12ce-4522-53c4-ad0f-1b4f8c9d8f08.html). Accessed March 22, 2022.

<sup>201</sup> “Vietnamica: The War Comes Home,” *The Nation*, April 22, 1996. <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Vietnamica%3a+The+War+Comes+Home.-a018205329>. Accessed March 22, 2022.

It was with this view toward righting the wrongs of American wars that the Amerasian Immigration Act was first proposed. On June 21, 1982, a U.S. senate committee hearing convened to discuss S.1698: The Amerasian Immigration Proposal as an amendment to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. The bill sought to “provide preferential treatment in the admission of certain children of United States Armed Forces personnel.”<sup>202</sup> The proposal extended first-order preference to the estimated 25,000-50,000 Amerasians born to Asian mothers and fathered by American citizens after 1950 in Korea, Vietnam, Japan, the Philippines, Laos, Taiwan, and Thailand. The hearing convened congressional members on the Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy, the Department of State, Veterans’ Affairs Committee, representatives of international adoption agencies—including the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, Holt International Children’s Service, and Americans for International Aid—as well as testimonies from several Amerasians. Immigration was suggested as the only humane solution for the Amerasian children.

The Americans who participated in the senate hearings emphasized the Amerasians’ victimization, simultaneously vilifying Asian cultures while valorizing the United States as a paternal benefactor. Senator Jeremiah Denton, who helped co-sponsor the bill, urged Congress to pass the bill for “those abandoned Amerasian children who, for reasons grounded in Asian culture, have been treated with discrimination and, sometimes, cruelty,” stating that his own interest “in the cruelty in that area began with a commitment in 1965 with respect to the tens of millions who

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<sup>202</sup> U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on the Judiciary. *Amerasian Immigration Proposals: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., 1982, S. 1698. Committee Print 99-291 O, 4. Referred to hereafter as *Amerasian Immigration Proposals*.*

are now being treated cruelly in the loss of that overall cause.”<sup>203</sup> Denton noted that Amerasians “are subject to unremitting social discrimination because the Asian cultures resist assimilating children of mixed parentage,” but that he was confident Americans would “feel compassion for the Amerasians partly because of the discrimination” and “because they have American blood.”<sup>204</sup> Without stating so explicitly, S. 1698 was thus an opportunity for the United States to reshape the national narrative and its global image in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. The repeated emphasis on the cruelty of Asian nations and the natural affinity Americans for those abandoned children with American blood portray Amerasians as caught between two cultures, vulnerable to discrimination and harm in Asian countries and needing rescue from their American benefactors. The image of the wounded Amerasian produces the image of “an Asian figure in distress...to be rescued or destroyed again and again.”<sup>205</sup> Denton’s emphasis on the distress that Amerasians surely felt presented the ideal opportunity for the United States to recoup its image as a savior.

It was not just “American blood” that senate hearing members emphasized but the American features that aroused such public interest. Denton himself was moved to act on behalf of Amerasians after seeing a cover of a *Life* magazine issue with the image of an Amerasian with remarkably “American” looking features.<sup>206</sup> Similar stories and images of Amerasians circulated, stirring debate about what the face of a citizen ought to look like and the responsibility of the

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<sup>203</sup> Jeremiah Denton, *Amerasian Immigration Proposals*, 13.

<sup>204</sup> Jeremiah Denton, *Amerasian Immigration Proposals*, 13.

<sup>205</sup> Kim, *Postcolonial Grief*, 6.

<sup>206</sup> Varzally, *Children of Reunion*.

American nation toward its children who “looked American” but were left abandoned in Asia. Amerasians with their mixed-race features stirred up images of a “crisis of visibility,” with anxieties over racial mixing finding their way into the senate hearings for the Amerasian Immigration Act. In establishing the procedures for vetting Amerasian immigration applicants, the bill stated that the “consular officer shall consider the *physical appearance* of the applicant and any evidence provided by the applicant, including but not limited to birth and baptismal certificates, local civil records, photographs of, and letters or proof of financial support from, an American citizen.”<sup>207</sup> In part the emphasis on physical appearance was included because of the recognition that obtaining papers would prove impossible in specific circumstances where activities of war had destroyed local archives containing birth records. However, the focus on appearance also reflects the persistent ways that racial and national identities continue to be understood and construed based on phenotype. Race is itself a visualizing technology, one that is produced through the attachment of racial constructs to specific physical features (skin color, eye shape, nose shape, etc.) and with it, certain moral attributes understood as “embodied” by racialized subjects. For the Amerasians, such emphasis on physical features not only aimed to uncover the proportion of “American” and “Asian” attributes they might have but also produced ideas about what the combination of those qualities might mean for their character. Prevailing ideas about Amerasians at the time suggested they were prone to delinquency, criminality, prostitution, drug use, and deviousness, moral failings that were attributed in part by the suffering and discrimination they experienced in Asian countries. Walter Martindale, who himself had

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<sup>207</sup> *Amerasian Immigration Proposals*, 9, emphasis added.

adopted two Vietnamese children, noted that “these strictly structured [Asian] societies, intentionally or unintentionally, stigmatize these children not only due to their mixed blood and western physical features, but concurrently due to the status assigned them in the social hierarchy...[Amerasians] feel they do not belong and know they are different, but are not responsible and cannot change their fate.”<sup>208</sup> In this way, long-standing debates about race were repackaged in terms of culture while maintaining the idea of fate associated with narratives of racial ambiguity. By emphasizing the cruelty of Asian societies, these debates nonetheless continued to valorize American efforts to bring Amerasians “home.”

While touted as a humanitarian gesture that also sought to absolve American ambivalence about the war, the Amerasian Immigration Proposal served a secondary interest of protecting the structure of US security in the Asia-Pacific region. Bringing Amerasians into the fold of the American family was but another element supporting this expansionism. During the early years of the Reagan administration, expenditures on military projects nearly doubled as the Pentagon increased troop levels in Asia and invested in research and development for various nuclear weapons systems and the launch of a new “blue water navy.”<sup>209</sup> Between 1980-1985, the military budget doubled and reached \$294.7 billion. Senator Alan K. Simpson, chairman of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee and the Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Policy, alluded to this massive military buildup, noting the particular interest in the Amerasian immigration issue “particularly with regard to the long-term solutions as we continue to station troops in Asia to

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<sup>208</sup> Walter Martindale, *Amerasian Immigration Proposals*, 77.

<sup>209</sup> Craig and Logevall, *America’s Cold War*, 319.

further U.S. strategic and defense interests.”<sup>210</sup> Rescuing the Amerasians would sustain more amicable relations with the countries where the United States government had long maintained—and would continue to expand—its military bases to protect against the threat of Communism.

Such Cold War security concerns were also informed by the interests of industry and Wall Street, their converging interests informed by the view that U.S. militarism was necessary to protect free trade and therefore economic liberalism in the region. Several policymakers had started their careers on Wall Street, and various parts of industry stood to gain from the establishment of U.S.-dominated security in the region.<sup>211</sup> That Amerasians factored into this intimate partnering of the military and industry is evident in who was asked to serve as witness or expert in the Amerasian Immigration Proposal. Walter Martindale testified in the hearing, as a representative of the American International Trade Group, but his previous experience in the Asian-Pacific included 13 years of federal service, spent with the military, the U.S. State Department, and the Agency for International Development. Father Alfred V. Keane, the director of the Amerasian Affairs for International Aid and Maryknoll missionary, seemingly aware of the marriage of industry and militarism, presenting the Amerasian Immigration Proposal as serving the interests of the U.S. state, noting that since “President Reagan, our Commander in Chief, has said that not all problems can be solved by the Federal Government, the private sector must do its

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<sup>210</sup> Alan K. Simpson, *Amerasian Immigration Proposals*, 1.

<sup>211</sup> See Christopher L. Connery, “Pacific Rim Discourse: The U.S. Global Imaginary in the Late Cold War Years,” *boundary 2* 21, no. 1 (spring 1994): 30-56.



part.” The Amerasian Immigration Act could serve as one of “the necessary legal tools to do so.”<sup>212</sup> In representing the interests of the military, the private sector, and the Christian aid organizations that promoted family values, the Amerasian Immigration Proposal was thus consistent with the Reagan administration’s conservative values and the expansion of militarism and securitization in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>213</sup>

Racial inclusion was critical to this military and economic security. The United States was aware that reports of segregation, economic disenfranchisement, anti-Asian exclusion policies, and police violence against Black Americans contradicted the image it had cultivated of the nation as a multi-racial democracy. The Cold War saw a shift in the rhetoric and policies on multi-racialism. On the one hand, such gains reflected the profound impact of civil rights movements that led to the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that lifted the quota limits on immigrants from Asian countries. At the same time, as Erica Edwards notes, this marked shift away from policies of segregation to policies of integration and “the government’s granting of formal rights of citizenship to Black people was part of a larger foreign-policy strategy of image management.”<sup>214</sup> Accepting Amerasian immigrants was an opportunity to recoup this image of a multiracial democracy, achieved in part by emphasizing the discrimination facing black Amerasians in Asian countries. In pleading the case for Amerasian acceptance, for example, Walter Martindale stated, “People must understand that these children as a whole face

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<sup>212</sup> Father Alfred V. Keane, *Amerasian Immigration Proposals*, 65.

<sup>213</sup> Varzally, *Children of Reunion*, 85.

<sup>214</sup> Edwards, *The Other Side of Terror*, 40.

discrimination in Asia due to their American heritage, particularly those black Amerasians.” Martindale believed that Amerasians “would have a happier, more equitable opportunity to achieve their potential in a multiracial society such as the United States” and that “the greater tragedy for these minors of mixed blood in Vietnam is that they now live under a Communist regime which will not let them forget who they are.”<sup>215</sup> Testimonies in the form of letters from black Korean and Vietnamese Amerasians further supported this narrative of American racial liberalism and Asian cruelty. One testifier, Eddie Choi, born in 1955 to a Korean mother and African American father, wrote, “There are many black Amerasians in Korea. They have a very hard time. Koreans think of black people as slaves. Koreans are frightened of people with dark skin. Please help us pass H.R. 808 and S. 1698. We just want our freedom and equality, and we are free and equal in America.”<sup>216</sup> Father Keane stated his belief that “In the eyes of the Asian people, the only reason someone would adopt ‘another’s child’ would be to exploit the child.”<sup>217</sup> On the one hand, these first-hand accounts revealed the exclusion facing Amerasians. On the other hand, they also supported a rhetoric about the cruelty of Communists and Asian countries more generally in ways that shaped the image of “the kindness of a democratic United States.”<sup>218</sup> These statements covered over the ongoing debasement of Black Americans and the fact that Amerasian immigration had been prevented because of the racism structured into U.S. foreign policy.

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<sup>215</sup> *Amerasian Immigration Proposals*, 78, emphasis added.

<sup>216</sup> Eddie Choi quoted in *Amerasian Immigration Proposals*, 48-49.

<sup>217</sup> Father Alfred V. Keane quoted in *Amerasian Immigration Proposals*, 63.

<sup>218</sup> Varzally, *Children of Reunion*, 82.

The racial liberalism evident in legislative debates over Amerasian immigration are indicative of the then emerging myth of the model minority. As Ellen D. Wu notes, the myth of the model minority that played up Asian Americans as a minority success story was instrumental to the ideology of racial liberalism, transforming Asian Americans “from liability to asset to benefit US expansionism.”<sup>219</sup> Politicians, academics, cultural producers, and a wide range of everyday people supported this project of racial inclusion with urgency, including Asian Americans. Japanese and Chinese Americans in particular emphasized their “Oriental” attributes that aligned them with the model minority myth, stressing “predisposition to harmony and accommodation, the reverence for family and education, and unflagging industriousness to enhance their demands for equality.”<sup>220</sup> Echoes of this ideology of racial liberalism structured on the model minority myth resound throughout the Amerasian Immigration Proposal, with emphasis on the particular “Oriental” attributes of the Amerasians. In a letter written at the request of Senator Denton in support of Amerasians, Father Alfred Carroll, S.J., the Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Gonzaga University, stated that Amerasians “are not delinquents, but industrious scholars and outstanding people.” Amerasians, he observed, demonstrated “a deeply rooted philosophy of goodness and industry; a strong sense of gratitude and loyalty to friends and benefactors; a determination to prove themselves as good Americans; and an openness to express their problems and situations in order to obtain advice.” There was great potential for Amerasians to become “exemplary and successful,” largely due to “how hard the Amerasians work, how high

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<sup>219</sup> Wu, *The Color of Success*, 4.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

is the quality of their work, and what excellent persons they are.” Drawing on the language of industriousness, loyalty to benefactors, a desire to be good Americans, and their potential for success transformed Amerasians from being Asians with American blood in Asia to Asian Americans waiting to come “home” and become model citizens. Carroll further suggested the difficulties Amerasians faced were not inherent to their racial qualities but the inflexibility of Asian cultures, which not only “revolve around the father, but its authoritarian structure forces each individual into extreme positions of inferior or superior positions.” In his assessment, he concluded that Amerasians “if they are allowed citizenships they will be exemplary Americans.”<sup>221</sup> Enclosed with his letter was a “picture of the Amerasians,” a list of their credits earned and GPAs, with their names redacted. Father Carroll’s statement counters a prevailing view at the time that Amerasians born in Asia had personality problems and were prone to delinquency and criminality.<sup>222</sup> As a character statement written in support of Amerasian immigration, he drew on the rhetoric of Asian Americans as a model minority, using language that echoed the “Oriental” attributes that had made primarily East Asian ethnic groups in the United States into the exemplars of hard-working citizens. At the same time, he framed their problems as stemming from cultural upbringing, associating negative traits to cultural difference. The emphasis on hard work and educational achievement illustrated his point that Amerasians were positioned to be exemplar American citizens, since they possessed all the admirable traits of the Asian American model minority that could then be refined and cultivated in a more flexible, American environment, where democratic

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<sup>221</sup> Father Alfred Carroll, S.J., *Amerasian Immigration Proposals*, 17-18.

<sup>222</sup> Varzally, *Children of Reunion*, 113.

freedom and individual progress were valued. These characterizations of Amerasians ultimately supported the ideology of racial liberalism and the view that Americans could still emerge from the war in Vietnam as leaders of goodwill and freedom.

In the senate hearings for the Amerasian Immigration Act of 1982, the picture that emerges of Amerasians is that they “mattered for what they seemed to represent...as much as who they were.”<sup>223</sup> The rhetoric of Amerasian unwantedness, neglect, and abandonment reflected larger debates about national identity and what legacies of imperialism entailed for the changing structure of the family. For the American policymakers, senators, missionaries, adoption advocates, and even the Amerasians themselves who testified in the Amerasian Immigration Act of 1982, Amerasians offered the possibility for the United States to right its wrongs from the war in Vietnam and reclaim its position as a global leader by embracing racial inclusion at a pivotal moment of increasing US militarism and expansionism in the Asian-Pacific.

As I show in the next section, such militarization did not go unnoticed, as Asian American writers understood that Amerasians reflected more deeply rooted systemic issues of racism and imperialism embedded in the structures of the US military-industrial complex. The prevalence of Black Amerasian characters in Asian American literature after 1990 also illustrate an interest Afro-Asian solidarities by portraying the overlapping struggles of African Americans and Asian Americans—two groups that US media and politicians often pitted against each other through the construction of the model minority myth and the spectacularization of events such as the 1992 Los Angeles Riots. Portrayals of Black Amerasians in Asian American literature thus became a way

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<sup>223</sup> Varzally, *Children of Reunion*, 112.

of responding to domestic interracial relationships and reckoning with Asian anti-blackness while contending with how Black American and Black Amerasian inclusion within the nation-state under the guise of racial liberalism ultimately masked US expansionism abroad.

#### **4.2 Amerasians and the Tragic Mulatta Trope in Asian American Literature**

One of the effects of the interimperial entanglements between Japan, the United States, and other European powers in vying for control over the Asian-Pacific was the institution of racial hierarchies grounded in Western white supremacy. Asian racialization and the Japanese subjugation of Koreans, Vietnamese, Filipinx, Marshall Islanders, and other Asian and Pacific Islander nations in the early twentieth century and throughout World War II must be understood within the context of the brand of Japanese white supremacy grafted onto Western white supremacy. During the early twentieth century, the Japanese Empire's attempt to carve out a position for itself within the global order required the nation re-invent itself as an honorary white nation. As Yukiko Koshiro notes, "modern Japan's dualistic racism needed American racism to reinforce the validity of white supremacy, upon which Japan built its own superiority in Asia."<sup>224</sup> This version of Japanese white supremacy was a constitutive element of Japanese colonialism in Korea, where during World War II, the Japanese Imperial Army established a system of sexual

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<sup>224</sup> Yukiko Koshiro, *Trans-Pacific Racisms and the U.S. Occupation of Japan*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 12.

slavery. Even after the war, this structure continued in the form of US military camptowns, thus creating a “continuity between Japanese and U.S. colonialisms.”<sup>225</sup>

It is in part because Amerasians are associated with these legacies of sexual slavery in Asia structured within a set of transpacific hierarches of race and racism that they become highly sexualized figures, whose fates are entwined with sexual violation and the violence their mothers experienced as camptown prostitutes. The historical conditions of their births overdetermine their fate as subject to either continued sexually coerced violence or literal or social death. These narratives of Amerasians abound in Asian American literature, with a focus on Black Amerasians indicating the ways that Asian American writers sought to disentangle the processes of racial formation and understand the place of Asians within a racializing system often understood as a black-white binary. Jessica Hagedorn’s Joey Sands in *Dogeaters* (1990) is one example, the putatively black Amerasian character who is the “bastard son of a whore,” who lives on the fringes of Philippine society as a heroin-addicted prostitute.<sup>226</sup> Similarly, the Black Amerasian character Sunny in Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life* (1999) is described as the product of “a night’s wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl.”<sup>227</sup> Sunny’s Blackness discomferts her adoptive father Doc Hata, who later forces her to undergo an abortion after he discovers she has become pregnant with the child of an African American man. Lisa Countryman in Don Lee’s *Country of Origin*

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<sup>225</sup> Naoki Sakai, “On Romantic Love and Military Violence: Transpacific Imperialism and U.S.-Japan Complicity,” in *Militarized Currents*, 206.

<sup>226</sup> Jessica Hagedorn, *Dogeaters* (New York: Open Road, 1990), 127.

<sup>227</sup> Chang-rae Lee, *A Gesture Life* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1999), 204.

(2004 ) also shares this history of militarized sexual transactions as the bedrock of her origin story, rumored to be the child of a father allegedly in the American Navy who was “some kind of mulatto. The mother was a bargirl.”<sup>228</sup> Lisa Countryman visits Japan and becomes a sex worker while searching for her mother, only to die of an accidental overdose shortly after learning about the circumstances of her birth and abandonment. In each of these novels, it is not only that Amerasians are represented again and again as the children of military prostitutes and American soldiers but that in Asian American literature after the 1990s, their complete abjection is understood as the result of their having both Black and Asian characteristics. Within the structure of white supremacy, both minority groups are subjugated, but the offspring who don’t fit into either group are more so. Their racial ambiguity and the lives destined for tragedy because of their racial mixing and association with blackness recall the earlier nineteenth century narratives of the Tragic Mulatta, where racial ambiguity destined these characters either to death or suicide to avoid a life fated for sexual violence. In the novels mentioned here, all the Amerasian characters experience either sexualized violence or social or literal death. Even in the case where Amerasians experience some degree of agency and escape from the ill-fated destinies stemming from the conditions of their birth (for example, Joey Sands escapes the city and goes to live in a revolutionary commune), the tropes of Amerasians as fated for violent births and tragic lives articulates how the meanings of war and militarism continue to bear out in the representations of mixed-race bodies even as they aim to disentangle histories of imperialism, militarism, and myths of racial purity.

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<sup>228</sup> Don Lee, *Country of Origin* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 199.



The trope of the Tragic Amerasian Mulatta also appears in Nora Okja Keller's *Fox Girl* (2002) but takes on new meaning in the context of Asian American critiques of racial liberalism and the model minority myth. Set in the fictional camptown America Town, the novel follows the protagonist, Hyun Jin, and her coming of age, from her childhood as a Korean girl to her eventual debasement as she discovers that she is the daughter of a military prostitute. The discovery of her birth circumstances pushes her into a life of military prostitution, sexualized violence, and statelessness, a condition shared by her half-sister, the black Amerasian character Sookie. The novel follows the two characters and their lives in the military camptown, as they work the local military bars and eventually migrate to the United States, their movement attesting to the ways that militarization and sex trafficking are conjoined in the making of security in the Pacific.

The debasement that Hyun Jin and Sookie both experience stems from the legacies of Japanese and US imperialisms. Both Hyun Jin's and Sookie's biological mother, Duk Hee, is also a military prostitute and a formerly enslaved "comfort woman." As Katharine H.S. Moon argues in her landmark work, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations*, the approximately 200,000 Korean women enslaved by the Japanese Imperial Army were a "historical precedent" for the sexual economies of the military prostitution in the camptowns.<sup>229</sup> According to Moon, "some former comfort women also worked as GI prostitutes among the first generation of *kijich'on* sex workers."<sup>230</sup> In Keller's novel, it is suggested that Duk Hee was one of these first generation *kijich'on* sex slaves. Duk Hee explains "During World War Two, the Japanese raided

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<sup>229</sup> Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 15.

<sup>230</sup> Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 46.

Korean towns and villages for boys to fight for them. And they took the girls, too, to...to...take.”<sup>231</sup>

The ellipses mark the unutterable horrors to which Duk Hee was subjected by the Japanese soldiers, a horror that continues in the aftermaths of World War II and the Korean War through the structure of the U.S. military camptowns. This history of being subjected to rape by the Japanese soldiers and later US soldiers stigmatizes Duk Hee for life, and with it, her daughters. Because military prostitutes “have mingled *flesh and blood* with foreigners (*yangnom*),” their profession marks the women as “pariahs, a disgrace to themselves and their people, Korean by birth but no longer Korean in body and spirit.”<sup>232</sup> In Keller’s novel, this metaphorical displacement, in which Duk Hee is marked as no longer Korean in body and spirit, passes on to Sookie and Hyun Jin. In Sookie’s case, because of the Korean Nationality Act of 1948 that instituted *jus sanguinis a patre*, she cannot claim Korean citizenship; she does not know her father. In Hyun Jin’s case, she grows up knowing her father, who asked Duk Hee to be a surrogate because his wife could not have kids. However, the conditions of her birth stigmatize her throughout childhood, as the wife of Hyun Jin’s father ominously repeats “It’s in the blood.” If Korean citizenship can be traced patrilineally through the blood and secured through *jus sanguinis*, the mother’s so-called sin of having mingled “flesh and blood” is seen as passing on through the blood, thus stigmatizing generations of women and their offspring through their coerced intimacies with first the Japanese and later the US military.

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<sup>231</sup> Keller, *Fox Girl*, 117.

<sup>232</sup> Moon, *Sex Among Allies*, 3.

This generational stigmatization is rooted within the larger structure of imperialism and both Japanese and US logics of white supremacy as well as Korean notions of racial purity. Both girls are “marked” by their mother’s history of being trafficked by the Japanese Imperial Army and later by the US military, Sookie by the color of her skin and Hyun Jin by the birth mark on her face that is as “black as Africa.”<sup>233</sup> Here, blackness connects the two girls, who are nicknamed “The Butt Twins” in their childhood and frequently characterized as each other’s double or twin. This gothic trope in Asian American literature signals not uncanniness but instead “an awareness of kinship.”<sup>234</sup> In the novel, blackness functions as an uncanny connection between the two, as Hyun Jin as an adult struggles to recall Sookie’s face, which appears to her in her memory as a “fragmented blur,” “as if through several layers of photographic negatives.” The description of visualization articulated in photographic terms here illustrates what Nicole Fleetwood explains as the visualizing of race, where technologies mediate “the field of vision and the production of visual objects/beings.”<sup>235</sup> Within this field of vision, “Blackness troubles vision in Western discourse. And the troubling affect of blackness becomes heightened when located on certain bodies marked as such.”<sup>236</sup> Sookie’s blurred image troubles Hyun Jin’s vision, which has been mediated by Western discourses of beauty and racial purity. Thus Hyun Jin repeatedly asks Sookie if she is

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<sup>233</sup> Keller, *Fox Girl*, 13.

<sup>234</sup> Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 88.

<sup>235</sup> Nicole Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 16.

<sup>236</sup> Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 6.

pure Korean (“You are pure Korean, hah, Sookie?”), even distinguishing her from the other black Amerasian character, Lobetto (“At least we’re pure Korean, not like you, half-half”).<sup>237</sup> What Koshiro calls “transpacific racisms” maps onto these ideologies of white supremacy, reinforced by Japanese imperialism that treated colonized Koreans as a sub-class subject to the sadistic sexualized violence of its military and then again by the incursion of the US military and its camptowns. The twinning of Hyun Jin and Sookie creates what Daniel Y. Kim terms a “relational’ translation,” one that situates the trauma of the Korean War “alongside other histories shaped by marginalization and violence.”<sup>238</sup> The sex trafficking of Korean women and the historic trafficking of Africans through the slave trade are connected and embodied in the characters of Hyun Jin and Sookie, while intersecting with and spawning new forms of racial hierarchies in the military camptowns. In portraying Sookie and Hyun Jin as twins, fated as they are for a life of prostitution and rape because of their mother having been forced into prostitution, then, Keller’s novel exposes the racial-gendered structure of white supremacy and the interimperial entanglements of Japan and the United States that have shaped the militarized intimacies in America Town.

In portraying Amerasian children of America Town, Keller lays the blame for the conditions of degradation and statelessness on the dominance of US white supremacist ideology, spread through its imperial expansions in the Asian-Pacific. The scene from the epigraph, in which Lobetto reads the letter from his father to the other children, illustrates the racial foundation US imperialism spread through occupation and militarization. The children’s (mis)recognition of the

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<sup>237</sup> Keller, *Fox Girl*,

<sup>238</sup> Kim, *Intimacies of Conflict*, 201.

America in the letter as America Town (“Shit,” Chung Woo said, looking from Lobetto to Sookie. “He’s talking about us. He’s talking about America Town”) suggests how racism translates through imperial circuits into local sites of occupation. On the one hand, we can read Lobetto’s ostracization as an instructive moment comparing anti-Blackness in the United States to anti-Blackness in Korea. However, the allusion to the 1963 March on Washington (“My father says that the King was talking to all the Negroes in America, that there were so many *gomshis* in the street listening to him that it was like a living river. ‘A river of humanity,’ is what he calls it”), identifies the United States as the source of white supremacy that prevents black Amerasians like Lobetto from emigrating, even when they know their fathers. Without denying anti-Blackness exists in Korea, Keller nonetheless is most forceful in her critique of US racial politics and racism. As Kung Jong Lee notes, this emphasis on “address[ing] white racism against black Amerasians on U.S. military facilities” is a distinguishing feature of Korean American narratives. While there is a “transpacific literary continuity between Korean and Korean American narratives,” Lee notes that absent from Korean narratives in contrast with Korean American narratives is a focus on black Amerasians’ experiences on military bases and any detailed portrayals of African American GIs as fathers. In portraying Sergeant James Robert Williams, and his attempts to bring Lobetto to America, Keller thus nuances the portrait of African American GIs. However, the sergeant ultimately gives up and stops sending letters to Lobetto, the latter who lives out his days pimping Sookie, Hyun Jin, and his mother. The message here appears to be that if the daughters of Asian military prostitutes are destined to bear out generational traumas by being forced into sexual servitude, the sons of American GIs will bear out their trauma by participating in the structures of violence that begat them.

Within the camptown's racialized and sexualized geographies, the presence of the US military maintains the structures of violence that hold up the security and “prosperity” of the region. Security here comes at a high cost of violence for the women and children of the GI camptowns. Hyun Jin's initiation from a child into a military prostitute is described in graphic detail. The scene ends with the statement that Hyun Jin is fourteen, emphasizing her youth as a child. This scene more than any other belies the romanticized narratives of friendship and the state's paternal care symbolized in legislative gestures such as the Amerasian Immigration Proposal. Life in the camptowns is brutal and violent, which is a direct result of the military structure. The perpetrators of that violence—the local pimps, club owners, and the soldiers—are agents of a larger structure that ostensibly maintains the peace and prosperity of the region.

Sookie and Hyun Jin attain a degree of mobility that Lobetto never does, largely because of the racial-gendered commodity value of Asian women's bodies. The two girls understand this and work the military camptowns and brothels as well as the US immigration service to achieve their own goals. In this way, Keller both participates in and seeks to modify the narrative of the Tragic Mulatta in an Asian American context. Sookie's life apparently has been fated from the beginning for tragedy and sexualized violence, having been first pimped out to her mother's boyfriend at eight years old. As an Amerasian and the child of a prostitute, the lack of opportunities available to her and her mother pushed them to the same fate. “What could my mother do? She kept me out of it as much as she could, for as long as she could,” Sookie states.<sup>239</sup> Keller offers a sympathetic, if fraught portrayal of Sookie and Duk Hee, showing how the tragedy of their lives

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<sup>239</sup> Keller, *Fox Girl*, 104.

is not of their own doing but the impossible situation they have been placed in as a direct result of the system of sex trafficking and the legacies of interimperial entanglements. Nonetheless, in repeating the trope of the Tragic Mulatta in the figure of the Amerasian prostitute, Asian American literature becomes complicit in the imperial project that reproduces dominant scripts about racial mixing and tragic fates. Within this restrictive situation, the exercise of agency is limited, though no less important. Both Sookie and Hyun Jin as military prostitutes draw on their street savvy and cunning to escape America Town, signing up for the visa immigration scheme through Club Foxa, where the owner obtains visas for the prostitutes so that she can send them overseas to Hawaii to work at Foxa Hawai'i. Both girls/women continue to ply their trade, but Sookie has also managed to get another paying client on the side, without the bar owner's knowing. Her decision to stay in the sex trade is ultimately then her own, even if being forced into it initially was not. Before she and Hyun Jin part ways, Sookie tells the story of fox girl, who is found by a farmer and taken into this home. "The fox girl try to live like people, but she have secret: animal hunger."<sup>240</sup> The fox girl eats the farmer's livestock and then the farmer himself, even as he cries out. Then Sookie tells Hyun Jin, "I'm changing the ending before I get eaten....You're the fox, Hyun Jin."<sup>241</sup> However, the novel suggests both of them are the fox girl, as moments later, when Sookie gets in the departing car and leaves Hyun Jin and Myu Myu at the airport, it looks as though their "faces [were] pressed together, merged in a trick of light and reflection."<sup>242</sup> The parallels between Hyun

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<sup>240</sup> Keller, *Fox Girl*, 278.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

Jin and Sookie go beyond their shared biological mother or the conditions of coerced sexual commodification of their bodies, a fact that Sookie cannot see because she fails to recognize she is also the fox girl. She is described as having a “feral grin,”<sup>243</sup> a word that is used several times throughout the novel. When Sookie is left alone after her mother gets taken away to the Monkey House to be treated for venereal disease, her room is described as smelling “musky and feral.”<sup>244</sup> When the wife of Hyun Jin’s father kicks Hyun Jin out after she reveals the truth of her birth, the woman howls, “raising her upper lip not unlike a feral fox herself.”<sup>245</sup> And when Hyun Jin, ostracized by her family and having nowhere to turn, asks Lobetto to get her into one of the clubs so that she can start working as a military prostitute, the ID shows a photograph of her in which she looks “naked and feral, an animal hunted for meat.”<sup>246</sup> In each of these situations, the characters have reached a point of debasement and have had to resort to the cunning and survival instincts that come from that. In this way, Keller changes the tragic fate of death mapped out for the Amerasian as Tragic Mulatta, allowing for the exercise of agency, no matter how limited or stymied by a life of ostracization, precarity, and sexualized violence, even in sites of overwhelming sexual violence.

Ultimately, through her portrayals of the racial politics in both America Town and America, Keller’s novel disavows the rise of racial liberalism and the assimilation of Asian and

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<sup>243</sup> Keller, *Fox Girl*, 189.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.



Amerasian immigrants into the US nation's imperialist project. Indeed, the novel's ending illustrates the ambivalence of Asian American cultural critique toward the racial liberalism of US politics, which not only obscured the foundational structures of white supremacy "on the domestic front" but also "simultaneously disavowed...how white supremacy also structured U.S. foreign relations itself."<sup>247</sup> The novel as a bildungsroman does not see Hyun Jin assimilating and identifying with any nation, Korea or the United States, but instead emigrating to the United States, where she discovers that though she was "three thousand miles away from Korea, [she] was still trapped in America Town."<sup>248</sup> Hyun Jin's hard working, industriousness ("I worked the way I always worked, the way Lobetto and Sookie had taught me; I cruised the room, targeting the men who were alone and nursing their drinks"),<sup>249</sup> exposes the exploitative racial-gendered logic at the core of the model minority myth and the fetishistic and violence obscured by the ideology of racial liberalism. In a word, Hyun Jin has been welcomed into America because of the rhetoric of inclusivity, but the cost has been her own body. Instead of embracing the ideology of racial liberalism that obscures these histories of violence, the novel offers a third way of holding these histories in tension and surviving despite such violence in the figure of Myu Myu. "Her face *is* a map—an inheritance marked by all who were once most important," Hyun Jin observes. Myu Myu represents "the best of Sookie, of Duk Hee, of Lobetto," and Hyun Jin herself, "everything [they] could have hoped for and wished to be—is here and has always been here under the skin, in the

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<sup>247</sup> Kim, *Ends of Empire*, 22.

<sup>248</sup> Keller, *Fox Girl*, 269.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

bone and in the blood, in this jewel of a girl who hold the world in her hand and sees it, loves it, as her own.”<sup>250</sup> Echoes of the same language that marked Sookie and Hyun Jin as outcasts, and the blood logic that occasioned their exclusion from belonging to any nation are transfigured by Myu Myu, who comes to represent hope and survival despite the histories of violence previous generations have experienced. In this way, Keller alters the narrative of the Tragic Mulatta and challenges the narrative of racial liberalism and assimilation while holding space for people marginalized by histories of imperial and military violence.

### 4.3 American Blood, Vietnamese Soul

If the rhetoric on Amerasians has constructed them as destined for tragedy, fated for lives of sexual violence and social or literal death because of their mixed-race identities and the sexual violence experienced by their mothers, Nguyen’s “The Americans” challenges those stereotypes and dominant ways of understanding Amerasians in American and Asian American discourse. In the decades following the American war in Vietnam, Americans sought to assuage their guilt, often evoking tropes of helpless Vietnamese refugees, whose plight was seen as proof of the evils of communism and the righteousness of American democratic values. This rhetoric also fueled the general view that all Vietnamese Amerasians were either motherless orphans or refugees, helpless and in need of American intervention or rescue.<sup>251</sup> Nguyen’s “The Americans” challenges this

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<sup>250</sup> Keller, *Fox Girl*, 288, 291.

<sup>251</sup> Varzally, *Children of Reunion*.

stereotype, showing that Amerasians constitute a diverse group of people whose distinctions are driven as much by racial and national identities as by “socio-economic class, family structure, and generation.”<sup>252</sup> The story follows James Carver on his “brief Vietnamese sojourn” while visiting the country where his daughter, the Black Amerasian character Claire, teaches English to Vietnamese children.<sup>253</sup> The story appeared in his short story collection *Refugees* (2017) and challenges discourses of refugeeness that characterized Vietnamese Amerasians while showing how humanitarianism is often another face of the security regime in the Asian-Pacific.

As in many of the 1990s Asian American literatures, Claire is Black Amerasian, the daughter of an Asian mother and American GI father. However, those characteristics are where the similarities between Claire and other Amerasian tropes stop. Claire’s parents, Michiko and James, met while the latter was “on R&R from Okinawa.”<sup>254</sup> The detail about where he was stationed when he went on leave for rest and recreation places James squarely in the network of securitization, where Okinawa served as a waystation and launching point for American soldiers during the war in Vietnam. However, by displacing the place of encounter from Okinawa, where an economy of sex work and mili-tourism grew as a direct result of the military bases, to mainland Japan “at a jazz bar in Roppongi,”<sup>255</sup> the story defamiliarizes the typical meeting place of Asian

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<sup>252</sup> Margo Okazawa-Rey, “Amerasian Children in GI Town: A Legacy of US Militarism in South Korea,” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 3, no. 1 (March 31, 1997), 72.

<sup>253</sup> Viet Thanh Nguyen, “The Americans,” in *The Refugees* (New York: Grove Press, 2017), 117.

<sup>254</sup> Nguyen, “The Americans,” 127.

<sup>255</sup> Nguyen, “The Americans,” 127.

women and GIs. Indeed, their encounter in a scene of globalized Black American culture plays with readers' expectations about the sorts of transactions that take place between American soldiers and Asian women and, in many of the narratives we've seen, limit their Amerasian offspring to lives of tragedy and social death. Indeed, Michiko and James' child, Claire, has apparently lived a life of relative privilege, a social and economic status made clear in the contrast between her and the Vietnamese children to whom she teaches English. While Vietnamese called Amerasians "dust of life" (bụi đời) because of their association with poverty and the peasant class,<sup>256</sup> it is the local Vietnamese children whom Claire teaches who are described as "dark as dust."<sup>257</sup> While in many prevailing narratives, Amerasians as children of the aftermaths are typified through the racialized narratives of the Tragic Mulatta as unwanted, abandoned, and disposable, Nguyen's story conceptualizes these racial categories within the broader structures of colonialism and capitalism that have rendered not the Amerasian transplants like Claire but rather the locals as disposable, particularly in the global South. The workings of these systems that converge with global racisms are represented by the two children with prosthetic limbs, whom Carver nicknames Tom and Jerry, "the same names he and us U-Tapao roommate, a Swede from Minnesota, had bestowed on their houseboys."<sup>258</sup> The boys have apparently had their limbs blow off by the mines remaining in the environment three decades after the war. Their situation illustrates how in the twenty-first century, what Jasbir K. Puar calls the "right to maim" exercised

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<sup>256</sup> Bass, *Vietnamerica*.

<sup>257</sup> Nguyen, "The Americans," 122.

<sup>258</sup> Nguyen, "The Americans," 128.

by hegemonic settler colonial and capitalist nations,<sup>259</sup> is embedded racialized geographies and the systems of globalization driven by powerful industrialized nations.

Claire's experiences as a mixed-race Japanese Black American have led to some degree of feeling "out of place," an affective condition often characterized as common to Amerasians. As Bernard Scott Lucious notes, Black Amerasians in Vietnam experience varying and often extreme degrees of "racial displacement," being excluded from familial, social, and national communities. However, Claire's sense of un-belonging is markedly different from the type of racial displacement and ostracization from the state and the family that Amerasians have experienced. Indeed, if being displaced is characterized as feeling out of place, it is clear that Claire's experiences have been primarily affective rather than the material displacement and exclusion from citizenship, family structures, and job opportunities most often associated with Amerasians. Claire professes that she never felt like she belonged, that there's "never been a place" for her to "go home."<sup>260</sup> Her sense of being without a home echoes what Anne Allison in another context calls "social precarity" in which a person experiences the sense of refugeeness as being "out of place" in situations of ordinary life. This affective situation leads to a "precarity of 'soul,'" in which precarity is understood as "insecurity in life: material, existential, social."<sup>261</sup> Claire's mixed-race identity has precluded her from feeling like she belongs to an ethnic Japanese or African American community,

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<sup>259</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

<sup>260</sup> Nguyen, "The Americans," 122.

<sup>261</sup> Anne Allison, "Ordinary Refugees: Social Precarity and Soul in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Japan," *Anthropological Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (spring 2012), 349.

leading to a sense of social precarity that has resulted from a politics of in/security fueled by the complex entanglement of domestic and transpacific racial politics in the securitization of the Asian-Pacific. It is in Vietnam, Claire insists, that she has finally found a place to belong, telling her parents she has a “Vietnamese soul.”<sup>262</sup> The phrase here is interesting as an antonym to the concept of “American blood” that was articulated throughout policy debates on Amerasian immigration and refugee programs. While her American blood may have enabled her access to material gains like immigration papers that would allow them to come “home” to America, the sense of having a “Vietnamese soul” counters this social precarity and grants her a return to spiritual kin.

There is a certain settler logic in Claire’s claims to feeling if not being Vietnamese. When she tells Carver she has a Vietnamese soul, he counters, “You’re not a native. You’re an American.”<sup>263</sup> The imperial logics that allow Claire to claim Vietnamese-ness show that even in the *longue durée* of empires’ aftermaths, which have overwhelmingly shaped the discourse on Amerasians, the proximity to empire and the position of the subject within the context of powerful forces of globalization may enable even Amerasians to become complicit with the imperial project. Claire is not a tragic victim of the aftermaths but a beneficiary of the new-colonial order produced through globalization and the transpacific securitization of the Asian-Pacific that serves the interests of economically dominant settler countries including Japan and the United States. Claire

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<sup>262</sup> Nguyen, “The Americans,” 126.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 121.

tells Carver that her Americanness is a “problem [she’s] trying to correct.”<sup>264</sup> However, her claims to Vietnamese-ness and her decision to remain in Vietnam, “indefinitely,” as she tells Carver, suggest the same capacity to exercise choice and power that settler colonizers claim in inhabiting indigenous lands. Indeed, Carver and Claire’s ideological conflict presents the interesting entanglement of what Jodi Kim calls the “settler garrison” structure and the settler colonial structure. Settler garrisons extend the frontiers of US empire to the Pacific through the establishment of the military-industrial complex, where the garrisons often serve as temporary waystations for soldiers who don’t intend to maintain a permanent residence in the place where they have been stationed. The structure of settler colonialism, in contrast, establishes permanent settlements. Carver and Claire represent these two sides, the one having “launched from Guam, Okinawa, and Thailand” and the other intending to stay indefinitely because it’s where she’s “supposed to be.”<sup>265</sup> Michiki, too, echoes this settler ideology, her Japanese relatives portraying Vietnam as a place reminiscent of “Japan’s bucolic past, before General MacArthur wielded the postwar hand of reconstruction to daub Western makeup on Japanese features.”<sup>266</sup> The critical tone toward US militarism and Westernization replays a narrative of victimization that has allowed Japan as a nation to obscure its own imperialist and settler aggressions, including in Vietnam during World War II, and the interimperial entanglement of which enabled the securitization of the Asian-Pacific throughout the American war in Vietnam. Indeed, Claire, Michiko, Carver

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<sup>264</sup> Nguyen, “The Americans,” 121.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 120, 124.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., “The Americans,” 117.

represent different aspects of these interimperial intimacies between Japan and the United States, each viewing Vietnam through a settler lens that reflects their positionality within the settler security network.

Carver is portrayed in many ways as a complement to Claire. The story's centering of Carver as the protagonist, rather than Claire, presents a perspective that is often missing in narratives of Amerasians: that of the African American father. Unlike in Lobetto in Keller's *Fox Girl*, Carver is present in his daughter's life, never having abandoned her or her mother. Their family unit challenges the dysfunctional domesticity so often presumed to characterize the conditions into which Amerasians are born. Carver himself is paralleled to Claire in many ways, as throughout the story, we learn that as a Black man, he has continually been made to feel out of place, first as a youth in a small-town (white) library, then as a student at Penn State on a ROTC scholarship, and later as an airman and a pilot. For Carver, few routes were open to a Black man in the 1970s except through the military, "He was never where he was supposed to be," Carver thinks, yet his viewpoint contrasts with Claire's in that rather than dwell on the injustice, he "survived by focusing on his goal, ascending ever higher, refusing to see the sneers and doubt in his peripheral vision."<sup>267</sup> His career as a bomber pilot in the war and later as a commercial pilot for PanAm is thus his ticket to upward mobility. However, this social and economic ascension also shapes his view of the people in Vietnam, "a country about which he knew next to nothing except what it looked like at forty thousand feet."<sup>268</sup> Even though the people of Vietnam remind him of

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<sup>267</sup> Nguyen, "The Americans," 123.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 117.



the “dirt farmers and sharecroppers of his childhood, their skin as brown and desiccated as the soil they tilled, the desiccated earth of summer’s oppressive months,” he feels none of the kinship that some African Americans in the civil rights movement shared with peoples of the Third World in their struggle for liberation. Indeed, Carver represents that as much as some Black Americans struggled for freedom for oppressed peoples and connected their situation to that of other colonized people subject to the terror of the US militarism, others became complicit with empire, partly as a matter of necessity and survival. Like Claire, then, he is part of the structure of imperialism that has brought him to Vietnam, however willingly or not. While he sees the country and its people differently from Claire, the parallels in their sense of unbelonging and how they find it in war and its aftermaths—whether in the cockpit or on the ground among the people whose land and lives have been destroyed—illustrate how even the people most often figured as victims of US imperialism and white supremacy can become complicit in its structure. By the story’s end, it’s unclear if Carver feels any guilt since he has struggled to unlearn this view. In a fever dream, he is trapped in a pilot-less plane, all the other passengers having Asian faces, including the two maimed boys. Carver goes to the “empty pilot’s seat waiting for him,” his decision apparently already made for him as to survive, he must sit in the cockpit once more. In this way, Nguyen shows how the rhetoric of racial liberalism masks the instrumentalization of African American and Third World people of color, including Amerasians, who are represented as the beneficiaries of racial liberalism’s promises of democratic freedom.

Security is itself structured not only through militarism as a form of hard power but also through soft power including economic development, humanitarian aid, and academic knowledge

production. As I suggested in the discussion of the Amerasian Immigration Proposal, the work of this soft power and particularly humanitarian rhetoric is to obscure the increase in militarism. Claire and Legaspi, an adopted Asian graduate student developing demining robotics technology, represent the humanitarian aid organizations, speaking the “humanitarian jargon of cost efficiency, improvement of the land, moral obligation, employment of technicians, and so on.”<sup>269</sup> Such humanitarian aid, however well-intentioned, is never far from the work of militarism and academic knowledge production. This securitization depends for its efficacy on the participation of the very people subjugated by the network. When Claire’s boyfriend reveals his work, Carver becomes irked by his naivete, admonishing him, “Some brilliant guy at a university working on a defense contract figure out a way to put a landmine on this robot. Then the Pentagon will send it into a tunnel where a terrorist is hiding.”<sup>270</sup> In pointing out that militarism, humanitarian organizations, and academia are bedfellows, Carver gets to the heart of how the Cold War has been shaped as a production of knowledge that justified and continues to justify US military intervention on a global scale. Thus, similar to how the humanitarian rhetoric on Amerasian immigration obscured the increasing militarism of the Reagan era, the same rhetoric is now working to obscure how militarism has been increasing again since 9/11. The reference to an unknown “terrorist” is itself suggestive as the term has become attached to racialized Arab bodies. The events of 9/11 also led to a surge in stationing military personnel overseas in Okinawa, Guam, and Thailand—the same countries where Carver launched from throughout the war in Vietnam. Both Carver and Claire’s

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<sup>269</sup> Nguyen, “The Americans,” 130.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

fraught positions within this network of securitization attest to how militarization is increasing throughout the twenty-first century.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Representations of Amerasians, as I have attempted to show, are responses to the continued and increasing US militarization of the Asian-Pacific. Whether in legislation that aimed to soften the impact of stationing American its troops by developing more amenable immigration polices that promoted the image of US benevolence, or the interrogation of humanitarian aid organizations and oppressed ethnic groups and their complicity with the US white supremacist power structures, the rhetoric surrounding Amerasians challenges us to confront the ways that US militarization is structured on Cold War in/securities. As I have shown in this chapter, narratives of suffering and wounded Amerasians speak as much to national politics and domestic racial constructions as they do to the restrictive and often prohibitive foreign policies shaped by histories of imperialism and colonialism. In the context of US legislation, the production of injured Amerasian bodies in need of rescue promotes an ideology of racial liberalism that obscures the violent and exploitative logics of the state and US expansionism, even as it masquerades in the language of benevolence and inclusion. A transpacific framework shows the precarity of this racist imperial logic, bringing into view the interimperial entanglements of the U.S. and Japanese empires that have shaped the foundations of security in the Asian-Pacific. Asian American literature confronts these legacies, at the same time that it can end up participating in the white power structure by rehashing the trope

of the Tragic Mulatta on an Amerasian body. Even in situations where humanitarian aid is the alleged motivation, as Nguyen's story indicates, humanitarianism often supplements the militarization of the Asian-Pacific driven by powerful American, European, and already industrialized Asian nations. It is by continuing to interrogate the narrative logics of race that circulate through such tropes that we can begin to untangle the interlocking logics of race, foreign and domestic policy, militarism, and imperialism that constitute the racial logics of Cold War securitization.

## 5.0 After the Mowing: Indigenous Persistence in the Ruins of Okinawa’s Black District

Aftermath \æftər, mæθ\ Agriculture:

A second crop or new growth of grass (or occasionally another plant used as feed) after the first has been mown or harvested.<sup>271</sup>

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K was the main business district in the middle part of Okinawa Island. It had the shabby postwar look of a town born and grown up along the military highway that ran through it from north to south. Its streets were lined with a jumble of souvenir shops, movie theaters, foreign import-export companies, bars, game centers, vendors’ stalls, and brothels—all fronted with signs written in English....Standing next to a bench in front of a restaurant, a boy with a G.I. haircut chewed sticks of gum one after another, spitting out the leftover wads. He was clapping his hands as he peered into a barbershop where a woman, whose low-cut blouse didn’t quite cover her breasts, could be seen reflected in the mirror as she sat in the barber chair.

—Kishaba Jun, “Dark Flowers”<sup>272</sup>

The drive to Teruya from the 58 takes seven minutes from the toll gate. Gate Street starts (or ends, depending on how you look at it) at Gate 2 of Kadena Air Force Base. You can’t miss the guarded entry, the barbed wire fences, the wide streets leading onto base, the buildings spaced far apart, the lawns freshly mown grass. *You can tell it’s a military base, my uncle said, by how they use the land. Everything is so spacious. Okinawans don’t build like that.* Gate Street was lined with tattoo parlors, strip clubs, bars, tailors, record stores, and restaurants advertising Indian, Peruvian, Jamaican. Most of the signs were in English with a few in Japanese and Spanish. It was the summer of 2022, but as I drove toward Teruya, the area struck me as strangely familiar, as if little had changed since Kishaba Jun’s “Kurai hana” (“Dark Flowers,” 1955). Set in Koza City—the name for Okinawa City before the 1972 Reversion of Okinawa to Japanese administration—

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<sup>271</sup> “Aftermath,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

<sup>272</sup> Kishaba Jun, “Dark Flowers,” translated by Steve Rabson, in *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa*, edited by Michael Molasky and Steve Rabson (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2000), 106.

Kishaba's story shows the aftermaths of World War II and the building of a military town in the ruins of the war. The strip clubs and tattoo parlors to me were evidence of that ruination and the camptown economies of prostitution and entertainment servicing that had transformed the area into "militarized, colonized, raced, and sexual landscapes," constructed to satisfy the desires of US soldiers on R&R.<sup>273</sup> Where I was heading, the Teruya neighborhood, in Okinawa City, had been one of those landscapes.

Teruya was designated the "Black District" during the era of US Occupation, when the US Army segregated Koza City and the areas surrounding Koza Crossroads. Also known as "Old Koza" for the US soldiers, during the 1960s and 1970s, the area became a place of bustling economic activity catering to Black GIs. An article in *The New York Times* characterized Old Koza as a site of unofficial segregation, a place where Black GIs could find "friendly and often attractive Ryukyuan girls, a place to drink and relax among others of his race and shops that cater to his tastes." It was a "haven for Negro servicemen brought up in segregated areas of the United States."<sup>274</sup> Like many of the military towns, Teruya gained a reputation for sleaze and prostitution. But within these risqué spaces were also pockets of resistance and solidarities among Black Americans and Okinawans. Portrayals of Old Koza as a "haven" captured the spirit of the times, where out of segregation, Black GIs and native Okinawans created a community that defied racial

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<sup>273</sup> Ayano Ginoza, "R&R at the Intersection of US and Japanese Dual Empire: Okinawan Women and Decolonizing Militarized Heterosexuality," *American Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2016): 583-591.

<sup>274</sup> "Negro G.I. Area on Okinawa Typifies Unofficial Segregation," *The New York Times*, March 29, 1964. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed February 4, 2021.

antagonisms and instead embraced an ethos of “transpacific antiracisms.”<sup>275</sup> This racial class consciousness was also structured around an anti-colonial politics, as Black soldiers and native Okinawans recognized in their conditions a shared oppression as a result of US imperialism, with Okinawan activist leftist intellectuals and artists such as Arakawa Akira calling for a Black and Okinawan solidarity in his poem “The Colored Race.” Groups like the Bushmasters and chapters of the Black Panthers aligned themselves with Okinawan protestors and demands for sovereignty. This shared sense of resistance to imperialism and racial oppression came to a head in 1970 with the eruption of the Koza Uprising.<sup>276</sup> Sick of the US occupation, native Okinawans retaliated by burning military vehicles. But they left the Black GIs alone and formed protective circles around them, recognizing that their Black brothers and sisters were not the cause of their oppression.

Little of that past was visible in the Teruya that I saw on my visit. Because of the pandemic, many stores had shuttered. It was the same when I walked into Teruya down the narrow green asphalt path covered by storefront awnings. I was looking for Koza MiXtopia Research Center, where Dr. Ariko Ikehara had agreed to let me intern. She would be my mentor in fieldwork because while I am Okinawa on my mother’s side (my father, from whom I get my surname, being Japanese), in many ways, I was still an outsider to the place. My family on my mother’s side lives in Urasoe, which is further south of Okinawa City, and because of that familial rootedness, I had

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<sup>275</sup> Yuichiro Onishi, *Transpacific Antiracism: Afro-Asian Solidarity in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Black America, Japan, and Okinawa* (New York: NYU Press, 2013).

<sup>276</sup> Wesley Iwao Ueunten, “Rising Up from a Sea of Discontent: The 1970 Koza Uprising in U.S.-Occupied Okinawa,” in *Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific*, edited by Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 91-124.

never visited Okinawa City, the town previously known as Koza City. My surname, being Japanese, also marked me as an outsider, and beyond the forced assimilation of Okinawans, the discrimination against Okinawans by Japanese is still fresh in the memory for many Okinawans. Indeed, my mother reminded me that even twenty years ago, I would have been called ‘hafu’ in Japan as a result of my being mixed-race Okinawan and Japanese, a difference that is even more heightened by my positionality as an immigrant raised in the United States and who has been educated and trained as a US researcher.

It was not only the Okinawan gaze noting the differences marking my scholarly and mixed-race positionality that made clear my outsider status in that initial visit, however. It was my own way of seeing, too. On my first visit, what I observed were shuttered storefronts, a dimly lit path, and other signs of dilapidation—I was starting to have doubts about how much research I could do when the very landscape seemed to show signs of ruin. Ruin and ruination have marked much of the historical traumas inflicted on Okinawa first under Japanese settler colonialism and its annexation of the former Ryukyu Kingdom in 1879; and then later in the Battle of Okinawa that killed more than one-quarter of the Okinawan population; and yet again with the American Occupation that rendered Okinawa stateless while giving the United States administrative and judicial control of the islands from 1945-1972. US occupation continues today not in administration but in practice, with 70% of US military bases in Japan built in Okinawa, a prefecture whose islands make up 0.6% of Japan’s national territory. Okinawa’s location in the crosshairs of dual empire and the deferral of Okinawan right to self-determination is also part of the racialized and gendered logic of both the Japanese and US states that treat the prefecture as a colonial backwater. Within this history of forceful takeovers and militarization of the islands, the



system of sex trafficking sacrificed Okinawan women to protect the chastity of Japanese women in the immediate post-war era. The cultural, linguistic, and economic ruins led to the image of Okinawa as a sacrificial, prostituted daughter who symbolizes the ruin of Okinawa.<sup>277</sup> Literature has often taken up these themes of sexualized violence, prostitution, and abuse by the military because these are the realities facing Okinawans. At the core of this denial of sovereignty is a logic of erasure, the denial of Okinawan Indigeneity and its disappearance through Japan's forced assimilation and US militarization under the guise of development and aid. The story of Okinawa, then, has been about sovereignty denied, living on in the ruins of Japanese settler colonialism and US militarism.

But ruin was not all there was to see.

While my initial impressions of Koza were the signs of economic depression and what I saw as evidence of the consequences of militarism, I also observed how everydayness in Teruya challenged my assumptions as an outsider. Dr. Ikehara welcomed me into the research center, telling me about the shops in the neighborhood, the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s where barbershops, beauty shops, tailors, tempura stores thrived. The prostitution I had read so much about in the literature also occurred, but in other locations. As she showed me around the neighborhood, Dr. Ikehara introduced me to the residents and shopkeepers: a rapper whose chic café and record store was also a hangout for the neighborhood kids, a bar where the owner's son also ran a popular YouTube channel that brought in loyal customers from other countries, the

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<sup>277</sup> Linda Isako Angst, "Loudmouth Feminists and Unchaste Prostitutes: 'Bad Girls' Misbehaving in Postwar Okinawa," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* no. 36 (2009): 117-141. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42771995>.

mother and daughter who had run a successful beauty and makeup store since the 1960s. Beneath the surface of what I read as signs of ruin and defeat, there was the undeniable hum of life as Okinawans persisted and innovated to revive their local economy, culture, and community. This liveliness, this vibrant everydayness and determination were not what I had expected.

How do you read a place, a landscape, as an archive of all the violence, oppression, and displacement that has come before without letting mourning and loss become the singular story of that place?<sup>278</sup> How might stories of loss and disappearance also obscure the many ways Indigenous presence persists and survives? How does one read the ruins for survivance as a salve against erasure and loss?

In this chapter, I draw on a Native feminist reading practice to read the landscape of the everyday in Teruya and to read with critical distance Kishaba Jun's "Dark Flowers." In Teruya, Black and Indigenous relationalities were not always reflective of the stories of abjection and sleaze, nor were they always buttressed by revolutionary fire. Instead, in between loss and resistance, there were quiet, ordinary lives, persisting in un-ordinary conditions of war and occupation. Attention to the everyday rather than the spectacular reveals the quietly extraordinary feats of persistence and how Okinawans have assured their survivance through cultural practices, community-based economic revival, and the creation of a champuru culture. "Champuru" is an Okinawan word for "mix" as in goya champuru or goya stir-fry. Despite the theft of their lands,

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<sup>278</sup> Saidiya Hartman asks, "If ruin was my sole inheritance and the only certainty the impossibility of recovering the stories of the enslaved, did this make my history tantamount to mourning?" Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 16.

the militarization of their land, Okinawans have persisted and maintained ties to their Indigenous past, by cultivating a distinct, Okinawan identity. Such an identity in the post-war and contemporary eras has been successful in part because of the *champurū* culture that retains an Okinawanness even while incorporating other cultures. As Ariko Ikehara notes, “Okinawa’s American *Champurū*” indexed in the unique Okinawa lexicon has a performative quality that reflects this amalgamation in ways that stretch “the function of the Okinawan language beyond western as well as Japanese colonial imaginaries.”<sup>279</sup> In these cultural aftermaths of war and occupation, Okinawan Indigeneity has persisted as a new growth of cultural and ethnic identity emerging from sites of ruin in spite of and in the face of military and settler colonial violence.

Throughout the chapter, I draw on the meaning of the “aftermath” as that which emerges after the mowing to trace what persists in sites of ruin as “vital refiguration.”<sup>280</sup> I read from Kishaba’s short story, while applying the concept of *yui-maru* as an Okinawan Native feminist reading practice. *Yui-maru* in Uchinanguchi, an Indigenous Okinawan language, translates loosely to “the spirit of giving and receiving.” In my reading, I see it also as the spirit of Okinawan survivance that is passed on through actions as well as stories. I apply *yui-maru* as a reading practice, in which the giving and receiving of stories that occurred in the exchanges of *yuntaku* (talk story) with Okinawans in Teruya shape my reading of the context of Kishaba’s story. Put differently, the giving of stories by Teruyans and my receiving of them also lend to my reading of

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<sup>279</sup> Ariko Ikehara, “Third Space as Decolonial Con/Text: Okinawa’s American *Champurū*,” *Transnational Asia: An Online Interdisciplinary Journal* 1, no. 1 (2016), n.pag. <https://doi.org/10.25613/gsc1-pf13>.

<sup>280</sup> Stoler, “Imperial Debris,” 194.

Kishaba's story. As a method of literary criticism that draws on fieldwork, yui-maru as reading practice follows what Joan Dayan calls "literary fieldwork," one that turns to the "literary source as data that can test, confirm, or enhance facts from other sources."<sup>281</sup> Here, I turn to the everyday and the landscape of Teruya to enhance my reading of Kishaba's story. The aim of this method is not to argue for the literary source's representational accuracy but instead to examine the complex interplay of literary text and landscape, understanding that literature can shape how we enter into and read landscapes. As Shalini Puri argues, literary fieldwork's potential is in its capacity to recalibrate "the relationship between the literary, the historical, and the everyday" and attune the reader, not only to the sensational, but also "the quieter everyday" and the "*ordinariness* of literature."<sup>282</sup> The everyday in Kishaba's story gives insight into how the military presence itself has been rendered ordinary in the lives of Okinawans. At the same time, it is also in the quieter everyday moments and the landscape as both text and context that we can see the ways Okinawan Indigenous culture have persisted through ordinary practices of living. In turning to the intersection of literature and landscape, then, my hope is that this practice also gives Okinawan and non-Okinawan readers a way of receiving the grounded knowledge of Teruyans, whose perspectives reveal the richness of Teruya's contemporary and historical culture in ways that exceed the violence and subjugation of occupation and militarism. Throughout the chapter, passages from

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<sup>281</sup> Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), xviii.

<sup>282</sup> Shalini Puri, "Finding the Field: Notes on Caribbean Cultural Criticism, Area Studies, and the Forms of Engagement," in *Theorizing Fieldwork in the Humanities: Methods, Reflections, and Approaches to the Global South* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 40.

Kishaba's story act anchor my own movement through the Teruya landscape, a place that is both an archive of violence but also a site of Indigenous Okinawan history and presentness. In Teruya and the areas around the Koza Crossroads—including Goeku, Nishihara/Misato, and Miyazato—I found that Indigenous Okinawan culture and spirit do persist despite decades of Japanese settler colonialism and industrialization and US militarization.

The stories Teruyans shared with me complicate the stories told in literature about places like Teruya or Old Koza, which depict these areas as part of a sexualized, militourist landscape defined by the desires and violence of American soldiers. Teruyans, while living with the knowledge of the threat and violence posed by the ongoing US occupation, also attest to the persistence of Indigenous Okinawan culture. My own positionality adds to this complexity because on the one hand, I was an outsider, yet my facial features and the fact that I could name, and therefore root, where my family comes from allowed me certain claims to belonging that are not always available to other mixed-race Okinawans, especially when they have visibly European or African features. As Mitzi Uehara Carter argues, for mixed-race Okinawans, there is a sense of being perpetually “*chuuto hanpa*” (halfway, or still becoming).<sup>283</sup> Being perceived and positioned as between two cultures or identities and therefore racially obscure complicates the ways that mixed-race Okinawans can claim belonging, particularly for Black Okinawans whose racial identity marks them as outsiders. Being an Okinawan and Japanese mixed-race person raised in the United States, I could understand the desire to claim belonging, at the same time that Okinawan

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<sup>283</sup> Mitzi Uehara Carter, “Mixed Race Okinawans and Their Obscure In-Betweenness,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 35, no. 6 (2014): 646-661.

assimilation into Japan as an ethnic minority group also eased my entry into Okinawan spaces. Indeed, some of my interlocutors may have been more comfortable with sharing their memories with me because my features and family heritage were more visually recognizable as Okinawan. These visual codes of racialization complicate Indigenous relationality and belonging to Indigenous communities, particularly for mixed-race people in sites of militarism. Such nuancing is important, however, for the broader struggle for Indigenous self-determination and solidarities with other Indigenous and Black communities (which are not necessarily separate) to articulate ways of surviving that don't reify old structures of racist segregation and erasure. Thus, to pull these different threads and trace the richness of the experiences I had in Teruya, throughout this chapter, I draw on a practice of *yui-maru* as Native Okinawan feminist reading method. This reading method centers the spirit of *yui-maru*, of giving and receiving, to weave together many stories. I read Kishaba's story as one among many that brings to life the Indigenous way of knowing and being in Okinawa. In my reading at the intersections of literature and life history, I find the stories—some shared with me, some my own—were what cultivated Okinawa's Indigenous persistence: in the material ruins and the immaterial refusal to be ruined, in the *yui-maru* that sustains the life of the community, in the cultural practices that honor the sacred and the spiritual that are part of the land, and in these words here.

## 5.1 Yui-maru as Method: An Okinawan Native Feminist Reading Practice

What I am calling a Native Okinawan feminist reading practice is first grounded in the understanding of Okinawans as Indigenous people. Native and Indigenous women face a specific set of issues distinct from other women of color and white women, which as Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill notes are tied to “land and settler colonialism,” because for Indigenous women, their/our struggle is “inseparable from the issues facing Indigenous people as a whole, [and] are resolved via decolonization and sovereignty.”<sup>284</sup> The struggle against settler colonialism and land theft are particular struggles Native feminists face as Indigenous. Such particularities are erased by discourses of multiculturalism, which “maintain settler colonialism because they make it easy to assume that all minorities and ethnic groups are different though working toward inclusion and equality.”<sup>285</sup> In Okinawa, Ayano Ginoza notes that Japanese multiculturalism reinforces the disavowal of Okinawan sovereignty through the denial of Okinawan Indigeneity, by which “the Japanese government contains Okinawans as an ethnic minority with ‘equal’ status in the context of multiculturalism.”<sup>286</sup> This disavowal of Okinawan Indigeneity by the Japanese government further prop up a system in which Japan not only maintains its own settler claims to

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<sup>284</sup> Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, “Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy,” *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 1 (spring 2013), 10.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Ayano Ginoza, “Dis/articulation of Ethnic Minority and Indigeneity in the Decolonial Feminist and Independence Movements in Okinawa,” *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 37 (March 2015): n.pag. <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue37/ginoza.htm>.

Okinawan Indigenous lands but also asserts its authority and right to lease land in Okinawa to the US military. Thus, Ginoza continues, the articulation of Okinawa Indigeneity—as opposed to Okinawan ethnic minority status—“is a key not only to address the contemporary militarized and colonial state of Okinawa but also to seek Okinawan peoples’ sovereignty, distinct collective rights, identity, political voice, and constitutional reform.”<sup>287</sup> Okinawan native feminist practice is thus not only about seeking restitution for past wrongs by both Japanese and US colonial authorities but also ensuring Okinawan survivance against the erasure of Okinawan Indigeneity and the ongoing deferral of rights and sovereignty.

In reading the stories of Okinawa’s Black Pacific using a Native feminist reading practice, I am influenced by Angie Morrill, who bases her idea of a Native feminist reading method on the work of Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor and his concept of “survance [that] is shared through stories.”<sup>288</sup> Morrill explains that Native feminist reading practice is “a methodology that involves reading against disappearance; it involves reading futures yet in store for Native lives.”<sup>289</sup> Reading against disappearance is also reading for survivance in landscapes and the stories we tell about those landscapes. In Okinawa, a Native feminist reading practice is about seeing the

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<sup>287</sup> Ayano Ginoza, “Okinawanness as a Form of Indigeneity in Transnational Anti-Militarist Feminist Movement,” UCLA: Center for the Study of Women (2011), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/58x8415h>, 21.

<sup>288</sup> Gerald Vizenor with Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, editors, “Resistance in the Blood,” in *Youth Resistance Research and Theories of Change* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 107-117.

<sup>289</sup> Angie Morrill, “Time Traveling Dogs (and Other Native Feminist Ways to Defy Dislocations),” *Cultural Studies* ⇨ *Critical Methodologies* 17, no. 1 (2017): 14-20, 15. For Vizenor’s articulation of survivance, see Gerald Vizenor with Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, editors, “Resistance in the Blood.”



landscape as more than colonial and military property defined by the interests of the Japanese government and the US military. It is also a way of reading, sometimes with, and sometimes against the grain of literature that represents Okinawa through the lens of a racialized and gendered landscape. While Kishaba's "Dark Flowers" does the important work of directing attention to the racial-gendered hierarchies and undue suffering of Okinawan prostituted women, stories of prostitution are not the only stories or only way of seeing the landscape. My critique here is not meant to dismiss the stakes for writers of Kishaba's generation, and indeed generations after, as Okinawans continue to struggle against the violence and oppression enforced by the US military burden. But I also want to listen for these other stories because to read a landscape for nothing more than loss and violence is to accept the colonial story of Indigenous erasure.

Stories, too, tell us about the radical movements for sovereignty, albeit in different ways from the activism and uprisings in the streets. Stories are a form of theorizing.<sup>290</sup> In his study of Black interiority, Kevin Quashie says that stories tell us about the "sovereignty of quiet." The prevailing focus on resistance in Black culture "thwarts other ways of reading," obscuring to our

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<sup>290</sup> Barbara Christian writes, "people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing...is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create" (52). Adding to this, theorizing is a way of explaining the world and sharing a way of knowing, story-telling is a way of expanding on that way of knowing and applying it to the ordinary moments of everyday lives. See Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse*, *Cultural Critique* no. 6 (spring 1987): 51-63.

view other capacities of being, the dignity and dynamism of the inner life.<sup>291</sup> “The inner life,” Quashie explains, “has its own sovereignty. It is hard to see, even harder to describe, but no less potent in its ineffability.”<sup>292</sup> In thinking with Morrill, Ginoza, and Quashie, I’m theorizing a way of reading literature and the stories we tell about places to read against the disappearance of Indigenous Okinawan culture. Such a practice is a necessary part of the struggle for sovereignty, which takes place not only in public forums, legislation, and mass protests but also in the inner life, the intimate spaces of the everyday, and the stories Okinawans tell about a place’s past, present, and future.

In reading for survivance, I also want to think about not only the stories told in literature but also in conversation, through what is called in *yuntaku* (talk-story). As I sat with Dr. Ikehara on my first day, I saw that part of what gave the atmosphere of liveliness in Teruya was the practice of sharing stories. While watching Ikehara practice what she calls “yuntaku-view,” a practice that draws on the conversational method of yuntaku to inform her method of interviewing, I saw how animated the Teruyan interlocutors became. Sharing their memories and stories was a way of keeping alive the spirit of the place. In these exchanges, I came to understand that yui-maru was also at the heart of these exchanges, that yun-taku was part of this giving and receiving that was all around me, at Café Noor, where the children parked their bicycles in front of Gushiken-san’s storefront and marched in and out of the shop, pouring themselves tea and telling Dai-chan about

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<sup>291</sup> Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>292</sup> Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, 6.

their day; at Keiko-san's bar, where the old men of the neighborhood sat talking and laughing and from where Keiko-san herself delivered to us a steaming plate of homemade *mozukutempura* (seaweed tempura) just because she happened to make it. In receiving stories, we are also giving care and time, insisting that their stories matter, their experiences matter. It is through stories that Teruya, what it was in the past and what it is now in the present and can become in the future, stays alive. The stories that the residents in Teruya shared with me also showed me that there was more to Teruya than a segregated, raced, colonized, sexualized landscape. I only needed to be open to the spirit of the neighborhood to see that the sovereignty of the inner life in this quiet area was everywhere, in the innovation of the residents, the kindness and community support they so freely gave, in the tending of the wells of sacred water and the shrine that are all that remain of the ruins of the Goeku Castle. In the landscape, the stories, and the everyday lives of the people, yui-maru was all around, a testament to the persistence of Okinawan Indigeneity. Therefore, I draw from the stories the Teruyans told me as part of that reading for survivance, yui-maru as Native feminist reading practice.

## 5.2 Satokibi Poetics in Okinawa's Weird Landscape

To get to Michikō's room, Nobuko had to walk along the asphalt military highway, turn at the corner gas station, go down a gravel road lined on both sides with tire repair shops, car washes, and other stores, then walk in the direction of the seacoast along narrow footpaths of brand-new houses, built on gravel landfills, with gleaming red-tile roofs. It made for a weird landscape. These houses, with their fancy roofs, stood in the marshes, paddies, and potato fields dotted with old tree stumps. They were owned by farmers who had moved here after being forced to give up their lands to 'protect freedom from its enemies.' It was the third time these farmers had been resettled. There were, without a doubt, fine houses. But by this time none of the farmers, who'd been relocated here in this forced migration, were living inside. Instead, they lived in tin-roof shacks that had been built onto the kitchens or put up in the backyards. The interiors of these 'fine houses' had been

partitioned into eight-by-eight-foot private rooms where yellowed bras and dresses in many colors now hung outside the windows, fluttering in the wind. At night these ‘fine houses’ became bars and cabarets.<sup>293</sup>

The area that would become Koza City during the US Occupation from 1945-1972 was one of the first places where the US military made landfall during World War II. Before the war, the areas occupied by the military and the construction of Camp Koza had been farming villages and rice paddies. Koza Crossroads was built between four towns: Teruya (40 houses, 150 people), Goeku (169 houses, 805 people), Nishihara/Misato (244 houses, 162 people), and Miyazato (32 houses, 38 people).<sup>294</sup> US troops landed at Yomitan on April 1, 1945, and the US military moved quickly to establish control over the area, setting up concentration camps in the villages of Goeku and Kamarra because the military was unable to distinguish civilians from enemy aliens. As the war continued and the encroaching battle displaced more Okinawans, the US military sent the refugees north to what became Camp Koza.

The United States landed on Okinawa on April 1, 1945, and began building the Koza Crossroads immediately to transport supplies. By the sixth, they had opened Camp Koza, hiring locals to start building their internment center. The military transported the first camp residents in

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<sup>293</sup> Kishaba, “Dark Flowers,” 101-102, emphasis added.

<sup>294</sup> *Koza Bunka Box*, No. 3, Okinawa-shi Soumu-bu Soumu-ka (Shi-shi henshuu tantou) (Okinawa-shi: Koubundou Insatsu Kabushikigaisha, 2007), 58. [Edited by Okinawa City General & Administrative Division, General & Administrative Department. Okinawa City, Okinawa: Koubundo Printing Co., 2007.]. Hereafter referred to as *Koza Bunka Box*.

three trucks, full of mostly children, women, and elderly people.<sup>295</sup> In April, the population of the camps was 3700 people; by July, that number had swelled to 11,600 people at Camp Koza.<sup>296</sup> As some of the area's original residents returned, they found that other camp residents had taken up residence in their households. For some, such as the original Teruyans, they were forced to live in the pig sty next to their original family home. Because of the camp structure, displaced Okinawans were also put in a position of displacing other Okinawans. Okinawans lived in the camps for up to two years after the war's end. As the camps grew, the development of stores in Camp Koza laid the foundations for Koza City.

Kishaba Jun's "Dark Flowers" takes place in this setting of former farmlands and the concentration camp turned military camptown. Set in the immediate aftermath of the war, Kishaba's short story was first published in the University of the Ryukyus' radical student literary magazine, *Ryudai Bungaku*. The magazine published writings critical of the US occupation and attracted significant attention during a time of US censorship, when occupation authorities required all publications to submit their contents prepublication.<sup>297</sup> With its sketches of guard towers and barbed wire fences filling the marginalia of the magazine, the publication's materiality and textuality are informed by the context of US occupation.

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<sup>295</sup> *Okinawa-shi Shi Daigokan Shiryouhen 4*. Okinawa-shi: Marumasa Insatsu Kabshikigaisha, 2019, 168. [Okinawa City History, Volume 5, No. 4. Okinawa City, Okinawa: Marumasa Printing Co., 2019]. Hereafter referred to as Okinawa-shi Shi.

<sup>296</sup> *Koza Bunka Box*, 58.

<sup>297</sup> Michael Molasky and Steve Rabson, editors, Introduction to *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), 25-26.

“Dark Flowers” is an exemplar of the magazine’s “occupation literature.”<sup>298</sup> The story focuses on a day in the life of the protagonist, Nobuko, a young Okinawan woman who works as a military prostitute. Her boyfriend, Joe, is a Black GI, and his racialization within the story suggests they are likely to frequent Teruya, the area designated as the Black District in Koza City. Although not explicitly identified as such, it is clear from the story’s details that the setting is Koza City. References to “K Town” and the many details of the signs in English, the red tile roofs on the “fine houses,” and the “yellowed bras and dresses in many colors” hanging in the windows make clear the story’s camptown setting at a time when US censors would have controlled what writers could depict about life under occupation.<sup>299</sup> Occupation authorities built the red-tile roof houses, many of which still exist today in Okinawa City, and the architecture quickly became associated with the activities of a red light district. Other details such as tiled entries more common for storefronts but on residential houses also signaled what services were available at a house. The undergarments and colorful dresses suggest the luxury gifts given by American soldiers to their

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<sup>298</sup> Michael Molasky distinguishes what he terms “occupation literature” from other literary classifications used in Japan, such as “postwar literature” (*senjo bungaku*) or “literature under occupation” (*senryōka no bungaku*). Molasky specifies that “occupation literature” concerns literary works that depict life under US occupation and interaction between native Okinawans and US occupiers. See Michael Molasky, *The American Occupation of Japan and Okinawa: Literature and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 3.

<sup>299</sup> As Molasky notes, occupation authorities in Japan strictly prohibited depictions of fraternization between Japanese women and American men. However, writers were able to get around censorship restrictions through specific place names and descriptions of luxury goods to convey the woman’s line of work.

girlfriends or to the prostitutes, as the apparel would have been uncommon at a time when many Okinawan women still wore kimonos.

More than a background setting, the “weird landscape” that Nobuko navigates reinforces the racial-gendered and sexualized subordination of Okinawans. As Ayano Ginoza writes, “tourism and US military bases in Okinawa have insinuated themselves into the landscape and every aspect of the social life of the island.”<sup>300</sup> The fenced-off military bases, the shops catering to the consumerism of American soldiers, the well-kept lawns, the glamour in Hollywood movies communicate “the ideology of the American dream—freedom through the consumption of the ‘modern’ West.”<sup>301</sup> Okinawan women who gained access to these spaces acquired not only physical mobility—the freedom to enter onto military bases otherwise inaccessible to Okinawan civilians—but also a form of social mobility, “the means to transform experiences of poverty and subordination.”<sup>302</sup> In this way, the allure of the American dream is spatialized, the military bases representing America as “a realm of opportunity, liberation, and romantic self-expression.”<sup>303</sup> For the Okinawan women seeking to escape repressive patriarchal attitudes and poverty, their intimacies with the GIs are inextricable from the colonial sexual economies of the military and tourist industries. Their sexual desires reflect the “interior frontiers” produced in conditions of

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<sup>300</sup> Ginoza, “R&R at the Intersection of US and Japanese Dual Empire,” 585.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 586.

<sup>302</sup> Ginoza, “R&R at the Intersection of US and Japanese Dual Empire,” 586.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

colonial intimacies.<sup>304</sup> That these intimacies are shaped within the social, racial-gendered, and sexualized landscape means that the physical landscape extends into the emotional landscape of the colonized population. Thus the “collaboration of militarism and tourism in a colonial emotional landscape thus reinforces extreme positions for Okinawan natives in relation to the perceived promises (or threats) of heterosexual relations with US GIs.”<sup>305</sup>

Nobuko walks through this “weird landscape” of former Okinawan farmlands turned into a red light district, her movement both spatial and temporal. The story begins with her waking in her boyfriend, Joe’s room in the enclosed space of the army barrack. Outside the bedroom window, Nobuko sees the “long rows of white barracks, separated by spacious lawns, [that] stretched northward along the seacoast all the way to the end of the cape.”<sup>306</sup> The pristine white of the barracks and the spacious lawns communicate the American dream, but access to these physical spaces also puts Nobuko in increasingly perilous situations. Immediately after seeing this vision, Nobuko decides to visit her friend Michiko in K Town. Nobuko recalls that “back when Michiko had a job as a housemaid, she had been raped by the man she worked for, but unable to decide where to go next, she ended up living with him for about a year and a half in N City.”<sup>307</sup> The contrast between the spacious lawns and white barracks and Michiko’s imprisonment because of her poverty and profession portray the fraught “colonial emotional landscape” that women like

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<sup>304</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>305</sup> Ginoza, “R&R at the Intersection of US and Japanese Dual Empire,” 589.

<sup>306</sup> Kishaba, “Dark Flowers,” 101.

<sup>307</sup> Kishaba, “Dark Flowers,” 101.



Nobuko and Michiko navigate every day. Holding out for the perceived promise of American freedom is inextricable from the threats that ensue from their relations with US GIs. Mobility in this sense proves to be illusory, as the Okinawan women moving between civilian areas and the military bases are no freer than the farmers forcibly displaced by the US military.

Part of what makes this landscape so weird is that it captures overlapping era of Okinawa's history, including the area's pre-war past as an area of mainly farmlands mixed with the story's current function as a place overdetermined by its catering to the sexual desires of US military personnel. Nobuko's walk along the military highway travels through what M. Jacqui Alexander in another context calls the "palimpsestic time," the landscape itself marked by the overlapping temporalities of past and present.<sup>308</sup> The setting of the military highway is itself structured by the US settler garrison, at the same time it gives a glimpse into pre-war Okinawa. This idea of palimpsestic time activated by specific places also corresponds with how Wesley Ueunten explains the Okinawan concept of "yu," which roughly translates to world but also captures the ways of living of a particular time:

The following contextualization includes Japan's use of force to integrate Okinawa into the Japanese world (yamata yu), the world of war (ikusa yu) in the form of the horrific Battle of Okinawa in 1945, and the American military occupation (amerika yu) from 1945

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<sup>308</sup> M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations of Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 190.

to 1972. It might be pointed out here, however, that each *yu* is not a linear temporal relationship to the others. Rather, *yu*'s coexist, overlap, and interact.<sup>309</sup>

Within these overlapping *yu*'s that recall multiple worlds and eras in the arc of palimpsestic time, the landscape itself comes to reflect the class of multiple worlds that coexist and overlap, often in uneasy ways (figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Okinawan red-tile houses with shacks out back like the ones Kishaba describes in his story. The caption reads: “Teruya Honmachi Street in the 1960s.” Photo credit: Courtesy of Teruya Community Center. While the military bases represent the racial-gendered, sexualized landscape produced by the military occupation, the juxtaposition of these militarized spaces with the surrounding Okinawan

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<sup>309</sup> Ueunten, “Rising Up from a Sea of Discontent,” 97.

farmlands calls attention to the persistence of Indigenous Okinawan presence. Even though the farmers have been resettled once more from the fine houses with their red tile roofs and are now forced to live in tin-roof shacks, they are present nonetheless. The “marshes, paddies, and potato fields” are a visible reminder of who and what are Indigenous to Okinawa, their contrast with the “fancy roofs” highlighting it is the architectures of militarism that have created a sexualized landscape in ways that are hostile to the island’s Indigenous plants and people. This emphasis on the Indigenous plant life in describing the landscape is notable in Kishaba’s story because it differs from the representations of landscape common to other Okinawan protest literature. As Michael Molasky notes, for many Okinawan male writers of occupation literature, the prevalence of bars and brothels in Koza presented a “landscape rife with allegorical possibilities.”<sup>310</sup> In the same way that the brothels gave foreign occupiers access to the “bodies of native women,” so too did the area present Okinawan writers the “metaphorical body of ‘woman.’”<sup>311</sup> The trope of landscape-as-woman presented a range of opportunities to represent Okinawa as a penetrated and violated feminized space, but in Kishaba’s story, the focus on the landscape as a cultivated, agricultural area is not only true to the region’s pre-war history; it also brings up interesting questions about Okinawan Indigeneity, what survives as the aftermath of mowing, when the relationship between the people and their land has been so severed by the structures of militarization and settler colonialism.

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<sup>310</sup> Molasky, *The American Occupation of Japan and Okinawa*, 55.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

Later in Kishaba's story, Nobuko returns to her home village. She travels "along gravel roads through the poor villages of southern Okinawa, which were planted with sugarcane and smelled of mud."<sup>312</sup> While the southern areas of the island do not have the military camptowns that came to define Koza City, the landscape is still haunted by the memories of the war:

The war had once denuded this forest, shamelessly exposing the barren red soil. Gone for some time after that was the sharp smell of resin that drifts from the thick groves of red pines, which stay dark even during the day. Nor was there any sign of the red-bellied water lizards that hide lazily in the grassy shade. The roofless stone graves that had been used for storing buns when Nobuko was a child were covered now with susuki grass.<sup>313</sup>

The Battle of Okinawa largely took place in the southern part of Okinawa Island, the history of which still haunts the area. The war itself brought the first wave of violence, but even after the war, the absence of resin and the red-bellied water lizards shows the lingering violence of the war that impacts human and non-human alike. This memory of violence and war lingers still in the landscape, under the *susuki* (pampas) grass that has grown back to reclaim the land.

The cost of militarization and the destruction of land have long-term consequences for the livelihoods and survivance of Okinawans, even decades after the war. The war destroyed Okinawa Island's agrarian and fishing economies, and even in southern areas where the US military did not steal Okinawan farmlands, the slow rebuilding of Okinawan ways of living produced decades of impoverishment. Nobuko and her family, who come from "the poor villages of southern Okinawa,

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<sup>312</sup> Kishaba, "Dark Flowers," 106.

<sup>313</sup> Kishaba, "Dark Flowers," 106.

which were planted with sugarcane and smelled of mud,” are victim of this structure of settler violence.<sup>314</sup> Nobuko’s family subsists on collecting scrap metal and cultivating sugarcane, but the meager gains from this provide insufficient. “And how’s the cane doing,” Nobuko asks. “There’re not supposed to be any more typhoons this year, so it should be a bumper crop.?” Her mother interjects, “A ‘bumper crop?’ Hah! On this teeny-weeny plot? Then we have to pay all that money to the farm co-op for fertilizer.” Sugarcane was a major cash crop in Okinawa after Japan’s forcible annexation. But even as Japanese sugar companies sought to push out local small producers, as Wendy Matsumura’s work shows, small producers held onto “communal forms of production, manufacture, and exchange.”<sup>315</sup> Nobuko’s mother’s bitter laughter and griping about the farm co-op suggests that even these communal relations have been disrupted in the postwar scarcity economy, where the theft of Okinawan farmlands for military base construction has stunted Okinawa’s postwar economic growth and changed how Indigenous Okinawans live in relation to the land and to each other. Despite these warped relations, Nobuko’s younger brother, Shinkichi, involves himself in organizing with the other satokibi farmers to create “the new farm village” and to bring forth a new future for Okinawa.

My first interlocutor in Teruya just so happened to be a sugarcane farmer. He wasn’t from the Teruya area but further south in Nanjo, formerly Oshiro. Like Nobuko, Shiroma-san was from a farming village where they grew satokibi, a type of sugarcane that is indigenous to southern

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Wendy Matsumura, *The Limits of Okinawa: Japanese Capitalism, Living Labor, and Theorizations of Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 144.

Okinawa. At 75, Shiroma-san was healthy, his body toned and energized from a lifetime of farming then later running the tempura shop next to Koza MiXtopia. Shiroma-san came to Teruya around 1965-1967, shortly after he graduated high school. He came up from the farm and joined his brother, who owned a soba shop around the corner on the busy Koza Crossroads. He eventually opened his own shop, which he had been running for 35 years. Most shops in the area, he told me, had been around for fifty or so years. Teruya back when he first arrived was in the middle of an economic boom.

I had asked him about what he had seen in Okinawa's changing landscape over the years. Having grown up as a sugarcane farmer, he described the changes using the indigenous plant he was most familiar with: satokibi. In the past, he described, the farmers would make hundreds of cuts in the cane to make the stalks sprout smaller shoots. But with the industrialization and mass production, farming practices changed, and they began using a single, clean cut to harvest the cane. The result was shorter, stunted shoots.

I came to think of satokibi as the poetics of Indigenous persistence, where on Okinawa, survivance persists in spite of militarization. What I am referring to as Indigenous persistence here is distinct from "resilience," a term often used to describe Okinawans. The term 'resilience' naturalizes an unnatural mowing process: the clean cut of an industrial blade, the sharp edge of a bayonet, the rumbling terror of a bulldozer. But the satokibi aftermath is less an effect of its resilience and instead the determination to grow back despite the mowing. A refusal to die, to be mown down. Still I wondered: How many more decades of militarization and commercialization would the area sustain? What happens when that mowing becomes too far spread, too harsh, too frequent? How many maths can an Indigenous culture survive?

### 5.3 Dark Flowers: Military Intimacies and Black and Indigenous Relationality

On the way back, Joe and Nobuko parted in front of his military base. Then, walking alone, she again recalled the faces of the Indian men in the movie. They brought back a horrible memory. It had been a sweltering dawn in mid-July when she witnessed this brutal scene. Just before sunrise, across the military highway from her room, she'd seen the faces of men and women huddled together, trembling with rage. They had just been dragged outside the barbed-wire fence that now surrounded their land, and the young men among them were being arrested. She had seen it with her own eyes. And she could still hear the endless clanging of an alarm bell at dawn as everything these people owned was being taken from them.<sup>316</sup>

During the two years after the war that the US military incarcerated Okinawans in concentration camps, the occupying forces moved quickly to steal as much land from the Okinawans as possible to build military bases, requisitioning 18,000 hectares of farmlands and displacing forty-thousand landowners and twelve-thousand households.<sup>317</sup> The US occupying authorities put Okinawans to work building the camps, instructing women to begin farming inside the camps to cultivate crops and supply the food for camp residents.<sup>318</sup> The military put Okinawan men to work building the camp eating halls, living quarters, and other facilities. Outside the camps, the military and third-party construction companies recruited Black GIs to assist in corralling the Okinawans and constructing the military bases.

That “Dark Flowers” takes place in Okinawa’s Black District is central to understanding the racial logics of settler militarism. In the early aftermath of the war, Black soldiers were also recruited for the bulldozer and bayonets campaigns. A 1946 article in the historically Black newspaper, the *Atlanta Daily World*, reported that African American soldiers in the 4337<sup>th</sup> Quarter

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<sup>316</sup> Kishaba, “Dark Flowers,” 106.

<sup>317</sup> McCormack and Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands*, 78.

<sup>318</sup> Okinawa-shi-Shi, 168, iv.

Master Service Company were responsible for the “guarding, screening, supervision, administration and eventual release and repatriation of enemy personnel, along with the guarding of American goods.”<sup>319</sup> *The Chicago Defender* announced that Black GIs who fought during the war there are being sent to Okinawa for construction work in the expansion of the army base there.<sup>320</sup> Construction firms contracted for expanding the army’s facilities were recruiting African American men from all over the country for jobs as carpenters and bulldozer operators. Black soldiers saw in these opportunities the chance to be treated with the respect and dignity they deserved, while in Okinawa, this forceful displacement and land theft by the US military is remembered as *Jyuuken to burudouzaa*, the bayonets and bulldozers campaign.

The instrumentalization of Black labor to promote American supremacy and expand its frontiers in the removal of Native Okinawans complicates the stories of cross-racial solidarities in Teruya. Instead, the enlistment of Black GIs in operating the bulldozers to expand the US settler state and build its military bases, alongside the designation of Teruya as the “Black District” in 1953, indicates the role of Blackness in structuring the White settler colonial imaginary. As Tiffany Lethabo King notes, while “black labor literally tills, fences in and cultivates the settler’s land,” we must understand that “the issue of Black fungibility [is] a constitutive element of settler colonialism’s conceptual order.”<sup>321</sup> The rendering of Blackness into property marks “Blackness as

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<sup>319</sup> “GIs on Okinawa Guard Property and Prisoners: 4337<sup>th</sup> Service Company Holds Fine Record,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 21, 1946. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed February 4, 2021.

<sup>320</sup> “Vets Go Back to Okinawa,” *The Chicago Defender*, May 3, 1947. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed February 4, 2021.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*



the ultimate sign for expansion and unending space within the symbolic economy of settlement.”<sup>322</sup> Within the White settler colonial structure, the image of the Black body is itself a constitutive part of conceiving the spatial possibilities of settlement. The designation of Teruya as a “Black District” reinforces this spatializing logic by obscuring the history and present of Indigenous Okinawan presence and rewriting the area’s identity as if it starts with US militarism.

Kishaba’s “Dark Flowers” connects the forceful mowing of Okinawan farmlands to the cultural hegemony that expands the ideology of the US settler nation-state. As Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Eve Tuck write, cultural productions are a foundational element of the structure of settler colonialism to the extent that “cultural productions remain complicit with ongoing settlement, both in everyday practices and intellectual projects.”<sup>323</sup> Cultural productions continually generate the elimination of the Native through tropes of the disappearing Native and celebrations of settler colonizers. Kishaba’s critique of the White settler imaginary connects the US militarized expansion and removal of native Okinawans to the US settler colonial expansion and removal of American Indians in the film that Nobuko attends with her Black GI boyfriend, Joe. The Western shows the protagonist, played by Gregory Peck, his bar hostess girlfriend, and a convoy of white settlers heading west, their mission “to attack at dawn and get rid of the Indians. Peck, their courageous leader, rode alone into the Indian fortress, and in the true pioneer spirit, with arrows flying all around him, he shot hordes of Indians dead, beat others to death with the butt of his gun,

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Eve Tuck, “Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies: Ongoing Settlement, Cultural Production, and Resistance,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 17, no. 1 (2017), 6.

and almost single-handedly annihilated the tribe.”<sup>324</sup> The detailed description of the movie shows the White settler imaginary in action, one that portrays settler colonial genocide as a heroic act and encourages the audience to celebrate the elimination of the Native. But Nobuko experiences a profound moment of disidentification while watching the film:

Why did the Indians have to be massacred, Nobuko asked herself. It had filled her with anger to see them desperately defending their homeland as old Indian women died in terror, young Indian men tumbled to their deaths from cliffs, and camera close-ups showed the faces of men trampled to death after falling from their horses. Why would Indians ever agree to perform in such a film, she wondered. The whole thing made her sick.<sup>325</sup>

Nobuko’s disidentification with the heroic Peck and his bar hostess girlfriend and the anger and sympathy she feels for the Indians on-screen is informed by what Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million calls the “felt knowledge” of Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women, for whom “felt experience [functions] as community knowledge.”<sup>326</sup> Affective knowledge is disruptive and dangerous because it poses an alternative to objective forms of historical knowing, drawing instead from community knowledges as ways of accessing truth. Million writes, “as Indigenous peoples, we are actively engaged in a political ethos that engages our remembering and telling our histories, our experiences with systems.”<sup>327</sup> The anger that Nobuko feels is informed

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<sup>324</sup> Kishaba, “Dark Flowers,” 105.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Dian Million, *Therapeutic Nations: Healing in an Age of Indigenous Human Rights* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 57.

<sup>327</sup> Million, *Therapeutic Nations*, 77.

by this felt knowledge as the movie and the depiction of White settler genocide of Indians later brings forth a “horrible memory” as she recalls the faces of men and women contained within barbed-wire enclosures. Nobuko’s disidentification with the settler colonizer Peck and her identification through felt knowledge with the Indians instead underscores the extent to which the US military conquest of Okinawa was itself an expansion of its settler nation-state.

The instrumentalization of Black labor to promote American supremacy and expand its frontiers in the removal of Native Okinawans is part of the affective structure that conditions the relationship between Joe and Nobuko. Throughout the story, Nobuko conceals her “repulsion” with Joe and what she senses to be his attitude of superiority. Yet the obvious racism he faces as a Black soldier, including lower pay than his white counterparts and his own lack of mobility in the segregated spaces of militarism, also elicits her sympathy. She understands his suffering as a product of the afterlife of slavery, his sorrow “the sadness of people who were resigned to hardship but determined to endure it—a sadness that refused to succumb to despair.” Nobuko is reminded of her own hardship when she sees the dark flowers of the story’s title. The hibiscus flowers are associated in the story with death and sadness, associations that come from ancient times, when farmers were forced into labor to build Shuri Castle:

Farmers were not only assessed heavy yearly tributes on their crops but were also drafted from districts far and near as forced labor to build the king’s castle at Shuri. Day after day they marched in long columns, dragging logs and stones, and many died from starvation and sunstroke. There were horrible scenes of death. Under the relentless gaze of bailiffs, the farmers, nearly dead from exhaustion, collapsed in the shade of trees beside the road to give their bodies a brief rest. At such times they must have noticed these dark flowers

blooming in the shrubbery. Perhaps these shabby dark flowers reminded the farmers of their suffering. Oppressed and impoverished, they might have felt toward these poor, dark flowers a kind of communion and, at the same time, a repulsion that came from their own self-loathing.<sup>328</sup>

The flowers act as a conduit for Nobuko to understand her own impoverishment and suffering in relation to Joe's, for whom she feels a mix of repulsion and sympathy. The flowers here materialize the entangled histories of violence against Black and Indigenous people within the structure of settler colonialism. Their conditions may not be the same or parallel, yet their entanglement and oppression because of the racial logics of the settler military structure are also what allows Nobuko to achieve a sense of relationality. Rather than give into this sorrow, Nobuko looks to her brother's optimism for the "new farm village" and the refusal she hears in Joe's own sorrow, as sources of strength for her resolve "to fight what was hateful to her with everything she had, and, like Joe, to celebrate what made her happy with a joyful smile."<sup>329</sup> In this moment, Nobuko reaches a sense of personal dignity, not through social movements or outright resistance, but in a moment of everyday, ordinary life. Her and Joe's relationship is no less fraught, but it is out of their relationality that Nobuko is able to imagine her own sense of how she might persist in the face of overwhelming violence.

Joe's and Nobuko's relationship is in many ways truer to life in its portrayal of Black and Okinawan relations. While uprisings, radical activism, and solidarities occasionally brought

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<sup>328</sup> Kishaba, "Dark Flowers, 110-111.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

together Black GIs and Okinawans, the spaces between those moments were just as important for achieving sovereignty in moments of quiet, everyday dignities, even under conditions of domination and violence. These interpersonal moments of relationality, co-existence, and even friendship and joy refute the narratives that equate Blackness with abjection or violence or limit the possibilities of Black and Indigenous relations to the public sphere. Indeed, in speaking with the Teruyans who remembered the area during US occupation, it was these moments of quiet, everyday life that were more common. Shiroma-san recalls that the Black GIs were always polite, and he and his brother tried to make foods that the soldiers seemed to enjoy most, like oden. Miyazato-san, who ran a ladies clothing store, remembered when she first moved to Koza in 1955, the same year Kishaba published his story. She was 16 then, a young girl, helping her mother run what back then was a kimono-shop. The Black men, she recalled, were “very stylish,” and when they weren’t wearing suits, they looked sharp in black and white tailored clothes. The GIs would sometimes bring their girlfriends to the kimono shop to buy them clothes. The whole area was teeming with tailors and barber shops back then, and on more than one occasion, I was told you couldn’t throw a stone without hitting a barber shop. Miyazato-san told us how many people came back to her store to visit in the years after reversion and how often even new acquaintances turned out to be connected to Teruya somehow. “This is what I want you to take away,” Dr. Ikehara told me, “this remembering through relationships. Teruya is like an umbilical cord: people are still connected to the place even when they aren’t here.”<sup>330</sup> Through the yuntaku, the stories of the everyday, I was starting to learn how much the sovereignty of the ordinary gives life to a place,

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<sup>330</sup> Ariko Ikehara, personal communication with the author.

the small gestures, like an Okinawan shopowner making oden because it's a customer's favorite food; or a Black GI coming to Okinawan seamstresses, tailors, and kimono dressmakers to buy clothes; or the way people become connected to a place and its spirit stays alive in yuntaku, in stories, in remembering. These stories gave me a different sense of the place than even Kishaba's story, showing that the so-called "Black district" was more than a racialized sexualized landscape but a place where Black soldiers and Okinawans were living with dignity and in relation to and with each other.

#### **5.4 Indigenous Persistence: Surviving Ruination**

Across the Koza Crossroads from Teruya is another neighborhood, Goeku. Here, nestled between a children's playground and a scenic overlook, there are the ruins of another castle: Giikugusuku (Goeku gusuku or Goeku castle in Japanese). According to Ryukyuan songs, Giikugusuku was built by Amamiku, the creator of the Ryukyus. During the era of the Ryukyu Kingdom, princes resided in the castle, and it was an important place for those next in line for the throne who would eventually take up their royal duties at Shuri-jo, the main seat of the kingdom. Little remains of that glorious past, save for an altar.

The ruins of Giikugusuku contrast with the magnificence of Shuri-jo, which is in the Southern part of Okinawa Island. Shuri-jo is a cherished monument to the former Ryukyuan kingdom, and the gate in front of the castle symbolizes the idea of Okinawa as a nation of peaceful people. In Kishaba's story, however, the forced labor of the farmers in building Shuri-jo counters

the image of peace that the castle has come to symbolize in modern times. Images of the “horrible scenes of death” as farmers are forced to march “in long columns, dragging logs and stones,” working until they are “nearly dead from exhaustion” suggests the inherently violent and exploitative nature of imperialism. This scene in Kishaba’s story can be read in one of two ways: as a direct critique of imperialism, in this case Ryukyuan imperialism, and the oppressive conditions that laborers anywhere are forced to endure; or as a masked critique of US militarism in the construction of Koza Crossroads. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the US military took stones from Giikugusuku and laid them down to build Koza Crossroads. As with other camp structures, the military pressed Okinawans into labor to dismantle the castle remnants. Written during the censorship of US occupation authorities, it is possible that the scene of the Shuri-jo construction is a critique of this dismantling of Giikugusuku and the forced labor of the Okinawans in Camp Koza, coerced into building a military transport highway from the ruins of a seat of their former sovereignty.<sup>331</sup>

Both readings are generative because they also gesture toward complicated questions about Indigeneity, Black and Indigenous relationality, and Okinawan sovereignty and how the latter can be maintained through cultural practices. In Okinawa, Indigeneity is itself a fraught term, laden

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<sup>331</sup> This use of displacement that relocates a story’s setting to another time or place to avoid the restrictions of occupation censorship is one employed by another Okinawan author, Ota Ryohaku in “Black Diamonds” (1949). Written under the eye of US censors in occupied Okinawa, Ota sets his story in Indonesia. Davinder Bhowmik and Steve Rabson note that this “‘exotic’ location” functions as a “haven for the pointedly subversive narrative he produces” (9). See Davinder Bhowmik and Steve Rabson, editors, Introduction to *Islands of Protest: Japanese Literature from Okinawa* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016), 1-20.

with abjection and notions of inferiority. These associations are products of a Japanese colonial gaze, but the term nonetheless can bring up discomfort for Okinawans. The ways that “Indigeneity” can become homogenizing also obscure the histories of invasions and exploitation within Okinawa prefecture, among its many islands and villages. Kishaba’s story is suggestive of how legacies of violence, including by Ryukyuan kings and the power they exercised over common people and farmers, must be interrogated for Okinawans to be able to imagine new forms of sovereignty, and through that, liberation from US military authority.

In my research, I also found Indigeneity was complicated by the fact that many Indigenous Okinawans lived in uneasy tension alongside other Okinawans, particularly as a result of the US military structure but also because of the histories of exploitation and prejudice between shimanchu. During the American Occupation, the displaced Okinawans who lived in Camp Koza and had their homes and farmlands taken from them continued to live in the homes assigned to them by the military. When the original occupants returned, they had to live next to their original homes in pig styes.<sup>332</sup> The economic boom created by the military presence also attracted Okinawans from all over the big island and the outlying islands. On one of the first days I went to Teruya, I mentioned that my grandmother, who was from Miyako-jima, an island that lies approximately halfway between Okinawa and Taiwan, had likely worked in the area or nearby in another neighborhood in Koza as a bar hostess. Mentioning my grandmother’s job, which she took to support three young children and her family, was itself difficult because of the association of bar hostesses and prostitution. I noticed more than a couple curious looks, but there were just as

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<sup>332</sup> *Koza Bunka Box*, 60.



many people who opened up because of the assumption that I might be less judgmental about them as shop owners and workers in Old Koza. Layered onto these looks was that beyond the military association, there was the history of inter-island conflicts between Okinawans from Okinawa Island and Okinawans from other islands. Miyako-jima women moved to Koza City for work during the occupation era, often creating their own neighborhoods. When I mentioned my grandmother, the old men—Nakasone-san, who seemed to be the fount of neighborhood gossip, and Shimojo-san, a recent arrival—recalled Miyako women worked in the area and lived by the river. Two of the ladies who were his neighbors for decades never once spoke to him, Nakasone-san said. Miyako women are “strong,” they said, referring to a close-knit and event distant attitude that they perceived about the women. But also “beautiful,” they laughed. I learned later that there was another conversation happening under the surface, referring to the stereotypes of Miyako people as prideful, a pride that was hard-won after years of discrimination by those on Okinawa Island.

The Shuri-jo scene in Kishaba’s story also complicates Black and Indigenous relationalities and solidarities in Okinawa. For Nobuko, the forced labor of the farmers in constructing the castle is connected in her mind to the tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and dockworkers who she imagines are part of Joe’s lineage. The overlapping oppressions therefore becomes her point of relational identification. Yet in Okinawa, such relationalities are also inflected with the history of militarism, in which the assertion of a pure Okinawan identity becomes attached to the notion of a homogenous ethnicity and “rooted spiritual indigeneity.”<sup>333</sup> As Mitzi Uehara Carter notes, “the indexical

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<sup>333</sup> Carter, “Mixed Race Okinawans and Their Obscure In-Betweenness,” 649.

relationships of the mixed body in Okinawa are always mediated by the fluctuating racializing concepts inherently embedded within national security rhetoric.”<sup>334</sup> Mixed-race Okinawans are always already read as other because of the military presence, and particularly for Black Okinawans, who face discrimination because of the entangled legacies of war, racism, and the ongoing military presence. Their experiences are at odds with the “spirit of openness” indexed in the concept of yui-maru, which tends toward the “sanitized image of an international, inclusive town.”<sup>335</sup> Perhaps more so than the Black GIs who found in Teruya a “haven” and sanctuary from the explicit racism and state violence of the United States, mixed-race Okinawans have had to live among people who view their racial obscurity as at odds with Okinawan Indigeneity.

There is no easy answer or resolution for these complex entanglements and frictions of race, Blackness, and Indigeneity. The lesson I took away from this was that Indigeneity cannot be grounds for ethnocentrism or the kind of nationalism that achieves self-determination through the subordination of others. The spirit of yui-maru has instead to come through reciprocity. Emalani Case describes in protect Mauna Kea, Kanaka Maoli aligned their struggles with other Indigenous struggles to protect land, waters, air, and life: “While we were gathered to protect our mountain, we felt it was important to return our love and support to them, recognizing that although we were in different places, the base of our fights were the same.”<sup>336</sup> Yui-maru, the spirit of giving and

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Carter, “Mixed Race Okinawans,” 647.

<sup>336</sup> Emalani Case, *Everything Ancient Was Once New: Indigenous Persistence from Hawai’i to Kahiki* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 2021), 10.

receiving, also reflects this idea of Indigenous reciprocity and relationality, one in which Okinawans struggling for demilitarization are also fighting alongside other Indigenous kin and racially oppressed others in their struggle against militarism, settler colonialism, and racism. Case continues that Indigenous persistence in this struggle must go beyond the symbolic, that we “need to maintain knowledge and unique ways of knowing as much as we strive to also protect our physical objects or structures.”<sup>337</sup> The meaning-making that attends these practices must serve a practical, everyday function since a “symbol of the past...cannot disrupt visions of a non-Indigenous future, or settler futurities.”<sup>338</sup> Symbols alone cannot dismantle structural, juridical, and material inequities. Instead, Indigenous persistence comes from “stories and relaying them to future listeners/readers.” In doing so, Case continues, we must attend to “what is both lost and gained in the choices we make about how to use what we create and construct.”<sup>339</sup>

As I stood before the ruins of Giikugusuku, I thought about what we gain and lose in the stories we tell (figure 4). The sign at the entrance to the park read that “the hillside where Goeku Gusuku once stood has been lost to development, and has been turned into residential areas and parks, but the Goeku Gusuku shrine in the park still carries the memory of the castle’s past.”<sup>340</sup> No mention of the military’s role in dismantling the structure. This too, another mowing, nearly erased along with the structures of Okinawa’s Indigenous past. Still here and there I saw signs of

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<sup>337</sup> Case, *Everything Ancient Was Once New*, 72.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>340</sup> Okinawa City Board of Education. “Goeku Gusuku Ato: National Place of Scenic Beauty.” Goeku Gusuku Park. Okinawa, Japan.

Okinawan Indigenous persistence: despite its diminished status, someone had taken care to protect the remains of Giiku Gusuku. Local residents still visit for prayers and rituals. Their rituals and everyday practices make Giikugusuku important to the heart of the community, and they reminded me of the many ways Okinawans persist in the present. Kneeling before the altar in prayer, I understood that it was their stories that would keep the memory and Indigenous persistence alive, stories like Kishaba's, stories like the ones shared with me by Shiroma-san and many other Teruyans, stories like the one the castle ruins offered a glimpse into, however partial. These were the stories through which Indigenous Okinawan survivance would continue, here in the crossroads of literature and landscape.



**Figure 4.** Giikugusku (Uchinaguchi spelling; Japanese spelling is Goeku). The remaining structure has been designated a site on the National Places of Scenic Beauty because of its cultural significance as a sacred Ryukyuan castle. Photo Credit: Nozomi (Nakaganeku) Saito, 2022.

## 6.0 Afterword: From the Thereafter

“These points of convergence, intersecting always with U.S. imperialist ventures, demand that we refashion the fields of American studies and Asian American studies, not around the narratives of American exceptionalism, and immigration, and transnationalism, but around the crucial issues of war, race, and violence—and of the history and memories that are forged from the thereafter.”

—Yen Lê Espiritu, “Thirty Years  
AfterWARD: The Endings That Are Not  
Over” (2005)<sup>341</sup>

“This Bridge needs no Foreword. It is the Afterward that’ll count. The coalitions of women determined to be a danger to our enemies, as June Jordan would put it. The will to be dangerous... And the contracts we creative combatants will make to mutually care and cure each other into wholesomeness.”

—Toni Cade Bambara, Foreword to *This  
Bridge Called My Back* (1981)<sup>342</sup>

In 2019, I attended the author meet-and-greet for Saidiya Hartman. She had just read from her then just published experiment in critical fabulation, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. But clutched in my arms was a different work: her personal

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<sup>341</sup> Yen Lê Espiritu, “Thirty Years AfterWARD: The Endings That Are Not Over,” *Amerasia Journal* 31, no. 2 (2005), xviii.

<sup>342</sup> Toni Cade Bambara, Foreword to *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983), viii.

and scholarly book, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, a work that exemplified to me the kind of scholarship I hoped to write someday, one that does not aim to flaunt its immense intellect but instead moves worlds in people's hearts. Starstruck, all I could express was my gratitude for her in showing that the personal still has a place in theory. And in her characteristic serious yet deeply generous and kind manner, she looked me in the eyes and said the personal always has a place.

Hartman's writing expressed the kind of urgency that I had found so moving in works like *This Bridge Called My Back*. When I first read those writings early in my graduate studies, I felt I had been jolted alive. There was something about the confidence with which the writers practiced a "theory in the flesh...where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings," knowing that their lived experiences "all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity."<sup>343</sup> In their words, I felt an energy, a vibrancy in academic theorizing that I had continued to seek in my graduate studies. It was the kind writing I knew I had to pursue so that I could write about what was happening in Okinawa in a way that would be legible to my fields of Asian American and American literary studies.

At the time of writing, it is forty-two years since the radical women of color writers who planted the seeds for creative rebellion published *Bridge*. They wrote in the aftermath—and present—of war, persecution, racial and gendered violence, and poverty. And they wrote with urgency, knowing that their oppressions were connected and entangled by the larger structures of

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<sup>343</sup> "Entering the Lives of Others: Theory in the Flesh," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983), 23.

white supremacy, colonialism, and racial capitalism. That sense of interconnected struggle motivated me to look for ways to connect the militarism and colonialism that have shaped my personal and familial history in Okinawa to the systems of oppression that have affected other women of color. As my research revealed to me, the issues of militarism in Okinawa are deeply tied to those that Yen Lê Espiritu identifies as the “crucial issues of war, race, and violence—and of the histories and memories that are forged in the thereafter.” The thereafter names a critical capacity to examine the histories and memories of destructive events and structures, and in that examination, to articulate the experiences of those marginalized and impacted most by violence.

In each aftermath that I examined, there were recurring issues that connected the resource extraction and nuclear contamination in the ecologies of the Pacific Islands; the carceral violence against African Americans and Southeast Asians; the neglect, disposal, and appropriation of Amerasians; the dispossession at the point of the bayonet and with the terror of the bulldozer in Okinawa. Yet so, too, did I find that in every site and history of violence, writers and creative combatants also sought creative ways to show readers that we did not have to resign ourselves to that tired old adage, *history repeats itself*.

It is difficult not to feel the recurrent violence of history when looking now, from another thereafter, at the expansion of the carceral state within the United States and its ramped-up militarization in Asia and the Pacific. Piecing together the crucial issues in the headlines:

*“If It’s Safe, Dump It in Tokyo. We in the Pacific Don’t Want Japan’s Nuclear Wastewater,” The Pacific Project, The Guardian, April 25, 2021*

*“South Korea to Compensate Victims of Japan’s Wartime Forced Labour,” BBC, March 6, 2023*



*“Vietnam War Veterans Are Still Reuniting with Children Left Behind,” USA Today, March 14, 2023*

*“A BLM Protest Brought Thousands of National Guardsmen to D.C. in June. Where Were They Wednesday [January 6<sup>th</sup>]?”*, Boise State Public Radio News, January 8, 2021

*“Air Force Moves F-16s from Europe to [Okinawa] Japan as Ukraine War Lingers and Pacific Tensions Simmer,”* Military.com, January 17, 2023

*“Biden Wants \$886 Billion Defense Budget with Eyes on Ukraine and Future Wars,”* Reuters, March 13, 2023

*“The Cold War with China Is Changing Everything,”* The New York Times, March 23, 2023<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Joey Tau and Talei Luscia Mangioni, “If It’s Safe, Dump It in Tokyo. We in the Pacific Don’t Want Japan’s Nuclear Wastewater,” April 25, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/26/if-its-safe-dump-it-in-tokyo-we-in-the-pacific-dont-want-japans-nuclear-wastewater>; Jean Mackenzie and Nicholas Young, “South Korea to Compensate Victims of Japan’s Wartime Forced Labour,” *BBC News*, March 6, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-64858944>; Nguyễn Phan Quế Mai, “Vietnam War Veterans Are Still Reuniting with Children They Left Behind,” *USA Today*, March 14, 2023, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2023/03/14/vietnam-war-veterans-reunite-children-they-left-behind/11332892002/>; Madelyn Beck, “A BLM Protest Brought Thousands of National Guardsmen to DC in June. Where Were They Wednesday?” *Boise State Public Radio News*, January 8, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2023/03/14/vietnam-war-veterans-reunite-children-they-left-behind/11332892002/>; Thomas Novelty, “Air Force Moves F-16s from Europe to Japan as Ukraine War Lingers and Pacific Tensions Simmer,” *Military.com*, January 17, 2023, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2023/01/17/air-force-moves-f-16s-europe-japan-ukraine-war-lingers-and-pacific-tensions-simmer.html>; “Biden Wants \$886 Billion Defense Budget with Eyes on Ukraine and Future Wars,” *Reuters*, March 13, 2023,

If we accept Jodi Kim’s point that the Cold War is not merely a historical period but a way of thinking and organizing what is and can be thought, then it is not surprising that these sentiments and modes of structural violence continue to repeat—the structures themselves have remained intact, even as the dominant players have changed or new hegemonies have joined their ranks, as antagonisms between former Cold War foes or competitors have created new alliances and new opportunities to become complicit with the extant structures of settler colonialism and US militarism that maintain the latter’s hegemony. Japan, despite having been a victim of nuclear bombing, is now preparing to dump its nuclear waste waters in the Pacific, which will most directly impact Micronesia and Melanesia, two regions that have already survived nuclear testing by the United States and France. What has changed since the period of the Cold War is Japan’s position, its decision to exercise nuclear imperialism an indication of how the highly industrialized nation has joined the ranks of other capitalist hegemonic nations in the Pacific. Such alliances are being bolstered, too, in the rush to lay to rest issues of Japan’s wartime forced labor by putting the burden of resolution on the Korean people. As widely protested as it has been by South Koreans, the political move makes obvious which are moving into place in preparation for a revival of the Cold War. But the violence brought on by the US state violence against Black Americans through the violence and murders of American policing call into question whose safety is being protected in

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<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/biden-wants-886-billion-defense-ukraine-continues-china-looms-2023-03-13/#:~:text=Biden's%20request%20earmarks%20%24842%20billion,than%20last%20year's%20%24858%20billion>  
.; David Brooks, “The Cold War with China Is Changing Everything,” *The New York Times*, March 23, 2023,  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/23/opinion/cold-war-china-chips.html>.

moving F-16s from Germany to Okinawa. With the Biden Administration proposing \$886 billion for a defense budget to protect against “future wars,” we must ask whose security is being assured in the accelerated militarization that is preparing the Pacific for a new Cold War against China.

The aftermaths of the Cold War analyzed in this dissertation show what the consequences will be; it is a math we have already seen before, a racial calculus that determines some lives worthy of security and others vulnerable to violence, disposal, contamination, and removal. Such a calculus will again reinforce the dominant discourse that renders Black and Indigenous lives disposable and vilifies some Asians while instrumentalizing other Asians in service of US expansionism. The narratives of the Black Pacific may therefore act, not as a reflection of the past, but instead as an anticipation and warning for the present. Writing here, now, in the afterward, it seems that 1989 marked an ending of a Cold War that is not really over. It is difficult not to become discouraged and to fear what the next thereafter will be. But we who remain and persist are also writing in a different context than the writers of *Bridge*, by which I don't mean a difference measured in drone technologies or social media or the hyper capitalism responsible for the ever-widening gap between those rendered disposable within the racial-colonial logic of the neoliberal state. Instead, it is the difference of knowing that we have survived other aftermaths and have the means to do so once more. The writings here from another thereafter are also our handbooks so that we might ready ourselves to “mutually care and cure each other into wholesomeness.”

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