

The Unending Korean War

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Upon the signing of the Armistice Agreement by representatives of China, North Korea, and the United States on July 27, 1953, peace did not ensue on the Korean peninsula. Notwithstanding the agreement's recommendation that all three parties return to the negotiating table within ninety days to settle the peace and to arrange the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Korea, war instead "became an extended present."¹ Although China recalled all its forces from North Korea within half a decade, the United States to this day still stations 28,500 troops and operates roughly 100 military installations south of the demilitarized zone (DMZ). The structure that holds the "peace" is thus itself agonistic—profoundly militarized and perilous. Militaries armed with nuclear weapons enforce the cease-fire along the most heavily mined strip of land in the world, ironically referred to as the "demilitarized zone." War simultaneously keeps and threatens what

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Paik Nak-chung has called the “division system.”² On the Korean peninsula, “peace,” if it can rightly be called such, has assumed “the face of a ‘war without end’.”³

This special issue of *positions: asia critique*, “The Unending Korean War,” undertakes as its focus the *longue durée* of the unending Korean War as a protean structure, at once generative and destructive, whose formations and deformations, benefits and costs, truths and obfuscations, can be traced on both sides of the North Pacific. Naturalized as “forgotten” in the United States yet seared into national consciousness in both Koreas, the Korean War, as a differentiated and multisited structure of feeling, perception, memory, knowledge, and historical ruin, has persisted some six decades after the signing of the Armistice Agreement. This unfinished war reverberates in the relations between the two Koreas and between North Korea and the United States, and it continues to pose a regional and global quandary. Yet it also bears recognizing that in the United States, the war, if indissociable from its necropolitical consequences on the Korean peninsula, has served as a vital “formative process,” albeit undertheorized as such.⁴ Here, the Korean War might be understood, against the grain, as “the positive mechanism, momentum, and condition of possibility of society,” to borrow from Rey Chow.⁵ Crucial to US imperial state building and global capitalist hegemony from mid-century onward, the Korean War has fostered a formidable, crisis-generating, self-perpetuating, institutional architecture—the national security state, the military industrial complex, and the perpetual war economy, all cushioned within a self-serving regime of forgetting.⁶ Without question, the impact of this permanent war footing has been borne by Americans when it comes to outsized “defense” budgets. But the war’s most devastating and stark consequences have left their indelible imprint largely outside the domestic purview of the United States—with the unending Korean War out of sight and out of mind of the the very national population which, according to the inscription on the Korean War Memorial in Washington, DC, “answered the call to defend a country they never knew and a people they never met.”⁷

The uneven terrain of the Korean War and its violence, with the war cognitively mapped as limited in one setting yet total in another, forgotten in one yet unforgettable in another, has ensured discrepant experiences of

what Mary Dudziak has called “wartime,” in which permanent war leads to “suspension of] time itself.”⁸ The alienated technological nature of US military intervention—the disjunction between what Chow calls “distant control,” on the one hand, and “instant destruction of others,” on the other—meant that “for the ordinary people of Korea and Vietnam in the 1950s and 1960s . . . life became more and more precarious—immaterial in the sense of a readiness for total demolition at any moment.”⁹ Not just a spatial distinction that obtained between the imperial eye of the bomber and the ground-level target in the 1950s, the cognitive structure of the Korean War, as an Orwellian “peace that is no peace,” has had lasting temporal and political implications.¹⁰ Albeit in theory coeval, the time of war as experienced on the receiving end of asymmetrical warfare, often in the finality of death, suffering, and ruin or in the limbo of perpetual siege, rarely intersects with the time of war on the interventionist end.¹¹ This contradiction, in which world-preserving security at home (the temporality of progress and order) justifies destabilizing, world-smashing violence and threat of annihilation abroad (the temporality of devastation and chaos), is central to wartime. Time has been securitized, with the risks unevenly distributed even after the spectacle of war has faded from public view in the United States. Straddling geographic time zones, one imperially marked as the present and the other targeted for relegation to pastness, wartime is thus deterritorializing in its effects. Strategically splintered, the time of consequences—which Chalmers Johnson, Cassandra-like, called “blowback”—is held in abeyance for the imperial present, not yet come full circle.

Constitutive of wartime is, in other words, disavowal of the fact that the intensely securitized present is, in very real terms, also a time of war and violence. Dudziak points out that “as conflict [in which US troops are involved] goes on, Americans pay increasingly less attention to it.”¹² This is the tedium of interventionist war on the imperial side. Buffered by distance and majority nonparticipation, most Americans experience wartime in desubjectified terms as “homogenous, empty time.”¹³ To adapt from Walter Benjamin, where Americans perceive “a chain of events” assimilable to a narrative of progress, in which their vaunted “bonds forged in blood” with their South Korean ally are naturalized in a triumphalist account of South Korea’s capitalist modernity, those on the receiving end of US aggression,

both north and south of the 38th parallel, see, by contrast, a “single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of [their] feet.”¹⁴ In this respect, the Korean War crystallized a Cold War perceptual problematic in which wartime would be misrecognized as peacetime, and devastation over there would be perversely justified as essential to security over here. If we understand coevalness, as “a mode of temporal relations,” to be the essential “condition without which hardly anything could ever be learned about another culture,” as Johannes Fabian reminds us, then we can begin to discern how the securitized temporality of the unending Korean War has adversely impacted the possibilities of a peace process between sworn historical enemies.¹⁵

Troublingly, the insulated temporality of the Korean War in the United States “effect[s] a kind of hypnotic condition that shatter[s] any rational pattern of cause and effect.”¹⁶ Indeed, central to the Korean War’s disquieting perdurance is an inversion of cause and effect that enables its present-day consequences, including North Korea’s steps in the past half-decade toward nuclear self-defense, to be decontextualized as “provocations” that call out for potentially catastrophic preemptive violence.¹⁷ This causal fallacy particular to the US interpretation of North Korea—of misreading effects as causes—now coincidentally justifies the deferral of peace, thus perpetuating the Korean War’s irresolution. As a mode of imperial consciousness, the disavowal that normalizes, even as it obscures, the fact that the unending Korean War serves as the necessary condition for a US militarized presence in Northeast Asia also justifies the prospect of renewed US intervention as a “solution” to an unfinished war of intervention. Not coincidentally, it identifies “liberation” narrowly as South Korea’s “debt of honor,” an apparently undischageable debit on a geopolitical balance sheet that stems not only from the 1945 US Pacific War defeat of Japan but also from US “sacrifice” in the Korean War.¹⁸ In this way, liberation, understood more critically as denoting the inauguration of decolonization, is demoted to anachronistic status as a failed experiment whose time has been decisively told. Even as, strictly speaking, the United States cannot claim the laurels of victory, counterrevolutionary time thus triumphantly obtains as the global dominant, shrouding the unfinished nature of the Korean War.¹⁹ The first hot war of the Cold War has thus outlasted the latter’s declared end elsewhere around the world.

Indeed, as a structure of feeling—theorized by Raymond Williams as “a social experience which is still in process” and thus at the “edge of semantic availability”—the Korean War resists neat temporal demarcation and recognition.²⁰ “A common way to place a war in time” may be “to rely on the date it was declared and the date an armistice was signed,” yet the Korean War defies such conventional periodization.²¹ Seldom understood in its own historical terms, the Korean War revealingly is often described in language nonidentical with itself. Whether arising out of critical provocation, political motivation, or casual misprision, some of this language registers as out of sync with the war’s standard 1950–53 periodization. In the late 1990s, with international publicity generated around US war crimes in Korea by a team of Associated Press reporters, the US military slaughter of civilians at Nogun-ri in July 1950 was suggestively framed as “Korea’s ‘My Lai,’” a temporally out-of-joint reference that pointed to Nogun-ri’s belated visibility, implying critical continuity between obscured US atrocities in Korea in the 1950s and those perpetrated over a decade and a half later in Vietnam.²² In the wake of 9/11, by contrast, US President George W. Bush, making no mention of the ongoing Korean War as the basis of US-North Korea relations, instead retrojected North Korea into an “axis of evil,” an anachronistic coinage intended to recall the global fascist threat of World War II. Albeit illegible to most Americans as an urgent matter of the present, the Korean War, in this way, tellingly resists linear accounts of war. Not bound by finalizing time markers, the war encroaches upon and trespasses the temporal limits of other conflicts.

Yet we might also observe that the nonsynchronous effects of the Korean War as a cognitive structure have not always neatly mapped onto geographic sites or national peoples. Nearly two decades before the emergence of critical Asian studies as a critique of US imperial hegemony and war violence from within the Western academy, black radicals in the United States issued one of the most searching and discerning comparative analyses of the two-front consequences of US racial violence. Writing for the Civil Rights Congress (CRC), which would be hounded by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), audited by the Internal Revenue Service, mercilessly red-baited throughout the 1950s, as well as infiltrated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, William Patterson, in the organization’s 1951 antilynching,

human rights petition to the United Nations, *We Charge Genocide*, argued that the collateralization of nonwhite life evident in the Korean War's sheer devastation should be traced to the racialized collateralization of human life at home. US "police action" abroad was, the petition contended, intimately tied to police violence at home. Of the convergence between war and police power around the figure of the enemy or internal menace, Mark Neocleous offers this insight: "Seen through the lens of sovereignty, these elements are the enemies of security; through the lens of property, they are the enemies of improvement; through the lens of police, they are disorderly. The outcome can only be war and war again."²³ Wartime can thus be synchronous in its racialized consequences across geographic divides. In the powerful words of the CRC petition: "We, Negro petitioners whose communities have been laid waste, whose homes have been burned and looted, whose children have been killed, whose women have been raped have noted with peculiar horror that the genocidal doctrines and actions of the American white supremacists have already been exported to the colored peoples of Asia."²⁴ The terror of "[w]hite supremacy at home," according to Patterson, "makes for colored massacres abroad. Both reveal contempt for human life in a colored skin."²⁵

Insisting on the domestic provenance of what we might today, in a Foucauldian register, dub the biopolitical, or more pointedly, following Achille Mbembe, the necropolitical consequences of the Korean War, the above passage from *We Charge Genocide* renders visible a dimension of the Korean War that in the years following would go undertheorized, if not wholly neglected, in most area and security studies analyses: namely, the racial nature and two-front implications of the lethal logic of the target. Insofar as the disjunction of wartime turns on the collateralization of human life within a securitized paradigm, it naturalizes the creation of preconditions for what Ruth Wilson Gilmore, in her incisive definition of racism, calls "group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."²⁶ If invaluable within US-based critical race studies as an analysis of state power toward racially profiled and criminalized subjects, Gilmore's structural analysis of racism merits critical application, beyond domestic US parameters, to the US war machine's relation toward its various "targets" in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, be it through "hard," unequivocally vio-

lent means (war, counterinsurgency, “low-intensity” conflict, drone strikes) or “soft,” less spectacular methods (sanctions, embargoes, human rights demonization, psychological warfare). In the case of North Korea, both the geography and the people have been framed as permissible military targets by US war planners for almost seven decades. In a structural sense, racism can thus be seen as implicitly coloring the disinformational lens, beclouded by a persistent fog of war, via which Americans perceive North Korea to this day.

As Mbembe points out, “sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not.”²⁷ Discussing the “right to kill” as sanctioned and enshrined in the context of war, Mbembe identifies “the murder of the enemy” as war’s “primary and absolute objective.”²⁸ Refusing the logic of collateralization, however, he reorients the critical terrain, asking, “What place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power?”²⁹ How, we might add, have they been inscribed in the order of knowledge? After all, “the war machine makes spaces into objects of knowledge well before they are occupied, partitioned, and demarcated by the state.”³⁰ In the knowledge economy of acceptable death and destruction characteristic of security studies, human risks and costs are depersonalized and often classified, and targets abstracted from ordinary view. It was precisely this bankruptcy and complicity of imperial scholarship—the production of lethal knowledge predicated on the separation of the creation from the lived consequences of US foreign policy—that gave rise to critical Asian studies at the height of the brutal US war in Vietnam. “We realize that to be students of other peoples,” reads the 1969 mission statement of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, “we must first understand our relations to them.”³¹ Written against the backdrop of a spectacularly asymmetrical war, this statement of intention turned on the recognition that enmity structures “our relations” to “other peoples” in Asia. Harnessed to the war machine, knowledge generated in imperial centers has been deployed—weaponized—against peoples inhabiting third-world peripheries. Premised on a geopolitical, temporal, and implicitly racialized divide, the collateralization of human life on the receiving end of US foreign policy proceeds according to the securitized logic of the target.

This special issue of *positions* thus poses the question not only of the limits of institutionalized knowledge formations in casting much-needed critical light on the Korean War but also of their abetting role in the war's irresolution. Indeed, within security studies, the collateralization of human life is a given, understood as a predictable outcome of conflict, albeit one that should, in theory, be minimized. Remarking on the culpability of area studies in US hegemonic violence around the globe, Chow observes that "the United States has been conducting war on the basis of a certain kind of knowledge production, and producing knowledge on the basis of war."³² Entangled, to extend this insight, in the Korean War's perpetuation are the very institutionalized epistemological approaches meant to explain the war. Such approaches all too often neglect or mitigate the history of US intervention in Korea, relegating to footnote status US authorship of the division of the Korean peninsula in 1945 and the subsequent establishment of the US Army Military Government in Korea (1945–48) that supplanted the Japanese colonial state but tellingly retained its collaborationist elite. Critical interrogation of the Korean War thus requires urgent inquiry into the inception of the South Korean state and the anticommunist *raison d'être* that constitutes its foundations. If, moreover, controversy around the Korean War's origins amounted to the central debate in Korean studies throughout the Cold War, this special issue calls attention to the underconsidered obverse of the question: namely, why is the Korean War not over, and to what degree are area and security studies complicit in its perpetuation?

Here, it is worth remarking the near unanimity of Cold War area and security studies with the official US and South Korean historiographic insistence on an etiology of singular North Korean culpability, the oft-rehearsed *casus belli* of North Korea's "invasion" across the 38th parallel on June 25, 1950. Consequent state-level US and South Korean commemoration on the anniversary of the war's supposed start date obscures the Korean War's persistence, not to mention the conflict's place within longer histories of imperialism, colonialism, and anticolonial struggles in Korea and throughout Asia, histories in which the United States has played no small part. In this regard, the unending Korean War has precluded the building of a peace structure for the rest of East Asia. Fixation on "first-shot" accounts, moreover, deflects attention from the fact that the last shot has not been assuredly

fired. Soberingly, in spring 2013, during the annual US–South Korea joint war games—a sure sign the Korean War is not over—North Korea saw fit to nullify the 1953 Armistice Agreement and to define the situation as wartime. Deemed to be of a piece with punitive US sanctions, war exercises, and ultimatums, the 1953 armistice was described by the North Korean government as the “main lever” not of peace but permanent war, forcing the state, as it disclosed with startling candor, “to divert large human and material resources to bolstering up the armed forces though they should have been directed to the economic development and improvement of people’s living standard.”³³ With the passage in 2013 of the sixtieth anniversary of the inauguration of an armistice system that institutionalized peacelessness as the order of things and with the seventieth anniversary this year of the US-authored division of the Korean peninsula, we might therefore pose an open-ended question: if not security, what has the Korean War’s irresolution enabled and fostered?

Foregrounding intersections between transnational Asian American studies and critical Korean studies on the Korean War’s overlooked diasporic consequences and biopolitical legacies, this issue extends from a three-year Teaching Initiative to End the Korean War, launched by the Alliance of Scholars Concerned about Korea (ASCK) in 2010 and timed to coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of the Korean War as it has been conventionally periodized. Nearly all the contributors to this special issue participated in the initiative, which ultimately included nearly eighty academics, based mostly in North America, who committed to teaching the Korean War in a dedicated or partly dedicated class within their respective institutions.³⁴ With the goal of facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration between scholars in critical Asian studies and transnational Asian American studies on matters of teaching praxis, overlapping research concerns, critical methodologies, and resources, the Teaching Initiative also sought to reanimate the historical call for critical engagement in both fields. With their common provenance in anti-imperialist critique of US aggression in Vietnam and shared investment in opposition to the violence of US global hegemony, critical Asian studies and transnational Asian American studies have crucial points of intersection in their analysis of the human costs, on both sides of the Pacific, of US imperial wars. Reflecting this kind of cross-

disciplinary interlocation, this volume calls attention to the biopolitics and necropolitics of the Korean War.

Distinguished as the first US war to be fought with racially integrated units, with many Nisei and black soldiers “retreads,” or recalled servicemen with direct experience in segregated US units during World War II, the Korean War was heralded in progressive terms by the US government as a “breakthrough on the color front,” a “successful racial revolution,” and “a door of opportunity to Negroes.”³⁵ US military desegregation in Korea, referred to as the Korean “experiment” in government-supported reports, was trumpeted as “a living example of democracy in action” that “change[d] the complexion” of the armed forces, in effect ideologically framing the US military as the vanguard of civil rights reform.³⁶ Yet, of the conflict’s militarized multicultural significance, historian Daniel Widener points out, on a more critical register, that “the Korean War provided the impetus for a specific reordering of American racial relations, paving the way for the emergence of the belief that the US military—the primary purveyors of organized violence on the planet today—somehow represents the most meritocratic, socially equal, and ultimately progressive institution in American society.”³⁷

Indeed, the war gave double-edged, unwitting meaning to the concept of collateral damage. Routinely referred to by North Koreans as “cannon fodder,” soldiers of color in the US military were meant to advertise the “liberal” renovation of the US war machine. In her 2012 *Home*, Toni Morrison’s novel about a demobilized black soldier who returns from the brutal Korean warfront to Jim Crow violence at home, one of the characters expresses the following trenchant view: “An integrated army is an integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better.”³⁸ More than simply destroy human life, the violence of the Korean War produced and reanimated at-risk subjectivities in semisovereign South Korea, figures that cast backwards and forwards in time, straddling the colonial and postcolonial, necropolitical threshold of life and death: the camptown prostitute, the mixed-race child, the war orphan, the subimperial soldier, the “Red” family. For such subjects, who fall under the capacious rubric of “biopolitical excess” or “war trash,” the time of war cannot be disavowed.³⁹ As Grace Cho and Hosu Kim have noted, the “war orphan”

is not simply “the child who has lost her parents to war” but, rather, “more broadly, . . . the child who was born out of the social and material conditions of U.S. militarism in Korea and South Korean nationalism.”⁴⁰ Surfacing as narrowly legible within the militarized humanitarian logic of the multicultural US war machine that purported to “rescue” them, these “war orphans”—so vital to the consolidation of the international adoption industry—were central to the imperial amnesia of the United States toward the Korean War. As Sahr Conway-Lanz writes, “although Americans touted their relief efforts and concern for Korean refugees, they tended to avoid acknowledging any American responsibility for the dislocation of refugees in the first place.”⁴¹ Offering, by contrast, a comparative and multisited inquiry into the foundational violence of the Korean War—a war that paved the way for a series of informal US wars in Asia and the Middle East—this special issue of *positions* examines the human costs of wars without end.

This issue assembles a spectrum of critical perspectives on the unending Korean War—creative, analytical, theoretical—from scholars and creative practitioners working within and across the fields of Korean studies, Asian American studies, and American studies. This issue’s coverage, however, is not comprehensive, and these shortcomings bear remarking. Missing is analysis illuminating China’s role in the conflict. Absent, too, are North Korean scholarly perspectives. Yet it is our hope that the prismatic scholarship in this issue sparks critical discussion of the war and its irresolution. Indeed, central to all the contributions to this volume is engagement with the war’s temporal contours. Far from “over” or narrowly reducible to battlefield cross fire, the Korean War, as the assembled articles reveal, persists in multiple, often overlooked modalities that call for critical and innovative interpretive practice. Taken as a whole, the image-essays, critical analyses, and interview in this special issue challenge the war’s standard 1950–53 periodization and status as a past event, discretely circumscribed in time and space. When this issue’s contributors have made recourse to the archive—to examine Korean War comic books, declassified prisoner-of-war (POW) political documents, Chicano war narratives, and photos of North Korean reconstruction—they shed light less on the war’s known, assumed, or congealed contours than on its unexamined recesses, eclipsed moments, and forgotten potentialities. Other essays in this issue cast for-

ward in time, to 1960s South Korea, the adoptee diaspora, and “post–Cold War” US-subsidized North Korean defector politics. In so doing, they call much-needed attention to the Korean War’s legacies, its undertheorized afterlives, and its oblique yet telling ongoing manifestations—in ways that variously question the integrity of state-sponsored accounts of the “truth” of the war. And it is precisely here that the assembled articles offer the prospect of alternative modes of history writing and knowledge making that intervene against the fog of received historiography on the Korean War.

In the comics-essay that opens this special issue, underground comix artist and scholar, Leonard Rifas, retrieves Korean War comic books, produced as disposable entertainment, from historical oblivion and the collector’s exclusive domain. Under titles screaming *ATTACK!*, *ATOMIC WAR!*, *BATTLE CRY*, *MEN OF ACTION*, and *WAR FURY*, the US comic book industry, at its apex in the early 1950s, enabled cultural apprehension of the war through a ten-cent lens shaded by ideological constraints—racial, gendered, political. Yet this pop-cultural archive of the war, Rifas argues, was not throwaway in its effects and indeed played a role in the militarization of US society. Catering to boy readers and young GIs, Korean War comics, littered with ads for Daisy air rifles and muscle-enhancing supplements, blurred the distinction between playground and battlefield. Hailing weak boys with bullies as their nemeses into identification with US soldiers pitted against Asian communist enemies, be the latter yellow hordes of indistinguishable soldiers or “Dragon Lady” seductresses, Korean War comics held out “military service as an adventurous rite of passage to masculine adulthood.” Despite reference to active controversies—POW riots, germ warfare, and forced confessions—these comics did little to educate, offering virtually “no specific background information about the history, culture, politics, society, economy, language, or geography of Korea.”

In her analysis of South Korean writer Hwang Sok-yong’s *The Guest* (*Sonnim*), a novel that stages the “truth” of the Sinchon massacre in which an estimated thirty-five thousand people were slaughtered in North Korea’s Hwanghae Province in late 1950, Youngju Ryu addresses the fraught historiography of this contested wartime event. Drawing on Dipesh Chakrabarty’s theorization of *identity*, “a mode of relating to difference,” understood in hypostatized or fixed terms, and *proximity*, a mode of relating to differ-

ence in which difference, understood in “historical and contingent” terms, is “neither reified nor erased but negotiated,” Ryu reconceives the politics of enmity and reconciliation. Whereas identity is central to statist war narration, both North and South, proximity, Ryu argues, bears the capacity to foster reconciliation. Irreconcilability, this is to say, is written into nationalist historiographies: if North Korea’s abiding position has been that rapacious US forces perpetrated a grave atrocity in Sinchon, South Korea’s official construction has been “that the ‘incident’ was ‘patriotic’ in nature and ‘defensive’ in origin.” Ostensibly reconciliatory in purpose, Hwang’s testimony-based narrative, which performatively operates as a mode of revisionist historiography, offers up the following “truth”: Christians and communists, all residents of Sinchon, slaughtered each other. Yet even as Hwang’s novel, during an era of unprecedented optimism about inter-Korean relations, loftily holds out truth as a precondition for reconciliation, Ryu contends that meaningful truth and reconciliation must necessarily proceed from a foundation of “active and comprehensive peace.” Indeed, as she observes, *The Guest*, far from clarifying the truth of the Sinchon massacre, plays its part in an ongoing “history war.”

Situating the Korean War within an unorthodox yet illuminating historical, cultural, and political trajectory, Daniel Y. Kim offers a comparative account of partitions resulting in the consolidation of international borders in disparate historical junctures, namely, the Rio Grande in 1848 and the 38th parallel in 1945. He reads these zones “as associated segments in the borderlands of US empire,” whose intersection can be traced in Rolando Hinojosa’s Korean War writings. In this way, retrieving a genealogical precedent to the Korean War in the US-Mexico War, as well as tracing its circuitous afterlives on geographic terrain far from Northeast Asia, Kim argues that Hinojosa’s Korean War writings enable an at-once disjunctural and conjunctural analysis of US imperial aspirations. Reading the politics of racial resistance and collaboration as conditioned by the encroachments of US military, political, and economic power in Hinojosa’s fictionalized description the US-Mexico borderlands, Kim extends his attention to omissions in Hinojosa’s less fully realized portrait of the Korean borderlands. As he argues, these silences and absences, which mark moments of racist violence, call for a historicized reading practice.

Monica Kim's analysis of the US Army Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) papers at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, reads the CIC's monthly reports, interrogation records, official organizational histories, as well as captured enemy documents and POW petitions not merely as the evidentiary basis upon which Korean War history is written but rather more thought-provokingly as an index of entwined discursive and symbolic practices—of reading, legibility, political subject formation, and recognition—central to an epistemology of violence. That the US archive of the Korean War is soaked in blood—indeed Kim closes her essay with a deft interpretation of a POW petition literally drafted in its writers' blood—compels us to attend to the ethical limitations of a historiographical method that mines information from documents that identified Koreans as targets, criminals, and enemies slated for death while justifying the violent extraction of information from them. Theorizing the US occupation as a time of “exceptional sovereignty” in which hegemony was unsettled, Kim argues that competing hermeneutic practices were central to the determination of sovereign authority—in essence, the core struggle of the Korean War. At stake in US counterintelligence efforts to construct and “read” the Korean—and in so doing, to set the terms for the occupied—was the fate of the latter as either viable or moribund political subjects. At the same time, as Kim argues, CIC records pathologizing the “illegibility” of the Korean or documenting lapses in communication and translation potentially represent critical apertures by way of which Koreans can be understood as having contested, ironized, and called into question US sovereignty claims over Korea.

In his photo essay, which pays tribute to the French filmmaker and photographer Chris Marker, historian Bruce Cumings begins with a thesis that posits Americans as the party of “absence, forgetting, amnesia” and North Koreans as a people “with burned-in memory.” Oblivious to its own criminality, the United States, as Cumings puts it, “assume[s] that evil resides entirely on the side of the North.” Yet “North Korea” is, to no small degree, in the eye of the beholder. Examining Chris Marker's images of North Korean society, in the wake of massive US aerial bombing campaigns, in a collection of photographs and commentary published in 1959 under the title *Coréennes*, Cumings invites us to see North Korean society through the

prism of a rare viewer, Marker, who was witness to the interlude between war ruin and reconstruction—and whose supple eye discerned a supple reality. Against stock images of the North Korean “enemy” that routinely circulate in the Western media—the goose-stepping legions, the mass spectacles, the mourning crowds—North Korea, through the lens of Marker’s camera, materializes in rare everyday settings: proletarians dancing with each other on the sidewalk, a grandmother carrying a child on her back, market-goers in Pyongyang and Kaesong. Yet Marker’s photographs of North Korea in a moment of reconstruction are shadowed by the obliterating violence of the Korean War. As he observed, “extermination passed over this land,” and with great perspicacity about ongoing foundations of the Korean War, he noted that “it’s naive to ask where the war comes from: the border is the war.”

Reading North Korean defector memoirs and Korean American “roots” narratives as forms of “second culture” relative to North Korea, namely, an alternative US-oriented culture whose representational authority is held as exceeding that of the socialist state of origin, my essay examines the ongoing Korean War as the backdrop for the neoconservative emergence of human rights critique of North Korea. Examining the transnational funding matrix behind the publication and international circulation of the North Korean defector memoir, specifically the National Endowment for Democracy’s role in sponsoring such “human rights” writings, this essay reads the latter as weaponized forms of expression, defined by their instrumentality within an uneven global landscape of power and rendered lethal by the state of unresolved hostilities between the United States and North Korea. Positing the illegitimacy of North Korea, the defector memoir has been marshaled toward sovereignty-challenging, or regime-change, ends. Widely read as “human rights” literary forms, the defector memoir, alongside the Korean American “roots” narrative of North Korea, this essay argues, have served in the geopolitical arena as vehicles for “dissident” North Korean voices in place of an extant samizdat literature.

In his against-the-grain reading of 1960s and 1970s South Korean Manchuria action films as “Korean War cinema,” Jinsoo An provocatively argues that this body of films, set during the colonial period, reveals—far more than those films that overtly engage the Korean War as their governing

narrative concern—the degree to which war became a permanent state business during the military dictatorship of Park Chung-hee. Conventional Korean War films, as a subset of the South Korean state-subsidized rubric of “anticommunist film,” as well as their antiwar variants, as An observes, offer little opportunity to interrogate South Korean state power, much less any room to apprehend war profiteering as the motor of the nation. Heavily censored and actively subsidized by the South Korean state, Korean War films typically “promote a vision of tradition-based humanism as the foundation for the national community.” By contrast, low-budget Manchurian action films, which feature treasure-seeking nationalist guerrillas whom An reads as figurations of the proto-South Korean nation-state, not only cast war making as a business but also allegorize South Korea’s economic rapprochement with Japan under Park Chung-hee’s regime. These revisionist films cast “bringing money home [as] the paramount nationalist act,” a “distinctively capitalist way of conceiving anticolonial nationalism.”

Critically exploring the temporal dimensions of alienation, displacement, and diaspora as gendered consequences of war and militarism on the Korean peninsula, Jodi Kim, in her reading of two documentary films, Deann Borshay Liem’s *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* and Jane Jin Kaisen’s *The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger*, theorizes “a time of the now that is linked to the ongoing histories of US militarism and imperialism in Korea.” Inaugurated under the potent affective sign of “war orphan,” the South Korean adoption industry, as Kim argues, transformed its war “garbage” into lucrative international exports and built, upon the backs of poor women and their children, a “transgenerational economy of reproductive injustice.” Trucking in a “transnational politics of pity,” the South Korean overseas adoption industry effectively extended the “present” of the war beyond its conventional periodization, producing in each successive decade new “orphans,” despite the fact that the latter were all-too-often not legally orphaned. Specific, then, to the adoptee diaspora—“a diaspora that has yet been unable to reckon with the conditions of its own making”—is what Kim identifies as the war’s “recursive temporality.” In their feminist critiques of war violence as the basis for South Korean “miracle,” Liem and Kaisen, both adoptee filmmakers, highlight the historiographical interventions generated by adoptee searches for their birth families—searches “that might

begin with the self but [ultimately] uncover broader 'pathways' to how . . . the adoptee 'self' was produced in the first place." Thus bringing to light "the simultaneous mode of production of the adoptee and the mode of producing reproductive injustice for her mother," Kim's essay, which powerfully demonstrates the critical value of Asian American and Asian diasporic approaches to the Korean War, attends to persistent historiographical lacunae around the gendered legacies and realities of war violence.

This special issue closes with an illuminating conversation with Kim Dong-Choon, a major historian of the Korean War and a former standing commissioner of South Korea's government-sponsored Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which carried out investigations of Korean War massacres. Indeed, the title of this special issue takes its inspiration from Kim's monograph, a "social history" of the Korean War.⁴² Addressing the logic of enmity behind South Korea's "war politics"—as he glosses it, "every . . . ruling bloc periodically uses an external threat to maintain its position"—Kim shines much-needed light not only on those victims of indiscriminate and sweeping arrests, rape, torture, illegal detention, summary execution, and massacres before, during, and after the Korean War, as it has been conventionally periodized, but also on their families who suffered political stigmatization and social exclusion—condemned, in effect, to "living death" within South Korea's "guilt-by-association" system. Reflecting, with searching self-examination, on the limitations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Korea (TRCK), which was constrained by its lack of prosecutorial authority, Kim today posits the "full accountability of past crimes" as a precondition for achieving justice. Commenting on the TRCK's geographical constraints, he offers this powerful insight: "the restoration of dignity for all will be possible only after the unification of North and South Korea."

Notes

This special issue, in its inception and inspiration, arose out of a transnational milieu of activists and scholars who have dared to envision and courageously called for an end to the Korean War. This special issue is dedicated to the ongoing struggle for peace.

Thanks go to Tani Barlow for her steadfast support of this issue in all of its phases, Rachel Ross for her unflagging work to help bring this issue to fruition, and the two anonymous reviewers who twice read this special issue cover to cover and offered tailored, insightful feedback to each of the contributors.

1. Mary L. Dudziak, *War-Time: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3. Transposed “solutions” derived from the Korean context, including partition, would enable the global Cold War within Asia 1954 Geneva Conference.
2. Paik Nak-chung, *The Division System in Crisis: Essays on Contemporary Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
3. Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 23.
4. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 129.
5. Rey Chow, “The Age of the World Target: Atomic Bombs, Alterity, Area Studies,” *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 35.
6. See Bruce Cumings, *War and Television* (London: Verso, 1992), 148. See also Dudziak, *War-Time*, 91–93.
7. US National Park Service, “Korean War Veterans Memorial,” www.nps.gov/kowa/index.htm (accessed January 13, 2013).
8. Dudziak, *War-Time*, 3. For a discussion of North Korea as “the party of memory” and the United States as “the party of forgetting,” see Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010), 37–58.
9. Chow, “Age of the World Target,” 35.
10. George Orwell, as quoted on Dudziak, *War-Time*, 68.
11. See Johannes Fabian on the “denial of coevalness,” *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia, 1983), 31.
12. Dudziak, *War-Time*, 8.
13. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 261.
14. *Ibid.* On the “bonds forged in blood” between the United States and South Korea during the Korean War, see, for example, Joe Biden’s comments about the US-ROK alliance before the US Senate: “[South Korean President Kim Dae-jung’s] visit will give us a chance to renew the close bonds forged in blood in the common struggle against the forces of

- oppression which united our people in the United States and South Korea." See Joe Biden, remarks before the US Senate, March 7, 2001, http://korean.seoul.usembassy.gov/030801_3.html.
15. Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 34, 33.
 16. Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 129.
 17. See, for example, Jeremi Suri, "Bomb North Korea, Before It's Too Late," *New York Times*, April 12, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/13/opinion/bomb-north-korea-before-its-too-late.html>.
 18. Robert M. Blackburn, *Mercenaries and Lyndon Johnson's "More Flags": The Hiring of Korean, Filipino and Thai Soldiers in the Vietnam War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland 1994), 46. In his explanation of South Korea's troop commitment to the US "More Flags" coalition in Vietnam during the 1960s, South Korean president Park Chung-hee referenced US and UN intervention during the Korean War as the basis for South Korea's debt of honor. "It was a way," Park stated in *To Build a Nation* (1971), "of repaying those 16 free nations which came to our military aid during the Korean War." See Park Chung-hee, *To Build a Nation* (Washington, DC: Acropolis Books, 1971), 131.
 19. On July 27, 2013, on the sixtieth anniversary of the signing of the Armistice Agreement, US President Barack Obama addressed an audience primarily comprising South Korean dignitaries from the right-wing Park Geun Hye government and US veterans. Against every serious historical account of the Korean War—all of which acknowledge the fact that the United States did not win the war—Obama stated, in this speech, that the Korean War was, in fact, "a victory." See Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at 60th Anniversary of the Korean War Armistice," *The White House*, July 27, 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/27/remarks-president-60th-anniversary-korean-war-armistice>.
 20. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.
 21. Dudziak, *War-Time*, 27.
 22. See, for example, Bruce Cumings, "Korean My Lai," *Nation*, October 25, 1999.
 23. Mark Neocleous, *War Power, Police Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 82.
 24. Civil Rights Congress, *We Charge Genocide: The Crime of Government against the Negro People* (New York: Civil Rights Congress, 1951), 7.
 25. *Ibid.*
 26. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California, 2008), 28.
 27. Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 27.
 28. *Ibid.*, 12.

29. Ibid.
30. Eva Horn, "Knowing the Enemy: The Epistemology of Secret Intelligence," trans. Sara Ogger, *Grey Room* 11 (2003): 73.
31. *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars (BCAS)* Mission Statement, March 29–30, 1969, <http://criticalasianstudies.org/about-us/bcas-founding-statement.html>.
32. Chow, "Age of the World Target," 36.
33. Korean Central News Agency, "AA Nullification Is Bold Decision to Terminate State of War on Korean Peninsula," March 26, 2013, www.kcna.co.jp/item/2013/201303/news26/20130326-17ee.html.
34. Several of the contributors also took part in an NYU conference held on April 22–23, 2011, called "The Unending Korean War," organized by primarily JT Takagi and Henry Em. Collaborative discussion of a special volume about the ongoing Korean War took place during this conference.
35. Lee Nichols, *Breakthrough on the Color Front* (New York: Random House, 1954), 126, 144, 169.
36. Assistant Secretary of Defense Anna Rosenberg, quoted in Nichols, *Breakthrough*, 179; Nichols, *Breakthrough*, 53.
37. Daniel Widener, "Seoul City Sue and the Bugout Blues: Black American Narratives of the Forgotten War," in *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans*, ed. Fred Ho and Bill Mullen (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 78.
38. Toni Morrison, *Home* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 18.
39. Hosu Kim and Grace Cho, "The Kinship of Violence," *Journal of Korean Adoption Studies* 1, no. 3 (2012): 9–27; Ha Jin, *War Trash* (New York: Pantheon 2004).
40. Kim and Cho, "Kinship of Violence," 10.
41. Sahr Conway-Lanz, *Collateral Damage: Americans, Noncombatant Immunity, and Atrocity after World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 162.
42. Kim Dong-Choon, *The Unending Korean War: A Social History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).



I end this article with *Peace in Korea Now*, a rare and powerful painting created circa the Korean War's hot-fighting years by the US artist Frank A. Rowe. A member of the legendary Graphic Arts Workshop, one of the only Bay Area artist groups that generated explicitly referential, political art during the repressive McCarthy era—a time when abstract expressionism not coincidentally was in vogue—Rowe was one of a principled handful of San Francisco State University professors fired for refusing to sign the Levering Oath, a Cold War loyalty declaration that not only required conformity to the anticommunist ethos of the day but also demanded that any California state employee consent to conscription as a civil-defense worker. As Rowe writes in *The Enemy among Us: A Story of Witch-Hunting in the McCarthy Era*, “the event that brought anti-Communist hysteria to a fever pitch and made a special oath for all California public employees a virtual certainty was the war in Korea.” His youngest daughter, Georgia Rowe, graciously allowed us to reproduce an image of her late father's painting, artwork whose call for peace is as timely today as it was over six decades ago. Great thanks go to Georgia and her family.