UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

The New C(old) War: Shaping North Korea in American Political and Cultural Discourse

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Ethnic Studies

by

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The Dissertation of Lisa Ho is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

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DEDICATION

For my maternal grandmother, Am Lu Dinh. Every achievement, success, and obstacle overcome has been made possible because of her. In her absence, I will keep on.

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Chapter 3, in part, contains material that has been submitted for publication. Lisa Ho. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this material.

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

The New C(old) War: Shaping North Korea in American Political and Cultural Discourse

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This project adopts an interdisciplinary lens grounded in the transnational analytics of Ethnic Studies, Asian American Studies, and Asian Studies to better understand the formation of North Korea as a political and cultural construct within a U.S.-based context. This project analyzes a collection of texts such as: congressional hearings, documentaries, archival materials, non-fiction material, and comedy to draw out

the larger common sense that portrays North Korea as an unstable, rogue nation. I argue that this common sense establishes North Korea as being "interiorly different" which adds ideological difference as another measure of racial difference. The goal of this dissertation is to outline the ways in which the interiorized difference of North Korea has been used to fulfill the imperatives of different political projects such as: American militarism, global humanitarianism, and the global American Left. As such, this project explicates how North Korea has become a malleable construction that has been shaped in different ways within American political and cultural discourse.

Introduction

On November 17, 2011, President Barack Obama addressed the Australian Parliament to detail the objectives of the pivot towards the Asia Pacific, an endeavor that counts on Australia as an ally. Obama explained that since the threats of Iraq and Afghanistan have waned, the U.S. will "pivot" from these areas to focus on the "vast potential" of the Asia Pacific.[1] Obama portrayed the United States as a "Pacific nation," citing the role that Asian immigrants' labor has played in building the United States, and weaved a narrative of violence, sacrifice, and a prosperous future ahead: "…from the rice paddies of Southeast Asia to a cold Korean Peninsula, generations of Americans have served here, and died here—so democracies could take root; so economic miracles could lift hundreds of millions to prosperity."[2] While Asia Pacific is marked by the "future" it has to offer in terms of economic prosperity, global security, and human rights, Korea remains behind, stuck in the "cold."

The United States has made efforts to bring Korea out of the "cold." In 2015, on the 70th anniversary of the Korean War, Charles Rangel (D-NY) introduced "House Resolution 384: Calling for a formal end to the Korean War" into Congress, which he wrote and sponsored with John Conyers (D-MI) and Sam Johnson (R-TX). The resolution explains that even though the Armistice Agreement was signed in 1953, the Korean War "…remains one of the world's longest ongoing armed conflicts" that has claimed the lives of so many and has involved not only the Korean Peninsula but also the

[1] Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament" (speech, Canberra, Australia, November 17, 2011) Obama White House, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament.
[2] Ibid.

United States.[3] If the resolution passes, it would be celebrated as tribute to those who fought in the war, who fell victim to its violence, and who were separated from their families. Rangel wanted the resolution to push the global community to pursue an image of a unified Korea and to support efforts "…to promote international peace, security, denuclearization, economic prosperity, human rights, and the rule of law both on the Korean peninsula and elsewhere."[4] This vision of the Korean peninsula is driven by the neoliberal, imperial, and neocolonial aspirations of the U.S. in which *its* "unified Korea" paves way to a new era of U.S. global hegemony in Asia, as articulated through the Asia Pacific pivot.

However, in this call to end the Korean War, the United States continues to escalate its war against North Korea through sanctions, public denouncements, and unrelenting undermining of its leadership—a persistence that is illustrative of the Cold War's "protracted afterlife."[5] In *Ends of Empire,* Jodi Kim explains that in this protracted afterlife, the Cold War is not just an historical period but also an "epistemology and production of knowledge, and as such it exceeds and outlives its historical eventness."[6] For instance, when North Korea was named a member of the "axis evil" in President George Bush's first State of the Union after 9/11 in 2002, this configuration was reminiscent of Reagan's designation of the Soviet Union as an "evil empire" during the Cold War.[7] In this current iteration, North Korea is accused of prioritizing the

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[3] U.S Congress, *Calling for a formal end of the Korean War*, 114th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015) 1.
[4] Ibid, 1.
[5] Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 2010) 3.
[6] Ibid, 3-4.
[7] Ibid, 4.

proliferation of weapons of mass destruction over its starving citizenry—an accusation that melded militarism and human rights together—a dialectical formation that frames the current American campaign against North Korea. This project explores how this dialectical formation is grounded in the perceived interiorized difference of North Korea—a construction that relies on conflicting ideological dispositions to express racial difference. This dissertation asks the following questions: How is the interiorized difference of North Korea being used to sustain and escalate American militarism in Korea? How is the interiorized difference of North Korea being used to support the purported benevolence of American humanitarianism?

This project embraces the Cold War as a "hermeneutic" to decipher North Korea's place in the War on Terror —a placement that renews U.S. efforts to finally end and claim victory in the Korean War.[8] This project does not consider North Korea as a formation of the War on Terror but as a residual of the Cold War that has been reanimated in the global campaign against terror. I argue that the War on Terror allows for the continued forgetting of the Korean War by portraying North Korea as a current terrorist threat as opposed to a Cold War enemy produced by the United States.

Additionally, I engage with the dialectical formation of militarism and humanitarianism to illustrate how the U.S. vilification of North Korea masks its own culpability in the Korean peninsula. In particular, I critically examine the activities of the North Korean human rights project—a collection of activists, elected officials, legislators, scholars, non-profit personnel, and researchers—that promote regime change in and/or collapse of North Korea due to the alleged brutality of its leadership towards the

[8] Ibid, 3.

North Korean people.[9] This collective do not officially coordinate their activities together but their work overlap and intersect because of their shared goal of collapse/regime change. I argue that this movement has been central in positioning the United States as the key actor in the toppling the North Korean regime—an objective that would grant a final victory to the United States in the Korean War.

Key Literature

A majority of academic scholarship on North Korea is "still dominated by the Cold War—driven area studies model, which aggressively prioritizes security-related works."[10] In *Toward a Better Understanding of North Korea,* Sonia Ryang describes that the scholarship on North Korea is filled with speculations, forecasting, and predictions about what North Korea "might or might not do in certain given situations"—scenarios that have found more traction in the post 9/11 moment.[11] She argues that since the United States is technically not at war with North Korea, this academic discourse escalates the tensions of war between the two countries.[12] The nature of this scholarship is illustrative of how area studies has contributed to the interests of the U.S nation-state. In *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies,* H.D. Harootunian and Masao Miyoshi explain that in the post-World War II era, the original objective of area studies was to collect and deliver information about rival nations; however, the field shifted its focus to investigate areas of the world that were "considered vital to the interests of the United States in the

[9] I attribute this definition to the work of Christine Hong.
[10] Sonia Ryang, "Introduction: North Korea: Going Beyond Security and Enemy Rhetoric," in *Toward a Better Understanding of North Korea,* ed. Sonia Ryang (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009) 2.
[11] Ibid, 2.
[12] Ibid.

Cold War."[13] In response, a growing conversation has emerged among scholars in the field of Critical Asian Studies to redirect attention to how the histories of American militarism, colonialism, and imperialism have shaped U.S. engagement with North Korea.

In December 2013, *Critical Asian Studies* released a special two-part issue on the North Korean human rights movement that offered a "critical reflection on the dominant discursive frame of North Korean human rights as a modality of asymmetrical power."[14] The objective of the special issue was to bring attention to the histories, knowledge, and figures that have remained in "the shadows of the North Korean human rights project."[15] Christine Hong, the editor of the issue, explains that the objective of the collection was to underscore the polemical limitations of this humanitarian venture by highlighting its

> …amnestic posture toward imperial violence; a lethal politicized agenda gussied up as a moral mission; a geopolitical language and structure of post 9/11 U.S. unilateralism; and an ideological mode of perception, conversion, subject-formation, and historiography. Working beyond these limitations, a number of the essays in this issue inquire into modes of understanding and engaging North Korea in addition to human rights practices that have been sidelined by the dominant, regime-change-oriented North Korean human rights project.[16]

In particular, Hong argues that the North Korean human rights movement creates a historiography that expunges the history of the violence of American militarism and imperialism in North Korea. During the Korean War, the United States launched a three-year long aerial campaign against North Korea that destroyed parts of its infrastructure,

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[13] H.D Harootunian and Masao Miyoshi, "Introduction: The 'Afterlife of Area Studies," in *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies*, eds. Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) 2.
[14] Christine Hong, "Introduction: Reframing North Korean Human Rights," *Critical Asian Studies* 45 (2013) 526.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.

including the irrigation systems that supplied water for 75% of the country's food production.[17] It was also the first time that the United States had used napalm; in other words, North Korea became the testing ground for a weapon that would be used to bring death and destruction in the subsequent proxy wars of the Cold War. Korean Historian, Bruce Cummings estimates that two million civilians perished during the Korean War. Afterward the armistice, the United States would impose economic sanctions that sought to isolate North Korea from the global economy. The United States banned all exports to North Korea; similar sanctions have continued in varying degrees till this day. In the 1990's, the U.S. applied sanctions on North Korea with the purpose of forcing its leaders to cease their production of nuclear technology and weapons.[18] As I will illustrate in the first two chapters, these histories of military violence and economic sanctions have not been acknowledged within the various segments of the North Korean human rights project. Instead, as Hong argues, this humanitarian venture embraces the convenience of the present in which a "human rights critique amnestically wipes the slate clean."[19] In other words, a human rights critique pushes aside the history of American militarism and instead chooses to focus on the presence of human rights violations The convenience of the present enables the United States to portray North Korea's proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as the efforts of a delusional dictator trying to spread terror as opposed to a sovereign country attempting to defend itself against a superpower that has repeatedly threatened its livelihood.

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[17] Bruce Cummings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York City: W.W Norton & Company) 296.
[18] Haeyoung Kim, "Stifled Growth and Added Suffering: Tensions Inherent in Sanctions Policies Against North Korea," *Critical Asian Studies* (2004) 91.
[19] Christine Hong, "Introduction: Reframing North Korean Human Rights," *Critical Asian Studies* 45 (2013) 515.

Contributions: Ethnic Studies & Transnational Asian American Studies

Ethnic Studies

I contribute to the work of Christine Hong, Sonia Ryang, and other concerned scholars of Asian Studies by considering U.S and North Korean relations through an Ethnic Studies and Transnational Asian American Studies perspective. In order to do so, I argue that we must first understand how North Korea has been racialized based on their "ideological difference." In *Humanitarian Violence*, Neda Atanasoski explains that "spaces of atrocity" like North Korea have become degraded as anachronistic and an illiberal system of governance that works against the modernizing efforts of the West to maintain global geographies of "freedom," as articulated by the politics of the "axis of evil."[20] As such, the basis of difference is not only grounded in racial/biological distinctions but ideological dispositions as well, otherwise known as the "interior difference of belief."[21] Applying Atanasoski's framework, my dissertation focuses on how the construction of North Korea's interiorized difference or its "illiberal mode of governance" serves to distance North Korea from Western modernity, thus justifying the clamor for its collapse.[22] Also, what is central to this construction of North Korea's interiorized difference is the alliance between South Korea and the United States—an alliance that has allowed the United States to advance its role of liberator of Korea.

North Korea and South Korea have been central to America's image as an agent of liberation in diverging but complementary ways. To better contextualize this connection to Atanasoski's work, we need to look at the alliance between the United

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[20] Neda Atanasoski, *Humanitarian Violence: The U.S. Deployment of Diversity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013) 7.
[21] Ibid, 6.
[22] Ibid.

States and South Korea; and how this relationship has contributed and sustained North Korea's interiorized difference. If we understand interiorized difference to be about how ideological beliefs are used to differentiate and categorize actors like nation-states—how is "visible difference" managed and balanced by perceived ideological similarity? In *Service Economies*, Jin Kyung Lee explains that the postwar economic development and "miracle" that South Korea experienced turned the nation into a "…model minority in the broader context of the United States' neocolonial 'under-development and impoverishment' of countries in Latin America and Africa."[23] As the success story of neocolonial American tutelage, South Korea's visible difference is harnessed as an asset because it contributes to the image of the U.S. as a transformative force in the global community. I bring this context into conversation to reveal the ways in which the construction of racial difference can shift and align itself with specific imperial and neocolonial formations. In the case of South and North Korea, visible difference becomes a secondary concern to interiorized difference because difference of belief can be corrected with tutelage. I argue that by conceptualizing North Korea as being interiorly different provides an entryway for Ethnic Studies scholars to consider how "rogue" countries like North Korea constitute a viable site to understand how race is being constructed within the larger frame of geopolitics. As the current presidential administration continues to exclude immigrant and refugee populations based on their religious difference, the concept of interiorized difference is an important lens to understand how the global racial order is being constituted in a multitude of ways to

[23] Jin-Kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010) 29-30.

sustain global American hegemony.[24] Of course, the concept of interiorized difference does not set aside biological and physiological difference as a marker of racial difference but instead adds another strand to our complex understanding of race and racialization.

Transnational Asian American Studies

Another contribution of this project is to bring North Korea into the field of Asian American Studies. Instead of framing Asian American Studies as a field that considers only the lives of Asian Americans within the domestic boundaries of the United States, a transnational approach allows for scholars to articulate how the formation and the racialization of Asian Americans is directly linked to the current ventures and residuals of the American empire.[25] I begin this exploration of these material linkages through the different figures that have emerged from the Korean War.

The figures of the Korean War reveal how the unevenness of power and violence was used to solidify certain racial gendered formations and dynamics. In *Sex Among Allies*, Katherine H. Moon explores how the sexual exploitation of tens of thousands of Korean women by U.S. soldiers was a "necessary evil" to ensure that the U.S. military remained in South Korea.[26] As such, prostitutes who worked and lived in military camp towns have been largely ignored by South Korean society because they are the "…living testaments of Korea's geographical and political division into North and South and of the South's military insecurity and the consequent dependence on the United States."[27] However, in the case of adoptees, adoptees were figured as "…objects of humanitarian

[24] By current presidential administration, at this time, is the Trump Administration.
[25] Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2003) 8.
[26] Katherine H. Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S-Korea Relations* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1997) 9.
[27] Ibid.

concern and became major beneficiaries of overseas charity following the war."[28] In *Adopted Territory*, Elena Kim explains that adoptees were instrumental to "…American postwar communist containment policy that sought to use humanitarian aid as a means of building good will among the Korean people."[29] Kim argues that the narrative of intercountry adoptions wavers between exploitation and humanitarianism, whereby some American servicemen played a paternalistic role as the key sources of support for orphanages in Korea that received donations from the concerned in the U.S. and others are known to have abandoned their own interracial children who had been illegitimately conceived. These uneven power dynamics are also found in the marriages between American servicemen and Korean women as explored in Ji-Yeon Yuh's *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*. Yuh explains that the gendered positioning of Korea as the "feminine order" in need of protection by the "masculine superiority" of the United States was a "…major factor in the skewed gender profile of intermarriages between Koreans and Americans, the overwhelming majority of which are between American men and Korean women."[30] While the relationship between South Korea and the United States during the Korean War determined the formation of these figures within the context of war, these racial and gendered formations would also follow those who choose to leave South Korea for the United States.

For instance, during the Korean War, sexual encounters between American soldiers and Korean women resulted in marriages and the subsequent migration of

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[28] Eleana J. Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 48.
[29] Ibid, 48.
[30] Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (New York City: NYU Press, 2002) 10.

Korean women to the United States. The War Brides Act of 1945 allowed American soldiers to bring their Korean wives to the United States on the basis of family reunification.[31] In *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, Grace Cho explains that sociologists believed that these marriages between Korean women and white men were a "social fact of assimilation."[32] As such, this marker of assimilation or "honorary whiteness" is a "facet of the American fantasy, the larger fantasy of how the United States imagines itself as a site of liberation and a nation of saviors…"[33] Of course, this fantasy depends on the belief that someone or something needs to be saved. The manifestation of the role of the American savior in these marital unions is reflective of how the United States saw itself in relationship to South Korea. In other words, the spread of American benevolence had also reached the realms of American domesticity. Cho writes that war brides (or the *yonggongju)* are "heavily invested in the American dream, carrying the weight of a familial longing for America, yet at the same time, her 'assimilation' in the United States is contingent on her serving from the past…"[34] I argue that the formation and the valorization of the North Korean refugee in the American political and cultural landscape is also dependent on a similar forgetting of the violence of the Korean War. The North Korean refugee crisis is constantly framed as a result of the brutality (or interiorized difference) of North Korean dictatorship as opposed to the longer history of American sanctions, embargos, and the denial of food aid. This forgetting allows the United States

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[31] Jaidep Singh "War Brides Act of 1945," *Asian American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia,* edited by Huping Ling and Allan W. Austin (New York City: Routledge, 2015) 90.
[32] Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora,* 130.
[33] Ibid, 130-131.
[34] For Cho, the yanggongju is a general reference to Korean women that engaged in sexual relations and relationships with American soldiers. The yanggongju is a complicated figure whose sexual labor is simultaneously condemned (for playing into American subordination) and praised (for sustaining American interest in South Korea). Cho explains that the GI bride is one formation of the yanggongju. See Ibid, 32.

to shape North Korea and its relationship to the nation-state in ways that sustain American global hegemony. The figure of the North Korean refugee is central to this molding because of how the population is used to signify the brutality of North Korean leadership—a valorization that can be traced back to the beginning of the Cold War.

The history of migration of refugees from the North *and* South reflected the politics of the Cold War, more specifically, how they were ideologically valorized during this era. In "Between Defector and Migrant: Identities and Strategies of North Koreans in South Koreans," Byung-Ho Chung chronicles the evolution of the migration of North Koreans to the South from 1945 to the present. After World War II, there was a large flow of Korean migrants to both South and North Korea, and migrants to each side were politicized by both nations. For North Korea, soldiers who returned represented "the undying ideological power of socialism" despite its economic problems.[35] For South Korea, North Korean refugees acknowledged the "absolute triumph of capitalism over communism."[36] By the end of the Korean War, it is estimated that 650,000 refugees had crossed to the South. Those who crossed the border had to prove that they were staunchly anticommunist in order to avoid political suspension and discrimination.[37] Refugees from the North also had to strongly identify with Christianity in order to survive. Chung explains that refugees from the North "became synonymous with "Christians" and "anticommunists."[38] Like refugees in East Europe, North Koreans were "instruments of

[35] Chung, Byung Ho. "Between Defector and Migrant: Identities and Strategies of North Koreans in South Korea," *Korean Studies* (2009): 5
[36] Ibid, 5.
[37]Chung, Byung Ho. "Between Defector and Migrant: Identities and Strategies of North Koreans in South Korea," *Korean Studies* (2009): 6
[38] Ibid, 6.

the Cold War" and "increments of power and sources of espionage and information."[39] Quite simply, they had become "important symbols in the ideological rivalry of the Cold War."[40] During the Cold War (1962-1993), the South Korean government generously compensated defectors who provided military secrets weapons across the armistice line. The financial rewards and special treatment that defectors received were granted through the "Special Relief Act for Patriots and Heroes to the State."[41] Grounded in Cold War politics, those who crossed the border were considered to be "openly rejecting the North," which was touted as "an act of distinguished service to the state."[42] The defection of these North Koreans helped South Korea's propaganda against North Korea and to "prove the superiority of the South Korean capitalist system."[43] However, the political valorization of North Korean refugees would begin to subside as the international community transitioned to a post-Communist era.

After the collapse of the socialist bloc, North Korea had to endure the problems that the collapse exacted on the country's economic and social systems. These conditions and the great famine of the 1990s led to the migration of North Korean citizens to other countries for employment and food. Between 1993 and 1997, there was an exponential growth of North Korean migration to the South. At this time, these refugees were treated as "economic refugees or people under social welfare," instead of patriots as they were

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[39] Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001) 7.
[40] Ibid, 7.
[41] Chung, Byung Ho. "Between Defector and Migrant: Identities and Strategies of North Koreans in South Korea." *Korean Studies* (2009): 8.
[42] Ibid, 8.
[43] Ibid, 8.

previously.[44] These changes in political recognition corresponded with the change in compensation for refugees, which was the result of a change in governmental oversight, and new legislation that was responsible for aiding North Koreans refugees. In 1993, the "Act to Protect North Korean Brethren Who Returned to the State" changed oversight from the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of Health and Welfare. This shift in governmental agencies signaled the loss of political value that the North Korean refugees once held for the South Korean government.

I include the history of North Korean refugees within South Korea to provide historical context but also to show how the specter of the Cold War hovered over the figure of the North Korean refugee, especially with its current configuration in the North Korean Human Rights project. In other words, Cold War logics were re-deployed in a seemingly different geopolitical context. Before 9/11, there were no legislative efforts to support the asylum of North Korean refugees; however, after 9/11, the language of human rights and the figure of the North Korean refugee began to emerge in legislative efforts, culminating in the proposed North Korea Democracy Bill of 2003. Beside economic sanctions, this legislative proposal was significant in that it granted refugee status and settlement in the United States to North Korean refugees.[45] The bill did not pass, but Bush signed the North Korean Human Rights Act into law in 2004, which has subsequently been re-authorized during the Obama administration.[46]

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[44] Ibid, 8.
[45] Chang, Semoon. "A Chronology of U.S. Sanctions Against North Korea," *Economic Sanctions Against a Nuclear North Korea: An Analysis of United States and United Nations Actions Against Since 1950,* edited by Suk Hi Kim and Semoon Chang (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2007) 49
[46] The object of the bill is to provide different resources to North Korea that promote "democracy" and also intends to assist North Korean refugees in gaining asylum.

I historicize the emergence of the North Korean refugee in American geopolitics to provide a historically and culturally grounded interpretation of how the Korean War continues to persist via the current iteration of U.S. and North Korean relations. I employ the analytics of Transnational Asian American Studies to understand how the American empire has shaped the lives of Asian Americans. In this case, a significant portion of the "two million strong" Korean American community can be attributed to the displacement and forced migrations that occurred because of the Korean War.[47] I argue that the celebration of the alleged socioeconomic success of Korean Americans provides the United States historical precedent for its intervention in North Korea. Of course, these humanitarian overtures are grounded in the forgetting of U.S. militarism and imperialism that allowed for the division of Korea and subsequent displacement of its people in the first place.

In short, conceptualizing the North Korean refugee as a residual of the Korean War allows for this conflict to be revitalized with new stakes. In the case of the North Korean refugee, Sonia Ryang argues that when North Koreans are humanized, it is done to malign the North Korean leadership for their human rights violations.[48] North Korean refugees are used to prove the brutality of North Korea and to justify the demand for its collapse, which illustrates the dialectical formation of militarism and humanitarianism that shapes the North Korean Human Rights movement. As such, I argue that American intervention on behalf of the North Korean refugee has revived the Korean War with new

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[47] Committee on International Relations, *The North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004: Issues and Implications*, 109th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 2005) 4.
[48] Sonia Ryang, "Introduction: North Korea: Going Beyond Security and Enemy Rhetoric," 4.

stakes that bolster the United States as the eventual and rightful victor in the Korean War, erasing its role as the war's key perpetrator.

Methodological Approaches

This project adopts an interdisciplinary methodology that draws from a variety of cultural materials, including congressional hearings, legislative documents, public addresses, documentaries, films, and standup comedy. I focus on how these various materials work concurrently across their various sites to maintain the hegemonic construction of North Korea as an unstable nation-state that cannot be trusted and thus must be dismantled. I explicate the relationship that exists between cultural and political sphere as articulated in Melani McAlister's *Epic Encounters*. McAlister proposes that foreign policy is a "meaning-making activity" in which the nation-state can define its borders, interests, or in the case of North Korea, its threats.[49] In *Re-imagining North Korea in International Politics*, Shine Choi argues that foreign policy been central to solidifying North Korea as a "problem" based on how this mechanism establishes binary relationships such as "good/bad, civilized/barbaric, normal/abnormal, pure/impure, [and] masculine/feminine."[50] For instance, the North Korean Human Rights Act was enacted on the belief that North Korea was abusing its citizens—the support and passage of this legislation solidified North Korea's otherness as a violent state. While the objective of the North Korean Human Rights Act was to provide asylum to North Koreans, the Act's economic sanctions penalized North Korea for its continued proliferation of nuclear weapons. In 2016, the United Nations passed a resolution that would reduce North

[49] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 5.
[50] Shine Choi, *Re-imagining North Korea in International Politics: Problems and Alternatives* (Routledge: New York City, 2015) 9.

Korea's coal export, cutting its export revenue by 25 percent—a resolution that was drawn up by the United States.[51] In other words, foreign polices like sanctions work to strangle the economies of rogue nation-states and ultimately, challenge their ability to support themselves.

As for the cultural sphere, McAlister explains that cultural texts do not simply illustrate the "preexisting social anxiety" but when placed within history, they can fulfill political objectives as well.[52] In her work on the Middle East and the United States, McAlister argues that cultural products ideologically construct places as being "acceptable area[s] for the exercise of American power" and how these places can be used "as a stage for the production of American identities."[53] My project adopts McAlister's approach by arguing that cultural texts have been central to solidifying North Korea as a brutal and barbaric nation-state that requires American intervention to hasten its collapse, which will then allow the United States to claim victory in Korea as a global leader in humanitarianism and security. Also, these cultural materials are grounded in the context of the current moment that embraces the conveniences of the present. While I bring together cultural and political texts to draw out this narrative, I approach these texts through a transnational framework that bridges Asian American studies, critical Asian studies, and American Studies and situate them within the history of U.S. empire in Asia to disrupt the present with the inconveniences of the past.

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[51] Dave Boyer, "U.N. hits North Korea with new round of sanctions over nuclear program," *Washington Times*, November 30, 2016, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/nov/30/un-hits-n-korea-new-round-sanctions-nukes-program/.
[52] McAlister, *Epic Encounters*, 5.
[53] Ibid, 3.

Chapter Overview

The first chapter catalogs the varying ways that the North Korean Human rights project has attempted to solidify and circulate the narrative of North Korea's brutality within the American political and cultural sphere. It also examines how this narrative intersects with narratives of American benevolence and redemption, which renders the figure of the North Korean refugee compelling to a larger American audience. The goal of this chapter is to illustrate how the North Korean refugee has been used to build a common sense understanding of North Korea's brutality for an American audience. I suggest that the common sense that surrounds North Korea reveals the ways in which North Korea has become a construction that lends itself to shaping and fulfilling different political projects and affiliations.

For the second chapter, I extend the transnational lens of the first chapter to explore how Korean Americans have been hailed to join the North Korean human rights project through the non-profit organization, Liberty in North Korea (LiNK). I explore how the narrative of the "socioeconomic success" of Korean Americans has been used as evidence of American benevolence in order to obligate community them to support North Korean refugees. As an American-based organization, LiNK provides young Korean Americans an opportunity to fulfill this obligation based on the language of universal human rights and ethnic affiliation. I examine how LiNK's Korean American members have adopted the organization's discourse of having a shared humanity with North Korean refugees, but have also emphasized their shared ethnicity and histories of division, war, and loss. As such, this ethnic-based affiliation provides Korean Americans the possibility of providing a different type of care that does not strictly adhere to the

polemics of universal human rights but that point to the lingering material and psychological violence of war that has been passed down through the generations of the Korean Diaspora. By including both North Korean refugees and Korean Americans in the same analytical frame, I explicate how these figures work together to produce a form of ideological and cultural labor that helps to erase U.S. imperial violence in the Korean peninsula. At the same time, this chapter also illuminates how young Korean Americans are (inexplicitly) exposing this very violence at the same time. As such, the common sense that sustains LiNK's narrative of North Korea offers an opportunity for Korean Americans to explore their relationship to the Korean War and its aftermath.

The next chapter reads Korean American comedienne Margaret Cho's performances that center on North Korea: her impersonation of former North Korean leader, Kim Jung Il in the television show, *30 Rock,* and her portrayal of a fictional army general at the 2015 Golden Globes. I explicate how the relationship between the United States and North Korea shapes these performances, but also how these forces work in concert with how Asian Americans are racialized as the perpetual "unassimilable alien." In particular, I analyze how the legibility of these performances is grounded in North Korea's refusal to assimilate to hegemonic standards of governance, similar to Asian American rejection of assimilation. I analyze these performances against the backdrop of the Sony hacking scandal in which North Korea was accused of leaking compromising materials in response to the studio's release of *The Interview*, a comedic film that details the fictional assassination of North Korea's current leader, Kim Jung Un. Although there was never any evidence to prove North Korea's guilt, the United States saw this (unsubstantiated) provocation as tantamount to a declaration of a (cyber) war.

While the first three chapters deal with U.S. relations with North Korea in the current moment, the final chapter shifts back to the Cold War by focusing on the brief alliance between North Korea and the Black Panthers that was forged in the late 1960s to early 1970s. The objective of this chapter is to provide an alternative formation of North Korea that is grounded in an anti-U.S. imperial politic that united the young nation-state with radical groups like the Black Panthers. I look to the archival materials that were collected by the North Korea International Documentation Project, a collection that was sponsored by the Wilson Center. I end with this chapter to offer an alternative imagination of North Korea that does not align with its current hegemonic constructions in order to highlight how North Korea sought to challenge U.S. state violence through Third World politics. While this chapter is situated within a different historical time and context as the rest of dissertation, the key connection here is how the Black Panther Party looked to North Korea to pursue its own political goals. Instead of using North Korean brutality to justify the continuation of American militarism in Korea, the Black Panther Party looked to North Korea to bolster its radicalism.

Conclusion

In *Ends of Empire,* Jodi Kim explains that the Korean War was the initial conflict that solidified the logics of the Cold War and determined how the United States would carry out its subsequent proxy wars and respond to the anticolonial movements that would emerge.[54] Unresolved, the Korean War remains as a "Cold War epistemology in the making."[55] My project focuses on how the knowledge produced about North Korea (a

[54] Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire*, 150.
[55] Ibid, 34.

creation of the Korean War) has been deployed to attempt to resolve this decades-long conflict. Since North Korea constitutes the "last remaining fault line of the Cold War," my dissertation brings attention to how the United States has constructed North Korea as the site of the unfinished business of the Cold War.[56] As a "Cold War remnant" North Korea has not been "solved" but has been "repressed" and forced to violently return in its designation as a member of the War on Terror's "axis of evil."[57] This insertion of North Korea into this notorious triad sought to bring North Korea back onto the global stage for scrutiny, suspicion, and ridicule but through a different ideological and military campaign. In many ways, I argue that the United States has welcomed this return because this campaign allowed its leaders to claim a victory that has been so elusive all these years. The goal of this project has been to explicate the various strands of knowledge that allow for this possibility of American hegemony in Korea. In other words, this project has been concerned about how the Korean War has been reanimated through North Korea within the American cultural and political sphere. My work contributes to the growing conversation around North Korea that seek to adopt different theoretical, analytical, and interdisciplinary strategies to challenge the dominant academic discourse on North Korea—a discourse that welcomes war between the United States and North Korea.

The objective of this dissertation is not to disprove the United States' allegations about North Korea or to claim North Korea's innocence. Rather, my goal has been to show how the United States has extracted ideological value from North Korea's assumed brutality and terror to support the continuation of American militarism and imperialism in

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[56] Tessa Morris-Suzuki, Exodus *to North Korea: Shadows from Japan's Cold War* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007) 16.
[57] Jodi Kim, *Ends of* Empire, 240.

Korea. In doing so, I seek to provide another venue to study North Korea outside of the realm of securitization, one that calls attention to the scope of the American empire in Korea. I argue that by using the interdisciplinary and transnational field of Asian American Studies, we can understand the current iteration of the Korean War via North Korea in the context of the brutality of the United States militarism and imperialism in Korea—a juxtaposition that is central to formulating a complex picture of U.S. and North Korean relations.

CHAPTER ONE:

"But we know their true nature": Cataloguing the Common Sense of the North Korea human rights movement

In his first State of the Union after the events of 9/11, President George W. Bush introduced the "axis of evil," a label used to reference an alliance of nation-states that allegedly threatens the world with terrorism. Determined by the logics of Islamphobia, the axis included not only the usual suspects—Iran and Iraq—but also North Korea. President Bush reasoned that "some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September the 11th. But we know their true nature. North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens."[58]Although there has been no direct provocation from North Korea prior to this speech, Bush still interpreted a "quiet" North Korea as an act of deception that necessitated constant suspicion, vigilance, and inspection from the United States.

In a 2009 Senate hearing, then Senator Sam Brownback similarly warned about the "evils" of North Korea:

> Perhaps all of the evils of Camp 22 and these other camps are fictions. If that is so, let Kim Jong Il open them to the eyes of the world. Let him refute me and all of us who believe that it is beneath our nation to collaborate with the evil of this depth.[59]

Based on North Korean refugee testimonies, Camp 22 is known as a notorious North Korean prison where North Koreans are forced into hard labor, tortured, and killed. Brownback's challenge to Kim Il Jung to disprove these accusations is framed by his absolute belief in the "depth" of North Korea's evil—any possibility of uncertainty is

[58] George W. Bush, State of the Union, (speech, Washington D.C., January 29, 2002) George W. Bush White House, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html.
[59] United States Senate, *Congressional Record*, 110th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008) 40.

bulldozed by Brownback's certainty in North Korea's brutality. Like Bush, Brownback remains confident in his beliefs about North Korea because of the perceived underlying "evil" of its "true nature."

In both cases, a racial logic that posits North Korea as an undisputed threat to the global community outweighs the lack of any actual evidence for these claims. Christine Hong rightly argues that the campaign against North Korea, more specifically, against its human right violations, has become evidentiary; it "generally passes as common sense."[60] These passages reveal how there is a larger "common sense" around North Korea that dismisses any need for concrete evidence to prove its insidious behavior. Consequently, this common sense allows for easy condemnation of North Korea: "It is easy to condemn North Korea. What could be easier?"[61] This chapter asks the following questions: Where does this common sense about North Korea emerge? What type of ideological labor does this "common sense" provide for the United States? What does this common sense erase in its formation and circulation?

This chapter traces the common sense that surrounds North Korea via the plight of North Korean refugees—a population that enables the United States to easily condemn and punish North Korea for humanitarian reasons. In particular, I examine how this common sense has been developed through the North Korea human rights movement, which is a transnational humanitarian campaign that focuses on "exposing" North Korea through the testimonies of North Korean refugees articulated via a multitude of platforms: congressional hearings, documentaries, non-fiction literature, podcasts, and

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[60] Christine Hong, "Reframing North Korean Human Rights: Introduction," *Critical Asian Studies* (2013) 519.

[61] Subcommittee on Immigration, *Examining the Plight of North Korean Refugees: The Case of North Korea*, 107th Congress., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, June 2002) 5 .

social media. I borrow the label "North Korea human rights movement" from Christine Hong, who describes the movement as a "human rights regime" that regards North Korea as a "temporal aberration—the fact of its perdurability an offense grievous enough for it to be yoked, along with Iraq and Iran, in a tripartite 'axis of evil' destined for eradication."[62] I examine how these materials work together to promote this objective or common sense. In *Epic Encounters*, Melani McAlister explains that framing knowledge as a form of common sense:

> focuses on the cultural work that happens at the messy intersections. We can begin to see how certain meanings can become naturalized by repetition, as well as the ways that different sets of texts, with their own interests and affiliations, come to overlap, to reinforce and revise one another toward an end that is neither entirely planned nor entirely coincidental.[63]

This chapter brings all these different texts together to illustrate how they work together in ways that are "entirely coincidental." These materials are colluding by happenstance because each is invested in the use of state power and violence but does so through the language of humanitarianism. In this case, these materials overlap each other to collectively advocate for the collapse of North Korea. I argue that this overlap is grounded in the common sense that has emerged to define, explain, or understand North Korea's "true nature" as the reason for its poor treatment of its people and its disregard for the expectations of civilized governance. If North Korea's interiorized difference has become the basis of common sense understanding of the country, the North Korean

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[62] Christine Hong, "Manufacturing Dissidence: Arts and Letters of North Korea's 'Second Culture.'" *positions* 12, no. 4 (2015) 750.
[63] Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2005) 8.

refugee has become the exception or "exceptional figure" to that rule.[64] First, North Korea's isolation and lack of transparency has made it difficult for intelligence officials to gather information about the country. As the black box of intelligence, North Korean refugees have become valuable sources of information because of the insight they can offer about North Korea and its leadership—a role that was also fulfilled during the days of the Cold War in South Korea.[65] In the field of Critical Refugee Studies, Yen Le Espiritu has argued that refugees should be considered as a "as a site of social and political critiques, whose emergence, when traced, would make visible the processes of colonization, war, and displacement."[66] While Critical Refugee Studies does this tracing to critique the violence of state power, the North Korea human rights movement has also treated the North Korean refugee as a site to critique the violence of the North Korean leadership. In other words, the North Korean refugee is used to make the violence and brutality of North Korean leadership publicly visible for international condemnation and intervention.

Secondly, I explicate how North Korean refugees are framed as exceptional figures because despite the perceived violence of the North Korean leadership, these individuals were able to flee because of their desperation for freedom. The figure of the North Korean refugee has thus been used to demarcate the difference between the brutality of North Korean leadership and the North Korean people—the former is incapable of providing freedom to its citizenry and the latter is desperately seeking and

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[64] I discuss the interiorized difference of North Korea in the introduction.
[65] I discuss the history of North Korean refugees or defectors in South Korea during the Cold War in my introduction.
[66] Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014) 174.

risking their lives for freedom. This framing renders this population as being exceptionally worthy of global attention and in this case, global action. I examine how this process of exceptionalization relies on a singular individual(s) because by doing so it becomes easier for those unfamiliar with the crisis to create connections and thus act on them.

This chapter analyzes a collection of different cultural texts: non-fiction literature, a documentary, congressional hearings, and an interactive webpage. The timeline of these materials range from 2002 to the present moment. The methodological objective of these materials is to "mak[e] spaces of atrocity transparent and accessible to our interventionism, visual, military, and legal technologies work in concert to affirm 'our' humanity by saving those suffering under a 'reign of terror.'"[67] Instead of organizing my analysis into different themes, this chapter moves from site to site to articulate how each builds on, repeats, and affirms each other. I trace how different figures, narratives, and ultimately, conclusions about North Korea's fate repeatedly surface to affirm the larger political objective of the North Korea human rights enterprise: we must collapse North Korea in the name of human rights. Christine Hong warns that an "engineered regime collapse would have grave humanitarian consequences on average North Koreans."[68] This goal of regime collapse reveals how the language of human rights has become a "militarized instrument of U.S. power" in which this ethic of humanitarianism works to

[67] Neda Atanasoski, *Humanitarian Violence: The U.S. Deployment of Diversity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013) 2.
[68] Christine Hong. "Reframing North Korean Human Rights: Introduction" *Critical Asian Studies* 45:4 (2013) 522-523.

mask state violence.[69] I underscore how the language of humanitarianism and militarism works seamlessly together to advocate for the collapse of North Korea.

The first section examines how efforts to analogize the North Korea refuge crisis to the events of the Underground Railroad connects the plight of the refugees to a familiar historical event for the American audience. I argue that this analogy focuses on the actions of individuals rather than on understanding how the U.S. nation-state has participated in the making of the crisis itself. I use Melani Kirkpatrick's book *Escape from North Korea* to detail and critique this analogy; I then look to the documentary *Seoul Train* to show how the North Korea human rights enterprise has used the Underground Railroad for its present needs. The second section turns to the legislative realm. I analyze how the U.S. common sense understanding of North Korea's brutality becomes articulated through the figure of the North Korean refugee. I argue that since common sense becomes the lens through which to read the refugee testimonies, these testimonies function as supplemental sources of knowledge to further affirm the existing understanding of North Korea. This section focuses on the congressional hearings that took place between 2002 between 2007, which debated whether or not North Korea improperly and/or misused foreign humanitarian aid. Although there was no solid proof that these accusations were true, these hearings rely on the plight of North Korean refugees to function as evidence of North Korean corruption. In other words, if the refugees are here, then North Korea's corruption has to be true. The final section focuses on the Bush Institute's "North Korean Freedom," a humanitarian initiative that allows

[69] Christine Hong, "The Mirror of North Korean Human Rights: Technologies of Liberation, Technologies of War," *Critical Asian Studies* 45, no. 4 (2013) 568.

former President George W. Bush to further purse his campaign against North Korea through a collaborative effort with state, non-state actors, and the American public. Ultimately, these sections work to explicate how eradicating North Korea has become articulated through the North Korean refugee crisis that advocates for collapse in the name of human rights.

The "New" Underground Railroad: Analogizing the Plight of North Korean Refugees

> I cannot help but look at that and the subsequent history, our own history with the underground railroad and the heroic efforts of some to secretly help some to escape and what is going on now among typically Christian, although Buddhist as well, typically faith-inspired persons who are attempting to help individuals escape because the governments are too scared to act. […] We see that. I am thinking to myself this has an eerie similarity to what we have experienced in our own country. I hope that what does not happen is what we did in our own country, which is to kowtow to "states rights." In this context, North Korea's states rights to oppress and enslave its own people, to keep them from hearing any news but its own, and worshipping any God but the dear leader. If we kowtow at this moment because we are ambivalent as to principle, then I suggest that China really has read us right, we will sell our souls for a buck. If we do that, we do deserve what we get. —Tarik Radwan.[70]

I begin with this passage from Tarik Radwan, an immigration lawyer who testified in a 2004 congressional hearing on the North Korea human rights Act (NKHRA) to illustrate the logic that connects the plight of North Korean refugees to the Underground Railroad: Both groups fled clandestinely in an attempt to escape oppression. What anchors this analogy is the constant use and deployment of the term "escape" to induce on the one hand, feelings of desperation and perseverance, and on the other hand, of hope and anticipation that there was something worth escaping to in the

[70] Committee on International Relations, *North Korea: Human Rights, Refugees, and Humanitarian Challenges*, 108th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 2004) 72.

first place. In fact, the term "escape" is included in many non-fiction titles that describe the plight of North Korean refugees: *Escape from North Korea: The Untold Story of Asia's Underground Railroad*; *Escaping North Korea*; *The Defector: Escape from North Korea*; *Escaping North Korea: Defiance and Hope in the World's Most Repressive Country; A Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea;* and *Dear Leader: My Escape from North Korea*. In reframing an unknown North Korean refugee crisis into terms that can be widely understood by a larger American audience, this analogy transforms these refugees into a persecuted group worthy of attention and rescue.

This section uses Melanie Kirkpatrick's *Escape from North Korea*, a 2012 non-fiction title, to identify the making of the North Korean refugee through the Underground Railroad analogy for the larger American audience. I then move to the 2004 documentary *Seoul Train* to show how it has customized the analogy for the purposes of the North Korea human rights movement, paying particular attention to how it relies on visuality to produce certain forms of knowledge that can be easily extracted, circulated, and consumed. I bring *Escape from North Korea* and *Seoul Train* together *to* explicate the textual and visual strategies that these materials of the North Korea human rights enterprise had adopted to incite affect, connections, and action.

In *Escape from North Korea*, Kirkpatrick cites a passage from the "Underground Railroad Record" to introduce each part of her book, thereby asking the reader to use the Underground Railroad stories to guide their understanding of North Korean refugees.[71] For example, Kirkpatrick offers this passage:

[71] Kirkpatrick's book is divided into six parts: the complicated migration of North Korean refugees, the trafficking of North Korean women in China, the influence of Christian-based advocates, the work of Korean Americans in the crisis, and the possibility of reunification.

> Anthony had fully made up his mind that when the last day of December ended, his bondage should end also, even if he should have to accept death as a substitute. He then began to think of the Underground Rail Road and of Canada; but who the agents were, or how to find the depot, was serious puzzle to him. —The Underground Railroad Record November 1854.[72]

This passage lays out the stakes and the consequences that await those that traverse the Underground Railroad. The chapter that follows then details the danger, desperation, and ultimately, hope that North Koreans experienced along their escape routes. Kirkpatrick thus uses the imagery and the language of the Underground Railroad to provide a shortcut to the emotions that should be felt by the reader, in the hope of inciting them to action against the serious threat that North Korea allegedly poses to its people and more broadly, the global community. By underscoring the fact that these refugees are resorting to death to escape North Korea communicates the severity of this crisis, and constructs the refugees as a figure that is worthy of our attention, and rescue.

Kirkpatrick also explicitly pairs the slaves who escaped through the Underground Railroad with North Korean refugees who fled North Korea. For instance, Kirkpatrick begins her book by comparing the life of Abram Harris, a slave who escaped his owner in 1857, with Hannah, who left North Korea and settled in China.[73] Drawing on her four-hour interview with Hannah, Kirkpatrick recounted the horrors Hannah faced during the journey, and the fact that Hannah did not "smile" until Kirkpatrick asked about her life is like United States, to which she replied, "My heart feels free."[74] However, what makes the comparison between Harris and Hannah glaring is that Harris was escaping *the United States* whereas Hannah was fleeing to it. The pairing of these narratives thus

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[72] Melanie Kirkpatrick, *Escape from North Korea: The Untold Story of Asia's Underground Railroad* (New York: Encounter Books, 2014) 20.
[73] Ibid, 2.
[74] Ibid, 3.

places the United States in the simultaneous role of being both perpetrator and savior. While the pairing contains within it the possibility of disrupting U.S. claim of benevolence, Kirkpatrick chose to represent the United States as the destination for freedom for North Korean refugees who were fleeing "the immoral regime."[75]

In particular, I am interested in how the North Korea human rights movement has emphasized the narrative of family separation, often articulated through the figure of the refugee child. Claudia Castaneda has conceptualized the child: "…as a potentiality rather than an actuality, a becoming rather than a being: an entity in the making."[76] I investigate the narrative of family separation and the child figure in *Seoul Train*, one of the first cultural texts to make the analogy between the Underground Railroad and North Korean refugees palpable to an American audience. It marks the routes traveled by North Korean refugees, identifying and interviewing the handlers or "conductors" that assist refugees in their migration, and bring attention to U.S lawmakers and advocates "or abolitionists" who staunchly advocate for American intervention. *Seoul Train* uses these interviews to narrate its footage—narration that instructs the audience how to process the images that are being shown to them. Jim Butterworth and Lisa Sleeth produced, directed, and provided camera work for *Seoul Train.* Both Butterworth and Sleeth decided to make the film after attending a presentation on the food and refugee crisis in North Korea by a *New York Times* reporter.[77] In a PBS interview, Butterworth and Sleeth shared that they have screened the film three times on Capitol Hill and have "seen laws passed and polices

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[75] Ibid, 8.
[76] Claudia Castaneda, *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) 1.
[77] Independent Lens, "Filmmaker Q&A," *Independent Lens*, PBS, No Date, http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/seoultrain/qa.html.

changed."[78] As one of the first documentaries on North Korean refugee crisis to cater to an American audience, *Seoul Train* is significant because it reflects the discursive practices that have been adopted by the North Korea Human Rights movement to make itself relevant to an American audience. In addition to relying on the language and imagery of the Underground Railroad, Butterworth and Sleeth center the film on the figure of the child. The most significant footage of *Seoul Train*, which shows refugees rushing into consulates or protesting, is not original but has been lifted from other sources and edited accordingly. For instance, the filmmakers do this with Han-mi and her family, whose story became an international incident.

On May 8th 2002, *The New York Times* reported that in Shenyang China, seven North Koreans tried to rush through the entrance of the Japanese Consulate to seek refugee status. Two North Koreans had climbed over the wall of the consulate the night before; the remaining North Koreans included a 2-year-old child who attempted to bypass Chinese guards by running through the front entrance. The article explains that there has been a growing trend of North Koreans living in secret in China who feared being repatriated back to North Korea where they would be punished. China does not recognize North Koreans as refugees but consider them "illegal economic migrants." *Seoul Train* appropriated the footage of this incident to advocate for the regime collapse of North Korea. Although the incident with Han-mi and her family was more about the repatriation agreement between North Korea and China, the filmmakers refitted this footage to support the intervention of the United States into this refugee crisis.

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[78] Butterworth and Sleeth do not specify what specific legislation was passed as a result of these screenings however, North Korea human rights Act of 2004 was passed during the same time of release of the film. It is possible that the filmmakers gave congressional members early screenings before the initial release. See Ibid.

Figure 1.1: Han-mi watching her mother.[79]

In the original footage, the focus on Han-mi's face is only for a mere second, whereas in *Seoul Train*, the filmmakers freeze the footage and zero in on Han-mi's face. This close-up highlights the despair of a little girl watching her mother being wrestled to the ground by men in military uniform. The filmmakers also removed the audio in this instance to focus the audience on Han-mi's expression of fear, sadness, and confusion. Paula Rabinotwitz explains that the technique of the close-up "…heightens emotional intensity" which "…sutures the viewer into the scenic space."[80] As mentioned above, one

[79] I borrow this photograph from Mike Kim's *Escaping North Korea*. I used this version of this photograph because of its clarity whereas using a snapshot from *Seoul Train* would be grainy. See Mike Kim, *Escaping North Korea: Defiance and Hope in the World's Most Repressive Country* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008) cover.

[80] Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (New York: Verso, 1994) 24.

of the techniques of human rights media is that it uses certain symbols to forge a connection with the audience; it is through this "emotional engagement" that the significance of the issue becomes established. In this case, Han-mi becomes the object of identification, whose innocence must be protected. *Seoul Train* is quite effective at this strategy through its use of concentrated close ups and the slowing and freezing of images. *Seoul Train* does more than inform; it attempts to have the audience lift themselves from the confines of reality and "surrender themselves to the immediacy of the reality onscreen."[81] In this moment of surrender, the audience becomes a witness because the medium of human rights enables "…images of suffering [to] travel" and constructs "audiences as virtual witness, a subject position that implies responsibility for the suffering of others."[82] After this scene, the audience is informed that Han-mi and her family have been arrested.

The Han-mi footage circulated through South Korean media, creating outrage among citizens, thus placing pressure on the government to arrange for the release of Han-mi and her family. At the end of the film, Han-mi and her family are shown arriving at the airport in South Korea and being greeted by a large crowd of people. As "virtual witnesses," members of the South Korean public held their government responsible for arranging the release of Han-mi and her family. In the immediacy of the moment, these witnesses became suspended from the geopolitical reality that specifies how North Korean refugees like Han-mi and her family are to be treated in such circumstances. In regards to North Korean refugees, Chinese policy stipulates that they must be

[81] Meg McLagan, "Principles, Publicity, and Politics: Notes on Human Rights Media," *American Anthropologist* (2003) 606.
[82] Ibid, 608.

immediately returned to North Korea.[83] In this moment of visibility, Han-mi and her family became the exception to the rule, which was made possible because the circulation of the footage allowed for public intervention. *Seoul Train* appropriated and accentuated the footage of Han-mi and her mother's struggle at the embassy to reach a larger audience and to induce legislative change in refugee law. By showing the scene of Han-mi and her family arriving at the airport being welcomed by members of the South Korean government and people, it demonstrates that public intervention can succeed. But again, this ending relies on the exceptional figure, in this case, Han-mi, whose innocence makes it for easy for the audience to connect to her cause.

In 2009, reporters Laura Ling and Euna Lee were arrested by North Korean authorities for illegally crossing into North Korea. Several months later, with the assistance of former President Bill Clinton, both women were released. After they were released, each published a book recounting their experiences. Euna Lee's *The World is Bigger Now: An American Journalist's Release from Captivity in North Korea* depicts the first time she came into contact with Han-mi. While working at "Current TV," Lee was asked to edit *Seoul Train* into a ten-minute clip. In response to the footage of Han-mi and her family, Lee expressed her relief that they were able to find a "happy ending," but that the "shocking footage" made it difficult for her to "…forget the desperate dash for freedom, and the heartbreaking confusion on little Han-mi's face. She was only a little older than Hana (her daughter) at the time, so these scenes really affected me."[84] For Lee, the pain that she felt when witnessing the separation of Han-mi from her mother became

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[83] Lankov, Andrei. "North Korean Refugees in Northeast Asia," *Asian Survey* (2004) 856.
[84] Euna Lee and Lisa Dickey, *The World is Bigger Now: An American Journalist's Release from Captivity in North Korea* (New York: Broadway Books) 23.

compounded by her own motherhood. The filmmakers' focus on Han-mi and her mother allows for these layers of affiliations that rely on feelings of sacrifice, unconditional love, desperation, and fear to emerge.

In his book, *Escaping North Korea: Defiance and Hope in the World's Most Repressive Country*, Mike Kim recalled his reaction to the Han-mi clip: "…I still remember the image of Han-mi, who was two years old at the time, standing safely inside the consulate crying, while just a few feet away, outside the gate, Chinese guards held down her mother…"[85] Kim's book uses a snapshot of the confrontation between Han-mi and the Chinese guards as its cover. The image seems to have incited the same strong reactions from the public. In a review of the book, Michael Gibb, the deputy editor of the *Korea JoongAng Daily*, believes that the image lingers because "it's the brutal force the Chinese guards are using to prevent the mother from reaching her child. It's the fear spreading across the toddler's face. It's the innocence of the pink clothes of the escapees against the officious green of the starched military uniforms."[86] In this consumption of the image, Han-mi becomes defined through her innocence against the violent contrast of her mother being wrestled to the ground by Chinese guards. As described by Gibb, Han-mi remained unprotected because her mother could not reach her. Gibbs invites the audience to adopt this protective role when he asks: "How did we as humans become so savage that we have let this kind of vicious inhumanity persist?"[87]

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[85] Mike Kim, *Escaping North Korea: Defiance and Hope in the World's Most Repressive Country* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008) 136.
[86] Michael Gibb, "No easy way out of North Korea," *Korea JoonAng Daily* 6 Dec 2008, 1 March 2011< http://joongangdaily.joins.com/article/view.asp?aid=2898252>.
[87] Ibid.

The circulation of Han-mi's image depicts a threat to her innocence—and by extension, the innocence of North Koreans who lived under the tyranny of the North Korean government. The Han-mi incident thus communicates the tenet of the larger political claim at hand—the collapse of North Korea for humanitarian reasons. Suzanne Scholte, a key figure in the North Korea human rights movement, who appeared in *Seoul Train*, concludes: "The South Korean government is afraid of regime collapse. But that's wrong to fear that. They should be welcoming it and they should be planning for it."[88] Scholte's push for collapse reveals how militarism becomes a protective measure against human rights violations. This ethic of humanitarianism is thus grounded in the exercise of state aggression and violence, and in this case, for the war on terror. Han-mi would find herself in the public spotlight, this time, in the Oval Office.

A couple years after the incident, in 2006, in celebration of "North Korea human rights Week," then President George Bush invited Han-mi and her family to the White House along with other family members of Japanese citizens who had been abducted by North Korean agents.

[88] Incite Productions, *Seoul Train*, directed by Jim Butterworth, Lisa Sleeth, and Aaron Lurbusky (2004; Boulder: Incite, 2004) DVD.

Figure 1.2: Han-mi and President George W. Bush.[89]

In this image, Han-mi, now six-years-old, was meeting the President of the United States, a drastic difference to how she was first introduced to the world. Yen Le Espiritu argues that the re-narration of the Vietnam War as an American victory has been dependent on the figure of the Vietnamese refugee—an object that solidifies the larger narrative of US benevolence. The Vietnamese refugee is cast into this before and after model: "Before" the rescue, the Vietnamese refugee is shown living in desperate conditions, whereas in the "after," the refugee is shown as "…flourishing in cosmopolitan and affluent United States."[90] In the case of Han-mi and her family, her "before" is depicted as living in North Korea, which has been regarded by former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton as a

[89] Getty Images, "Bush Meets Family Members of Japanese Abducted by North Korea," gettyimages.com. April 28, 2006. http://www.gettyimages.com/event/bush-meets-with-family-members-of-japanese-abducted-by-north-korea-57470553#united-states-president-george-w-bush-speaks-with-kim-hanmi-the-of-picture-id57486310/.

[90] Yen Le Espiritu, "The 'We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose' Syndrome: U.S. Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the 'Fall of Saigon'" *American Quarterly* 58. No. 2 (June 2006) 341.

"state-sponsor of terrorism;"[91] her "after" is meeting the U.S. president in the White House.

In the meeting with Bush, Han-mi was dressed in pink, the same color she was wearing in her "before" image. However, Bush's other guests, were not prominently featured in the photograph, nor mentioned by name in the description of the photograph. I contend that they are not the focus because their narrative has not been resolved as their children have not been found.[92] Instead, Han-mi became the center of attention because her rescue has been completed. In the meeting, President Bush "…promised six-year-old Kim Han-mi that he will work hard for freedom, so the people of North Korea can raise their children in a world that's free and hopeful."[93] Bush expressed his disbelief over the "heartless" nature of North Korea in that it would condone abductions in the first place. Bush positions the U.S. as the antidote to such brutality by identifying its role of providing freedom and hope to other refugees. This photograph of Han-mi symbolizes this promise and the possibility of resolution via state intervention for others who were in the same conditions that she was once in.

Although North Korean refugees are still subject to punishment if found, their "escape stories" are still being circulated through public cultural media like *Escape from North Korea* and *Seoul Train*. I focused on Han-mi because of her visibility as a

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[91] Associated Press, "U.S. mulls putting N. Korea back on terror list," *MSNBC* 7 June. 2009, 7 June 2009 http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/31153424/

[92] The mother of Megumi Yokota is in the photograph but is not pictured. Megumi Yokota was one of the eight children that had been abducted by North Korea agents in 1977. Although it has been reported that Yokota had committed suicide as her remains were sent to her parents in 2004, DNA tests proved that they were not her remains. See The Chosun Ilbo, "Megumi Yokota 'Seen Alive in 1994.'" *The Chosun Ilbo* 27 May 2008, 14 March 2011 < http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2008/05/27/2008052761020.html>

[93] Sun Tae-kyung, "Bush Calls on Pyeongyang to Respect Human Rights," *Korea's Global TV: Arirang* 29 April 2006, 1 Feb 2011 <http://www.arirang.co.kr/News/News_View.asp?nseq=61399&code=Ne8&category=1>

marketing tool for *Seoul Train.* For example, when you visit the homepage of *Seoul Train,* Han-mi's face can be located next to their URL in the address box—Han-mi has been transformed into an icon of the rescued North Korean refugee. Also, if you search for reviews for the film, this photograph always seems to accompany the text. Han-mi has thus become the defining feature of the film and the event itself. Of course, the marketability of Han-mi resides in her innocence, fear, and confusion as a child—these emotional markers become the points of identification that are immediately felt with her face. These materials work together to bring insight into how the North Korea human rights movement has adopted textual and visual strategies in the cultural sphere to communicate the emergency of this crisis and to suggest available legislative solutions to the problem.

If They Are Here, It Has To Be True: Supplemental Value of Refugee Testimonies

In a June 2002 congressional hearing, Debra Liang-Fenton, the Vice Chair of the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea, reported that Han-mi and her family were now in Seoul. The hearing was held a month after the incident with Han-mi's family and the Chinese guards. Liang-Fenton's testimony illustrates that Han-mi's story had traveled all the way to the congressional halls of the United States. Liang-Fenton did not elaborate on Han-mi's story so it could be assumed that congressional members were already familiar with her story. Along with her update, Liang-Fenton testified that "human rights violations and abuses affect a larger majority of 23 million North Korean people. There is precious little specific information available about human rights in North Korea since the government refuses entry to international human rights groups. This in

itself causes for profound concern."[94] In other words, if North Korea refused inspections, they must be hiding something.

North Korea was also accused of improperly distributing the international aid it received from non-governmental organizations and foreign countries. I am not concerned with the validity of this accusation, but with how these hearings did not cite concrete evidence to prove these accusations. Instead, the mere presence of North Korean refugees was used as evidence for these claims of corruption. In other words, the mere presence of North Korean refugees articulated the failure of North Korea—a political and rhetorical maneuver that has been practiced since the Cold War. In *Body Counts*, Yen Le Espiritu explains that the U.S. acceptance of refugees fleeing from communism was valuable because they were considered "living symbols of communism's failure."[95] In this case, the refugees' testimonies supplemented the larger belief in North Korea's inability to care for its people, or in the words of former President George W. Bush, its "true nature." If they (North Korean refugees) are here, then it has to be true.

Instead of framing congressional hearings as an act of "information gathering," cultural anthropologist Phyllis Pease Chock argues that these proceedings and the testimonies reflect how "…ideologies [that are] put to work in the talk, both as practical activity and as ritual performance."[96] Chock alternatively imagines the congressional hearing as a site where cultural narratives like "…canonical versions of national myths and hegemonic ideolog[ies] [that] encompass the speakers' disparate renderings of

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[94] Subcommittee on Immigration, *Examining the Plight of North Korean Refugees: The Case of North Korea*, 107th Congress., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, June 2002) 38.
[95] Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and the Militarized Refuge(es)* (Oakland: University of California Press 2014) 8.
[96] Chock, Phyllis P. "'Illegal Aliens and 'Opportunity': Myth-Making in Congressional Testimony." *American Ethnologist* 2 (1991): 278.

events" are reproduced.[97] The myth that is circulated in these select hearings is that North Korea's collapse will model Eastern Europe's—the fleeing of refugees will destabilize North Korea just as the flight of the Eastern European refugees toppled communist rule in Eastern Europe.[98] The reality was that Eastern Europeans who defected were "caught between the administration's desire to promote escape and powerful legislators' declination to accommodate those who did so within the United States."[99] The collapse of Eastern Europe overshadowed the fact that Eastern European refugees did not receive the necessary support and resources. This section uses Chock's theorization to highlight how the "information-gathering" process of congressional hearings is not neutral but builds on existing narratives. The myth of the Eastern European model of collapse reveals how refugees have been used as nonmilitary weapons to bring the downfall of unsavory nation-states.

By analyzing a selection of hearings, I trace how congressional members, expert witnesses, and refugee testimonies echo each other to create a discernable narrative of how North Korea is interiorly differentiated. Also, the lack of "significant partisan distinctions on human rights policy toward North Korea" in the hearings allows for a narrative free of partisan bickering that clouds most congressional discussions.[100] As such, these hearings repeatedly reproduced the United States as a humanitarian agent who safeguards the global community thus sustaining the hierarchy between the United States and everyone else it "helps" beneath it. These hearings function as ritualistic practices

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[97] Ibid.
[98] Susan L. Carruthers, "Between Camps: Eastern Bloc: 'Escapees' and Cold War Borderlands," *American Quarterly* 57, no 3 (2005) 911-942.
[99] Ibid, 913.
[100] Committee on International Relations, *North Korea: Human Rights, Refugees, and Humanitarian Challenges*, 108th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 2004) 6.

that "work" to ensure the hegemonic narration of the United States as a reputable humanitarian with a hierarchy that accords to its formation. This hierarchy is mirrored in how these hearings are conducted in which refugee testimonies are given at the end after congressional members and expert witnesses have spoken, thus ultimately framing how these testimonies should be understood. The space of the congressional hearing is a significant site of knowledge production because it explicates how the state (through the legislative branch) collaborates with non-state actors and agencies to exercise state power. This collection of hearings reflects the ability of the state to sustain the existing knowledge about North Korea by incorporating the testimonies of North Korean refugees and expert witnesses to authenticate its claims. I read this collection of hearings as conversations that have blended into each other over time that reify North Korea's interiorized difference and thus the necessity of its inevitable demise.

"Experts" who were called on to testify on North Korea's improper distribution of aid consistently commented on the lack of information, yet proceeded to make claims despite this ambiguity. In a June 2002 hearing, Arthur E. Dewey, the Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration, states:

> We do not have a lot information about what goes on in North Korea and we have little information also about the situation on the border, *but we certainly have enough* to realize that this would be on anyone's short list of greatest manmade disasters in the world.[101]

What do we certainly have enough of? Just like Senator Sam Brownback from above, Dewey's certainty of North Korea's culpability in its own "disasters" makes the need for evidence to prove otherwise unnecessary. In a 2005 hearing, Marcus Noland, a scholar

[101] Subcommittee on Immigration, *Examining the Plight of North Korean Refugees: The Case of North Korea*, 107th Congress., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, June 2002) 5.

who has published work on refugees, also assumes North Korea's corruption of foreign aid: "How large is this diversion, and what effect does it have? No one knows for sure, but it is likely to be substantial"—which translates to: whatever they are doing, it's bad.[102] Noland argues that North Korea's diversion of foreign aid to its people is a larger reflection of its "…denial of a battery of other rights to its citizens. If these rights were present, neither the great famine nor the ongoing food shortages would have occurred."[103] Noland's argument dismisses the fact that the great famine was not engineered by the North Korean government but was the accumulation of natural disasters, unfavorable agricultural conditions, and changes in its relationship with the former Soviet Union.[104] Instead, North Korea's "behavior" was located as the source of its own demise. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) took these criticisms of North Korea's actions one step further by subtly questioning the mental state of its leadership:

> well, however we would like to characterize the mental state of their leader and the leaders of the regime. But we do know they are willing to see larger numbers of their own people starve to death while they pump money into their military establishment; perhaps, out of some physiological paranoia.[105]

By focusing on the mental state of North Korean leaders, these experts ignored the structural conditions that may explain the current state of North Korea. Rohrabacher's testimony echoed President George W. Bush's first State of the Union after 9/11 in which he accused North Korea of prioritizing its proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

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[102] Committee on International Relations, *The North Korea human rights Act of 2004: Issues and Implications*, 109th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2005) 49.
[103] Ibid, 49.
[104] Sarah Fahy, *Marching through Suffering: Loss and Survival in North Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015) 3.
[105] Committee on International Relations, *North Korea: Humanitarian and Human Rights Concerns,* 107th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: May 2002) 39.

over the welfare of its own people. My objective is not to discredit the claims made in these congressional hearings, but to focus on how assumptions based on North Korea's interiorized difference produced simplified conclusions. As such, refugee testimonies merely supplemented this common sense that had already formed around North Korea. For example, in his introduction to refugee testimonies during a 2003 hearing, Senator Brownback stated: "What you're about to see has been going on for 50 years since the end of the Korean conflict. It's about time that behavior comes to an end."[106] The practice of including refugee testimonies at the end of the congressional hearings also allowed the testimonies by congressional members and "witnesses" to set the stage for the North Korean refugees' stories. Besides being the symbol of North Korea's failure, North Korean refugees represented the potentiality of *complete* success in the Korean peninsula while continuing the success of the war on terror. The duality of this ideological labor articulates the durability of North Korean refugees. In a May 2002 hearing, Norbert Vollersten, a medical doctor who had worked in North Korea, testified: "I have to speak and I have to believe in the power of refugees. That means a land of refugees can lead to the final collapse of a terror regime. And North Korea is a terror regime."[107] Vollersten's statement can be read in two ways: "the final collapse" of North Korea signals an end to the Korean War (more broadly, the Cold War), or one axis down on the war on terror's "axis of evil."

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[106] Committee on Foreign Relations, *The Hidden Gulag: Putting Human Rights on the North Korea Policy Agenda*, 108th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC: November 2003) 3.

[107] For this paper, I will refer to each hearing by the year when it took place. However, there were two hearings that took place in 2002 that I refer to each by the month and year. See Committee on International Relations, *North Korea: Humanitarian and Human Rights Concerns*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: May 2002) 45.

Just as *Seoul Train* relied on the affective pull of Han-mi and her family, these congressional hearings also depended on an exceptional individual: Soon Ok Lee was that exception. Soon Ok Lee first testified in a May 2002 hearing and was referred to as a "Former Prison and Camp Prisoner." Lee was known for her 1999 memoir, *Eyes of Tailless Animals*, which detailed her experiences in a North Korean prison. Typically, witnesses may be interrupted by questions or their testimonies may be suspended because congressional members have to leave to vote on other legislations. In the case of Soon Ok Lee, she was granted more time because her testimony was "…stunning [in its] details of human hardships" and conveyed "the depth of her experiences and convictions."[108] Besides the incredible length (at over 20 pages) of Lee's prepared statement, there was also an accompaniment of illustrations. Lee worked with a volunteer art student to produce these drawings. Here is a drawing depicting the treatment of North Korean prisoners by North Korean prison guards:

[108] Ibid, 84.

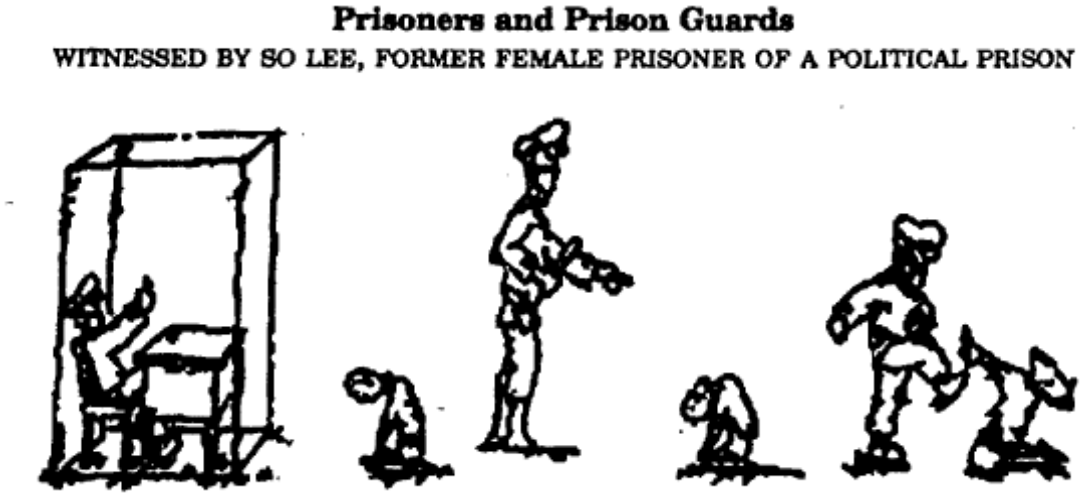

Figure 1.3: A drawing of prisoners and prison guards witnessed by So Lee.[109]

Note the rudimentary nature of these illustrations. They all have basic captions like this one, but Lee's prepared statement filled in these drawings with details. These drawings were never discussed in the hearing itself, but at its close, Congressman Ed Royce (R-CA) encouraged his fellow congressional members to read Lee's lengthy statement in its entirety. For those who could not attend the hearing, the drawings provided a visual substitute for the affect of her personal testimony. These illustrations attempted to communicate the brutality, torture, violence that Lee experienced in a very direct way—its visualization left no room for alternative interpretations because they there for you to see, not imagine. No other refugee testimony within this collection of hearings has provided such textual and visual details like Soon Ok Lee. As noted above, Lee was given more time because of the details she has been able to provide in her testimony and her "convictions" that included advocating for the humanitarian collapse of North Korea.

[109] Committee on International Relations, *North Korea: Humanitarian and Human Rights Concerns*, 107th Cong., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: May 2002) 61.

James Leach (R-IA) would preside over two more hearings on the plight of North Korean refugees in 2004 and 2005—I bring this up because like with any other humanitarian project, there are always figures that re-appear time and time again, thus marking their position as gatekeepers. For instance, Leach's giving Lee more time to convey her "conviction" reveals what types of knowledge are validated within this movement. In the case of Lee, what made her testimony (or testimonies) particularly compelling was because it aligned with the narrative of regime collapse that relied on North Korean refugees to destabilize North Korea: "In my view, for North Korea to collapse, we need more refugees to leave North Korea. This way, we can prevent war."[110] But how do we collapse a country without a war? And how do we collapse a country that we are still at war with?

According to a report conducted by the Congressional Research Service, in 2008, the United States halted its aid to North Korea because of its development of its nuclear program. The Obama administration implied that it would be "…willing to consider other types of aid if North Korea takes steps indicating that it will dismantle its nuclear program."[111] But in the same report, the researchers referred to a 2014 United Nations Commission of Inquiry, which found that North Korea's deliberate starvation of its people was a crime against humanity. If so, why would the U.S. also deliberately withhold aid if it knew that people in North Korea were starving? This refusal reveals the contradictions within the North Korea human rights movement in which (short term) violence justifies the pursuit of human rights. As nonmilitary weapons of regime change,

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[110] Subcommittee on Immigration, *Examining the Plight of North Korean Refugees: The Case of North Korea*, 107th Congress., 2nd sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, June 2002) 22.
[111] U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Foreign Assistance to North* Korea, by Mark E. Manyin and Mary Beth D. Nikitin, R40095 (2014).

refugee testimonies supplemented the existing common sense (and conclusions) about North Korea with their "insider perspective;" they also authenticated it. Refugee testimonies provide a form of affective labor that cannot be duplicated by any congressional members or "expert" witnesses—their desperation, perseverance, innocence, survival, and triumphs (as articulated in these hearings) make North Korean refugees worthy of rescue and intervention.

Lee's story was circulated through multiple outlets outside of the congressional hearing. Lee would testify at another hearing in June 2002 but would submit only a prepared statement at a 2004 hearing because she was at a vigil for North Korean refugees just outside of the hearing. An abbreviated version of Lee's testimony was also published in the November 2002 issue of *Harper's* Magazine with the title "Made in North Korea" which was categorized in the magazine under "ordeal." Lee would also be named in Senator Sam Brownback's autobiography, *From Power to Purpose*, as the person who provided insider information about North Korea based on her experience in a North Korean prison that Brown described as a "heartrendering story."[112] I bring attention to Lee's appearance in these multiple sites to show how her narrative is used to echo key ideas and conclusions in the North Korea human rights movement. Of course, Sun Ok Lee is the only figure to be in multiple places, but there are other state agents, non-state actors, and scholars who do so as well to cohere a singular knowledge base around North Korea. I argue each segment of these contributors (or producers of this knowledge) provides a different degree of credibility and certification that contemplates

[112] Sam Brownback, *From Power to Purpose: A Remarkable Journey of Faith and Compassion* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007) 164.

each other but is ultimately rooted in the residual geopolitics of the Korean War—which found new life in the war on terror. While the first two sections focused on the exceptionalism of North Korean refugees, the last portion concludes with the exceptionalism of the individual.

Coming Full Circle: Conceptualizing "Humanitarian Citizenship" through the Bush Institute

> We must do more to improve the human condition of North Korea especially those of us blessed to live in free societies. Over the past year, the Bush Institute has brought together experts, government officials, and leaders in civil society and business to form a new path for improving the human condition in North Korea. We have issued a call to action to help raise global awareness of the suffering of North Korean people. We can do more to support and empower refugees, break down informational barriers in North Korea, and make human rights a priority for all governments. Please join me in standing with the people of North Korea. —Former President George W. Bush [113]

This passage was transcribed from a 2015 video clip provided by the Bush Institute—thirteen years after Bush's 2002 State of the Union in which he declared North Korea a member of the "axis of evil." While this passage does acknowledge the collaboration between the public and private sector that constitutes the larger North Korea human rights movement, this section focuses on how the single citizen-subject is called into action for this cause. Bush's appeal to the "blessed" suggests that those living in "free" societies have an abundance of resources that can "improve the human condition" of North Korea. This plea illustrates Grewal's concept of humanitarian citizenship, which "…is constructed against those who are not allowed to be citizens and on behalf of those believed to require Western rescuers; it works through networks of foundations, resources

[113] George W. Bush, "President George W. Bush: A Call to Action on Human Rights in North Korea," *The Bush Center,* online video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1mTsOwZsWA.

from groups and individuals, and relies on privileged forms of mobility."[114] I use this concept to direct our attention to how the individual is incorporated into this human rights movement, and how the individual also becomes exceptionalized. In the North Korea human rights enterprise, the mobility of information becomes the key that subjects of the West hold above North Koreans. Bush suggests that we use this privilege to spread the information that we do have (from North Korean refugees) to "improve the human condition of North Korea." Neda Atanasoski explains that this "humanizing mode of governance" calls upon individuals to place "…their faith in a global humanity manifest in normative articulations of racial, religious, and cultural diversity enshrined as individual juridical rights."[115] Although, Bush does not directly speak to this multiculturalism, the ways in which the U.S. portrays itself as a beacon of diversity has been used to exemplify the freedoms it offers.

Unlike the Bush of 2002, when he was in elected office, the Bush Institute shifts from the sole exercise of state power to include non-state actors to illustrate a collaborative neoliberalism of: "the humanitarian order [that] encompasses a wide range of individuals, groups, and organizations from both the Left and Right, and it brought them together within a neoliberal citizenship that partners the projects of militarism and empire."[116] As a non-partisan organization, the Bush Institute presents a collective of state actors, non-profit organizations, scholars, and other relevant figures who are working to: "expose the suffering of the North Korean people, put the gulags and other

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[114] Inderpal Grewal, "American Humanitarian Citizenship, The 'Soft' Power of Empire," *Gender, Globalization and Violence: Postcolonial Conflict Zones*, edited by Sandra Ponzanesi (New York: Routledge, 2014) 68.
[115] Neda Atanasoski, *Humanitarian Violence: The U.S. Deployment of Diversity* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2013) 5.
[116] Grewal, "American Humanitarian Citizenship, The 'Soft' Power of Empire," 69.

human rights abuses on the radar screen of opinion leaders and the general public, and develop policies with the public and private sectors to help the North Korean people."[117] In a way, Bush came full circle with the establishment of this institute, which compounds state action with other sources and resources to formulate a more comprehensive solution for the North Korean refugee crisis and by extension, the violation of human rights in North Korea.

The "Freedom in North Korea" section on the Bush Institute's website contains a variety of mechanisms to present its information about human rights violations in North Korea: infographics, video clips and reports/studies. This variety of informational mechanisms seeks to appeal to the spectrum of visitors who access the site from the casual browser to the concerned citizen to the skeptical academic. For the casual browser, infographics is able to streamline critical information into digestible pieces while providing a corresponding visual to drive its point. For the concerned citizen, video clips of interviews with relevant figures of the crisis and reports about North Korean refugees living in the United States and policy recommendations are available for viewing. Not only does the webpage work to inform its visitors but also to provide an opportunity to act upon that knowledge, in this case, this chance is presented in steps:

[117] The Bush Center, "Promoting Freedom in North Korea," bushcenter.org, February 16, 2016, http://www.bushcenter.org/explore-our-work/fostering-policy/promoting--freedom-in-north-korea.html.

Figure 1.4: Steps to #EXPOSENK.[118]

For the remainder of this section, I will refer to this list of steps as #EXPOSENK. #EXPOSENK relies on the digitally mobile and technologically privileged to achieve its objective of "exposing" North Korea—an action that suggests that there is something insidious to be discovered about the nation-state. This assumption fits in perfectly with Bush's earlier iterations of North Korea's inherent inability to care for its citizens. This hashtag reinforces the common sense about North Korea in such a succinct matter that renders additional explanation or clarification unnecessary. Like the Underground Railroad analogy, the hashtag functions as a discursive shortcut to a larger set of political objectives regarding North Korea, in this case, making the nation-state transparent for global intervention. #EXPOSENK elevates the digitally mobile, and technologically privileged to pursue and achieve this transparency. Grewal explains that digital media become the critical advantage in a human rights campaign in that even if the state in question is corrupted, digital media "provide[s] transparency—utilizes what are seen to be the democratizing aspects of new media."[119] The elevation of the digitally mobile and technically privileged turns the average citizen-subject into the exceptional figure, who

[118] Ibid.
[119] Grewal, "American Humanitarian Citizenship, The 'Soft' Power of Empire," 77.

chooses to use its "blessings" to uplift others. Grewal explains that Western media tends to "…celebrate[s] individual activists in Asia or Africa or Latin America, these individuals are understood as extraordinary and unusual rather than as normative citizens of their countries, as is the case with US humanitarians."[120] #EXPOSENK relies on the citizen-subject to utilize its digital access and participation in social media for the greater good of establishing freedom in North Korea.

The normative citizen-subject thus becomes exceptional because it uses the resources it has in abundance to uplift others. This work is done not in isolation but in collaboration with the larger confines of the Bush Institute—an organization that collapses the divide between the public/private and transnational/national. This partnership and its demands explicate how humanitarian citizenship functions in which individual actions become the critical site of change. In this case, the individual is critical to circulating the common sense about North Korea as articulated by the Bush Institute. Also, the reliance on this extraordinary citizen-subject (and its digital mobility and technological privileges) further pronounces the larger global hierarchy that has categorized North Korea as a "…poor, backward, and isolated place [that] should been relegated to history's graveyard."[121] For example, the iconic satellite picture of the Korean peninsula is used as a referent for North Korea's technological shortcomings. In the same video clip from above, Bush describes the picture:

> Satellite images of the Korean peninsula show a startling contrast between the North and South. While South Korea is alive with light, North Korea is shrouded in darkness just as stark in the contrast of human freedom. South Koreans live in a free and prosperous society. Just across the border,

[120] Grewal, "American Humanitarian Citizenship, The 'Soft' Power of Empire," 66.
[121] Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012) 7.

> twenty-four million North Koreans suffer tyranny and deprivation under brutal rule. Torture and political camps are routinely used to keep the population in line.[122]

This belief in North Korea's technological backwardness becomes further emphasized when the exceptional citizen-subject is called upon to utilize its digital mobility and technological privileges to "expose" this shortcoming. The exceptional citizen-subject is called upon to be become another conduit for the North Korea human rights enterprise to circulate the common sense understanding of North Korea.

Conclusion

As of 2017, fewer than two hundred refugees have been admitted to the United States through the North Korea human rights Act (NKHRA) since its passage in 2004. I suggest that the underlying object of the NKHRA was never about creating a significant North Korean refugee community in the United States but was instead a concerted effort to use the symbolic value of these refugees to prove North Korea's failure as nation-state. In other words, what makes the North Korean refugee exceptional is not necessarily the number of refugees, but the fact that they exist to prove North Korea's brutality of its people. This chapter underscores how this exceptionalism was made legible for the American audience through familiar narratives, figures, and tropes. The cultural materials that were analyzed in this chapter were grounded in the convenience of the present in which atrocities committed by American militarism are conveniently forgotten. By working concurrently across different forms, these cultural materials weave together a coherent and *common* narrative about North Korea and its people.

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[122] George W. Bush, "President George W. Bush: A Call to Action on Human Rights in North Korea," *The Bush Center,* online video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1mTsOwZsWA.

As I noted in the introduction, the objective of this analysis is not to disprove the claims that are being made by refugees and their advocates but instead to show how these narratives are being used to further U.S. state power and violence; in particular, how North Korean refugees have been used to construct North Korea's brutality and thus justify the continuation and escalation of American militarism in the peninsula. In other words, the goal of this analysis was to provide a foundation to understand the specific construction of the North Korean refugee within American-based context that designates the United States as an agent of intervention. In the following chapter, I focus on how the Korean American community has been prompted to fulfill this role as well. While this chapter details how this campaign has been narrated, the following chapter examines how young Korean Americans reckon with this narration through their own humanitarian work toward North Korean refugees and imbue North Korea with their transgenerational memories of violence and loss.

CHAPTER TWO:

"You're Korean, don't you care about your own people?" The Korean Diasporic Politics of LiNK's "People Over Politics" Campaign

> Twenty-four million people–ordinary people like you and me–face the world's most repressive government, but they have been lost in this definition of North Korea. This politicized and securitized narrative has created a barrier of apathy, preventing global citizens from engaging with this issue, causing a huge deficit in support for the North Korean people.
>
> -Liberty in North Korea (LiNK)

> They are my people.
>
> -Richard, LiNK Rescue Member

LiNK is a Southern California-based non-profit organization that aids in the "refugee rescues"[123] of North Korean refugees out of China. LiNK also supports refugee resettlement through different educational and professionalization or "empowerment" programs. Established in 2004, LiNK has raised over five million dollars and has helped or "rescued" over 500 refugees.[124] LiNK was founded by the Korean American Student Conference (KASCON), the largest national organization that hosts Korean American undergraduates on an annual basis to address issues facing the community. Not long after LiNK was established, the organization sought to broaden its reach to a more general American public via its "people over politics" campaign, whose goal is to humanize North Korean refugees as just "people" deserving of help.

This chapter examines how the ethnic and familial ties of LiNK's Korean American members challenge the language of universal human rights and

[123] LiNK uses the term "rescue" throughout their organizational material but does not situate itself as being the "rescuer." Instead, LiNK sees themselves as being only a helping help or a mediating force that is providing assistance to North Korean refugees.
[124] Liberty in North Korea, "Overview," *Financials*, Liberty in North Korea LiNK's, accessed April 24 2016, http://www.libertyinnorthkorea.org/financials/.

humanitarianism that the organization uses to persuade its audience to intervene on behalf of North Korean refugees. The opening epigraphs demonstrate this tension: In the first epigraph, LiNK encourages its audience to see North Koreans as "ordinary people like you and me;" in the second, a Korean American LiNK member moves beyond the "we are all people" mantra to claim kinship with North Koreans: "They are *my* people" (emphasis added). Other Korean American members whom I interviewed for this chapter echoed Richard's sentiment. For others, the memories of war, loss, and violence, as experienced by members of their family, have shaped their connections to the North Korean refugee crisis. However, the "people over politics" effort expunges any mention of the historical origins of the Korean War, especially the U.S. role in the division of the Korean peninsula.

In a 2005 congressional hearing to discuss the progress of the 2004 North Korean human rights Act, Adam Smith (D-WA) stated:

> The United States has by far the largest refugee settlement in the world. It is also home to the largest Korean population in the world outside of Korea. Many members of the highly successful Korean-American community came from the North around the time of the Korean War. Large networks of vibrant North Korean churches have expressed a desire to help their brothers and sisters who are seeking refuge.[125]

In this passage, Congressman Adam Smith mentioned the Korean War but only as a backdrop to the achievements of "the highly successful Korean-American community." And yet, the Korean Peninsula is still in a technical state of war, as evidenced by these reminders: the presence of 28,500 American troops in South Korea, as it is still designated a "combat zone;" the existence of long-separated Korean families, kept apart

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[125] Committee on International Relations, *The North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004: Issues and Implications*, 109th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 2005) 4.

by the highly regulated borders; the declaration of North Korea as a member of the "axis of evil;" and the highly-publicized plight of North Korean refugees.[126] In this chapter, I argue that the legacy of the Korean War and the division of the Korean Peninsula has created a different kind of belonging for Korean Americans within the larger Korean diaspora, particularly around familial and ethnic affiliation. And yet, the loss and violence that shaped these affiliations are often obscured by the touted "successes" of Korean Americans—an "organized forgetting" that justifies ongoing U.S. militarism in Korea.[127] This chapter investigates how LiNK's language of shared humanity works in relationship with its Korean American members' personal ties to Korea. It also examines how the trope of Korean American success displaces the responsibility of the North Korean refugee crisis onto the shoulders of Korean Americans, and thus turning them into actors who will intervene on behalf of this population.

As discussed in chapter one, the North Korean refugee crisis has become a major topic of attention amongst political scientists, policymakers, and scholars. Many political scientists have claimed that the 1990s famine in North Korea caused the mass exodus of North Koreans to surrounding countries. But Ji Yeon Yuh has argued that while the famine was the immediate catalyst, the "…instability, repression, conflict created by the political result of the Korean War, the framework of national division and opposing

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[126] Raina Han, "Continuing Impact of the Korean War on Korean Americans," *Encyclopedia of Asian American Issues Today Volume 2*, edited by Edith Wen-Chu Chen and Grace J. Yoo (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010) 782.

[127] I thank Simeon Man for articulating this argument for me and pushing me to think about how the citizenship of Korean Americans have been conditioned to ensure the continuation of U.S. militarism in Korea.

nation-states, are [the] underlying causes."[128] In contrast, LiNK presents North Korean leadership as the main cause of this crisis:

> The people of North Korea are denied even the most basic rights of free speech, free movement, and information of freedom, because the ruling elite prioritizes regime survival over all else. They use a brutally repressive system of political control to ensure their domination over society, employing extreme measures including collective punishment, public executions, and political prison camps.[129]

LiNK's designation of North Korean leadership as the ultimate and *only* perpetrator reveals how the language of universal human rights "renders illegible or 'rogue' rights-based interpretations of structural violence perpetrated by imperial nations."[130] What LiNK's charge obscures is how the Korean War has persisted as an active conflict by the continued presence of the American military at the DMZ. Christine Hong, a critic of the North Korean human rights movement, argues that this type of omission of "asymmet[rical] militarism" within LiNK's universal human rights discourse "amnestically wipes the slate of colonialism clean, adopting a conveniently presentist perspective."[131] As such, LiNK's platform of "people over politics" produces a form of antipolitics that centers on the suffering and desperation of individuals instead of on a "political discourse of comprehensive justice."[132]

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[128] Ji-Yeon Yuh, "Moved by War: Migration, Diaspora, and the Korean War," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8, no. 3 (2005) 285-286.
[129] There is a section that provides historical background to the Korean War but there are no explicit connections between the conflict and the current moment. Also, this history is not prominently placed like its other information materials. See Liberty in North Korea, "Why North Korea," *Learn*, Liberty in North Korea, April 24, 2016 accessed, http://www.libertyinnorthkorea.org/why-north-korea/.
[130] Christine Hong, "War by Other Means: The Violence of North Korean Human Rights," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 12, no. 2 (2014) 11.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Wendy Brown, "'The Most We Can Hope For,' Human Rights and the Politics of Fatalism" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103 (2004) 453.

While LiNK ensures that the Korean War continues to be forgotten, some young Korean Americans have continued to center the war. In my conversations with Korean American rescue team members, it is clear that the memories of the Korean War have been passed down to them from older generations. The memories of loss, family separation, and frustration over the division of Korea remain at the forefront of young Korean Americans' understanding of this crisis and provide a point of tension with LiNK's generalized slogan of "people over politics." Unlike LiNK, the Korean American organization Nodutdol, based in New York City, approaches the topic of North Korea through a radical critique of American imperialism and militarism in Korea.[133] The differences between Nudutdol and LiNK reflect a longer legacy of political divisions in the Korean diaspora in regards to unification, the role of the United States in Korea, and other war-related topics.[134] With its "people over politics" priority, LiNK remains committed to only helping North Korean refugees. I decided to focus on LiNK, rather than on Nudutdol, because of the accessibility of its organizational materials, staff, and its larger network of student volunteers. LiNK's infrastructure and professionalization provided much ease in the research for this chapter.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section maps out the organizational framework of LiNK which I examine through its promotional materials,

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[133] Nodutdol adopts an intersectional approach to understand the issues around its community such as economic exploitation, gender, and racial violence.

[134] After Korea's liberation from Japanese colonialism, two parties of the independence movement emerged: those who aligned with the Americans and those who partnered with the Siberian-Manchurian group. South Korea aligned with the Americans and produced what historian Richard Kim called a "…strategic reliance on the U.S. nation-state as a guarantor of the national goals of Koreans" and forged "the domestic and foreign policies of South Korea, which came to be manifested in a neocolonial relationship with the United States." Simply put, the legacy of Korean division produced its own divisions within the Korean diaspora. I suggest the varying objectives of LiNK and Nutdutdol reflect similar splits in the current state of U.S. and North Korean relations. See Richard S. Kim, *The Quest for Statehood: Korean Immigrant Nationalism and U.S. Sovereignty, 1905-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 160.

press coverage, and other related media that has been made available through its webpage. Through these materials I trace how LiNK's "people over politics" campaign places an onus on the role of North Korean refugees as advocates of change that begins their trek from their homeland to their successes as North Korean refugees in the United States with the unique capacity to "open" North Korea. The second section moves from the individual North Korean refugee to rescue team members. LiNK's rescue teams are made up of groups of individuals from universities, high schools, and churches. Instead of focusing on the collective of the rescue team, I look at how the individual rescue team member is valorized. I assert that positioning the individual as the site of change makes visible the neoliberal values of contemporary humanitarianism. While the first two sections seek to inform the public about how LiNK has attempted to universalize the North Korean human rights crisis on an organizational and volunteer level, the final section examines the ethnic affiliations that motivate the participation of Korean Americans. I conducted ten interviews with LiNK's Korean American rescue team members to better understand their reasons for joining the organization in the first place.[135] For these interviews, I reached out to the college rescue teams of LiNK via social media, which was made possible through the support of their rescue team manager, Sarah Palmer.[136] In my conversations with interviewees, I used a basic questionnaire that functioned more like a guide and through clarification and follow-up questions, these

[135] It was difficult to find Korean American members to discuss their participation about LiNK as some students may not have wanted discuss or publicize their participation in LiNK for numerous reasons: it's taboo to discuss North Korea in parts of the Korean American community, their parents may not approve of their participation, or any other related reason. For those reasons, the students that did interview with me, I gave them fictitious names to ensure anonymity. I included the questionnaire I used in the appendix.
[136] I interviewed Sarah to get an overview of how rescue teams function and how they interact with the organization. My interview with Sarah yielded a lot of information that was necessary to understand the significance of rescue teams in relationship to LiNK. Also, I was able to gain insight as to why college students are attracted to LiNK and thus decide to volunteer in the first place.

discussions expanded to include personal anecdotes, difficult family histories, and even positions on reunification.

As a young scholar writing about the North Korean human rights movement, I have found LiNK's public discourse around North Korean refugees problematic; however, I recognize the work it is trying to do for North Korean refugees. In its short twelve years, LiNK has raised a significant amount of money, amassed countless number of volunteers and donors, and has helped over 500 refugees—figures that should not be dismissed in any context. I wish to provide a balanced and critical portrait of LiNK to better understand how its work has impacted the makeup of the Korean diaspora in the United States.

"Changing the Narrative": LiNK's Organizational History and Framework

In response to the perceived North Korean human rights crisis, different scholars, policy makers, and advocates have supported Korean Americans in taking charge of the issue. Michael Horowitz, Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute, has regularly testified before congressional members about the human rights crisis in North Korea. Horowitz insists that if the Korean community or if "every Korean American church" went to Congress and demanded freedom for North Koreans 'Kim Jong Il would not survive…It is the leadership for the Korean American community, they are gaining a sense, which they do not have, of the power they have to shape events.'[137] Note that Horowitz's statement problematically assumes that Korean American political power and agency rests solely in institutions like the church. In her study on the connections between

[137] This was taken from an interview that Mike Kim conducted with Michael Horowitz for his book, *Escaping North Korea*. See Mike Kim, *Escaping North Korea: Defiance and Hope in the World's Most Repressive Country* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008) 215.

Korean Americans and foreign policy, Katherine Moon explains that the plight of North Korean refugees is a critical issue because it "attracts the interests, passion or sense of political or moral purpose of both Koreans and those without Korean heritage."[138] Moon argues that this movement has adopted this universal language so that the general American audience can "claim [the movement] as part of their own national creed; it can thus draw the sympathy and organizational interest of human rights organizations and individuals in the United States and around the world."[139] LiNK is a key example of how an organization has used the language of universal human rights to spread global awareness about the refugee crisis through their "people over politics" campaign.

In 2004, at the Eighteenth Annual Korean American Students Conference (KASCON), LiNK was created. At this KASCON, Jim Butterworth showed rough cuts of *Seoul Train*, which eventually became a seminal documentary of the North Korean human rights enterprise.[140] The film was part of KASCON's effort to educate young Korean Americans about the plight of North Korean people.[141] In an interview with *KoreaAM* about LiNK's beginnings, founding CEO Adrian Hong described LiNK as being "fueled more by passions" for reunification and for "saving everybody" in North Korea.[142] With its 70 chapters, the volunteer-based LiNK had a difficult time managing

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[138] Katherine H.S. Moon, "Ethnicity and U.S. Foreign Policy: Korean Americans," *Asia Policy* 13 (2012): 30.
[139] Ibid.
[140] My first chapter discusses how this film became a canonical piece in the North Korean human rights movement.
[141] C. O'Carroll and J. Hong, "Liberty in North Korea: Can You 'accelerate change' from the outside?" *NKNEWS*, nknews.org, accessed August 8, 2016 < https://www.nknews.org/2014/11/liberty-in-north-korea-can-you-accelerate-change-from-the-outside/>.
[142] Suevon Lee, "A Vital LiNK: How One Group Is Helping Change the Narrative on North Korea," *Kore*, August 5, 2015, http://kore.am/a-vital-link-how-one-group-is-helping-change-the-narrative-on-north-korea/.

its messaging.[143] Eventually Hannah Song replaced Hong as CEO and has been credited with turning LiNK into a "legitimate, functioning nonprofit" that has two-dozen salaried employees, interns, and team-building retreats.[144] LiNK re-directed their efforts from policy work to using storytelling as a method for change, in particular, focusing on North Korean people and "their potential to drive change."[145] This shift prioritized "people over politics." LiNK believes that an existing "barrier of apathy" prevents the global public from seeing North Korea's twenty-four million people as "ordinary people like you and me," which led to a "huge deficit in support" for North Koreans.[146] The language of LiNK's "people over politics" campaign demonstrates how "human rights and humanitarian law share a view of humanity as a unified legal community when crimes are committed that offend not only a nation or country but the entire human race."[147] As such, the connection of the individual to this larger community of humanity is used to appeal to the larger general public. LiNK's work in rescuing, settling, and empowering North Korean refugees allows the organization to use the successes of these programs to illustrate how individual action can culminate in a larger resolve—the "opening" and "transformation" of North Korea**.**

LiNK's services are divided into three parts: refugee rescues, resettlement, and empowerment programs. First, refugee rescues employ what they call a "free passage model" for North Korean refugees. Through this model, North Korean refugees can

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[143] Ibid.
[144] Hannah Song was a volunteer for LiNK when the organization was initially founded. Eventually, she moved up in the organization and became the CEO once Adrian Hong stepped down. See Ibid.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Liberty in North Korea, "People over politics," *libertyinnorthkorea.org*. (No date). http://www.libertyinnorthkorea.org/people-over-politics/.
[147] Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown, *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 5.

bypass potentially abusive brokers and rely on a network of LiNK-affiliated individuals who can provide them with ground support on "escape routes" through China and Southeast Asia. LiNK believes that its free passage model "…ensures that refugees are treated with dignity and respect through the risky journey, and allows them to begin their new lives in freedom without the burden of broker loans."[148] Second, LiNK offers resettlement assistance for refugees such as counseling, health care and financial support, community gatherings, and translation and interpretation services. The objective of LiNK's resettlement programs is to provide support for North Korean refugees in South Korea and the United States to overcome the obstacles that accompany resettlement and ultimately to become "self-sufficient."[149] Finally, LiNK's Empowerment Programs help refugees to "reach their full potential"[150] by offering English Tutoring & Cultural Exchange, Study Abroad and Career Development, Education Grants, and leadership training. For LiNK, it is not just about helping refugees fulfill their professional and personal ambitions but also about cultivating their role in becoming advocates for change in North Korea:

> North Korean refugees who have resettled in safe and free societies have a vital role to play in bringing forth change in their homeland. They have emerged as essential channels for getting information and resources back into North Korea. They are also the most important advocates for the North Korean people, and an unrivaled source of insight on the country. The more they can maximize their potential, the greater force there will be for change in North Korea, and the stronger the North Korean people will be in the long term. That's why we run our Empowerment Programs. We

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[148] Ibid.
[149] Liberty in North Korea, "Refugee rescues," *libertyinnorthkorea.org,* accessed April 10, 2016, http://www.libertyinnorthkorea.org/rescue-refugees/.
[150] Liberty in North Korea, "Empowerment programs," *libertyinnorthkorea.*org, accessed April 5, 2016, http://www.libertyinnorthkorea.org/empowerment-programs/.

> are investing in the long-term ambitions, potential, and strength of the North Korean people.[151]

In the previous chapter, I showed how in U.S. public and official discourse, the mere presence of North Korean refugees was used as proof of North Korea's terror. In contrast, LiNK views the North Korean refugees as advocates that can lead to change in North Korea. For example, Joseph Kim was one of the first North Korean refugees that LiNK supported. Kim has become a well-known advocate—giving a TED talk that has been viewed over two million times with 300 viewer comments that commend his bravery. He released a memoir titled, *Under the Same Sky: From Starvation in North Korea to Salvation in America* in 2016 that makes Amazon's top 100 books on North Korea. LiNK prominently features a screenshot of Kim at his TED talk under the "EMPOWERMENT" section of its webpage with the tagline: "Resettled North Koreans have emerged as some of the most effective agents of change on this issue—and they have the potential to do even more."[152] For LiNK, Joseph Kim represents the success that other North Korean refugees can emulate—a perfect advocate for the rescuing of other refugees. Kim's picture is also included in a photo collage with other refugees. When the cursor hovers over each photograph, a short paragraph appears that provides details about how that refugee has participated in LiNK's Empowerment Programs. The pictures of other refugees show them studying in school, using a computer, and traveling—evidence that these refugees are able to persevere despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles to lead "normal" lives. Unlike other organizations that commodify images of human

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[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.

suffering to attract attention and funding, LiNK showcases the success of its refugees to prove their worthiness of support.[153]

Additionally, LiNK commends the tenacity of North Korean refugees in the face of the challenges of resettlement: "…many of them show remarkable resilience and spirit in tackling these challenges, but they are also able to study and work (often at the same time), and find their grounding in their new surroundings. Not only that, many are able to send thousands of dollars back to their families in North Korea."[154] This description reflects how meritocracy is valued by LiNK. Instead of playing into the narrative of being saviors, LiNK sees itself as simply a helping hand: "…individuals may require assistance in order to claim their rights, but the assumption is still one of self-directed individuals pursuing their claims, immunities, privileges…"[155] LiNK constructs this journey to freedom as a universal human experience of persevering for a better life. This journey to freedom (and its various formations) through meritocracy parallels how Asian immigrants have been valorized through the model minority concept. The familiarity of the successful Asian immigrant becomes a method for LiNK to make North Korean refugees relatable and legible to the American public—a population that has been constructed as being unreletable because of North Korea's isolation from the global community. By mobilizing the model minority figure, the isolated and unrelatable North Korean refugee becomes the successful *and* familiar Asian immigrant. In this case, the successes of North Korean refugees can be used to obfuscate the role of the United States in the crisis. Yen Le Espiritu explains, "scholars and policymakers often wield [the model

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[153] Wilson and Brown, *Empire of Humanity*, 8.
[154]Liberty in North Korea, "Resettlement Challenges," *libertyinnorthkorea.org*, accessed April 20, 2017, http://www.libertyinnorthkorea.org/resettlement-challenges/.
[155] Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown, 8

minority] as an ideological weapon to chastise and discipline poor black and brown communities for perceived persistent problems of poverty, unemployment, and crime."[156] Similarly, the United States (and LiNK) uses the North Korean refugee to reprimand North Korea for its inability to care for its citizens while the U.S. continues to refuse aid to North Korea until the nation-state halts its development of "weapons of mass destruction." Instead of solely depending on the suffering of North Korean refugees to garner attention and action, LiNK's featuring the success of its refugees creates a familiar narrative and thus makes them relatable but also distances them from North Korea. In the context of the post-9/11 era, Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai explain that the model minority has been used by some South Asians to establish their distance from the "Muslim Other" of the South Asian diaspora and thus their commitment to the U.S. campaign against terrorism.[157] The language of success that defines the North Korean refugee (within LiNK) operates in a similar fashion, in that this construction challenges the image of failure that has been used to define North Korea and its people. In this case, just like the model minority figure, the valorization of the North Korean refugee's success ensures a global order in which the legitimacy of the United States is dependent on the illegitimacy of North Korea.

In *Race for Citizenship,* Helen Heran Jun explains that the construction of post-1965 Asian Americans as "competitive, self-enterprising, market driven,

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[156] Yen Le Espiritu, "Toward a Critical Refugee Study," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1, no, 1-2 (2006) 416.
[157] Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai, "The Remaking of Model Minority: Perverse Projectiles under the Specter of (Counter) Terrorism" *Social Text* 22, no. 3 (2004) 96.

instrumentalizing, highly productive" made this population "universally desirable."[158] In the same way, LiNK's representation of North Korean refugees as successful transforms them into advocates who have the potential to impact their compatriots still in North Korea.[159] This representation erases the role of the United States in the North Korean human rights crisis and places the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of "ordinary citizens" and North Korean refugees themselves. In other words, if North Korean citizens were not subjected to such repressive leadership, they would have been successful.

In *The Gift of Freedom*, Mimi Thi Nguyen explains that the gift of freedom is what allows subjects to "catch up" with the rest of modernity to fulfill their "preordained future, whether technological progress, productive capacity, or rational government."[160] For LiNK, it was the absence of freedom that made it impossible for these North Koreans to realize their potential. However, as Nguyen argues, this "gift of time" also includes "…the politics of comparison, homogenous time, and other commensurabilities—through the intervention (a war or development) that rescues history for those people stalled or suspended in time."[161] As the final stage of the Cold War, North Korea has been represented as being locked in time, unwilling to move forward, thus hindering its own progress. LiNK's focus on the success of North Koreans creates an afterimage of western intervention that clearly articulates its benefits of having the gift of time to move forward. While these afterimages do privilege the importance of "people" over "politics"—a

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[158] Helen Heran Jun, *Race for Citizenship: Black Orientalism and Asian Uplift from Pre-Emancipation to Neoliberal America* (New York City: NYU Press, 2011) 131.
[159] LiNK believes that one of the keys to changing North Korea is cultivating its underground economy because it will allows its citizens to pull themselves away from its tyrannical rule.
[160] Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012) 16.
[161] Ibid, 16

political statement is still being made that North Korean refugees are worthy of being rescued.

The LiNK's homepage features pictures of the "rescued" North Korean refugees, but the majority of them have their eyes blurred or their faces covered. In most cases, North Korean refugees fear the retribution that family members who still in live North Korea may face for their defections; therefore, many refugees live in anonymity to keep their families safe. At the same time, even when the refugees are disguised, the audience can still see their smiles, which communicates the successes of LiNK and the failures of North Korea. These portraits are a living reminder of the need for LiNK to continue its work and for others to join their efforts. The following section examines how LiNK takes these narratives of success and translates them into organizational tools for its college chapters or "rescue teams."

"YOU": The Cultivation of Humanitarian Citizenship in LiNK's Rescue Teams

LiNK offers a variety of resources to help its rescue team members organize, sustain, and maintain their respective chapters. These materials offer instruction on how to fundraise, how to conduct meetings, and even how to maintain the chapter during the summer. LiNK also provides downloadable and printable handouts, posters, and even photographs that can be shared between members and potential donors. As mentioned earlier, LiNK's founding member Adrian Hong explained that it was difficult for LiNK to manage its messaging because the organization relied on volunteer work. As such, these rescue team resources work to systemize how its rescue team members organize their branches and do so according to LiNK's main messaging: "people over politics." This section focuses on how LiNK's "people over politics" is practiced by its rescue team

members whereby the individual of this general collective becomes a key factor in LiNK's efforts to mitigate this humanitarian crisis. I argue that the elevation of the individual in this context exemplifies the concept of humanitarian citizenship. I use this concept to illustrate how rescue team members are reminded of their privilege and urged to help those who have been made powerless, in this case, North Korean refugees. This form of citizenship "…relies on the self-perception of Americans as 'good' and 'generous,' giving aid and coming to rescue of distant others."[162] While LiNK does depend on this self-perception, LiNK attempts to correct the perpetual victim/savior dynamic in human rights and humanitarian discourse through the language of empowerment, agency, and collectiveness; nevertheless, these corrective measures still elevate the Western subject and their ability to effect change. I argue that the Western subject or the individual remains at the forefront of solving this crisis because it is their freedoms that allow for the democratic-driven transformation of North Korea. LiNK's valorization of individual rescue team members and their potential to contribute to this change further minimizes the role and responsibility of the United States in the crisis. The following section examines how LiNK's materials call on the individual to fulfill this responsibility.

In order to help rescue members to remain "on message," LiNK has crafted a "brand guide" that illustrates the "basic standards for design and communication to unite this global movement into one body of action." The brand guide instructs rescue team members on how to ideologically, aesthetically, and verbally align with LiNK's

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[162] Inderpal Grewal, "American Humanitarian Citizenship: The 'Soft' Power of Empire," *Gender, Globalization, and Violence: Postcolonial Conflict Zones* (Florence: Routledge, 2014) 68.

organizational objectives and goals. Before the brand guide dives into its specific instructions, there is a page-long explanation about "what makes us different" that is answered with a resounding "YOU":

> **Liberty in North Korea goes beyond the office of a non-profit.** We are the collective energy and effort of a global movement of support for the North Korean people. People just like you are educating and engaging the entire world on the vision of liberty in North Korea. This requires local action on a global scale. That is where you and thousands of people around the world play an integral role. As a part of this movement, you are not involved just to support an organization; you are involved to stand with and support the North Korean people. Thank you for supporting the people and adding your time, talents, and energy to this movement of support.[163]

While the paragraph does emphasize the importance of building a base of collective support for North Koreans, it also places special attention on the power and potential of the individual. The individual is the critical link between the world and the North Korean people—a role that has boundless possibilities to create an impact on a global scale. In *Cold War Orientalism*, Christina Klein explains that the imagery of a shared humanity (as articulated in the paragraph above) is a form of sentimentalism, which is a "complex cultural mode" grounded in "reciprocity and exchange, often of a personal, intellectual, or material nature; the paired acts of giving and receiving serve as the mechanisms through which differences are bridged."[164] Klein highlights how sentimentalism was used as a method to write the narrative of anticonquest in Asia during the Cold War—a narrative that emphasized integration to legitimize expansion as opposed to coercion. In the case of LiNK, the rescue member is asked to enter into a similar dynamic of

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[163] Liberty in North Korea, "Rescue Teams: Branding Guides," *libertyinnorthkorea.org*, accessed May 4, 2016, http://www.libertyinnorthkorea.org/rescue-teams/guides/.
[164] Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2003) 14.

reciprocity and exchange in which their contributions (their time, labor, donations) will be acknowledged as being central to the objectives and goals of LiNK—based in their belief of "people over politics" or simply, a shared humanity with North Koreans. In addition, the centering of the individual as being central to alleviating the North Korean refugee crisis keeps the United States unaccountable and thus, out of view.

While the LiNK paragraph above seeks to empower and imbue the individual with importance and a sense of purpose, the rest of the brand guide places certain limitations on the boundlessness of the individual. The ensuing pages of the brand guide after this page are filled with direction on what phrases to use, what color and font to use for promotional materials, and how the narrative of the North Korean human rights crisis should be articulated. Also, there are instructions on what terms not to use when discussing the crisis such as "victim & suffering" or "saving." In particular, LiNK explains that using the phrase "victim & suffering" creates the "…perception of Us and Them. Many North Koreans are suffering, but many are active agents of change inside and outside their country, so labeling the people as victims is not completely accurate."[165] This explanation illustrates how LiNK attempts to keep their rescue team members "on message" while educating them on the reasoning behind using certain types of discourse to describe the crisis.

LiNK suggests replacing "victim and suffering" and "saving" with: "together," "empower," "possible & positive," and "North Korean people." Instead of producing an "Us & Them" mentality, these terms suggest collectivity, agency, and most importantly, solidarity. These suggestions on phrasing and language are illustrative of how LiNK

[165] Ibid.

wants to systemize the strategies of its rescue teams, in order to reduce the possibility of individual members stepping out of line with LiNK's messaging. For instance, there is a section of the guide that is titled "Our Key Messages":

> **The problem:** North Korea is one of the greatest challenges facing humanity today.
> **The solution:** The North Korean people are the best solution, and they are already driving changes to overcome these challenges.
> **Our role:** We can stand with & support the North Korean people to accelerate these changes.

In this section, there is a photograph that accompanies each point. "The problem" was paired with the notorious photograph of a dark North Korea next to a bright South Korea—this image eliminates the need for a thorough explanation as to why North Korea might be "the problem" because it's clear that a country that chooses to reside in darkness must be suspect. "The solution" is set next to a photograph of a young North Korean boy and girl pulling a wagon-like vehicle carrying strips of wood. This photo expresses how ordinary North Korean people like these two children are capable of bringing change to their country. The final photo that accompanies "Our role" is an image of rescue team members holding flags with "LIBERTY IN NORTH KOREA" printed on them. This photo shows a racially diverse crowd of rescue team members that subtly articulates that you do not have to be Korean or even Asian to care about North Korean refugees because this is a "people" issue that requires all of our attention and action. This careful packaging enables rescue team members to disseminate its language and discourse in a clear, concise, and impactful manner through a multitude of outlets via its rescue team members. Even though LiNK begins this guide by emphasizing the significance of the individual and her/his potential contributions to LiNK's efforts, the rest of the guide

makes clear what those contributions should look like, sound like, and how it should be done.

The brand guide ends with the section "Most Importantly":

> When you share about our work, wear a shirt, or host an event, YOU are representing this movement. The things you say and do will reflect on everyone else around the world working toward the same vision. It is through YOUR words and actions, your respect for others, and your passion for change that people will be inspired to join us and stand with the North Korean people. Liberty in North Korea is larger than any one person or group. We are all collectively responsible for the effectiveness for the people, and that begins with the words and actions of each individual.[166]

Despite this paragraph's emphasis on the importance of the collective, the individual is positioned as the starting point that is required to engineer transformative change in North Korea. While LiNK's language of empowerment, agency, and collective does not fit neatly into the savior/victim dynamic that typically constitutes human rights and humanitarian discourse, I argue that its elevation of the individual contributes to how the Western-citizen subject is still privileged as a critical point of action and intervention. For example, this passage valorizes the ability of the individual to create a domino effect in that if the individual rescue team member carries forth LiNK's message and goals, they motivate others to do the same. In other words, the individual is necessary for collective action and impact. Also, the privileging of the western citizen-subject as the starting point for intervention and change suggests that western democracy is *the* model of freedom that qualifies its attendants to model it for willing participants. Whether it is the individual refugee or rescue team member, the construction of the individual and its potential for success and intervention pushes the United States further out of view of critique.

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[166] Ibid.

However, as indicated in the following section, for some LiNK members, memories of the Korean War—the violence, loss, and a divided Korea—remain central in their lives, at times complicating LiNK's "people over politics" message.

"It Could Have Been Me": College-Age Korean Americans in LiNK

> After the Holocaust, Jews vowed, never again. American Jews kept that promise during the Cold War, advocating in Washington, D.C., on behalf of persecuted Jews in the Soviet Union and demanding that Moscow allow Jews to exit the county. This example is not lost on the second and third generations of Korean-Americans. These young people increasingly are taking up the issue of North Korean human rights and beginning to organize on campuses and elsewhere. The U.S.-born activists were raised on American values of personal liberty and respect for the rule of law.[167]

While LiNK's "people over politics" slogan invokes shared humanity to motivate its audience to assist North Korean refugees, the above excerpt identifies ethnic bond as the reason for Korean Americans to help North Korean refugees. For Melanie Kirkpatrick, who authored *Escape from North Korea: The Untold Story of Asia's Underground*, what makes Korean American activism and intervention possible is their upbringing on "…American values of personal liberty and the respect for the rule of law"—a difference that distinguishes Koreans in the United States from North Korea and a distinction that legitimizes the work of Korean Americans and American imperialism. Although the success of Korean Americans has been used to justify the continued presence of U.S. militarism in Korea, this section examines how this success has obligated college-age Korean Americans to help their fellow Koreans in the North. Instead of deploying the language of universal human rights, some young Korean Americans base their involvement in LiNK on familial and ethnic affiliations that move

[167] Melanie Kirkpatrick, *Escape from North Korea: The Untold Story of Asia's Underground* (New York City: Encounter Books, 2014) 207.

away from LiNK's "people over politics" framework. I argue that these familial and ethnic connections allow some young Korean Americans to pursue a kind of politics that does not completely invest in the language of universal human rights, but that recognizes how the material and psychological effects of the Korean War continue to affect their families—those they still may have as well as those they have lost during this conflict. As such, these personal ties create an alternative set of politics that move beyond the discourse of liberal human rights. However, my interviewees still operated under and believed in LiNK's "people over politics" position. LiNK provides a physical and ideological infrastructure that allows young Korean Americans to acknowledge their connections to the larger Korean diaspora and their place within it. Although LiNK does not promote itself as being part of the Korean diaspora, their work with North Korean refugees does significantly impact the movement of North Koreans that ultimately implicates the makeup of the Korean diaspora. Also, LiNK's focus on North Korean people as being the source of change provides young Korean Americans a unique opportunity to fulfill their sense of ethnic and familial obligation.

In recent decades, Korean Americans have emerged as a vibrant political group. In *Legacies of Struggle*, Angie Y. Chung explains that after the Los Angeles riots, Korean Americans worked to integrate themselves into mainstream politics to establish their presence in the larger community. With money raised after the riots, Korean Americans formed programs "on youth leadership, economic development, and interracial cooperation" and non-profit organized voter drives to encourage civic

participation.[168] For Korean Americans, the events of 1992 taught them "that blind dependency on the Seoul government in Korea, marked indifference to the society around them, and unconditional donations to local politicians would not earn them the respect and stature they needed to demand outside protection and prevent future calamities within the community."[169] Consequently, these efforts have motivated and made Korean Americans visible as viable participants in mainstream politics. As of April 2016, there are 35 Korean Americans in various public service sectors such as elected and appointed office, the judicial branch, and various administrative positions.[170] While the 1992 Los Angeles riots changed how Korean Americans participated in the domestic political sphere, the events of 9/11 have shaped the "Korean American consciousness of political activities abroad."[171] Grace Cho argues that "the specter of the axis of evil and North Korean communism have also troubled the honorary whiteness in that the scrutiny of Korean Americans and South Korean activists in the United States since 9/11."[172] This section is not concerned with whether or not my interviewees are participating in the performance of "honorary whiteness," but I do agree that North Korea's precarious position in the post-9/11 era may have reanimated its presence within the lives of my interviewees.

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[168] Angie Y. Chung, *Legacies of Struggle: Conflict and Cooperation in Korean American Politics* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2007) 3.
[169] Ibid, 2-3.
[170] Thomas Chung, *Korean-American Elected and Appointed Politicians, Administrative Officials, and Judges 4th Version* (New York, NY: The Research Center for the Korean Community, 2016).
[171] Chung, *Legacies of Struggle*, 4.
[172] Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, 229.

In a report on circulating information in North Korea, Jieun Baek included a photograph in the appendix that she took with a young girl when she was in North Korea. The caption reads:

> I met this young girl who called me 'Comrade' during my trip to North Korea in August 2013 after having studied the country for 9 years. She asked me numerous questions about my life in the United States. This was a very beautiful haunting moment for me because I, a US-born citizen with grandparents from North Korea, could have easily been born in North Korea like this little girl, and have led a tremendously different life.[173]

In this caption, Baek's shared Korean ancestry with the young North Korean girl compels her to contemplate the life she could have had if she had been born in North Korea. While Baek does not suggest that this potential life could have been worse, its possibility haunts her. Avery Gordon defines haunting as "when the over-and-done-with comes alive, when what's been in your blind spot comes alive. Haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future."[174] For Baek, the ways in which North Korea has been relegated to the past comes into her present to remind her of the life she could have had. In *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, Grace Cho explains that the Korean diaspora in the United States "has been haunted by the traumatic effects of what we are not allowed to know—the terror and devastation inflicted by the Korean War, the failure to resolve it, and the multiple silences surrounding this violent history."[175] Baek's experience of haunting is not based on what she is "not allowed to know" but by the shared belief in North Korea's mistreatment of its own people. Although Baek does not elaborate on what that "tremendously different life"

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[173] Jieun Baek, *Hack and Frack North Korea: How Information Campaigns Can Liberate the Hermit Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2014) 20.
[174] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008) xvi.
[175] Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, 12.

could have been—the tone of her caption suggests it would have been an unwanted difference.

I included Baek's anecdote because it parallels the sentiment of many second-generation or American-born Koreans who volunteered for LiNK as rescue team members. For my interviewees, the stories of lost families and war violence are passed down through generations to create for them a base of knowledge about the Korean War. One of my interviewees, Ethel, recounts a story that has been impressed throughout her childhood:

> My grandfather was sent to the South by his family for a better education. While he was in the South, the Korean War broke out. So when the war broke out, his family was up in the North, and he was still down in the South. He was actually able drive by up to the North and he was able to see his family. When he was going to bring his family down to the South, his townspeople were all there and they were saying please take us but there wasn't enough room. So his family told him that you can take the townspeople to the South and come back for us. So he drove the townspeople to the South and when he was going back up the bridge connecting the North and South was bombed off by the North.

Ethel lamented that the story "broke her heart" because her paternal grandfather never did know what happened to his family, whether they were still alive or had been killed. Her grandfather passed down this feeling of never knowing to her father and finally, to her — a haunting that weaves together multiple generations' contemplation of the fates of lost loved ones. As Grace Cho writes, "seemingly incomprehensible acts of violence are thick with a history of collective trauma that refuses to remain fixed in the past or in its original place."[176] For Ethel, the trauma of never knowing has trickled into her present, pushing her to engage with the past through her work with LiNK. Her father has reminded her

[176] Ibid, 30.

"you cannot ignore the North Korean crisis because your ancestors may still be living there." Through LiNK, Ethel can explore a multitude of possibilities: if her ancestors are still in North Korea, maybe they have tried to leave, and so possibly they were able to receive LiNK's support in their migration. In other words, the loss of family in times of war has created a "potential presence" for Ethel that has prompted her to be active in LiNK.[177] I suggest that by understanding the possibility of seeing loss as being "productive," we can challenge how we can view loss solely as a deficit.

The experience of lost family members also resonated with LiNK's current CEO, Hannah Song, who shared during our interview that her grandmother had to leave behind her husband and children during the war. For Song, this certainty of having family in the North Korea yet being unable to ever meet them or ever truly know them is compounded by her grandmother's refusal to discuss the past. Another interviewee, Olivia, explains that the older generation's refusal to engage with the past stems from the brutality of the Korean War:

> From what I have observed, the older generation tends to generally view North Koreans as communists and a topic to avoid. This is understandable though since the red scare and the witch-hunt for communists in South Korea was particularly brutal after the Korean War. It would be like having someone who has touched a hot stove to try touching it again without convincing them that the circumstances have changed and that the stove has been turned off.

Olivia's use of a hot stove metaphor reflects how *hot* the Cold War was and continues to be for the older generation. The salience of this silence seems to motivate the participation of Korean Americans in LiNK because of their curiosity about a place that

[177] David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, "Foreword," *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley, University of Press 2003) ix.

lives in the memories of their family members. Interviewees expressed that a shared Korean ancestry also motivated their participation. For instance, Richard explained that non-Korean causes did not "cling on as much" whereas LiNK provided a chance to help those who "…look like me. They have a similar history as me" and because "they are my people." Although Richard did not share any family history during our conversation, his ethnic-based affiliation with North Korean refugees allowed him to be "naturally sympathetic" to their plight. Ethel, who shared her story about her grandfather also explained that the connection to this issue is stronger because "we have the same language, we have the same culture, background, history." For another interviewee, Lance, his hesitation to join LiNK was met with "You're Korean, don't you care about your own people?" from friends—shared ethnicity became synonymous with shared responsibility and obligation. This exchange depicts ethnic affiliation as a method to encourage action and to care for others beyond yourself—a logic that takes the specific experiences of some members of an ethnic group to make it evident for all members. Alternatively, this exchange could also represent how an ethic of community/ethnic-based responsibility was being impressed on Lance.

For a majority of my interviewees, this shared ethnicity also brought forth a form of generational responsibility and obligation that drove their respective work in LiNK. One of my interviewees, Alex explains:

> My ancestors were lucky enough to have escaped. It is amazing how vastly different my life could have been had they not escaped. If I had arbitrarily been born in another family, I might be in North Korea now. I joined this rescue team because I, to an ingenuous degree, believe in fixing the opportunity gap between South and North Koreans.

Other interviewees shared this sentiment of "it could have been me" in their responses—a pattern that expressed an obligation that had to be fulfilled because their families were able to leave a war-torn Korea and lead successful lives. This "it could have been me" narrative revealed feelings of gratefulness but at the same time, sympathy for those who were left behind. This narrative of "it could have been me" mirrors the indebtedness that comes with the "gift of freedom" that Mimi Nguyen argues creates other freedoms: "the right to have rights, the choice of life direction, the improvement of body and mind, the opportunity to prosper—against a spectral future of their nonexistence, under communism, under terror."[178] In this case, gratefulness is expressed through obligation to care for those who were unlucky enough to be the "unfortunate":

> Whenever I think about the people in North Korea I think about how unfortunate their circumstances are. In terms of the people, South Koreans and North Koreans are practically the same in my opinion. The only thing that has caused the difference to occur is due to political disturbances. Because of this, I am motivated to help the people that could have been me and my family. I mean think about it, until the split occurred we were all the same people with the same language and the same culture. Even if I don't personally know anyone in North Korea, the fact that they are Korean motivates me to help them.

The emergence of obligation out of gratefulness compels Jennifer to "help" despite not knowing "anyone" in North Korea. In this case, Nguyen rightfully asks: "how is that thankfulness, and all that it implies about the gift and its giving, a problem of imperial remains?"[179] Jennifer's response reflects a larger global order in which North Korea is racialized as the problem that needs help—a reasoning that coincides with LiNK's characterization of the nation-state as *the* reason for North Korean refugees and for the

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[178] Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012) 2.
[179] Ibid.

continuing division of Korea. This narration leaves the United States unaccountable for instigating the war in Korea and for participating in its division.

In addition, the feeling of "it could have been me" reveals how the practice of imagination plays an integral role in humanitarian work. In *The Need to Help*, Liisa Malkki examines the need to work of members in the international Finnish Red Cross. For example, Malkki explains that not only do people have to see the figure in need but also imagine how they are related to the figure based on their own personal circumstances.[180] In the case of these interviewees, their relationship or how they relate to refugees is grounded in the belief that they easily could have been these refugees or that they still might have family in the North or family wanting to leave the North. I suggest that this imagination functions as a form of haunting—possibilities that become instances of responsibility and obligation. In particular, this obligation is compounded by the material success of the interviewees' families and parents:

> What I do think makes my participation uniquely important is coming from a middle-income family and an opportunity to attend a university which allowed me to gain the resources to learn about different social issues in our community and around the world that I can participate in changing.

This passage further draws out the larger theme of success that has been developed throughout this chapter. In this case, material success produces class privilege that affords these students the ability to reach out to North Koreans who could have been them, who look like them, or even could have been related to them. This feeling of it "could have been me" is similar to the narrative of "would have been" as discussed by Yen Le

[180] Liisa H. Malkki, *The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015) 13.

Espiritu in *Body Counts:* "in many ways the 'would-have-beens' are the most powerful in communicating the allures of the United States because they assume the form a testimonial—a looking back from individuals who have tasted life on the 'other side.'"[181] Espiritu argues that the "would have been" narrative is grounded in a racial knowledge that constructs Vietnam as a place of poverty, misery, and hunger.[182] Similarly, my interviewees reflect back the construction of North Korea as a place of hunger, destitution, and suppression as articulated by LiNK and their allies in the North Korean human rights movement.

Like the other forms of socioeconomic success discussed throughout this chapter; the successful Korean American further makes invisible the United States as a perpetrator of violence in the Korean peninsula. Instead of locating the state as a responsible or even obligated agent, these students place the burden on themselves. What is significant about this displacement is that these students turn themselves into agents who must act on behalf of their shared ethnicity and possible familial affiliation with North Korea refugees. This language of familial connections, shared ethnicity, and personal and community responsibility provides a much-needed historicized context to the North Korean refugee crisis that LiNK does not offer. I argue that this context is central to narrating the Korean War in ways that are critical of the current narrations of U.S. and North Korea relations. However, even as my interviewees carried their own personal and

[181] Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 98.

[182] I want to thank Yen for pointing out this parallel between our respective research projects. Although my interviewees used the phrase "could have been" I argue that the sentiment of "would have been" is very much there because their feelings of "could have been" is grounded in a prior racial knowledge as well as transmitted through the media and familial memories and experiences.

family experiences into their work with LiNK, they also subscribed to LiNK's "people over politics" vision.

As extensive and transparent LiNK is with their work and how rescue team members can succeed in their fundraising efforts, these narratives of responsibility that are couched in family and ethnic-based responsibility are nowhere to be found in LiNK's materials. When I asked the interviewees: How do you (and/or the rest of your rescue team) want to represent North Korea? All of my interviewees fell back on LiNK's motto: "people over politics." Lance explains:

> I want to be very open about North Korea. Their issues are very marginalized in the news. The most important thing is to represent North Korea as people. People who are just like us, but were born into very unfortunate circumstances. It compelled me to join the rescue team when I saw North Koreans as dreamers. Why are they less able to chase their dreams than I am?

Lance's response adheres to the LiNK's "people over politics" campaign by focusing on the shared humanity between rescue team members and North Korean refugees. For Lance, the shared humanity between himself and refugees was expressed through the act of dreaming or being "dreamers"—an expression of sentimentality that emphasizes and privileges integration as opposed to the differences that separate people. Other interviewees explained that the goal of their respective teams was to focus on North Korean people and their suffering, resistance, and difference from North Korean leadership. For instance, Elizabeth insisted that North Korean people be seen as being "actual people" separated from North Korean leadership: "I don't want people to think that North Korea is filled with people just like their leaders." Richard agreed with this distinction: "What I am certain are the facts that we want to help those who are suffering

due to tyranny in North Korea and represent the PEOPLE of North Korea. Overall, I would like to represent our rescue team as LiNK, an organization who stands FOR THE PEOPLE, rather than represent North Korea as a whole."

Although this distinction may be important for rescue team members and LiNK to change the knowledge production about North Korea, it still naturalizes North Korean leadership as being the main source of oppression and suffering of North Korean people. In other words, this distinction reflects the common sense around North Korea and its leadership as being the *only* responsible actor for the plight of North Korean refugees and people. While these responses focused on the separation between North Korean people and leadership, Lance commented on how he wanted to portray North Koreans as performing forms of resistance:

> The common consensus is that the people are suffering helplessly under the totalitarian rule, but that isn't entirely true. Recent videos have pointed to signs of resistance from the people as a whole. Citizens are shown standing up against the guards, watching movies and television shows that were banned by the regime, and many more. And while these forms of resistance may seem small and trivial, it is not the act that is important but the mindset behind it. This shows that the country isn't filled with brainwashed men, women, and children as the media would have the world believe.

This response adheres to LiNK's "people over politics" by emphasizing that change can come through the hands of the North Korean people. Lance's focus on the "mindset" behind acts of resistance that "may be small and trivial" can be seen as an effort to close the gap between Americans (LiNK's donor base) and North Koreans in that their shared humanity means that both seek and want freedom. Also, that North Koreans can think for themselves and have not been "brainwashed" by North Korean leadership. For these

students, the constant focus on North Korean people is an attempt to alter how the larger global audience thinks about North Korea. Instead of imagining North Korea as an isolated country that is completely out of synch with the global community, these responses are about drawing out a commonality that the world and LiNK's potential donors can attach themselves too. But how do we understand these responses in relationship to tales of brutality, family separation, and the feeling of "it could have been me"?

Many of these responses are illustrative of how rescue teams are remaining "on message" by focusing on the North Korean people and their efforts to change North Korea from the inside out. However, when we juxtapose these responses with personal stories of family separation, war brutality, and the "it could have been me" haunting, they produce a vexed form of belonging for these interviewees in the Korean diaspora. While none of my interviewees explicitly remarked on their place within the Korean diaspora, their responses reveal a complex form of belonging in this community that emphasizes its historical specificity and investment in a shared humanity. LiNK offers an infrastructure for young Korean Americans to contemplate their place in the Korean diaspora through their ethnic and familial connections to the North Korean refugee crisis even though the organization does not articulate itself as doing so nor does it discourage its Korean Americans members from doing so. While LiNK's organizational structure and language provides a sense of uniformity amongst its members, the obligation, gratitude, and affiliation of my interviewees can be read as a productive disruption and critique to the organization's orderliness.

However, LiNK's lack of (public) acknowledgement of the larger historical context of the North Korean refugee crisis and its relationship to the Korean War makes it difficult for these narratives of violence, loss, and division to be articulated through LiNK's organizational and discursive approaches. This limitation works in contradiction to how the organization was founded through KASCON—an establishment that was made possible precisely because of these narratives. As such, these memories remain as the implicit narrative behind LiNK's "people over politics" campaign.

Conclusion

In December 2015, LiNK announced that rescue team members could win an all-expenses-paid trip to South Korea to meet North Korean refugees that have been supported by LiNK's fundraising efforts. To qualify, rescue teams had to raise at least 500 dollars during the month of December and their chances increase every time that amount is raised. The announcement was accompanied by a description of what previous winners did during their five days in Seoul. Winners had the chance to share meals with former refugees that LiNK has funded and resettled in South Korea. Winners also went to the DMZ, met with Shin Dong-hyuk, author of *Escape from Camp 14* and a well-known advocate in the North Korean human rights crisis, and visited a school for North Korea orphans and other children, whose families could not support them. This contest offered an opportunity for rescue team members to meet with those that they had helped—tangible proof that their fundraising efforts made a difference in refugee lives. However, this chance was based on whether or not rescue team members could fundraise enough money to qualify for the competition in the first place. The contest was a unique way to

energize LiNK's rescue team members to seek to raise more funds and collect more donations. The winners of this contest would be able to directly meet with refugees that their fundraising had helped—an opportunity that offers a form of gratification that cannot be accessed in any other context. Not only do North Korean refugees benefit from rescue team member's efforts to raise enough money to be in the running for the trip, rescue team members also obtain a certain kind of recognition for winning the trip.

I close the chapter with this "contest" because it demonstrates the ways in which LiNK does offer opportunities for young Korean Americans to engage with Korea through humanitarian work. Although this competition is not strictly for Korean Americans, it could be argued that its prize may be slightly more meaningful for these particular members, especially since the North Korean refugees settle in other countries besides South Korea. The goal of this chapter was not to criticize LiNK nor praise its success but to draw out the tensions that emerge between its discourse of the North Korean refugee crisis and the memories of war of its Korean American members. My interviews prove that this tension cannot easily be absolved but can be productive in understanding how some Korean American see themselves in relationship to the larger Korean diaspora. The stories of violence, loss, and separation that my interviewees shared were not simply just expressions of familial or ethnic affiliations but insights into how the young generation deals with the residual of a war that has not ended. My interviewees were able to explore their familial and ethnic affiliation through LiNK's specific deployment of the common sense that surrounds North Korea. In the following chapter, I examine how comedienne Margaret Cho has wrestled with these constructions against the backdrop of national security.

CHAPTER THREE:

'I'm playing the rice card, not the race card': The Unassimilable Alien in Margaret Cho's North Korea

At the 2015 Golden Globes, Korean American comedienne Margaret Cho appeared as Cho Young Ja, the newest member of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association and a general of the North Korean Army. As Young Ja, Cho spoke English with an accent, dressed in traditional military garb, and donned pale make-up. Young Ja was stoic throughout the show but when prompted by hosts, Tina Fey and Amy Poehler, Young Ja expressed her discontent: "In North Korea we know how to put on a show. This is not a show. You no have thousands of babies paying guitar at the same time…"[183]

Cho Young Ja was intended to be a comedic gag that poked fun at the Sony hacking scandal, which released a deluge of embarrassing emails from Sony executives that resulted in the termination of its Co-Chairperson, Amy Pascal. All of this was said to have been instigated by North Korea in retaliation for the release of *The Interview,* a comedic Hollywood film that revolved around the assassination of North Korea's Kim Jung Un. After the ceremony, Margaret Cho faced immediate public fallout, with reviewers characterizing the performance as "low, then even lower," "stereotypical and offensive," and "humorless."[184] E. Alex Jung of *Vulture* criticized Cho for fulfilling the

[183] Hollywood Foreign Press, *72nd Golden Globes*, directed by Louis J. Horvitz (2015, Beverly Hills: Dick Clark Productions and the Hollywood Foreign Press, 2015) Television.
[184] Vulture Editors, "The Highs and Lows of the 2015 Golden Globes," *Vulture*, January 12, 2015, http://www.vulture.com/2015/01/highs-and-lows-of-the-2015-golden-globes.html?mid=huffpoent.

racialized expectations of the predominately white audience by solidifying the belief that North Korea is "ultimately unknowable, ignorant and bad speakers of *Engrish*."[185] Cho defended her performance by tweeting: "I'm not playing the race card. I'm playing the rice card."[186] This chapter asks: What is the difference between the race card and the rice card? And how does the rice card speak to the Asian American experiences? Also, how does her usage of the "rice card" relate to North Korea?

The "race card" is a colloquial shorthand for when an individual purportedly invokes race to gain advantage or to pander to others.[187] Cho's tweet denies that she was pandering to the racial expectations of the white audience, but provocatively suggests that she was playing the rice card instead. While Cho probably used the term "rice card" for the effect of comedic absurdity, I argue that the term also underscores the specificity of the Asian American experience: as perpetual foreigners. Placed within Cho's larger repertoire of comedic work and personal writings, Cho's evocation of the rice card destabilizes the black-white racial binary in the United States and centers her own embodiment as the "unassimilable alien."[188] This embodiment becomes further emphasized against the backdrop of North Korea—a rogue nation that refuses to play or assimilate to the "rules" of hegemonic expectations of global governance. In this

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[185] Alex E. Jung "Despite What She Says, Margaret Cho's Golden Globes Jokes Was An Empty Caricature," *Vulture*, January 12, 2015, http://www.vulture.com/2015/01/margaret-cho-golden-globes-joke-was-an-empty-caricature.html#. (December 5, 2015).

[186] Margaret Cho, Twitter Post, January 12, 2015, 9:00 a.m., http://twitter.com/margaretcho

[187] I use's Lopez conception of the race card as he relates to the role of race in American electoral politics. See Ian Hanely Lopez, *Dog Whistle Politics: How Coded Racial Appeals Have Reinvented Racism and Wrecked the Middle Class* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2014) 179.

[188] Yen Le Espiritu argues that the black and white duality reinforces the figuration of Asian Americans as the "unassimilble alien" because it cannot be categorized as either black or white, which solidifies the racial order. See Yen Le Espiritu, *Asian American Women and Men* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997), 110.

instance, Cho plays *up* or amplifies the rice card to underscore the racialization of Asian Americans as foreign, permanently unable to assimilate.

This chapter focuses on two of Margaret Cho's key performances: Cho's portrayal of Kim Jung Il on the television show, *30 Rock* in 2011; and her appearance as Cho Young Ja at the 2015 Golden Globes. Although these appearances are four years apart and Cho is portraying different characters, I show how the legibility and continuity of these performances are reliant on the discursive hyperbolism that constitutes North Korea in American popular and political culture—as illustrated in the Sony hacking scandal. I read these performances against the backdrop of the events around the scandal, in particular, how the American government accused and penalized North Korea without consistent evidence on their wrongdoings. As I argued in the first chapter, the presence of "evidence" is not necessary in the case of North Korea because the construction of its interior difference has been used to prove its constant and consistent guilt.

This chapter utilizes a transnational analytic to make visible the dynamics that make Cho's performances legible for an American audience but also the larger geopolitical conditions that shape them as well. Cho's performances are a projection of the common sense that has constructed North Korea within the American cultural and political landscape; but this chapter makes visible how these projections can be re-imagined when read through Cho's larger collection of performances and writings. Also, Cho's own family connections to the Korean War reveal how her performances need to be situated within a longer of history of American militarism, imperialism, and sexual violence in Korea that has directly impacted the representations of Korean Americans like Cho.

The Race Card, Rice Card, and Amplified Disidentifications

This section shows how Cho's strategy of amplification or hyperboles frames how I understand her usage of the rice card, especially when read through the larger collection of her performances and writings. In particular, the ongoing amplification of North Korea as the unassimilable "rogue nation" mirrors Cho's own practice of amplification to underscore her positioning as the foreigner that refuses to or cannot assimilate. Margaret Cho's ability to extract subversive value from excess is a practice that draws from racial fictions that pivot on the foreigner's inability to assimilate, or perhaps worse yet, to fulfill racial expectations. I define and understand amplification as Cho's reliance on exaggeration or excessiveness to maintain a form of subversive legibility for the masses. In order for Cho to be heard within mainstream American culture, she amplifies what she terms the rice card as a way to index the language of white supremacist imperial domination. In *The Racial Mundane*, Ju Yon Kim explains that historically "…the everyday scenes of eating, working, shopping have buttressed competing views of Asian Americans as ideal and impossible Americans."[189] I suggest that Cho's replacement of race with rice reflects the impossibility of Asian American belonging in the national body because of how certain things like rice are forced to cling onto Asian Americans as a reminder of their foreignness. Instead of perpetuating the belief that the race card accords some degree of racial advantage, Cho's usage of the rice card illustrates how racialization limits her legibility as a performer of color. Cho's deployment of the rice card to explain her performances reveal how the racial

[189] Ju Yon Kim, *The Racial Mundane: Asian American Performance and the Embodied Everyday* (New York City: NYU Press, 2015) 3.

sensibilities of a white audience frame her legibility as a performer and thus leave her vulnerable to charges of perpetuating racial stereotypes. However, when we consider Cho's usage of the rice card within the larger context of her career, the possibility of subversion is evident. This chapter contends that the "rice card" functions as the discursive/performative shorthand for the mirage of physical and vocal mannerisms, foodstuffs, and other related "cultural" practices that have been assigned to "Asians" that have constituted their racialized difference from the U.S. national body politic. In doing so, the rice card enables Margaret Cho to use this hegemonic language to subvert spaces in which she is only legible as the unassimilable alien.

I use Cho's collection of standup-performances, autobiographical writings, and interviews as a lens through which to analyze the subversive possibilities of the hyperbolic language that surrounds North Korea in her *30 Rock* and Golden Globe performances. I argue that this methodological approach acknowledges Cho's larger political stakes in her work that allows for generative readings of her more mainstream performances. For instance, Cho's fluctuating weight during the run of *All American Girl,* the first sitcom to feature an Asian American family, served as the excess that ABC television executives wanted to restrict and control.[190] Cho recounts this incident in one of her stand-up performances: "I always thought that I was okay looking. I had no idea I was this giant face that was taking over America. HERE COMES THE FACE!!!"[191] Rachel C. Lee argues that Cho's weight or the fear of its excess is "…likened to an

[190] *All American Girl* was Margaret Cho's first television sitcom and it was the first television show to feature an Asian American family. The show was cancelled after a single season. It would take over twenty years for another television show about an Asian American family to premiere—*Fresh off the Boat. Fresh off the Boat* is currently in its third season.
[191] Rachel C. Lee, "'Where's My Parade,'" Margaret Cho and the Asian American Body in Space, *TDR*, 48.2 (2004) 119.

invasion or a deluge of too much immigrant/foreign body"—a body that was only acceptable after Cho dieted.[192] Lee describes Cho's amplification of ABC executives' attempts to manage her body as a "hyperbolic quip."[193] This hyperbolic quip is crucial to the way Cho embraces her own excess in volume as a method to "wake up" her audience and to force them to see her for how she wants to be seen.

Similarly, Susan Pelle argues that Cho exemplifies the "grotesque" because her body has been perceived as being excessively threatening, "…because it is big, loud, leaky, perverse, abject, dangerous, and always transforming."[194] In the examples by Lee and Pelle, Cho's embrace of excess through amplification aligns with Jose Munoz's concept of disidentification: "a mode of performance whereby a toxic identity is remade and infiltrated by subjects who have been such identity categories but have not been able to own such a label."[195] Cho's practice of disidentification remaps racialized and gendered personas that have been created out of social fantasies that restrict the Asian body while making it readily accessible for consumption onto her body, through her artistry to create disruptions in conversations about race, race relations, and xenophobia in the United States.

Additionally, I argue that the rice card answers to how the evocation of the race card dismisses critical discussions of race. Richard Thompson Ford writes "playing the race card makes it too easy to dismiss rather than address the legitimate concerns of others. And the accusation of bigotry inevitability provokes defensiveness and resentment

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[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Susan Pelle, "The 'Grotesque' Pussy: 'Transformational Shame' in Margaret Cho's Stand Up Performances," *Text and Performances Quarterly*, 30.1 (2010) 22.
[195] Jose Munoz, *Disidentification: Queers of Color And The Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 185.

rather than thoughtful reaction."[196] I contend that Cho's embrace of the excess of the rice card forces audiences to confront what the racialized Asian body must do to achieve legibility. The following section details how Cho's impersonation of Kim Jung Il in *30 Rock* considers the hyperbolic imagery of the former leader in American culture but creates a disidentification that lends to a subversive reading.

Margaret Cho & KJ: The Disidentification of Kim Jung Il and the "Bomb"

The first time Margaret Cho did a performance centered on North Korea was in the American sitcom, *30 Rock*, in which she impersonated former leader, Kim Jung Il. In this episode of *30 Rock*, Avery, the wife of Jack Donaghy and a financial reporter for MSNBC, was captured by North Korean authorities while on assignment in China. The plot centers on Jack's efforts to get Avery released from North Korea by reaching out to different political figures such as John Boehner and Condoleezza Rice. Margaret Cho's impersonation of Kim Jung Il renders her almost unrecognizable. Cho donned a buzz-cut hair piece, dark sunglasses, and a pantsuit that mimics the communist garb that Kim Jung Il was known to wear—an appearance that contrasted Cho's typical display of her colorful tattoos, medium-length straight black hair, and casual dress. In preparation for the role, Cho explained that she could not find any clips of Kim Jung Il actually speaking—she then gave him a "voice" in which *Engrish* functions as the vocal stand-in for Kim that is based on Cho's mother's voice, a substitution that she deemed "worked out fine."[197] While a casual viewer may find Cho's explanation playing into various

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[196] Richard Thompson Ford, *The Race Card: How Bluffing About Bias Makes Race Relations Worse* (New York City: Picador, 2008) 20.

[197] I am using "Engrish" in a colloquial manner to refer to how Asians who speak English, do so with a distinguishable accent that marks their foreignness. See Fox News, "Margaret Cho on Playing Kim Jong-il," Fox News, January 10, 2012, 1 Feb 2012 < http://www.aresearchguide.com/8firstfo.html#15>.

stereotypes of Asians, when read through the lens of her upbringing, this response reveals the complexity and the stakes behind Cho's position as an Asian American comedienne.

Much of Cho's standup and personal writings have focused on her mother in which Cho portrayed her as being larger-than-life. As such, Cho's mother has been considered a "cornerstone" of her career.[198] In an interview with *NPR*, Cho explained that her immigrant parents were "incredibly, undeniably foreign" which caused her younger self so much embarrassment that she wanted to distance herself from them.[199] Cho used humor to distance herself from the foreignness of her parents such as making fun of her mother's inability to pronounce certain English words. This "bit" found its way into Cho's stand-up routine, a space where she was recognized as being "racially different":

> when I became a stand-up comedian, it was a very natural thing to talk about. Also, when I started doing comedy, I was so different from everybody else doing comedy. I was racially different. I was much younger. There were very, very few women and certainly no young women, so it was a weird thing. So I ended up talking a lot about my heritage and a lot about what made me kind of the way that I was and so I think talking about my mom was a very, very natural thing to do.[200]

Cho's decision to include her mother in her stand-up was a way for Cho to identify with her Korean heritage while discussing her earlier attempts to disassociate with her ethnic identity**.** Cho shared that her father worked hard to lose his accent while her mother held on to hers. In this case, Cho's embrace of her mother serves to remind Cho that her racial difference cannot be pushed aside. I read this performative intention as a form of disidentification from American-ness: Cho's portrayal of her mother's *Engirsh* accent re-imagines this marker of foreignness as one immigrant's refusal to assimilate. In

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[198] Margaret Cho, "Comedian Margaret Cho as 'Mother to the World," interviewed by Michel Martin. *National Public Radio*, January 22, 2013.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.

Immigrant Acts, Lisa Lowe explains that disidentification is the "…cultural and racial, and linguistic forms of the nation…" that constitute an alternative site where "…the palimpsest or lost memories is reinvented, histories are fractured and retraced, and the unlike varieties of silence emerge into articulacy."[201] By extension, I read Cho's embrace of her mother's accent in her impersonation of Kim Jung Il as her own form of survival and fight to belong as an artist of Asian descent in mainstream media. In *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture*, Tina Chen argues that it is through the act of impersonation that Asian Americans can simultaneously "…establish their own claims to U.S. identity and to critique American institutions that have designated them as aliens."[202] Cho's adoption of her mother's accent is indicative of what Cho had to do as a comedienne to be legible to the older, white, male-dominated industry of standup comedy; it is also a refusal to brush aside her "difference." As such, I read Cho's impersonation of Kim Jung Il as a performance layered with critique even in its attempt to be legible within the confines of American popular culture.

Although the episode pays tribute to how North Korea and Kim Jung Il is used to incite fear in the American public, it also portrays the former leader as being endlessly obsessed with American popular culture. For example, when Kim announces to the North Korean public that another American reporter has "come" to the region, he introduces himself as the "…world's greatest golfer, and movie director, and best man at Tom

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[201] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 6.
[202] Tina Chen, *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005) XIX.

Brady's wedding."[203] This characterization of Kim gets played up in his friendship with Tracy Morgan's character, Tracy Jordan. It is revealed by Tracy that the two of them have collaborated together in a film of the buddy cop genre that Kim had written and directed. In this episode arc, Tracy refers to Kim Jung Il as "KJ" and is not familiar with KJ's infamous reputation in the global community. Although Tracy's ignorance of KJ's reputation is supposed to rift on the character's lack of awareness of events and people outside of himself, this rift reduces the hyperbole that constitutes North Korea and turns Kim Jung Il into a relatable and almost normal character. For Tracy, KJ is simply a friend who had made a movie with him.

The audience is shown a brief clip from Tracy Jordan and KJ's buddy cop film in which Kim and Jordan defeated CIA operatives within North Korea. KJ declares their victory with "I defuse bomb, black partner. Hasta la vista baby!" Once again, KJ illustrates his familiarity with American popular culture; in this instance, KJ reiterates the emblematic phrase of Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Terminator*.[204] KJ's knowledge of American popular culture (albeit, belated) makes KJ relatable to the audience but does so in a manner that casts the former leader as the bumbling foreigner who wants to desperately belong. For example, the pairing of Jordan and Kim mimics the successful *Rush Hour* trilogy, in which a black detective, Carter, played by Chris Tucker, is assigned to work with a detective from Hong Kong, Lee, portrayed by Jackie Chan— the contrast of the American and foreigner relies on the comedic value of misinterpretations, miscommunications, cultural and temporal disconnect. In *30 Rock,* Kim Jung Il tries to

[203] This joke is in reference to the incident when Asian American reporters, Laura Ling and Euna Lee were imprisoned in North Korea. The joke re-imagines their time as being voluntarily and thus re-writes the whole narrative of the incident that ignores the fact that it caused a diplomatic crisis.
[204] *30 Rock*, NBC, New York City, New York, 28 April. 2011.

replicate this comedic pairing with Tracy Jordan but fumbles in an inaccurate replication with his use of *Terminator's* famous one-liner. The poor replication reflects how the foreign Other inevitably stands at a distance from Western culture—a distance that is communicated as an inherent shortcoming and/or dysfunction. This inadequacy is materialized through this poorly constructed fictionalized film. The film is illustrative of Kim's characterization as the foreigner obsessed with yet unable to fully engage American popular culture; his association is thus portrayed as comically fraudulent. The poor production and execution of the film reflects the logics of the rice card in which the unassimilable alien cannot belong despite persistent efforts. However, this episode arc made visible that the unassimilable alien only becomes legible in the amplification of their foreignness.

On the other hand, what is ironic about this fumbled replication of *Terminator* is the scene where Kim's character tells Jordan's character that he has defused the "bomb." Instead of Kim Il Jung being the person who detonates the bomb, as KJ, he disables the bomb—a disidentification that rearranges the hyperbolic construction of North Korea and its leadership. In this rearrangement, North Korea is no longer the threat but the solution to nuclear proliferation. This reading becomes possible when we consider this excerpt from Cho's standup film *Margaret Cho-Revolution*: "People come up to me and say: "What's going on with North Korea? What's up with that guy? Does he have a bomb? What's going on? What's going on with North Korea? What's up with that guy? Does he have a bomb?"[205] In response, Cho angrily yells "I DON'T KNOW! I have no idea. Quit

[205] *Margaret Cho-Revolution*, dir. Lorene Machado, perf. Margaret Cho, DVD, Wellspring, 2004.

asking me. I do not have his phone number. Please." [206] This excerpt allows the audience to recognize the possible disidentification that can emerge in Cho's impersonation when read through her standup work. Cho answers excess with excess—a performative maneuver that loudly expresses Cho's frustration with these racialized assumptions. Or quite simply, if Cho yells loud enough someone may finally hear her. I pair this passage from Cho's standup with the storyline of KJ dismantling the bomb in *30 Rock* to rearrange or disidentify North Korea's association with the "bomb" —North Korea is no longer the threat but the solution to nuclear proliferation. This reading becomes possible with Cho's excessive rejection of having any ties to North Korea's leadership or any knowledge of their nuclear program. Instead of being the rogue nation that threatens the world with nuclear weapons, North Korea is the hero that saves the world from nuclear destruction. Cho's impersonation does borrow from the amplification that has constructed North Korea as dangerous and unpredictable. In order for the subversive elements of her performance to register, Cho must speak through the hyperbolism of North Korea to produce a form of disidentification. Cho takes the language and imagery that has created North Korea in American politics and culture but rearranges it for subversive purposes. Cho's embrace of Kim Jung Il is made possible by de/refusing the one object that has come to define Kim—the bomb.

This particular *30 Rock* episode was released in the spring of 2011. Kim Jung Il passed away at the end of 2011. In response to Kim Jung Il's passing, Cho wrote a piece for the Arts & Entertainment section of the *Wall Street Journal* titled: "I Was Once Kim Jong Il." The first half of the article is similar to the interview she gave about her

[206] Ibid.

preparation for her role on *30 Rock*; however, the latter half veers into her personal connections to North Korea in which she laments family members she has lost in North Korea and will never able to know. Although Cho does partake in the general U.S. consensus of Kim Jung Il as the "crazed megalomaniac who fancies himself a polymath," she also accuses Leonardo Dicaprio, Thomas Edison, and Woody Allen of being the same.[207] In one sentence, Cho draws upon the caricature that defined Kim Jung Il in the U.S. cultural sphere but also extends this exaggeration to revered American cultural figures. While this slight could be read as just another joke, I suggest that this comparison works to undercut the vilification of Kim Jung Il by pointing to other American cultural figures that exhibit the same characteristics.

At the close of the article, Cho poignantly but comically writes: "Now that he is dead I would like to know what he really sounds like. Let me hear so I can truly do him justice."[208] The juxtaposition of Cho's impersonation of Kim Jung Il with her very real ties to North Korea calls our attention to the connection between the mainstream vilification of Kim Jung Il and the legacy of U.S. militarism in the Korean peninsula. In this moment of comedy, an alternative affiliation emerges for Margaret Cho and possibly other Korean Americans—an association that is grounded in part in the loss brought on by the war. Before I delve into Cho's performance at the 2015 Golden Globe Awards, we must first examine the events of the Sony Hacking scandal that created the context for her performance in the first place.

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[207] Margaret Cho, "Margaret Cho: I Was Once Kim Jung Il," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 19, 2011, http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2011/12/19/margaret-cho-i-was-once-kim-jong-il/.
[208] Ibid.

Sony Hacking Scandal

Although there was no empirical evidence, Sony executives believed that North Korea was behind the attack as retaliation for the upcoming release of *The Interview*.[209] The plot of the *Interview* is about a talk show host, Dave Skylark (played by James Franco) and his producer, Aaron Rapport (played Seth Rogen) who travel to North Korea under the guise of interviewing Kim Jung Un but are actually there to assassinate Kim on behalf of the CIA. The inflammatory plot imagines the death of a current leader and does so as a comedic film.[210] The hacking attack delayed the release of the film and forced the film to be distributed through the popular streaming site, *Netflix* because movie theatre owners did not want to take the risk of possible terrorist attacks.[211] Citing these potential threats, the stars of the film, Seth Rogen and James Franco, also cancelled promotional events. Rogen was shocked by the adverse response to *The Interview*, declaring that all he wanted to do was to "'make a really funny, entertaining movie and the movie itself is very silly and wasn't meant to be controversial in any way.'"[212] Rogen's cavalier response reveals the privilege he has as a prominent white actor; for North Korea, these

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[209] David Robb, "Sony Hack: A Timeline" *Deadline*, December 22, 2014, http://deadline.com/2014/12/sony-hack-timeline-any-pascal-the-interview-north-korea-1201325501/. (December 15, 2015).

[210] While this chapter does not analyze the film, I suggest that the comical portryal of the assasination of the current leader of North Korea illustrates how the common sense that constitutes North Korea has manifested in a variety of ways in American culture. In this case, the medium of comedy underescores the absurdness of the film and distracts the audience from understanding that such a plot is not a novel idea but has emerged in subtle ways in the realm of global geopolitics.

[211] Dominic Patten and David Liberman, "Theater Owners Showing 'The Interview' Put Themselves At Potential Legal Risk" *Deadline*, December 16, 2014, http://deadline.com/2014/12/sony-attack-theater-owners-the-interview-lawsuits-1201327233/.

[212] Lesley Messer and Lee Ferran, "Sony Says Theaters Don't Have to Show 'The Interview' After Threats," *ABC News*, December 16, 2014, http://abcnews.go.com/US/sony-theaters-show-interview-threats/story?id=27641600.

accusations created consequences that furthered damaged its relationship with the United States.

North Korea proclaimed their innocence of the hacking and offered to work with U.S. federal agencies to find the true assailant. The FBI believed that North Korea was responsible for the attacks because the "IP addresses that were being used to post and to send the emails were coming from IPs that were exclusively used by the North Koreans."[213] The director of the FBI, James Comey, blamed North Korea and described the attacks as "sloppy" because the hackers would forget to disguise themselves sometimes with the proper proxy servers.[214] Comey's comment is reflective of how North Korea is often treated as a "threatening failure": Although North Korea poses a danger to national security, it is also represented as incompetent—a failure. In the case of the Sony Hack, the simultaneous impossibility and possibility of North Korea committing the breach shifts back and forth—a characterization that has become a familiar narrative of North Korea.

Private cybersecurity experts argued that North Korea was incapable of this breach because the hackers would have had to have detailed knowledge of Sony's digital infrastructure, thus blaming North Korea felt "politically convenient."[215] They concluded that it was more likely that a disgruntled employee was responsible for the attacks because Sony was planning massive layoffs. However, it was convenient to blame North Korea because the ongoing vilification of North Korea in the American mediascape

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[213] Dina Temple-Raston, "Connecting North Korea To Sony Hack," *NPR*, January 7, 2015, http://www.npr.org/2015/01/07/375671935/fbi-offers-new-evidence-connecting-north-korea-to-sony-hack.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Sam Biddie, "A lot of Smart People Think North Korea Didn't Hack North Korea," *Gawker*, December 22, 2014, http://gawker.com/a-lot-of-smart-people-think-north-korea-didnt-hack-sony-1672899940.

encourages such accusations.[216] These discussions about whether or not North Korea did the hacking boils down to two conflicting narratives that have come to define North Korea: North Korea is guilty because of its past transgressions and its overall enmity towards the United States; and North Korea is not capable of such an attack because they are not technologically equipped to do so. The seemingly inconsistency of these narratives reveals the contradictory ways in which North Korea is portrayed: suspicious but not worth worrying about. In a larger sense, this contradiction reveals how the constructions are flexible enough to benefit a multitude of political projects.

While there was no direct evidence to indicate that North Korea was responsible for the hacking of Sony Studios, the United States passed Executive Order 13687 that imposed new economic sanctions on North Korea as punishment.[217] In a press release from the State Department in December 2014, John Kerry described the attack on Sony Entertainment as "…lawless acts of intimidation" that demonstrated North Korea's "…flagrant disregard for international norms."[218] Kerry explained that these cyber-attacks only "strengthen[d] our resolve" to work with global partners to "promote norms of acceptable state behavior."[219] The passage of Executive Order 13687 thus solidified the accusations against North Korea into an executive order that contributes to the larger belief that North Korea must be handled with force, even when there is little evidence to suggest otherwise. Just as the figure of the North Korean refugee has been treated as *the*

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[216] Christine Hong, "Introduction: Reframing North Korean Human Rights," *Critical Asian Studies* 45, 4. (2013): 519.
[217] Federal Register, *Imposing Additional Sanctions With Respect To North Korea*, 2015 80, 3, Washington D.C.: United States Federal Government, 819-821.
[218] John Kerry, "Condemning Cyber-Attack by North Korea," *U.S. Department of State* December 19, 2014, http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/05/242538.htm.
[219] Ibid.

evidence of North Korea's deplorable treatment of its own citizens, the *mere* suspicion of North Korea's involvement in the hacking scandal proved to be enough. The passage of Executive Order 13687 follows a longer history of sanctions that the United States has placed on North Korea—the ideological and material infrastructure is already in place for the United States to maintain its legacy of subordination of North Korea in the current moment. I bring these details of the Sony hacking scandal into this chapter to illustrate the larger political context that preceded the 2015 Golden Globe Awards, an event that took a comical spin on the scandal.

"Do it for all of us"[220] : Margaret Cho and the Responsibility of Representation

Four years after and an Emmy nomination later, Margaret Cho returned to American television as another imaginary figuration of North Korea and again with Tina Fey but this time, on one of Hollywood's most prestigious main stages: the Golden Globes.[221] In this iteration, Cho's performance must again rely on the hyperbolism of North Korea as the rogue nation that has renewed its threat against America through the Sony Hacking scandal. As the hosts, Amy Poehler and Tina Fey treat Cho Young Ja with care in the hopes of avoiding another incident with North Korea. The running joke throughout the night was quite clear and simple—North Korea can infiltrate Hollywood so do whatever Cho Young Ja wants. For instance, initially Cho Young Ja does not speak but instead gestures to Fey and Poehler that she wants to take a picture with actress Meryl

[220] Cho was nominated for her performance of Kim Jung Il in *30* Rock—this is the most prestigious mainstram industry honor that Cho has received. See Hollywood Foreign Press, *72nd Golden Globes*, directed by Louis J. Horvitz (2015, Beverly Hills: Dick Clark Productions and the Hollywood Foreign Press, 2015) Television.

[221] Sponsored by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, the annual awards show both television and cinematic work and have been known to be predictive of Hollywood's most prestigious accolade, the Academy Awards.

Streep. Fey urges Streep to comply with Cho Young Ja's request by saying that "we got a lot of weird emails we can't get out. You gotta do this for us. Do it for all of us, Meryl."[222] Streep helps the skit along and takes a picture with Cho Young Ja, to which Fey responds with relief: "Thank you! Crisis adverted. God bless."[223] Fey's request that Streep "do it for all of us" demonstrates how commonplace the threat of North Korea is that it becomes a comedic shortcut to the joke's punchline. Similarly, Fey's own (satirical) paranoia about North Korea hacking her emails mimics Liz Lemon's in *30 Rock.* However, similar to how James Comey's assessment of North Korea in the Sony Hack, there is a feeling of unviability that clouds North Korea's potentiality of being a threat.

Just like in *30 Rock*, the discrediting of North Korea as an unviable threat is demonstrated through its obsession with American popular culture. For example, Cho Young Ja was shown sitting amongst the audience and holding a copy of *Movies Wow!* with a cover filled with pictures of Kim Jung Un's face. The only visible headline and that is in English is: "Kim: Break The Internet" which plays on a popular 2014 magazine cover of reality show personality Kim Kardashian that appeared with the same tagline. *Movies Wow!* cleverly uses Kim Jung Un's surname of "Kim" to replicate the Kardashian cover, whose first name is "Kim." Similar to how KJ or Kim Jung Il in *30 Rock* try to replicate an aspect of American popular culture via the buddy cop movie genre, the *Movies Wow!* cover feels like an unconvincing mirroring with its poor English and lack of familiar celebrities. This comedic prop continues the caricature of Kim Jung Il as the

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[222] Hollywood Foreign Press, *72nd Golden Globes*, directed by Louis J. Horvitz (2015, Beverly Hills: Dick Clark Productions and the Hollywood Foreign Press, 2015) Television.
[223] Ibid.

foreigner obsessed with American celebrity culture in *30 Rock*. In this instance, the caricature becomes stretched to include his son. This continuity provides a dependable source of comical relief especially in a moment of cultural crisis (the hacking scandal) in which the villain (North Korea) who threatens our cyber security cannot be taken too seriously because he is too preoccupied with American popular culture to actually follow through with its threats. Cho worked with Fey and Poehler to develop Cho Young Ja.[224] Cho had to work with the hyperbolic imagery and language that constitutes North Korea as the rogue nation to make herself legible to the dominant white audience. However, these efforts were greatly criticized by the Asian American community.

After the Golden Globes aired, Margaret Cho faced fallout for her appearance because it was deemed as an act of yellowface. In "Margaret Cho's Golden Globes Skit Was Minstrelsy, Not Comedy" Kai Ma writes: "Cho was invited for the sole purpose of making fun of the North Korean government in light the alleged Sony hack, while a backdrop of white celebrities laughed."[225] As Cho Young Ja, Cho was not allowed to be "herself but was treated as a 'perennial stereotype' made to perform for an awards show that has historically excluded Asian American performers. As a performer of color, Ma argues that Cho is forced carry the "responsibility of representation" in which people held Cho accountable through various platforms of social media by accusing her of "shuckin for white people."[226] This responsibility has not been assigned to white, heterosexual, male comedians, who are free to make racially and culturally insensitive jokes without

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[224] Nolan Feeny, "Margaret Cho Isn't Sorry About Mocking North Korea at the Golden Globes," Time January 12, 2015, http://time.com/3664746/golden-globes-2015-margaret-cho/. (December 13, 2015)
[225] Kai Ma, "Margaret Cho's Golden Globe's Skit Was Minstrelsy, Not Comedy," *Time* January 13, 2015, http://time.com/3665825/margaret-cho-golden-globes-minstrelsy-comedy/.
[226] Ibid.

being subjected to any significant penalty. Ma does acknowledge the precarious position that Cho occupies as a performer of color, whose material has been considered both subversive and racist: "The reactions to Cho's Sunday performance capture a sliver of her unique role as a breakthrough Asian American artist that employs outrageous racial content: she had been applauded for dramatically pushing back racial barriers during her career, while also being accused of racism throughout it." [227]

In response to the accusations of minstrelsy, Margaret Cho provided a variety of defenses: that her ethnic Korean identity and familial ties authorized her performance; that her performance was meant to draw attention to the accusations of human rights violations in North Korea; and that because she believed North Korea was treating its citizens poorly, Cho felt justified in her performance. In another tweet about the performance, Cho tweeted: "I'm of mixed North/South Korean descent – you imprison, starve and brainwash my people you get made fun of by me #hatersgonhate #FreeSpeech."[228] Similar to the Korean American members of LiNK, Cho's performances around North Korea provide an opportunity for her to establish her familial and ethnic affiliations to the country; in this case, it also outlines the rights she has as an American citizen. This contrast plays into common sense that portrays North Korea as being a threat to its own citizens. Her identity as a Korean American and a performer color intersect in this moment to allow Cho to have a platform to be critical of North Korea's treatment of its people.

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[227] Ibid.
[228] Margaret Cho, Twitter Post, January 12, 2014, 8:03 AM, https://twitter.com/margaretcho/status/554670104026177536.

In addition to this reasoning, Cho took this moment as an opportunity to criticize the predominately white field of actors, actresses, and audience members in attendance at the Golden Globes. Cho pointed out: "What's racist is that I was the only Asian person at the entire event."[229] The performance was deemed racist because the parameters that determined its possibility were inherently racist—it played within the confines of the white imagination of the unassimilable alien. However, if we read this performance through her method of amplification, it underscores how the legibility of Asian American performers is dependent on their racial degradation. In a collection of personal writings, *I Have Chosen to Stay and Fight*, Margaret Cho writes:

> My very presence as an Asian American woman talking about race and sexuality is a political statement. I had always regarded the world of political humor as the exclusive domain of white men and immediately disqualified myself from participation. I know better know, and it's immensely pleasing when I'm referred to as a political comedian because it rings true. It feels right. It feels strong.[230]

While one of the objectives of Cho's performance as Cho Young Ja was to bring attention to the lack of Asian American performers at the Golden Globes, this passage reveals the political value Cho sees in her mere presence in spaces that have been dominated by White performers. As such, Cho's defense of her performance reveals the larger stakes of this performance and thus cannot be simply reduced to and understood as a racist spectacle. The continuity between Cho's performance as Kim Jung Il and Cho Young Ja is not a coincidence but reveals how foreignness is a racial construction that can easily be replicated and circulated. I argue that in the case of Cho's mainstream

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[229] Jesse Spero, "Margaret Cho Talks Golden Globes Racism & North Korea (Exclusive)" *Access Hollywood* January 16, 2015, http://www.accesshollywood.com/articles/margaret-cho-talks-golden-globes-racism-north-korea-exclusive-156109/.

[230] Margaret Cho, *I Have Chosen to Stay and Fight* (London: Riverhead Books, 2005) 68-69.

performances, each replication can be imbued with subversive possibility when read through her larger body of work. If we consider race through this performative frame then we can identify the "…complex negotiation between always already articulated roles and emerging paradigms of performance" and thus consider how the practice of impersonation (and more broadly, performance) can be both limiting and generative for moments of "self reflexive strategies of enactment."[231] In this instance, I argue that using Cho's larger body of work as a lens allows us to locate these possible moments of self-reflexivity and to view Cho's longer career as being about creating those possibilities.

Conclusion

Margaret Cho as Cho Young Ja was allowed to be loud while Cho as Margaret Cho, the Asian American comedienne, was expected to be silent. This silence was further pronounced as the journalists of *Charlie Hebdo* were remembered as martyrs at the 2015 Golden Globes for their pursuit of the freedom of speech when their satire targeted the Muslim community of Europe by depicting them as the violent, uncivilized, and perverse zealots of Islam. Covering this satire with "…liberal values like secularism and freedom speech [cloaks] garden-variety xenophobia."[232] The death of these journalists made clear what bodies were worth mourning, and how their rights, in this case, their freedom of speech, is understood as legitimate. In contrast, Cho's access to this same right is denied because it infringes on the logics of nativism and race that constitute white supremacy. I bring the events of *Charlie Hebdo* to illustrate the role of people of color at industry

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[231] Tina Chen, *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005) xvi.

[232]Jordan Weissmann, "*Charlie Hebdo* is Heroic *and* Racist" *Slate* January 8, 2015, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2015/01/charlie_hebdo_the_french_satirical_magazine_is_heroic_it_is_also_racist.html.

events like the Golden Globes—as figures that provide scaffolding for the racial sensibilities of the dominant white audience. In the black and white dichotomy of race in the United States, Asian Americans are subjected to a litany of racial hyperboles that remind of us of their suspected foreignness.

For instance, at the 2016 Academy Awards, Asian Americans faced racial hyperboles that emphasized their foreignness, which left them out of the discussions of the lack of racial diversity that plagued the Academy. The ceremony was marred in controversy because of its lack of African American nominees. Chris Rock, the host, chastised the Academy for its racism during his opening monologue, which attempted to produce a critical tone for the ceremony. During the show, Chris Rock brought up three young Asian American children and introduced them as Ming Zhu, Bao Ling, and David Moskowitz. Rock described the children as the "most dedicated, accurate, and hard-working accountants" at PricewaterhouseCoopers, the accounting firm that counts Oscar votes.[233] In an anticipation of backlash for the joke, Chris instructs the audience to "just tweet about it on your phone that was also made by these kids."[234] This skit relies on the racial hyperbolism of the model minority myth and yellow peril because its points to hyper-achieving Asian Americans who cannot be trusted. This incident reveals that when race becomes a topic of conversation, the rice card is used to alienate Asian Americans from this discussion and remind them of their suspect foreignness. The preoccupation with Asian Americans as suspect foreigners makes it impossible to consider how the community fits within American racial context.

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[233] Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, *88th Academy Awards*, directed by, Glenn Weiss (2016, Los Angeles: Academy of Motion Arts and Sciences, 2016) Television.
[234] Ibid.

While the rice card reminds us of the ways in which Asian Americans are still treated as the forever foreigner, Cho uses the rice card to challenge this racialized legibility. If the rice card directs our attention to the ways Asians have been racialized, then Cho's larger career functions as a lens to see these constructions in a subversive light. In particular, Cho's embrace of the excessive and loud is similar to the racial hyperboles or amplification that follows North Korea which provided a familiar template for Cho to work and wrestle with. Instead of challenging representations of North Korea as the unsavory rogue nation, I argue that Cho embraced its excess to make a larger claim about the place of Asian Americans within mainstream media. Cho's racialization as an unassimilable alien aligned with North Korea's (and its leadership) positioning as a rogue nation—both are unwilling or cannot assimilate into hegemonic understanding of proper governance. This alignment makes clear how larger geopolitical conditions continue to sustain the racialization of Asian Americans as the unassimilable alien. By using Cho's artistry as an analytical lens, this approach makes visible how these connections can be broken down and reanimated with different meanings that challenge their initial constitution. Ultimately, what this analysis calls for is more holistic consideration of how performers of color negotiate and navigate their legibility, which can offer readings of possible subversion and resistance.

On the other hand, Cho did play into the common sense that surrounds North Korea when she discusses her familial and ethnic ties to Korea. Cho's participation in the circulation of this common sense of North Korea, in particular, as a nation-state that brainwashes its citizens, brings attention to how her engagement with North Korea as something to be performed reveals the flexibility of these prevalent constructions. On the

one hand, North Korea provides her a template to challenge the relationship of Asian Americans to the American entertainment industry; on the other, it gave her the opportunity to support the larger political and cultural campaign of the United States against North Korea. The following chapter also points to the ways in which North Korea provides a space for others, in this case, the Black Panthers, to project their political beliefs and aspirations.

Chapter 3, in part, contains material that has been submitted for publication. Lisa Ho. The dissertation author was the primary investigator and author of this material.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Black Power in the Hermit Kingdom: Re-imagining Cold War North Korea through the North Korean International Documentation Project

> "Stubbornly dedicated to chuche, which translates roughly as 'masters in our own house' and also means autarchy or total self-reliance, Kim is dependent on foreign aid he knows can be capricious, arbitrary and unreliable."—Robert S. Elegant, *Los Angeles Times* (1968)

> "We have seen here with our own eyes the beauty and strength of the Korean people under the wise leadership of Comrade Kim Il Sung, and have learned in detail of the glorious anti-Japanese struggle; the ignominious defeat of the U.S. imperialists in the Fatherland Liberation War."—Eldridge Cleaver (1970)

I open the chapter with these two epigraphs to demonstrate conflicting representations of North Korea during the Cold War: the *Los Angeles Times* excerpt depicted North Korea as a threat to American democracy and a reckless dependent of the former Soviet Union, while Eldridge Cleaver's quote glorified it as the victorious young country that had defeated the United States. As a counterpoint to the mainstream representation of North Korea as a rogue nation, this chapter examines how the depiction of North Korea as a radical counterbalance to global American hegemony was central to the U.S. Third World Left's efforts to challenge American imperialism and colonialism. To do so, I focus on the alliance of the Black Panther Party (BPP) and North Korea, specifically through an examination of the activities of one of its members, Eldridge Cleaver.[235] I examine how the BPP cultivated a relationship with North Korea, promoting it as a viable ally in the shared struggle against American imperialism. The BPP-North

[235] I am relying on the politics of the U.S. Third World Left to explain why organizations like the Black Panthers seek alliances with nations like North Korea. This chapter is using the U.S. Third World Left to frame the Cleaver's travels with the Anti-Imperialist Delegation but also, looking at the specific transnational efforts of the BPP to understand the stakes and context of these relationships.

Korea alliance challenges the widespread perception of North Korea as isolated from the outside world, and instead presents it as a willing ally to the transnational aspirations of the BPP and the U.S. Third World Left more generally.

This chapter analyzes the writings of Eldridge Cleaver, the former Minister of Information of the Black Panther Party, who traveled to North Korea in the 1ate 1960s and early 1970s with the Anti-Imperialist Delegation while he was in exile. The Anti-Imperialist Delegation included Elaine Brown from the BPP, Robert Scheer and Jan Austin from *Ramparts*, Regina Blumenfeld and Randy Rappaport from the Women's Liberation Movement, Alex Hing of the Red Guard, Ana Froines from the Panther Defense Committee of New Haven, Patricia Sumi from the Movement for a Democratic Military, Andy Truskier of the Peace and Freedom Party, and Janet Kranzberg.[236] Cleaver's wife, Kathleen, who was the communications secretary of the BPP, traveled to North Korea ahead of the delegation because of her pregnancy.

The bulk of the evidence for this chapter comes from Cleaver's writings that are stored in the "American Radical Left and North Korea" section of the North Korean International Documentation Project (NKIDP). Culled from larger archives at the University of California, Berkeley and Texas A&M University, the NKIDP functions as an "…informational clearinghouse on North Korea for both the scholarly and policymaking communities" by distributing recently declassified materials on North Korea that "…provide[s] valuable insight into the action and nature of the North Korean

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[236] In *Radicals on the Road*, Judy Wu provides a detailed background of each member of the delegation. This delegation was a diverse cross-section of the American Left, whose experiences of North Korea were a reflection of their own political goals and objectives. See Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013) 137.

State."[237] The depiction of North Korea in Cleaver's writings connects global American hegemony to the racial terror and structural violence experiences by marginalized communities within the United States—connections that were central to the U.S. Third World Left's campaign against the United States. I examine Cleaver's writings on North Korea to understand how the alliance between North Korea and BPP and the larger U.S Third World Left developed and shifted over time. As in my previous chapters, I argue that what makes North Korea so valuable to U.S. political discourse is how malleable its constructions can be to fit the imperatives of different political projects.

In analyzing how North Korea was imagined through the transnational dimensions of Black Power, I show how the BPP - North Korea alliance elucidates the role of American militarism in the division of the Korean peninsula. I contextualize this analysis within the larger politics of the U.S. Third World Left—a collective that saw their struggles in "global terms."[238] In *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. World Left*, Cynthia A. Young explains that this collective of activists, journalists, students, and artists who looked to Third World anticolonial movements for inspiration and for strategies in the fight against state violence, racial terror, and other related issues that targeted communities of color.[239] In the case of Eldridge Cleaver, his writing about his trips to North Korea with the Anti-Imperialist Delegation reveals his efforts to uncover the possibility of racial harmony within the newly decolonized North Korea.

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[237] Wilson Center, "About" *North Korea International Documentation Project*, Wilson Center, Accessed 2016, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/about-14.
[238] Cynthia A. Young, *Soul Power: Cultural, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Power Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 2.
[239] For the purposes of clarification, I consider the BPP as a part of the U.S. Third World Left because Young's description aligns with the makeup of delegation that Cleaver lead to North Korea.

While the first three chapters of my dissertation explore how North Korea was continually produced as an eminent threat to the United States, this chapter flips this script by examining how U.S. militarism threatens the existence of North Korea. By returning to the era of North Korea's formation as a nation-state, I argue that the knowledge produced by these documents is central in building a larger critique of the violent ventures of American imperialism and its linkages to racial violence in the United States. Also, North Korea's commitment to national self-determination (through juche) was a model of governance that inspired Cleaver and members of the Anti-Imperialist Delegation. Although other scholars, like Judy Tzu-Chu Wu and Benjamin Young, have written about North Korea's coalition building with Third World countries, I bring attention to the *strategic* nature of these efforts as illustrated by Cleaver's denouncement of North Korea and shift to conservative politics after he surrendered to American authorities when he returned from exile in the late 1970s. In doing so, I illuminate how the constructions of North Korea are reflective of whatever political agenda different groups are pursuing at a given moment. For instance, the trope of "North Korea as an eminent threat" is integral to the continuation and escalation of American hegemony in the Korean peninsula and more broadly, in Northeast Asia. In the following sections, I analyze how Cleaver's depictions of North Korea aligned with the U.S. Third World Left's admiration of the decolonized world's challenge to global American hegemony and imperialism.

The first section provides context to the transnational connections and approaches that the BPP used to critique, disrupt, and undermine the spread of American imperialism across the globe. I also show how the transnational formation of the party emerged out of

a longer legacy of Black Internationalism. This section is not exhaustive but offers insight into the foundational aspects of the BPP that facilitated its solidarity building with the different revolutionary centers and leaders. I use this section to explain and contextualize the affinity that the BPP and Eldridge Cleaver had for Kim Il Sung and North Korea.

The second section conducts a close reading of the selected documents from the NKIDP collection that were chosen based on their length and detail, as not all the materials were complete. The goal of this section is to draw out key themes that mirror the important linkages that the BPP were making between racial terror that was experienced by black communities in the United States and American imperialism abroad. I suggest that these connections reflected how a form of relational geography was produced out of these relationships that challenged the bipolar formation of the Cold War. But, I also argue that Cleaver's elevation of North Korea and Kim Il Sung produces a different kind of hierarchy that accord to the logics of Judy Chu's concept of radical orientalism.

The last section shifts in a different direction that feels more familiar in the context of this dissertation project. In *Soul on Fire*, Eldridge Cleaver's second memoir; shares a very different image of North Korea that contradicts his previous declarations that celebrate North Korea as a fellow comrade in the struggle against American imperialism. While the NKIDP does not include Cleaver's memoir in its collection, I do so because this analysis aims to illustrate how the portrayal of North Korea shifts accordingly to the change in Cleaver's politics. As such, what makes North Korea so valuable within the context of American politics (whatever affiliation) is the malleability of its construction by external actors. The objective of this chapter is not to argue one

depiction of North Korea is more "valid" than other but to articulate the political value that North Korea had as an ally to the U.S. Third World Left, in particular, for the Black Panthers. In this case, the imagination of North Korea as a viable ally to the Black Panthers does not perpetuate the common sense that dictates North Korea as a site of unstable and constant violence.

Instead, this chapter argues that the representation of North Korea as anti-U.S. imperial agent reveals the culpability of the United States in the Korean War and division. This reversal disrupts the narration of North Korea as the violent perpetrator and presents the nation-state as righteously defending itself and other subjugated peoples. Also, this challenge is rooted in the connections being made by the Black Panthers between the racial and structural violence that is experienced by communities of color and the global spread of American imperialism**.** While there has been other scholarship that has studied Cleaver's trips to North Korea, I am more interested in what these materials have to say about the nation-state itself and its relationship to the current status of North Korea in the landscape of American cultural and political discourse.

The Transnational Dimensions of Black Power

The transnational approaches of the Black Panthers are rooted in the larger legacy of Black Internationalism—a movement that was considered by the American government as instigating the spread of communism during the Cold War. Historian Robyn Spencer explains that figures like W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson were central in "flouting the official Cold War line" because they connected the struggle for racial justice in the United Sates to the global campaign against capitalism, militarism, and imperialism. For instance, Paul Robeson, a supporter of the Civil Rights Congress,

charged that the United States was violating the rights of African Americans—a petition titled *We Charge Genocide* was submitted to the United Nations in 1951. The group framed the violence of racial terror through the newly institutionalized language of human rights and did so by making connections to the Korean War.[240] The transnational nature of *We Charge Genocide* "link[ed] mass violence perpetrated with impunity in the imperial center that furiously unleashed on millions in the periphery—here implying a homology between police brutality in the United States and the U.S. 'police action' in Korea."[241] Although those who helped to "internationalize" the civil rights movement would be censored by the United States, activists who followed in their footsteps continued to bring global attention to the struggles of the black community and form connections with other nations to make a larger critique of American empire. I bring attention to this history to illustrate that the global dimensions of the BPP were extensions of Black Internationalism.

Spencer argues that what made the BPP unique was that the group "fused a radical internationalist posture—anticolonialism, Third World solidarity, and opposition to U.S. imperialism—with an equally radical critique of U.S. society" that revealed structural inequalities and violence that plagued subjugated communities across space.[242] In *Black Against Empire*, Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin explain that Huey Newton and Bobby Seale understood that their struggle against the racial subjugation of Blacks

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[240] Cheryl Higashida, *Black Internationalist Feminism, Women Writers of the Black Left, 1945-1995* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013) 20.
[241] Christine Hong, "War By Other Means: The Violence of North Korean Human Rights," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 12 (2014): 8.
[242] Robyn Spencer, "Merely One Link in the Worldwide Revolution Internationalism, State Repression, and the Black Panther Party, 1966-1972," *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution*, edited by Michael O. West, William G. Martin, Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 217.

was "…part of a global revolution against American imperialism."[243] Members of the BPP were required to read the writings of revolutionaries like Che, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, and Kim Il Sung for their political education classes. In particular, the Vietnamese liberation struggle deeply influenced the BPP because the organization revered how the Vietnamese people fought American imperialism.[244] The unpopularity of the Vietnam War attracted many anti-war activists who demanded peace and U.S. withdrawal from the country; however, the BPP distinguished themselves from this larger movement by declaring solidarity with the Vietnamese in hopes of defeating U.S. imperialism.[245] Even though the Panthers were influenced by these Third World revolutionaries, Bloom and Martin argued that the ideological alignment with these leaders was "…never rigid, sectarian, or dogmatic" but was "…motivated by a vision of a universal and radically democratic struggle against oppression, ideology seldom got in the way of Party's alliance building and practical politics."[246] As such, the Party's declaration of global solidarity with other nations that were struggling against colonial forces was reciprocated with similar support and admiration by those nations, especially when the Party needed it the most, like when Huey Newton was imprisoned in 1967.

The admiration of the BPP by different foreign allies enabled the organization to "pursue[d] their own foreign relations," which Nikhil Pal Singh argues challenged "the

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[243] Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2012) 2.
[244] Michael L. Clemons and Charles E. Jones, "Global Solidarity: The Black Panther Party in the International Arena" *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New Look at the Panthers and their Legacy*, edited by Kathleen Cleaver and George Katsiaficas (New York: Routledge, 2001) 30.
[245] Spencer, "Merely One Link in the World Wide Revolution, Internationalism, State Repression, and the Black Panther Party," 219-220.
[246] Bloom and Martin Jr., *Black Against Empire*, 310-311.

state in what is perhaps the most scared of its own constitutive monopolies."[247] For instance, Huey Newton celebrated the fact that the Panthers were the only Americans that had "a foreign policy" towards Vietnam and that he visited China in 1970 before President Nixon—a visit that allowed Newton to "rebuke the American President publically in front of the Chinese."[248] Singh explains that this strategy of the Panthers was practiced by Robert Williams and Malcolm X to validate their respective movements but did so through the "internationalist rituals of delegation and diplomacy."[249] In other words, the Panthers had adopted state practices to create opportunities to spread their critique of American empire on a global stage, thereby enlarging the scope of their influence. The Panthers traveled to Algeria, Cuba, Mozambique, some parts of Europe, and of course, North Korea. The relationships that would be cultivated through these travels would be critical for the livelihood of Panther leadership.

In 1967, Newton was imprisoned after a police confrontation that left one police officer dead. After Newton's imprisonment, Cleaver, who was the Party's Minister of Communication, became a more prominent member. Cleaver joined the BPP in 1967 because of the Party's militant practices and disposition. In his foreword to *The Black Panthers Speaks*, an edited collection of BPP writings, Clayborne Carson explains that Cleaver's initial attraction to the party was born out of violence: in February 1967, Cleaver witnessed a confrontation between the police and a group of armed Panthers who were guarding the widow of Malcolm X, Betty Shabazz. Carson writes that Cleaver was "impressed by their brash militancy" a partiality that would come to characterize

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[247] Nikhil Pal Singh, "The Black Panthers and the 'Underdeveloped Country," *The Black Panther Party: Reconsidered,* edited by Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 85.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid.

Cleaver's approach to Panther politics.[250] Cleaver became the editor the Black Panthers' Community News Service and the public spokesperson of the Party.[251] In his autobiography, *This Side of Glory,* David Hilliard, former Chief of Staff of the BPP, described Cleaver as a "master of words" who was "…not scared of saying anything."[252] According to Hilliard, before Cleaver's entrance into the Party, he had been imprisoned on rape charges. Cleaver had written a letter to Beverly Axelrod, who was a Bay Area lawyer; Axelrod fielded requests like Cleaver's all the time. However, Axelrod was impressed by Cleaver's "command of language" that prompted her to organize a campaign for his parole.[253] Axelrod submitted the letters she received from Cleaver to *Ramparts* magazine, which led Cleaver to gain national attention. Later, Cleaver joined *Ramparts* as a staff writer and turned his letters to Axelrod and other writings into a book, *Soul on Ice,* which became a best seller. This anecdote reveals how Cleaver became such an effective spokesperson for the Party because his written work helped him establish connections with the radical community of the Bay Area, connections that would follow his work with the Panthers.

In response to Newton's imprisonment with other members, Cleaver helped launch the "Free Huey" campaign that became "internationalized" through declarations of support from allies abroad. For example, Connie Matthews, who worked for the United Nations Educational, Science, and Cultural Organization in Copenhagen, arranged speaking tours for Bobby Seale and fellow Panther member Masai Hewitt throughout

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[250] Clayborne Carson, "Foreword" *The Black Panthers Speak,* edited by Eric Foner (Cambridge: De Capo Press, 1995) XII.
[251] Ibid.
[252] David Hilliard and Lewis Cole, *The Autobiography of David Hilliard and the Story of the Black Panther Party* (Little Brown & Co: Boston, 1993) 128.
[253] Ibid, 127.

Scandinavia. At each stop of their tour, the Panthers were able to create a solidarity committee, gain official endorsements of support from European organizations, and more importantly funding for Newton's legal defense. The global presence of the Party was facilitated through these transnational offshoots. As noted earlier, these relationships were reciprocal in that the BPP and their respective allies were educated in each other's politics and struggles. Quite simply, these relationships were important in a practical and ideological sense for the maintenance and expansion of the BPP. On the domestic front, Cleaver's position as the editor of *Ramparts* allowed him to share a counter-narrative of Newton's case that was not being shared in mainstream media outlets; and his speaking engagements allowed him to provide funds that were needed for Newton's legal defense. However, Cleaver would again find himself in trouble with authorities.

On April 6, 1968, Cleaver was involved in a shootout with police that ended in the death of fellow Panther, Bobby Hutton, and left Cleaver injured. With his parole revoked, Cleaver was released on June 12th but was ordered to return to prison on November 27th. Cleaver fled to Cuba the day before he was expected to return to prison, on November 26th. Cleaver arrived in Cuba on December 25th. As a fugitive, Cleaver sought refuge in Cuba, Algeria, and North Korea. After some time in Cuba, Cleaver would relocate to Algeria where he spent his life traveling to other nations. Algeria was considered a "valuable political sanctuary" for the Panthers because it provided opportunities for them to interact with a "constellation of global revolutionaries" from other like-minded countries.[254] These interactions gave members the chance to engage with diplomatic officials from socialist nations and to receive formal invitations to visit

[254] Clemons and Jones, "Global Solidarity," 33.

countries like North Korea. During this period, the International Section of the Party was established on September 13, 1970 in Algeria. The purpose of the International Section was to promote BPP activism on a global stage, gather resources, align with other social movements, and bring Party issues to the United Nation—all in one centralized space.[255] The establishment of the International Section was central for the BPP to cultivate relationships with politically like-minded nations like North Korea.

The "Ugly Piratical Face" of U.S. Imperialism: Building Affinity with North Korea

In a statement on behalf of the Anti-Imperialist Delegation, Eldridge Cleaver praises North Korea and Kim Il Sung's fight against U.S. imperialism. Cleaver declared:

> If all of the oppressed and revolutionary peoples of the world follow the example of the heroic Korean people, led by the far-sighted Genius-Commander, the Ever-Victorious Comrade Kim Il Sung, then our program of PEOPLES DIPLOMACY will be a great success and U.S. imperialism will have received a stinging and significant slap in its ugly piratical face.[256]

Cleaver's bold declaration illustrates the predatory nature of U.S. imperialism on a global stage. I included this passage here to explicate how Cleaver identified a key commonality between North Korea and other revolutionary agents—dismantling U.S. imperialism. This section recounts how North Korea and the BPP formulated their political alliance—in particular, their shared struggle against U.S. imperialism. In 1969, North Korea's ambassador in Algeria invited Eldridge Cleaver to attend the International Conference of Revolutionary Journalists in Pyongyang, North Korea.[257] Cleaver attended the conference

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[255] Ibid, 36.
[256] Statement from the US Peoples' Anti-Imperialist Delegation to Korea, 1970, Carton 5 Folder 4, The Eldridge Cleaver Papers, 1963-1988, Bancroft Library, Berkeley.
[257] Clemons and Jones, "Global Solidarity," 33.

with fellow Panther member, Byron Booth, and returned to North Korea in 1970 with the Anti-Imperialist Delegation.[258]

In his second autobiography, *Soul on Fire*, which was released when he returned to the United States after surrendering to American authorities, Cleaver reflected on his political work abroad: "Recognition of the International Section of the Black Panther Party by these Asians gave me status and belonging in the overseas jungle. Without diplomatic recognition, I was simply a notorious gangster."[259] For Cleaver, these international travels were not just about cultivating alliances but also about having his political positions affirmed and even valorized. Also, Cleaver's trips to North Korea and later to Vietnam and China reflected the practice of "peoples diplomacy," in which the members were treated like "dignitaries."[260] As Annie-Marie Bradley explains, for China, people's diplomacy was a pathway for the government to make "official" contact with "nonofficial contacts" to spread its influence as a nation-state.[261] For North Korea, people's diplomacy provided an opportunity for the nation-state to support Third Worldism and thus a pathway to creating a "new international order based on mutual assistance amongst small postcolonial nations" that would be central to socialist modernity.[262] For Cleaver and the delegation, these trips were part and parcel of the romanticization of Asia among U.S. activists as "the progressive, revolutionary East" that

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[258] Kathleen Rout, *Eldridge Cleaver* (London: Macmillan Publishing, 1991) 52.
[259] Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Fire* (Hachette: Hodder, 1979) 149.
[260] Judy Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 137.
[261] Anne-Marie Bradley, *Making the Foreign Serve China: Managing Foreigners in the People's Republic* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003) 23.
[262] Benjamin Young, "Juche in the United States: The Black Panther Party's Relations with North Korea, 1969-1971" *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, no. 3 (2015) 6.

challenged the "capitalist and militaristic West."[263] In other words, both North Korea and BPP (and members of the delegation) were working to defeating the hegemonic global order of the Cold War by replacing it with an order that challenged this dominant formation.

In North Korea, Cleaver and the delegation were greeted with a welcoming message that affirmed the country's relationship and solidarity with the BPP. Although the "speaker" is not identified, the speech begins with a warm welcome for the delegation, stating that the purpose of this gathering is to show the "…great significance in strengthening the solidarity of the Korean people and the progressive people in America in the struggle against U.S. imperialism, the common enemy."[264] The speaker identifies that the site of commonality between the delegation and the DPRK is their struggle against the violence of U.S. imperialism. However, at the same time, the speaker's labeling of the delegation as being part of the "progressive people" marks North Korea's efforts to find important commonalities with those outsides its borders.

The speaker refers to then President Nixon as being a "war maniac" who is "…running amuck to find a way out of their crisis at home and abroad in stepping up their maneuvers for aggression and war externally and intensifying their plunder and repression of the people internally."[265] The speaker frames U.S. aggression as being an external and internal force, which was a strategic challenge to U.S. claims of moral superiority on a global stage. I draw attention to the generality of the speaker's language because it highlights how the rhetoric of the speaker is flexible enough to illustrate

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[263] Judy Wu, *Radicals on the Road,* 138.
[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid.

support for the delegation and to bring in more potential alliances with other similar groups. I suggest North Korea's welcoming message is strategically vague in order to illustrate goal to become a model for Third Worldism and how an alliance with the BPP would be central to that purpose.

Although the speaker does acknowledge that the BPP and the Black population are forced to endure the racial discrimination of the United States, the speaker does not elaborate on the conditions of this racial repression. Instead, the speaker focuses more on how "genuine freedom, liberation, and the right to existence" is a shared goal of the BPP and North Korea and what ultimately connects both parties. The speaker ends the greeting by demanding that the United States "…unconditionally and completely withdraw from South Korea without delay…"[266] By making this demand in front of Cleaver and the Anti-Imperialism illustrates how North Korea valued this alliance to achieve their own political goals. The speaker indicates that North Korea wants Korean reunification to be achieved without foreign intervention or oversight and that the process should be "…settled by the Korean people themselves independently, on democratic principles…"[267] The conditions for reunification outlined by the speaker emphasize the need for self-determination for the people of North Korea, thus rejecting interference or oversight by both the United States and their ally, the former Soviet Union.

This vision of reunification is grounded in the logics of "relational geography" that was based on the perceived similarities of North Korea's struggle against U.S. militarism and the liberatory politics of the BPP. North Korea struggled for reunification whereas the

[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid.

BPP sought to eradicate black subjugation and in order to do so, American imperialism needed to challenged and eliminated as well.[268] In both cases, American imperialism was marked as the key obstruction to these demands of self-determination and freedom. Sheila Hones and Julia Leyda define "relational geography" as the process of moving away from "viewing space as a kind of container…and toward the idea that is the acting and relating that literally produce space."[269] Instead of affirming the Cold War divide, both North Korea and the BPP challenged the superpower of the United States and the former Soviet Union. North Korea wanted to pursue reunification on their own terms and the BPP challenged the moral standing of the United States by critiquing the subjugation of Black Americans. In other words, both North Korea and the BPP imagined a world without the two global powers who were struggling for global domination.

While in North Korea, Cleaver provides a similar statement of support, albeit longer and more detailed, expressing his affinity for the nation-state and its leader, Kim Il Sung. For example, Cleaver opines that if all the "oppressed and revolutionary peoples of the world" would follow the "…example of the heroic Korean people, led by the far-sighted Genius-commander, the Ever-Victorious Comrade Kim Il Sung, then our program of PEOPLES' DIPLOMACY will be a great success and U.S. imperialism will have

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[268] Clemons and Jones, "Global Solidarity," 27.

[269] In "Geographies of American Studies" Sheila Hones and Julia Leyda argue that the centering of the U.S. nation-state within the field of American Studies determines how the scholarship of U.S.-based scholars as being universal whereas the works of scholars outside of the U.S. is "foreign." Hones and Leyda use critical geography to intervene into these designations by indicating that instead of viewing the field through a territorial notion that its geography should be understood as being produced through interaction. Hones and Leyda explain that American Studies should "…shift away from the practice of viewing space as a kind of container, within which Americanists act and across the distance of which they relate to each other, and toward the idea that is the acting and relating that literally produce the space." See Sheila Hones and Julia Leyda, "Geographies of American Studies," *American Quarterly* 57, 4 (2005): 1021.

received a stinging and significant slap in its ugly piratical face."[270] Cleaver's boisterous and colorful language is indicative of Cleaver's valorization of Kim Il Sung and the DPRK. Cleaver's admiration for Kim extends not only to the DPRK's efforts to resist U.S. imperialism but also to "the revolutionary history of Comrade Kim Il Sung's family—a family that had fought bravely for generations as true patriots of Korea."[271] Cleaver and the delegation concluded that Kim's "revolutionary heritage" had been "courageously planted and carefully nurtured so that he [would] be able to take on the glorious task of leading the Korean people down the road of liberation and revolution."[272] Cleaver argues that because of this "revolutionary heritage," Kim was able to predict the "impeding rise of Japanese militarism under the guiding of U.S. imperialism."[273] Cleaver's belief that Kim was born to be a revolutionary or his admiration of such a legacy represents Kim as the pre-ordained leader of the DPRK. The reader is not privy to the other facts of this history mentioned in the document which makes it difficult to identify the larger context of this narration so we do not know how Cleaver and the delegation came by this information and what ways. I suggest that these gaps are important to fill to understand the larger objective of narrating Kim as being a pre-ordained leader of North Korea.

Cleaver's overzealous praise of Kim is an act of turning developing nations like North Korea into "heroic" countries. As "radical orientalism" details, radical activists, such as Cleaver, have disrupted the global hierarchies engineered by U.S. imperialism

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[270] Statement from the US Peoples' Anti-Imperialist Delegation to Korea, 1970, Carton 5 Folder 4, The Eldridge Cleaver Papers, 1963-1988, Bancroft Library, Berkeley.
[271] Ibid.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Ibid.

and militarism, only to replace them with other hierarchies that solidify the power of leaders of the decolonizing movements in Asia. For instance, the BPP's admiration of revolutionary leaders like Kim, Che, and Mao prompted leadership to include writings and teachings of these individuals into the organization's newspaper, *The Black Panther*.[274] In *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, Feminism during the Vietnam Era*, Judy Tzu-Chun Wu uses radical orientalism to refer to the process of how some activists of the American Left used the idealized depictions of decolonizing Asia to create a new hierarchy in which the East was superior to the "denigrated West."[275] Wu contends that "the radicalness of their orientalism stemmed from how they invert and subvert [these] previous [West-East] hierarchies…."[276]

As I noted above, another member of the BPP, Byron Booth joined Cleaver on his first trip to North Korea in 1969 for the International Conference of Revolutionary Journalists. Booth published an article detailing his experiences in the Panther newspaper, *The Black Panther*. Like Cleaver, Booth saw Pyongyang as the "future" that the BPP envisioned for its communities.[277] North Korea had healthcare, free education, and a stable economy while "poverty, crime, and gun violence plagued the streets of Oakland."[278] In particular, the BPP believed that education would be central in combating the violence of white supremacy that controlled Black America.[279] Of course, it must be noted that this perception of North Korea was the result of BPP members being led "on

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[274] Clemons and Johnson, "Global Solidarity, 30.
[275] Judy Tzu- Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 5.
[276] Ibid, 5.
[277] Byron Booth, "Beyond the Demarcation Line," *The Black Panther* 3, no. 27 (October 25, 1969).
[278] Benjamin Young, "Juche in the United States: The Black Panther Party's Relations with North Korea, 1969-1971" 10.
[279] Ibid, 10.

strict government approved routes that maintained the façade of a workers' paradise."[280] Wu's concept of radical orientalism can be used to identify how these romanticized portrayals ignored the "...dynamic societies undergoing complex, political, and military social changes."[281] In the case of North Korea, it could be argued that these ideal images cultivated by North Korean officials were central in building North Korea's identity as a revolutionary nation-state and thus a model for other Third World nations that that seek revolution.

I focus on the ideological value that Kim's history and legacy provides to Cleaver's effort in forging a global alliance between nations like the DPRK and the BPP. Regardless of the validity of Kim Il Sung's revolutionary life, it provides a pathway for Cleaver and North Korea to solidify itself as a legitimate anti-imperialist nation. I argue that by focusing on Kim's revolutionary background provided a tangible figure to relate to that could offer inspiration. In *Illusive Utopia,* Suk Young Kim contends that despite how "underverified" Kim Il Sung's revolutionary legacy and his history of resistance is, it has been "…compensated for and reinforced" through different forms of North Korean artwork. For example, the painting, *Arduous March (Gonan-ui haenggun)* depicts Kim leading a group of soldiers through the harsh winter landscape with the red Communist flag in which "…he assumes a vertically higher position as the unchallenged leader of the brotherhood…"[282] Kim explains that little is known about the actual history of Kim Il Sung's anti-Japanese guerrilla movement and his revolutionary activities. However,

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[280] Benjamin Young, "Juche in the United States: The Black Panther Party's Relations with North Korea, 1969-1971" 10.
[281] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road,* 6.
[282] Suk Young Kim, *Illusive Utopia: Theatre, Film, and Everyday Performance in North Korea* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2010) 76.

paintings like the *Arduous March*, are able to "…recover faithfully the undocumented part of his actual life."[283] Consequently, the depiction of the early years of Kim Il Sung's life as the future "liberator of the Korean nation" remains in the "…liminal zone between and history, feudal past and present, and illusion and reality."[284] Cleaver builds upon the revolutionary history of Kim Il Sung (that was shared by his North Korean hosts) by explaining that the North's attack of South Korea on June 25, 1950, which ignited the Korean War, "…would go down in history as the beginning of the downfall of the lying, murderous U.S. imperialists." Cleaver expands the revolutionary narrative of Kim Il Sung beyond the Korean Peninsula, claiming that when Kim called for the Korean people to raise against their repressors, he was also calling for "…all of the oppressed and exploited masses of the world to begin their glorious struggle to smash forever the imperialist war makers, especially U.S. imperialists."[285] Although Cleaver does not provide evidence of Kim Il Sung's concern with oppressed populations outside of the Korean peninsula, his recasting of Kim's resistance from a national campaign to a global one was designed to make Kim Il Sung and DPRK relevant to the BPP and its supporters. In this case, the marking of U.S. imperialism as the central obstacle to freedom and liberation aligned North Korea and BPP towards a common target. This transnational alignment was grounded in the understanding that U.S. imperialism worked internally and externally to solidify its domination.

In his statement on behalf of the Anti-Imperialist Delegation, Cleaver mentioned the murder of fellow party member, Fred Hampton, by members of the Chicago Police

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[283] Ibid, 75.
[284] Ibid.
[285] Statement from the US Peoples' Anti-Imperialist Delegation to Korea, 1970, Carton 5 Folder 4, The Eldridge Cleaver Papers, 1963-1988, Bancroft Library, Berkeley.

Department. Cleaver writes that Hampton was shot while he slept, which demonstrated to him that the "…methods of terror and suppression are the same wherever the U.S. imperialists set foot and attempt to wipe out the righteous resistance and rebellion of the people."[286] This connection is similar to how the Civil Rights Congress conceptualized police brutality through the language of American imperialism as noted above. In this case, Cleaver connected U.S. persecution of Kim Il Sung to that of those in the BPP. In other words, American violence (whether through militarism or police brutality) has targeted marginalized communities of color—a commonality that binds North Korea and the BPP together in resistance and rebellion. Yet, at the same time, Cleaver's glorification of Kim Il Sung felt heavy-handed and problematic in that the information on the life and history of Kim Il Sung was provided to him by North Korean officials. As noted by Suk Young Kim, the line between fiction and reality that holds together the revolutionary narrative of Kim Il Sung becomes blurred through its constant repetition, which Cleaver adds to with his own retellings.

During his visit, Cleaver vouched to enact what he considered to be the shared political objectives of Kim and the BPP's. Cleaver promised that he and the delegation will "…re-educate the American people about a long forgotten chapter of their history; that chapter in which the Korean people were the first to bring the U.S. imperialists to their knees…."[287] Also, Cleaver indicated that through this "re-education," the American people will demand that the leave South Korea so it can be once again a self-determining nation. Cleaver explained that the BPP's expression of solidarity with North Korea would

[286] Welcoming Message to Eldridge Cleaver, Kathleen Cleaver, and Robert Scheer Upon Their Arrival in North Korea, 1970, Carton 5 Folder 2, The Eldridge Cleaver Papers, 1963-1988, Bancroft Library, Berkeley.
[287] Ibid.

aid the BPP "…in strengthening our own revolutionary struggle."[288] As noted above, alliances with like-minded nations was important for the BPP in cultivating a global network of support and resources central in their struggle for freedom.

For North Korea, hosting these trips gave the nation-state an opportunity to showcase the modernization it was experiencing and thus offer "an alternative form of modernity, a socialist version that countered Western capitalism."[289] Judy Wu explains that the idea that socialist Asia was advancing past the West defied most Americans' understanding of their country and the rest of the world.[290] In the preceding chapters, I have shown that the construction of North Korea as being "stuck in time" has been used to demonstrate their interiorized difference and thus the necessity of removing them from the global community. In contrast, Cleaver's trips showcased North Korea as experiencing a form of modernity that was not legible under a Western framework, thereby challenging the perception of a "stuck-in-time" North Korea.

In 1970, Huey Newton, one of the founding leaders of the BPP, was released from jail on bail, while Cleaver was abroad in North Korea. At that time, the BPP was in "disarray," as key members like Seale and Hilliard were awaiting trial for different charges. Moreover, party chapters in the Eastern states were not heeding the direction of BPP headquarters in Oakland, and there had been various FBI informants, like Earl Anthony, who were disrupting BPP affairs.[291] To reclaim his control over the Party, Newton focused on creating "survival programs" that addressed the everyday realities of the Black community. Newton's new direction clashed with Cleaver's, who still believed

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[288] Ibid.
[289] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road,* 147.
[290] Ibid, 147.
[291] Clayborne Carson, "Foreword," XV.

in "picking up the gun." Newton believed that "Cleaver's profane, bombastic rhetoric…made the Panthers vulnerable to external repression and increased the influence of those more concerned with displays of bravado than with political organizing."[292] Newton believed that Cleaver's rhetoric was not achieving concrete political goals and was isolating potential supporters from the Black community. In "On the Defection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party and the Defection of the Black Panther from the Black Community," Newton detailed the ways the Party had abandoned the Black community, and charged Cleaver with having forced such a betrayal. Newton explained that Cleaver's "either-or" attitude about armed revolution pushed out community members because those who chose not to "pick up the gun" were deemed as "cowards" and thus had no place in the organization.[293] Consequently, if there were no community, "...then there was no way that the Black Panther Party could make any revolution, for the record shows that the people are the makers of the revolution and of world history."[294] Newton's accusations of division contrasted sharply to the work of solidarity that Cleaver claimed he was doing with Third World nations. As articulated by many scholars of the Black Panthers, divisions like the one between Newton and Cleaver may have been engineered by the efforts of COINTELPRO—an FBI initiative that sought to dismantle the Party through infiltration. I bring up Newton's charges against Cleaver in order to contextualize the following section which details Cleaver's political shift, and the resulting perspective on North Korea. After Cleaver was forced out of the Party, he

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[292] Ibid, xvi.
[293] Huey P. Newton "On the defection of Eldridge Cleaver from the Black Panther Party and the defection of the Black Panther Party from the Black Community: April 17, 1971," *The Huey P. Newton Reader*, edited by David Hilliard and Donald Weise (New York City: Seven Stories Press, 2002) 205.
[294] Ibid.

settled in Paris with his family, but eventually grew restless because he had to remain under the radar due to his undocumented status. Cleaver's departure from the radical spotlight would ultimately push him into a new political circle that contradicted his revolutionary beginnings.

A Change of Heart: Eldridge Cleaver's Public Conversions

In this section, I detail the surrender and return of Cleaver to the United States, as told in his second autobiography, *Soul on Fire*. As noted by Kathleen Cleaver, his return was shrouded with suspicion because of Cleaver's public conversion to Christianity, which he detailed as the motivating force behind his "sudden change of heart." In *Target Zero*, Kathleen Cleaver writes that Eldridge Cleaver's "sudden change of heart" to come out of hiding from Paris and return to the United States was "…so shocking that it fueled wild assumptions and rumors about a supposed 'deal' he'd struck with the FBI in exchange for his surrender."[295] She explains that "given the dark climate of deception and intrigue that cloaked that decade of war in Vietnam, no evidence was needed for these assumptions; suspicions became sufficient unto itself."[296] This section does not seek to prove or disprove these accusations but to contextualize Cleaver's changed attitude towards North Korea.

In 1975, before his surrender to U.S. authorities, Cleaver wrote, "Why I Left the U.S. and Why I am Returning," an op-ed for the *New York Times.* Cleaver writes "lots of people believe I left because I preferred to go live in a Communist country, and that now, several years later, I find the grass [is] not greener on the Communist side of the

[295] Kathleen Cleaver, "Foreword," *Target Zero*, edited by Kathleen Cleaver (New York City: St. Martin's Press, 2006) XXIII.
[296] Ibid.

fence."[297] He explains that even though "from Gov. Ronald Regan down, the politicians wanted me silenced," he optimistically states that "a new fabulous new era of progress [was] opening up to the world" because of how the events of Watergate had "…opened a creative era for American democracy."[298] Cleaver argues that despite all its "faults," the American political system "…is the freest and most democratic in the world."[299] Cleaver's public admiration for American democracy provides a sharp contrast to his condemnations of American imperialism, which he made less than ten years prior. Cleaver frames this "re-examination" of his politics as a duty that every American should fulfill, no matter their political beliefs.

In *Soul on Fire*, Cleaver writes: "I spent several months in North Korea in 1970, during which time Kathleen had our second child…Also, long enough to become thoroughly disenchanted with their brand of communism."[300] Cleaver confesses that in the first few days in North Korea, he wrote to members of the BPP to support the reunification effort of the Korean peninsula that was being headed by Kim Il Sung; however, what he didn't report back was his "…increasing resentment over the brainwashing and unsubtle racism of North Koreans."[301] For example, Cleaver recounts how a female Japanese American member was treated by their North Korean hosts: "The hatred for the Japanese was profound and endless. The youngster from the West Coast caught it on both cheeks—first for being Japanese, second for being American. The Koreans were not friendly to her; they had limited capacity to express the international

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[297] Eldridge Cleaver, "Why I Left the U.S. And Why I Am Returning*," New York Times*, 18 November 1975, page 37.
[298] Ibid
[299] Ibid
[300] Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Fire*, 121.
[301] Ibid, 122.

solidarity of workers who were supposedly united."[302] Cleaver writes that by the end of the delegation's tour of North Korea, the young Japanese American woman was "…ready for therapy or at least an exit visa from this paradise of liberation and truth. The poison of racism hit her where she least expect it; but then, that is the Communist style."[303] Cleaver portrays North Korea or more broadly, communism, as a two-faced force that cannot be trusted despite its claims of "liberation and truth."

The Japanese American woman that Cleaver was referring to was most likely Pat Sumi, the only Japanese American woman in the delegation. In *Radicals on the Road*, Judy Wu writes about Pat Sumi's experience in North Korea:

> Pat Sumi had experienced discomfort and embarrassment when exposed to the legacy of Japanese imperialism in Korea. She recalled feeling reluctant to speak Japanese with one of her North Korean hosts, because she did not want to evoke the experience of colonization. In the spirit of people's diplomacy, her Asian host focused on the responsibility of the Japanese and American governments in carrying out the imperialist policies, not the guilt of the Japanese and American peoples.[304]

In contrast to Cleaver's claims of racial discrimination, Wu's alternate telling of Sumi's experience in North Korea acknowledges Sumi's mindfulness that her presence could remind her North Korean hosts of Japanese imperialism. Second, this excerpt indicates North Korea's willingness to forge critical forms of solidarity, regardless of the national origin or ethnic background of their allies.

Cleaver was not the only member of the BPP delegation to move away from their praise of North Korea. According to Judy Wu, other members of the BPP delegation

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[302] Cleaver does not name this Japanese American woman was but based on who was in the delegation, it could have been Patricia Sumi for the Movement for a Democratic Military. Cleaver may have maintained Sumi's anonymity to avoid any unwanted attention or publicity. See Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Fire*, 122.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 147.

eventually "expressed skepticism toward the constant references to Kim Il Sung, who was credited for all the positive developments in North Korea."[305] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to determine the validity of these negative retellings of North Korea and its leaders. I argue instead that these later claims against North Korea should not be used to dismiss the potency of the earlier writings on North Korea. In the context of the Cold War, the alliance forged between the BPP and North Korea was valuable as a part of the global movements of decolonization and of the BPP's struggles against U.S. racism and imperialism—so valuable, in fact, that it might have quieted any concerns over the more malevolent conduct of the people and leaders of North Korea. Based on the materials that I reviewed in chapter one and my reading of the archival documents in this chapter, I argue that in the American imagination, North Korea constitutes a malleable figure that can be invoked by different groups to support their seemingly divergent political agendas: to bolster U.S. claim of humanitarianism, as discussed in Chapter 1, or the global radical aspirations of the BPP, as reviewed here.

The International Section of the Black Panthers in Algiers was shut down after three years in 1973. The relations between the BPP and the Algerian government "quickly deteriorated," and the BPP became a "political liability" when officials acquired a lucrative liquefied gas deal with an American oil company.[306] The breakdown of the alliance between the BPP and the Algerian government reflected a larger trend of postcolonial nations having to engage in building their countries economically after regaining independence. This shift revealed that "there were no clear-cut revolutionary

[305] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 148.
[306] Clemons and Jones, "Global Solidarity: The Black Panther in the International Arena," 37.

champions and capitalist villains;" and thus, the anti-imperialist alliances that were created earlier began to break.[307] In the case of North Korea, the "future" it had once offered was not as perfect anymore as the nation-state had its own prejudices that contradicted the BPP's belief in racial equality as exemplified in the Pat Sumi incident. As for the BPP, a number of conflicts eventually led to the organization's demise: internal struggles between Party leaders, government suppression like COINTELPRO, the restructuring of the organization to emphasize electoral political office, and the emergence of authoritarianism within party leadership.[308]

Conclusion

As reviewed above, the trips that Eldridge Cleaver took to North Korea have been written about and studied for multiple purposes. I contribute to this scholarship by highlighting how the transnational dimension of the Black Panther Party allowed for another narrative of North Korea to emerge, which differs considerably from how it is presently represented in the United States. The NKIDP provided materials that emphasize that during the Cold War, North Korea was considered a valuable ally in the global struggle against colonialism, imperialism, and militarism. Most importantly, these documents underscored the violence of American forces within Korea, which disrupts the construction of North Korea as a perpetual site of violence. While there is plenty of scholarship that brings attention to the violence of American militarism in North Korea, the materials in this chapter do so through a focus on anti-imperialistic alliances. Although North Korea was an ally of and received aid from the former Soviet Union,

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[307] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 271

[308] Ollie A. Johnson III, "Explaining the Demise of The Black Panther Party: The Role of Internal Factors" *Black Panther Party: Reconsidered*, edited by Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998) 398-409

Bruce Cummings argues that North Korea forged other international alliances to establish its independence from the former communist superpower.[309] Thus, the knowledge produced out of the interactions between the BPP and North Korea did not contribute to the dyadic ideological formation of the Cold War.

The goal of this chapter was to bring attention to how North Korea's struggles against American imperialism were grounded in the transnational practices of the U.S. Third World Left —a narrative that disrupts the U.S. mainstream construction of North Korea as the perpetual "hermit kingdom."[310] Instead, these archival materials demonstrate North Korea's active engagement with the Third World through solidarity building and opening the country for activists like Eldridge Cleaver and Anti-Imperialist Delegation to witness the success of its revolution. As I have noted in the last section of this chapter, Cleaver's awe and admiration of North Korea did not last. In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination,* Robin D.G. Kelley writes that "over time, the subjects of my books as well as my own political experience has taught me that things are not what they seem and that the desires, hopes, intentions of the people who fought for change cannot be easily categorized, contained, or explained."[311] In the face of uncertainty, Kelley challenges us to dream: "I'm not suggesting we wholly embrace their ideas or strategies as the foundation for new movements; on the contrary, my main point is that we must tap the well of our collective imaginations, that we do what earlier generations have done:

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[309] Bruce Cummings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997) 403.
[310] Martha Raddatz, "Hilary Clinton's New Approach to Diplomacy," abc.news.go, February 20, 2009, http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/International/story?id=6921007&page=1.
[311] Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003) vii.

dream."[312] This chapter was not about focusing on the inconsistences of Cleaver's comments about North Korea, but about recognizing the possibility of a *different* North Korea from the one circulated in American public imaginary.

[312] Ibid, xii.

Conclusion

On January 29, 2017, the Yonhap News Agency, a South Korean-based news outlet, reported that President Donald Trump's Executive Order 13769—otherwise known as the "Muslim Ban"—was extended to North Korean refugees. The executive order suspends the North Korean Human Rights Act, which granted refugee status to North Koreans that have fled their homeland.[313] North Koreans seeking refugee status would have to wait 120 days in addition the 18-24 month vetting process they must complete before entering the United States.[314] Marcus Noland, who testified in the congressional hearings that were analyzed in the first chapter, criticized the Trump administration by writing: "One would think that encouraging defection and debriefing refugees for insights into an adversary would be a no brainer."[315] Here, Noland still falls into the narrative about the value of defection and refugees to the cause of the United States in collapsing their "adversary," North Korea. LiNK (Liberty in North Korea) described the executive order as "unnecessary" and "unfortunate" in a public statement about the suspension.[316] Both Noland or LiNK do not comment on the obvious illegality, anti-Muslim sentiment, or discriminatory character of the executive order—an oversight that keeps the United States unaccountable for its exercise of state violence towards Muslims and other refugee communities. I do not suggest that this omission is evidence of Islamphobia but instead how the North Korean human rights movement in the United

[313] Jaeyeon Woo, "U.S. entry of N. Korean refugees put on hold by Trump's executive order: report," *Yonhap News*, January 29, 2017, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2017/01/29/52/0301000000AEN20170129000400315F.html
[314] Marcus Noland, "Trump Bans North Korean Refugees," *Petersen Institute*, January 30, 2017, https://piie.com/blogs/north-korea-witness-transformation/trump-bans-north-korean-refugees.
[315] Ibid.
[316] Liberty in North Korea, LiNK Statement on the Executive Order on Immigration and Refugees," link.org, February 1, 2017, http://www.libertyinnorthkorea.org/link-statement-executive-order-immigration-refugees/.

States has turned a blind eye to the use of state power and violence. In particular, the ways in which the North Korean human rights movement has advocated the collapse of North Korea in the name of humanitarianism and human rights. However, in the current moment, American militarism has become front and center while the concern of human rights violations in North Korea has been pushed aside.

As I am writing, there has been a significant escalation of tensions between the United States and North Korea. Both countries are being led by leaders, who are willing to prove themselves with their military prowess. In 2017, North Korea has conducted six missile tests alone.[317] The United States sent an aircraft carrier, the USS Carl Vinson, to the western Pacific Ocean in response to the increase of North Korean missile tests. The USS Carl Vinson conducted tactical training drills with two Japanese destroyers.[318] Although military officials explain that the USS Carl Vinson was only passing through on their way to Australia for training, the aircraft carrier returned to the Western Pacific as a 'prudent measure.'[319] North Korean-state run media declared that the military threatens to destroy the aircraft carrier with a single strike.[320] These events and its coverage in the American news media created an atmosphere of impending war between the United States and North Korea. But, how do we start a war that never ended?

"A New C(old) War: Molding North Korean in American Political and Cultural Discourse" illustrates the ways in which North Korea has been shaped to fight an old war,

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[317] Elizabeth McLaughlin and Luis Martinez, "A look at every North Korean missile test this year," abcnews.go.com, April 28, 2017, http://abcnews.go.com/International/north-korean-missile-test-year/story?id=46592733.
[318] Junko Ogura and Susannah Cullinane, "North Korea threatens to sink US aircraft carrier," cnn.com, April 24, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/23/politics/uss-carl-vinson-japan-us-drills/.
[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid.

the Cold War, under the cover of a new war, the war on terror. I examined how the language of terrorism and brutality has been used to construct North Korea's interiorized difference and thus, renew the sovereign state as a current threat to American national security and the larger global community. The interior difference of North Korea has been further compounded by how its brutality has been extended to the North Korean people—a formation that illustrates the dialectical formation of humanitarianism and militarism that constitutes the common sense around North Korea in public and official U.S. discourse.

While the first chapter identified how the common sense of North Korea has been cultivated and circulated through the multiple and colluding circuits of the North Korean human rights movement , the next two chapters illustrate how this common sense has provided opportunities for other types of engagement. The second chapter examined how LiNK has played into the dominant discourse around North Korea but its Korean American members use their participation in the organization as an opportunity to deal with transgenerational memories of war, loss, and violence. The third chapter illustrates how the common sense of North Korea, in particular, was a reason for its culpability in the hacking of Sony Studios. These events allowed Margaret Cho to center a performance around North Korea and the subsequent backlash she received provided her a platform to critique the legibility of Asian American performers in popular culture. The final chapter explores how the travels of the Black Panther's Eldridge Cleaver to North Korea in late 1960s offered an imagination of North Korea that disrupts current dominant discourse but also how this construction provided a chance to envision liberation for the U.S. Third World Left. Ultimately, what brought these chapters together was each demonstrated how

North Korea is a malleable construction that can be shaped in varying directions to enable different conversations, affiliations, and visions to be had.

As noted in the introduction, this analysis relied on the field of Asian Studies to better understand the historical context of U.S and North Korean relations, the legacy of the North Korean refugee, and how scholars have critiqued the current North Korean human rights movement. The purpose of this engagement was to identify ways to bridge these conversations within the field of Ethnic Studies and Transnational Asian American Studies to illustrate how the process of racialization and the implications of the American empire within the domestic United States is central to understanding current U.S. and North Korean relations. In this moment of escalation, I argue that this interdisciplinary engagement is crucial to provide an alternative perspective that does not encourage war but instead offers a lens that considers the legacy of the American empire in Korea and the implications of that history for Korean Americans.

Also, the growing catalogue of cultural texts on North Korea that continue to circulate the narrative of North Korea's interiorized difference requires analysis that challenges the legibility of this formation. For instance, at the 2017 Association of Asian American Studies Conference, I organized a panel with other scholars that discussed North Korea through a transnational Asian American perspective. The panelists were trained in a variety of fields: Literature, Sociology, and Ethnic Studies. In response to the conference's theme of "care" we organized our conversation about how North Korea has been "cared" for through the language of humanitarianism and human rights. This panel was important to have in the field of Asian American Studies because it created an entryway point to think about the nation-state within the longer legacy of the American

empire and imperialism. I argue that this strategy is central to disrupt the narration of North Korea as a brutal dictatorship that seeks war with the United States but instead as a nation-state that may simply just want to defend itself against a world power that has steadily strangled its livelihood.

For this project, there were a lot of materials and sites I decided not to include for analysis such as: *The Interview*, Nodutdol, the organization that takes a critical stance against U.S. militarism in Korea, and studies conducted by the Bush Center on the settlement of North Korean refugees in the United States. The abundance of materials was a limitation of this project because it was difficult to incorporate everything into this dissertation in a coherent and concise manner. Instead of including as much as possible for this project, I focused on what materials work together to outline the underlying common sense of North Korea and how this dominant discourse has circulated that has resulted in different types of engagement.

In the future, I want to focus more on the role of Korean Americans on the issue of U.S. and North Korean relations. In order to do so, I want to examine a variety of sites: the presence of North Korean refugees in Korean American churches, Nodutdol, and documentaries that have been produced about North Korea from the perspective of Korean Americans. I suggest that by focusing on how Korean Americans have positioned themselves in relationship to North Korea or how have they decided to engage with the nation-state will be critical to explicate what types of knowledge is being produced to narrate North Korea from those that may consider the country as home.

The goal of this project was never to dismiss the variety of accusations that have been lodged about North Korea's brutality, terror, or state violence. Instead, my questions

have always been: why are these accusations important to make? What is the value of these accusations? How are these accusations being used to justify the presence of U.S. militarism in Korea? Here, I have concluded that these accusations were important to make because the United States needed "evidence" to justify North Korea's assertion into the War on Terror even though the nation-state has never committed terrorist attacks in the United States (neither did Iraq and Iran for that matter). These accusations were valuable because the War on Terror provided momentum and cover to continue to fight another war that still has not ended—the Korean War. The number of American military bases in South Korea and at the DMZ illustrates how war or the threat of war is used to maintain U.S. militarism in Korea. While the War on Terror continues target those that have been deemed "interiorly different" and thus a threat, North Korea has been shaped to fight this new imperial project.

APPENDIX

The following was the questionnaire used for chapter two's interviewees.

Questionnaire:

Why did you join the LiNK rescue team on campus?

Does your ethnic background motivate you to join?

As a Korean American, why do you think your participation may be uniquely important?

In your opinion, how is North Korea regarded by the larger Korean American community or in particular, the older generation?

How do you (and/or the rest of your rescue team) want to represent North Korea?

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