

The Black Amerasian Experience in Korea: *Representations of Black Amerasians in Korean and Korean American Narratives**

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Abstract

This essay discusses the literary representations of the black Amerasian experience in Korea. It first studies a late-1920s novella that featured the first black-Korean character and foreshadowed the major issues facing black Amerasians in later Korean and Korean American narratives published from the mid-1950s. By putting Korean-language narratives into direct dialogue with their Anglophone counterparts, this transpacific study argues that the texts in Korean and English are complementary to each other and help piece together the diverse aspects of black Amerasian experience in Korea told from the two perspectives, Korean and Korean American. Both Korean and Korean American narratives portray black Amerasians fundamentally as the unfortunate victims of and-rocentrism, patriarchy, ethnonationalism, militarism, neo-imperialism, and racism. Yet there is a signal difference between the two literatures: whereas Korean narratives focus on black Amerasians' discrimination and ostracization by Koreans, Korean American narratives highlight white racism in U.S. military facilities and criticize U.S. legal barriers and immigration policy against (black) Amerasians.

Keywords: black Amerasians in Korea, literary representations of black Amerasians, race in literature, comparative Korean (American) literary studies, transpacific literary studies

* This essay was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF 2012S1A5A2A01016718). Seminar versions of the essay were presented at the Sixteenth Futures of American Studies Institute, "State(s) of American Studies," Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, USA, June 20–26, 2011 and the Third International Conference on Asian British and Asian American Literatures, "War Memories," Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, December 9–10, 2011.

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Introduction

In its current usage, an “Amerasian” means any bi-/multiracial person of mixed U.S. and Asian parentage born in Asia or the United States (Root 1997, 30). But the term commonly refers to a person born to a U.S. serviceman and an Asian woman in Asia. As such, the first Amerasians were the “American-Mestizos” born as a direct result of the 1898 Spanish-American War in the Philippines, and their descendants continued to appear on the East Asian scene in the footsteps of the U.S. military after the end of World War II (Shade 1981, 23; Burkhardt 1983, 522). Generally known to have coined “Amerasian” after the term “Eurasian,” Pearl S. Buck published three narratives about Amerasian children born in Korea: *Welcome Child* (1963), *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John* (1967), and *The New Year* (1968). Strangely enough, however, Buck featured only white Amerasians in her two children’s books on Amerasian adoption and one novel about the reunion of an ex-GI father and his Amerasian son. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation’s “Yessir, That’s Our Baby” (1979), an episode of *M*A*S*H*, also revolved around a *white* Amerasian girl left at the entrance of a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital. The exclusive portrayal of white Amerasians by Buck and Twentieth Century Fox did not do justice to the reality of the Amerasian population in Korea, since about one out of three Korean Amerasians was fathered by an African American GI (K.W. Lee 1974, 35). The omission of black Amerasians in Buck’s narratives and the TV episode reflects, more than anything else, Americans’ subconscious wish to deny the existence of Amerasians fathered by African American servicemen in Korea. After all, even in the later popular imagination of the United States, while Asian-descent multiracials have been regarded as “apocalyptic monster[s],” they have been considered “even more frightening if [their] multiracial composition includes African ancestry” (Houston and Williams 1997, vii). Not surprisingly, then, black Amerasians born in Korea have been deliberately forgotten and erased by the country of their fathers and virtually invisible in the literary and cultural imaginary of the United States.

Black Amerasians, however, have not been so thoroughly forgotten by

the country of their mothers. Rather, they have left indelible marks on Korean culture and literature. We can find at least four Korean films featuring black Amerasians: Kim Han-il's *Nae-ga naeun geomdungi* (The Darkie I Gave Birth To) (1959); Kang Dae-seon's *Heungnyeo* (A Black Woman) (1982); Yu Hyeon-mok's *Sanghan galdae* (The Broken Reed) (1984); and Kim Ki-duk's *Suchwiin bulmyeong* (Address Unknown) (2000). Black Amerasians associated with the U.S. military, camptowns, and military prostitution were also persistently if not frequently featured in Korean narratives from the late 1950s: Yu Ju-hyeon's "Taeyang-ui yusan" (A Legacy of the Sun) (1957); Kim Sun-deok's *Eomma, na-man wae geomeoyo?* (Mom, Why Am I Alone Black?) (1965); Jo Jung-rae's "Miun ori saekki" (Ugly Ducklings) (1978); Mun Sun-tae's "Munsin-ui ttang" (Land of Tattoos) (1987); Yun I-na's "Samdae" (Three Generations) (1992); and An Il-sun's *Ppaetbeol* (Quagmire) (1995).¹ Black Amerasians disappeared from Korea's narrative scene when the number of newborn (black) Amerasians began to noticeably decrease with the demographic change—the replacement of Korean sex workers by migrant women from the Philippines and former Soviet Union countries—of Korean camptowns in the mid-1990s. Significantly, it is precisely from this period that Korean American narratives started to portray the black Amerasian experience in Korea: Heinz Insu Fenkl's *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (1996) and Nora Okja Keller's *Fox Girl* (2002). Complicating the unidirectional continuity across the Pacific, however, the first black-Korean character—though not a black Amerasian in the strict sense of the term—had already appeared in Sankkul's "Teugi" (Mixed-bloods) (1928–1929), a novella serialized in a U.S.-based, Korean-language weekly, *Sinhan minbo* (New Korea).

Despite the pervasive presence of black Amerasians in Korean and Korean American narratives, black Amerasian experience in Korea has not been properly discussed in Korean and Korean American literary studies. True, black Amerasian characters have been noted in the studies of Korea's national literature, anti-American literature, literature of national division,

1. Although there are also several Korean poems portraying black Amerasians, they are beyond the scope of the current study's focus on the narrative representations of black Amerasians.

and camptown literature. But they have not been studied in depth and on their own terms, mainly because they have been regarded fundamentally as one of the background materials of the camptowns near U.S. military bases in Korea. When examining the literary representations of biracial children at camptowns, Koreanists have tended to focus on their racial hybridity indiscriminately without paying due attention to the significance of race and color.² Even in their studies of black Amerasian girls/women, Korean scholars have highlighted the characters' sex work at the expense of their blackness.³ In a similar vein, while discussing *Memories of My Ghost Brother* and *Fox Girl*, critics of Korean American narratives have concentrated on Fenkl's white Amerasian protagonist and Keller's black Amerasian girl/woman, thereby disregarding the significance of black Amerasian male characters in both texts.⁴ On the other hand, scholars interested in black Amerasian experience in Korea have rarely addressed the transpacific literary continuity between Korean and Korean American narratives. Korean scholars have rarely studied Korean American narratives featuring black Amerasians. Most U.S.-based scholars have presumed that *Memories of My Ghost Brother* and *Fox Girl* are the first literary renditions of (black) Amerasian experience in Korea (Zaleski 2002, 267). Probably the only exception to this trend is Jin-kyung Lee's reading of the representations of two black Amerasian characters in *Ppaetbeol* and *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (J. Lee 2010, 165–168). No less problematic, the only study of “Teugi” featuring the first black-Korean character in Korean (American) literature is Cho Kyu-ik's introductory essay (1999, 199–208).

In order to fill the critical lacuna, this essay first studies the late-1920s seminal text that foreshadowed the major issues facing black Amerasians in later Korean and Korean American narratives. It goes on to examine the full

2. See Choi (2006, 287–314); Choi (2009, 47–50); J. Lee (2010, 163–169).

3. See Jang (1990, 424); M. Lee (1990, 106); E. Kim (2003, 168); Y. Ko (2003, 444, 455); Park (2004, 293); M. Kim (2007, 29, 33).

4. See Koo (2002, 137); Usui (2004, 259, 269, 274); S. Lee (2005, 105, 107, 114); Wilson (2005, 108); S. Oh (2007, 130, 138–139, 141–145); Schullermandl (2007, 167–169, 171); S. H. Lee (2008, 173, 177, 179–183); K. J. Lee (2008, 334–335); J. Kim (2008, 297–299); S. J. Lee (2011, 132); J. Ko (2011, 165–171, 174, 176–178, 179); Hwang (2012, 112).

spectrum of black Amerasian experience in Korea represented in Korean narratives and Korean American narratives. By putting the Korean-language narratives into direct dialogue with their Anglophone counterparts, this transpacific study of the literary representations of black Amerasian experience in Korea not only demonstrates that the texts in Korean and English are complementary to each other and help piece together the diverse aspects of black Amerasian experience in Korea told both from the two perspectives, Korean and Korean American. It also attests to the need and possibility of comparative and bilingual approaches to Korean (American) literary/cultural studies.

The First Black-Korean Character in Korean (American) Literature

Sankkul's "Teugi" (Mixed-bloods) chronicles the history of a mixed-blood family. When a peasants' revolt broke out in Korea in 1894, Japan and China sent their troops to the Korean peninsula under the pretext of helping suppress the revolt, thereby entering into the first Sino-Japanese War. At the end of the war, a group of retreating Chinese soldiers killed a Korean man and gang-raped his wife, who later gave birth to a mixed-blood son, Sa-bok. After growing up, the Chinese-Korean man migrates to Hawaii to work on a sugar plantation. Sa-bok moves to the continental United States and works on a farm in Colorado, where he marries an African American cook of the farm and fathers a biracial son, Il-nam. The Chinese-Korean-African American boy grows up to marry a biracial woman born of a Korean man and a Portuguese woman in Hawaii. The mixed-blood couple moves to a small Korean village, the hometown of Sa-bok. The novella reflecting the modern history of Korea and the Korean diaspora is a carnivalesque fiction ruthlessly mocking Koreans' obsession with "pure" bloodline. The narrative shatters the Korean myth of homogeneous bloodline by bluntly asking a rhetorical question: "Who, among all the Koreans, is not a mixed-blood person?" (Sankkul [1928-1929] 1999, 635).⁵ The unidenti-

5. All translations from Korean into English in this essay are author's own.

fied author⁶ even transforms the half-black protagonist from a despised outsider into a noble Korean at the end of the narrative. He accomplishes this partly by playing on the double meanings of the novella's title, "Teugi." Though some scholars presume that *twig*, the pejorative term for a mixed-blood, etymologically signifies "(half-)twisted" (McDowell 1966, 11; Hurh 1972, 14), its origin, "teuk-i," literally means "uncommon," "unusual," and "extraordinary," and does not necessarily have negative connotations prior to its racialization.

Nonetheless, the author of the novella seems to have internalized the dominant white supremacist ideology of the United States. This is best shown in the opposing voices of the narrative. Not only does the representative voice of the bigoted Korean village repeat the late nineteenth and early twentieth century U.S. pseudo-scientific racist arguments against mixed-bloods. The enlightened voice of a U.S.-educated character sympathetic to the mixed-blood family also betrays the contemporary anti-Chinese, anti-Semitic, and anti-black stereotypical prejudices. Not surprisingly, both the blatantly racist character and the apparently unbiased character ultimately situate black-Koreans at the lowest level of the mixed-blood Korean/U.S. populations (Sankkul [1928–1929] 1999, 608–609, 635–636). "Mixed-bloods" demonstrates that ethnocentrism, anti-miscegenation discrimination, and anti-black racism in Korea and Korean America were prevalent even in the late 1920s. Thus the narrative refutes the popular claim that Koreans learned anti-black racism from white GIs in Korea "since the mid-1940s" (Moon 1997, 72). More significantly, the fiction provides us with one crucial reason why mixed-bloods have been despised in Korea. Chinese-Korean Sa-bok is despised and ostracized in his hometown less because he is the illegitimate son in the patrilineal society than because he is the shameful personification of the Korean blood contaminated by foreign soldiers. In a country shot through with innumerable military conflicts with China, Mongolia, and Japan throughout its history, mixed-bloods have painfully reminded Koreans of foreign soldiers' invasion, devastation,

6. *Sankkul* (mountain honey) is the pen name of an anonymous Korean immigrant worker who lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in the late 1920s.

and subjugation of their country. Hence, Koreans' presumption of their ethnic purity might be seen as an expression of their yearning to maintain their integrity, honor, and self-respect especially in times of national crisis such as the Japanese colonization of Korea. "Mixed-bloods" also describes in detail how the Afro-Asian and Eurasian couple is discriminated against, despised, and ostracized by Koreans, thereby prognosticating the tribulations of black Amerasians in later Korean and Korean American narratives. Lastly, the seminal text itself, with the first black-Korean character, uncannily foretells the very position of black Amerasians: the Korean-language novella published in the late-1920s United States had been an orphaned, homeless text marooned somewhere mid-Pacific, claimed neither by Korean literature nor by (Korean) American literature for seven decades until it was retrieved from the archive of an American university library by a Korea-based scholar, Cho Kyu-ik, in 1999.

Black Amerasians in Korean Narratives

Most appropriately, the first black Amerasian in Korean literature is a newborn baby in Yu Ju-hyeon's "Taeyang-ui yusan" (A Legacy of the Sun). In the short story, Sam-sun, a war refugee and camp follower, returns to her home after the Korean War. But she is immediately driven out by her father who has noticed the black face of her baby. Enraged at the sight of the "nigger brat," he barks at his daughter: "Dirty slut! Get out of my sight! . . . Go someplace to kill yourself or where you belong" (Yu 1957, 73). Proud of his aristocratic family lineage, the old man is shocked at his black grandchild, the visible symbol of the contamination of the "pure" bloodline of his family. For him, the black Amerasian baby not only signifies the pollution of his daughter's body but also portends the demise of his blue-blooded family and even the disintegration of the homogeneous nation. To salvage the purity, integrity, and honor of his family, class, and nation, he disowns and expels his daughter and her mixed-blood baby from his family and, by implication, national boundary. In his imaginary, the black Amerasian baby carries the stigma of military prostitution in addition to illegitimacy,

moral decadence, sexual promiscuity, and/or rape traditionally attached to mixed-bloods in Korea. Symbolically enough, the black Amerasian baby—the unspeakable shame of shames in the self-professed homoethnic country—is not even sexed and named in the narrative. At the end of the story, the black baby who has made her/his existence known only by crying out for milk disappears ominously into the darkness which will lead to where s/he belongs, a camptown around a U.S. military base. Thus the baby portends the precarious existence of later black Amerasians who, abandoned by their African American fathers and disowned by their Korean mothers' families, will manage to survive in the camptowns, the deterritorialized colony of the country of their birth. The black Amerasian baby's disappearance into the darkness also draws our attention to the ironic title of the story. In the U.S. and Korean official taxonomy of the world, the United States—the “liberator” of Koreans from Japanese colonialism and “savior” of South Koreans from communist invasion—is symbolically the “country of the sun” representing liberty and human rights. Yet, a “legacy of the sun” in the narrative is personified by the black Amerasian baby belonging to the darkness—“the undesired index [and] reminder . . . of America's protracted military presence, violence, and dominance” which undo “the Manichean narrative of American benevolence” (J. Kim 2008, 293).

As if to make up for the first black Amerasian's voicelessness, the second black Amerasian in Korean literature eloquently makes her voice heard in Kim Sun-deok's *Eomma, na-man wae geomeoyo?* (Mom, Why Am I Alone Black?). The narrator of the autobiography is one of the many first-generation Amerasians fathered by GIs who regarded Korean women as “the spoils of war” and raped them during and after the Korean War (D. Kim, et al. 2003, 36). The innocent victim of the violent sexual encounter of the United States and Korea is despised and ostracized in her neighborhood and school because of her physical appearance and skin color. Sun-deok comes to regard the norms of the homogeneous society as a positive frame of reference and even tries to rub the blackness off her skin with a rough stone—a motif that would recur in later narratives on black Amerasians. After being transferred to an Amerasian school, she learns that

five first-graders will be adopted by American families. She also hopes to go to the United States to escape from the racist discrimination in Korea. But she is disappointed to find that all the “lucky” adoptees are “white” Amerasians (S. Kim 1965, 206). In fact, there was a preference for adoption in terms of race and gender of the Amerasians: (1) white Amerasian girl, (2) white Amerasian boy, (3) black Amerasian girl, and (4) black Amerasian boy. This practice had to do with a few factors: white, middle-class American families mostly adopted white Amerasians; the initial policy of the Holt Adoption Program—responsible for the adoption of most Korean Amerasians since the mid-1950s—tried to place black Amerasians in the community corresponding with their American “half”; and the economically underprivileged African Americans could not adopt many black Amerasians. Since only 13 percent of all Korean adoptees to U.S. families from 1950 to 1966 were black Amerasians, an inappropriately large number of black Amerasians were left in Korean orphanages and camptowns (Miller 1971, 12–23; Hurh 1972, 14; Hurh and Kim 1984, 50; A. Oh 2005, 162, 179). The consequent overrepresentation of black Amerasians in Korea was construed, ironically enough, as the telling evidence of black GIs’ hypersexuality, irresponsibility, and violence. But it was simply the result of the highly racialized adoption process: most black Amerasians were bypassed and left in Korea, for they, unlike Korean and white Amerasian adoptees, were not believed to be able to perform “the ideological labor of reproducing the social relations of the white heteronormative bourgeois nuclear family ideal” (J. Kim 2009, 869). In other words, the apparently humanitarian, moral, and altruistic practice of reclaiming “our” children was in fact a racially hierarchical process that was overdetermined by black-white race relations in the United States. It is the very American practice of Amerasian adoption imbricated with and complicated by U.S. domestic racial politics that Sun-deok severely criticizes in the episode of the exclusive adoption of white Amerasians.

What might have happened to those black Amerasians who were bypassed by American adoption agencies is dramatized in Jo Jung-rae’s “Miun ori saekki” (Ugly Ducklings). The novella features four black Amerasians—Suk-hui, Dong-su, Bobby, and George—but focuses on the two

characters with Korean names. Like Sun-deok, Suk-hui is not noticed by U.S. adoption agencies at an Amerasian orphanage. When being compelled to leave the orphanage because of her age, the black Amerasian girl has no other place to turn but a camptown. She gravitates towards the origin of her existence, for it is the only place where she can be comparatively free from the racist discrimination of the society at large. Seeing no future in Korea, she rejects her half-Korean identity symbolically by changing her Korean name to Maria and voluntarily becomes a sex worker to “trap [a GI] into marriage as a ticket to the United States” (Okazawa-Rey 1997, 77). Suk-hui/Maria is the typical black Amerasian girl absorbed into the vicious cycle of militarized prostitution in a camptown. The generational continuity of militarized prostitution is the extreme form of what Bruce Cumings called the most “constant” element in the Korean-American relationship: “the continuous subordination of one female generation after another to the sexual servicing of American males” (Cumings 1992, 169). While Amerasian girls are generally exposed to the danger of repeating the life pattern of their mothers, the generational continuity has been known to be more prominent in the matrilineal genealogy of Korean women fraternizing with black GIs and their black Amerasian daughters (Okazawa-Rey 1997, 83–84). Like Suk-hui, Dong-su returned to the camptown after his dream of becoming a baseball player was frustrated by racist sports fans who rejected black Amerasian players in the Korean sports world.⁷ The black Amerasian boy wants to rescue his girlfriend from the debt bondage system of the camptown prostitution that virtually enslaved her. But he cannot even secure a job of delivery boy or an unskilled worker because of his physical appearance in the race-conscious society. True, handicapped by a lack of education and skills, he is poorly prepared for entering the labor force. But he is more a victim of the society’s stereotypical belief that Amerasians are “[d]ifficult to handle, emotional, easy to upset and offend, show no stability in work and are not altogether honest” (Moen 1974, 41). Unable to obtain a job, he ultimately resorts to robbing

7. The episode is heavily indebted to Jeong Okjin’s portrayal of Bobby. See Jeong (1968, 341–345) and Jo (1978, 108–111).

and starts to run from the police, drifting from camptown to camptown. Thus, the novella unfortunately ends up repeating and reinforcing the stereotypical images of a black Amerasian girl/woman as instinctive, undisciplined, immoral, and promiscuous and a black Amerasian boy/man as deviant, delinquent, and prone to crime and violence.

Unlike the black Amerasians, white Amerasians are positively portrayed in “Miun ori saekki.” The differential characterization of black and white Amerasians in the novella clearly reflects Koreans’ color prejudice, succinctly uttered by a neighborhood woman in Kim Sun-deok’s autobiography: “If she was predestined to be a twig, she should have at least been born white!” (S. Kim 1965, 11). Koreans have traditionally preferred lighter skin, identified with aristocrats, to the darker skin associated with peasants. This traditional color prejudice was easily translatable into their preference for white over black Amerasians. Their color prejudice was unalterably strengthened and radicalized by American racial ideology which, first introduced by Korean (im)migrants to the United States in the early twentieth century, came to Korea when American GIs arrived at the end of World War II. Moreover, during and after the Korean War, Koreans witnessed “the black-white polarization . . . among the ranks of U.S. military personnel” (Moon 1997, 71), “the black-white geography of the U.S. military in South Korea” (Abelmann and Lie 1997, 150), unequal treatment of black and white GIs in-/outside the military camps and facilities (Moon 1997, 186, note 88), (in)formally segregated camptowns with inferior, smaller, and more run-down “black” bars and clubs,⁸ and U.S. adoption agencies’ neglect of black Amerasians. The message to Koreans was clear enough: African Americans are, at best, second-class Americans. This was corroborated by the cultural constructions of African Americans in U.S. films and television programs as lowly, dirty, lazy, and criminally-oriented.

8. Korean camptowns were strictly segregated along racial lines until the 1970s. Reporting the racial division still clear in the late 1980s, Sturdevant and Stoltzfus note with irony the existence of two DMZs in Korea: African American servicemen hang out mostly in the DMZ (Dark Man’s Zone) of Tong Du Chun (Dongducheon), home of a U.S. military base and camptown near the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) separating North and South Korea (Sturdevant and Stoltzfus 1992, 178).

In short, the racist dimensions of American society were replicated and reenacted across the Pacific in the U.S. military camps; and the camptown residents interpellated by the U.S. military culture naturally internalized anti-black racism, which smoothly spilled over to Korean society at large and found its most vulnerable victims in black Amerasians.

Unlike Sun-deok and Suk-hui, Bedro in Mun Sun-tae's "Munsin-uitang" (Land of Tattoos) vehemently refuses to be adopted by an African American GI in order to live with his mother. An itinerant saxophone player at nightclubs in Seoul, he is the representative of the invisible, nameless black Amerasian musicians who have survived by working in Korea's entertainment industry. Some black Amerasians also performed at the U.S. Eighth Army Shows to entertain the GIs, army civilian employees, and their families in the U.S. military camps. Black Amerasian musicians' performance to boost the morale of the U.S. servicepeople and their families was ironical enough: they were abandoned but their musical talents were exploited by the U.S. military. One of the most telling examples of the irony can be found in Kim Sun-deok's autobiography: though ineligible for adoption to the United States, the black Amerasian girl is invited to sing black spirituals for U.S. diplomats and military officers at an Independence Day party at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul! Like Sun-deok, Bedro has a Korean half-sibling. Bedro's mother became a single mother when her husband was killed during the Korean War. She struggled to feed her son, Man-gi, by whatever means in the precarious confines of the postwar economy. She ultimately resorted to prostitution for GIs and gave birth to a black Amerasian son. Though having survived thanks to her sex work in the GI-dependent 1950s, Man-gi despised, disowned, and abandoned his black Amerasian half-brother, the visible symbol of his mother's sex work. But he is not the only character who tries to dissociate from his past in the narrative. The Korean narrator's father was an interpreter at a U.S. military camp and earned extra money by providing GIs with Korean women after the war. Now a typical middle-class man, he denies his association with the U.S. military and involvement with camptown prostitution during the hard times. But the narrative suggests that the camptown economy should be acknowledged as one of the material foundations

of Korea's modernity and development. This is especially clear in the description of Bedro's living environment. The black Amerasian lives in a sprawling shantytown on a hill to the east of a high-rise apartment complex in Seoul. The dilapidated slum bypassed by the urban gentrification not only mars the modern cityscape—"a malign tumor on the body of development and prosperity" (Mun 1987, 278); it also painfully reminds one of the war-ravaged and poverty-stricken 1950s—the past no middle-class Korean in the neighboring apartment complex wants to look back on. But the shantytown proclaims its presence with a vengeance to the affluent residents of the apartments, as if asking to be recognized as the ineradicable—if uncomfortable—"scars" (Mun 1987, 277) in the trajectory of modern Korean history. Indeed, eloquently personifying the scars with his blackness, Bedro symbolizes not only the indelible "black" tattoos left by GIs on the bodies of Korean sex workers represented by his mother but also the invisible "white" tattoos etched in the psyche of mentally Americanized middle-class Koreans exemplified by the narrator's father in Korea, "the land of tattoos."

The generational continuity of military prostitution hinted at in "Miun ori saekki" is fully developed in Yun I-na's "Samdae" (Three Generations). An unnamed Korean woman lived off her body following African American servicemen near the front lines during the Korean War. Later, she came to see one African American GI almost every day in a camptown without recognizing that her black Amerasian daughter, Jeong-suk, was growing up. Jeong-suk was sexually precocious and competed with her mother for the same black GI. The Korean woman saw her half-black daughter live with her patron only to return with a second-generation black Amerasian girl, Yeong-hwa, a few years later. Living in a camptown where prostitution was the daily reality, Yeong-hwa wanted to be a "nigger bride" from her childhood and, indeed, "became a woman" at 13 (Yun 1992, 94, 99). As the title of the narrative suggests, nothing fundamental has changed for the three generations of women over the past four decades. In fact, the second-generation black Amerasian woman closely follows in the footsteps of her Korean grandmother: as the Korean woman was a camp follower in the early 1950s, so is the black Amerasian woman a

member of a “blanket corps”—a group of sex workers from diverse camp-towns across Korea who sell their bodies on blankets in the open to GIs participating in a field exercise—during the Team Spirit Exercise in the early 1990s. The Team Spirit Exercise was a joint U.S.-Korean military training exercise held between 1976 and 1993. During the exercise designed to deter North Korea’s war provocations and fortify South Korea-United States security cooperation, U.S. Forces in Korea were augmented by American army, navy, and air force units from outside Korea. As “Samdae” shows, Korea provided not only its military but also female bodies to service the GIs during the joint military training. In the narrative, Yun ultimately suggests that the transgenerational passage of prostitution from mother through daughter to granddaughter has been impelled by the persistence of the U.S. military presence in South Korea.

Chapter Seven, “Blanket Corps,” of An Il-sun’s two-volume novel *Ppaetbeol* also emphasizes that Korea is, technically speaking, still a war zone that has the world’s most heavily militarized border with the U.S. military and Korean sex workers. No less significantly, the chapter traces the origin of the transgenerational succession of militarized prostitution back to the “comfort women” system of the Japanese military during WWII. An ex-comfort woman, Sun-sil, cannot go home after her return from China because she is a fallen woman even in her own eyes. Instead, she goes to Bupyeong, which has a U.S. military base. At the first camp-town established in 1945 (Yuh 2002, 20), she “just switche[s] patrons” (Cumings 1992, 174) and begins to service GIs. As she insightfully observes, the only change for her is “the substitution of the Stars and Stripes for the Rising Sun” (An 1995, 1:182). Indeed, when the U.S. occupation forces took over most of the Japanese military bases in Korea in 1945, many of the former comfort women—part of the military supplies for the Japanese military—were also taken over by the U.S. military. An’s portrayal of the comfort woman-turned-sex worker was a provocative one in the mid-1990s, since many Korean feminist activists differentiated comfort women for the Japanese military from sex workers for the U.S. military. But both groups of women are in the last analysis identical victims of colonialism, imperialism, militarism, patriarchy, and androcent-

trism.⁹ Sun-sil gives birth to a black Amerasian daughter, Rose, after moving to Ppatbeol—which means a “quagmire,”—the most fitting local nickname of the camptown at Uijeongbu. When a black GI shows an interest in adopting Rose, the strong-willed Sun-sil refuses to make her daughter a legal orphan eligible for adoption. She in effect affirms her right as the birth mother and refuses to be erased and forgotten by “undergo[ing] a social death” of her daughter and herself (J. Kim 2009, 857). Enraged at the lost chance, however, the black Amerasian girl hates her mother, curses her own birth, and decides to go to the United States by hook or by crook. Like Suk-hui, Rose comes to regard marriage with an African American GI as the only possible way to escape to a future life in the United States. She repeats the life pattern of her mother who has moved from one camptown to another in search of a better market. She ultimately escapes from the “quagmire” of camptown life and settles in the United States through marriage with an African American serviceman.

Black Amerasians in Korean American Narratives

Conspicuously missing from the Korean narratives discussed so far is black Amerasians’ experience on the U.S. military bases. For most black Amerasian children in Korean camptown narratives, the U.S. military base is a dreamland completely different from the camptowns and Korean society at large. Importantly, Korean American writers have captured the complexity of black Amerasian experience in Korea by expanding the narrative scene and shattering the uncomplicated image of the U.S. military bases. A case in point is Heinz Insu Fenkl’s portrayal of black Amerasian experience on the U.S. military base and its affiliated educational institution in his *Memories of My Ghost Brother*. On his first day at Seoul American Elementary School, James, a black Amerasian boy, takes a seat with his Korean mother and black GIs at the back half of the segregated U.S.

9. See Moon (1999, 310–327) for a nice survey of the debate between the two camps of activists advocating the rights of comfort women and camptown prostitutes, respectively.

Army bus. When they are getting off the bus, one of the white GIs hurls a racial slur at them: “Mama whale and baby coon” (Fenkl 1996, 96). The unsegregated American elementary school is no better for the black Amerasian boy: the white principal calls the black Amerasian boy “a little monkey.” Fenkl is able to describe the white racism against black Amerasians—an issue never depicted in Korean narratives—simply because, having grown up in a camptown, he has intimate knowledge of the workings of racism on U.S. military facilities. Fenkl also rejects the stereotypical image of Korean mothers as portrayed in Korean camptown narratives. After James’s father is transferred to Vietnam and there killed in action, his mother wants to marry a white GI and escape from the camptown to the United States. When the white GI does not want a black step-son, she simply does the pragmatic thing to remove the obstacle blocking her way to the United States: in cold blood, she drowns her black Amerasian son in a sewer creek. James is thus the supreme victim of “the devious conniving of [a] Korean wom[a]n” who wants to escape camptown and begin life anew in the United States, even over the corpse of her own child. The infanticide of a black Amerasian by her/his own mother is an unspeakable taboo in Korean narratives, which mostly portray Korean women as self-sacrificing and caring mothers. Lastly, unlike both Koreans and Americans, Fenkl does not differentiate white Amerasians from black Amerasians though he is fully aware of the significance of race and color. Hence he elevates James to the representative of all the tragic Amerasians, black and white, who have failed to escape to the “mythic America [they] . . . believed in as children”—those who were killed, died, disappeared, or were abandoned to the harsh realities of camptowns (Fenkl 1996, 172, 212, 230).

Equally absent from Korean narratives is any detailed portrayal of the African American GIs who fathered black Amerasians. This is so mainly because most (black) Amerasians were illegitimate children born out of wedlock. Jackson, Yeong-hwa’s father, in “Samdae,” is the only African American GI who is given a name in Korean narratives. But he is just a flat character: a shameless black GI who makes use of a Korean woman and her black Amerasian daughter. In contrast, Nora Okja Keller offers a nuanced and even contradictory portrayal of an African American GI father

in *Fox Girl*. Sergeant James Robert Williams seems to have entered into a marriage of convenience with a Korean woman and have lived with his common-law wife and black Amerasian son, Lobetto, on a relatively stable basis. The African American serviceman loves and pampers his son while he is stationed in Korea. But he is not merely a loving father: he buys a black Amerasian girl for his black Amerasian son and obtains sexual gratification from observing their sexual acts when the children are still in primary school. When his tour of duty is up, the sergeant leaves Korea with a promise to bring his wife and son to the United States. He maintains contact with his Korean family through letters and sometimes sends money to help support his biracial son. In one of his letters to Lobetto, he writes: "I haven't forgotten you. I been working hard to bring you to America, but the man is trying to keep us down" (Keller 2002, 97). In the letter, Williams refers to the red tape of U.S. bureaucracy that hinders him from bringing his black Amerasian son to his country. He meets unexpected legal barriers mainly because his biracial son born out of wedlock abroad cannot receive citizenship *jus sanguinis* from him under the applicable U.S. laws (Augustine-Adams 2000, 99–100). Thwarted by the tremendous legal obstacles, Williams gives up hope of bringing his half-Korean son to the United States, stops sending letters to Korea, and ultimately "disappear[s] into thin air" (Keller 2002, 99).

When he lives with his GI father, Lobetto is on good terms with his neighbors because of his father's economic power in the poverty-stricken camptown. With the departure of his father, however, the black Amerasian boy is reduced to the most despised being. Abandoned by his father and neglected by his mother, he comes of age in the dead-end world of poverty, despair, and vice, anchored only by his American dream. After his dream of being rescued by his long-departed father turns out to be a delusion, he tries to work out his escape from the camptown to the United States on his own. To save money for his ticket to the United States, he sells photos of naked prostitutes to GIs, runs errands for prostitutes, passes out flyers for clubs, pimps for prostitutes and bar-girls, places girls after training them in clubs, and provides black marketeers with Yankee goods. By capitalizing on the militarized prostitution in America Town, Lobetto

pimps not only for his childhood friends but also for his mother. Thus he personifies the degradation and nadir of camptown life. Camptown environments have desensitized him to ethics and morality. However, it might not be fair to criticize his ethics and morality alone, since—to borrow Sveinung J. Moen’s conclusion after years of experience with Korean Amerasians—his “conception of morality, right and wrong” might have been “decided for each particular situation” and “[his] morality is pragmatic—what [i]s to be done today [i]s very much resolved by the immediate need” in the camptown where survival is the main imperative (Moen 1974, 49). Being raised in a morally loose environment, he might not regard his jobs as unusual since, after all, he practices a little of what he has been witnessing throughout his life. He might be streetwise and smart enough to survive in the camptown, but ultimately comes to recognize his fate as a black Amerasian permanently stuck in America Town and leaves the narrative scene with resignation.

Conclusion

Mixed-bloods were regarded mostly as the living emblems of the invasion, devastation, and subjugation of Korea by foreign soldiers in Korea. They were discriminated against by Koreans, mainly because they reminded Koreans of the sore spots of their national history. Of all the mixed-bloods, Amerasians with their phenotypically and racially foreign features have been the most severely despised and ostracized as the *Other* in the apparently homogeneous country with its myth of a “pureblooded nation.” This is so mainly because Amerasians are associated with—in addition to rape, promiscuity, and the bastardy traditionally attached to mixed-bloods—U.S. military presence and militarized prostitution in Korea. In other words, Amerasians are painful embodiments of Koreans’ collective trauma, their neocolonial/imperial subject status *vis-à-vis* the United States. Both black and white Amerasians have been victims of the interlocking forces of androcentrism, patriarchy, ethnocentrism, nationalism, colonialism, neo-imperialism, militarism, and racism. But black

Amerasians in whose bodies race, gender, and color clash most prominently have faced far greater discrimination and rejection than white Amerasians. In a word, black Amerasians have lived as the quintessential social pariahs, bearing the most blatant brunt of ethnocentrism, sexism, and racism at the lowest rung of the social ladder, for they are doubly contaminated, mixed-blood and black at that.

In Korean (American) literary history, the first black-Korean character appeared in a late 1920s Korean-language novella published in the United States. The seminal text clearly reveals that mixed-bloods were despised and ostracized because they were the incarnations of the invasion, devastation, and subjugation of Korea by foreign countries. The narrative also anticipates the tribulations of black Amerasians in later Korean (American) narratives. In Korean narratives, black Amerasians usually keep a low profile in accordance with their pariah status in Koreans' national imaginary. While portraying black Amerasians from a newborn baby to a second-generation sex worker, Korean narratives graphically describe black Amerasians' origin; discrimination and ostracization; dead-end world of poverty, despair, and vice; generational continuity of militarized prostitution; yearning for adoption; disappearance into the bottomless nadir of camptowns; and "escape" through marriage to the United States. In contrast, Korean American narratives address white racism against black Amerasians on U.S. military facilities; depict black Amerasian family life (legal or common-law); uncover the issues of infanticide, child prostitution, and even pimping for one's mother; denounce U.S. legal barriers and immigration policy against Amerasians; and criticize the transnational trafficking of female bodies. Although denouncing racist discrimination against black Amerasians in Korea, however, Korean and Korean American writers have rarely envisioned a black Amerasian who claims her/his Korean identity. Even the most sympathetically portrayed black Amerasians are, in the final analysis, pathetic objects outside the boundary of the national body politic. No less problematic, no Korean (American) writer has portrayed black Amerasians who have struggled to overcome racist discrimination and to take root in Korean society; have worked for the human rights of black Amerasians and their mothers; or

have given up their U.S. citizenship, remigrated to Korea, and claimed their Korean identity. It should also be pointed out that black Amerasians' Korean experience is only half of the whole picture, since many black Amerasians have migrated to the United States as adoptees, spouses of GIs, and immigrants (especially after the 1982 Amerasian Immigration Act). In conclusion, a more comprehensive, balanced, and nuanced study of the black Amerasian experience in Korea and the United States could be made through bilingual, transpacific, and bi-/multicultural approaches that take into account Korean, Korean American, and African American materials and perspectives.¹⁰

10. Black Amerasians' American experience has been portrayed in Paul Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* (1996), Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* (1999), Don Lee's *Yellow: Stories* (2001) and *Country of Origin* (2004), Mia Yun's *Translations of Beauty* (2004), and Leonard Chang's *Crossings* (2009). Out of them, Beatty's *The White Boy Shuffle* is the only African American narrative portraying a black Amerasian character. And Don Lee's *Country of Origin* is an interesting twist on the black Amerasian issue since it is about a black Amerasian born to a Korean woman and an African American GI in Japan.

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