THE CAMPTOWN ORIGINS OF INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION AND THE HYPERSEXUALIZATION OF KOREAN CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT. Why do so many Korean American women recall being told as young girls that had they not been adopted, they would have grown up to be prostitutes—just like their mothers? This essay addresses that troubling question by reorienting our understanding of the history of international adoption from South Korea. It centers the camptown—recreational spaces around US bases infamous for military prostitution—and the mixed-race children who constituted the vast majority of those sent abroad in the program's initial years, to help explain how adoptee bodies have been coded in the American psyche ever since.

Introduction

In her 2003 memoir entitled *The Language of Blood*, Jane Jeong Trenka—a South Korean adoptee placed into a white Minnesotan family during the 1970s—remarks that "through adoption, Mom had rescued us from the fate of becoming prostitutes, though our rampant sexual energy managed to surface anyway."[1] While sarcastic in recalling an early memory when her and her also-adopted sister's childhood masturbation deeply frustrated their white mother, the notion of needing to be saved from a perverse heredity and carnal savagery is one found commonly among Korean adoptee women across generations.[2] As evidenced here, the postwar concept of white middle-class domesticity bolsters and upholds the myth of American exceptionalism in which US citizens, like Trenka's mother, dutifully uplift the Third World and its people (almost always imagined as women or children)[3] and reform them into advanced democratic citizens of the new free world.[4] It is fitting then, that scholars of Asian American studies have found South Korea's international adoption program—arguably where

JAAS OCTOBER 2021 • 351–382

the practice emerges in the United States, broadly speaking—to be a particularly fertile site to analyze US empire as it intersects with Cold War internationalism, racial liberalism, and family formation in the postwar era.[5] Often overlooked in the service of these important ideological considerations, however, are the more intimate, on-the-ground conditions in which Americans first began welcoming Korean children into their homes as adoptive sons and daughters in the 1950s and 1960s, and therefore an explanation for these more vexed intrapersonal relations—including, for instance, the discursive and ideological framing of adopted girls as rescued and rehabilitated prostitutes.

Since the Korean War, approximately 200,000 Korean children have been sent to Western nations for adoption, the vast majority (around two-thirds) landing in the United States.[6] Yet, despite the dominant image of the Korean adoptee as a "war orphan" of full-Korean parentage, South Korea's international adoption program did not start with children like Trenka and her sister.[7] Rather, it was the "illegitimate" mixed-race progeny of US servicemen and Korean women, assumed to have been born from illicit sexual encounters between reckless GIs and local prostitutes in the camptown neighborhoods surrounding US military installations, who were first adopted to the United States in large numbers in the years immediately following the 1953 ceasefire agreement that informally ended the Korean War.[8] While studies of Korean adoption often acknowledge these facts in passing, few works, if any, have analyzed the camptown as not merely a setting in which some early adoptions occurred, but rather as the very site where international adoption emerged as a major phenomenon in US society and culture.[9] In other words, while the military camptown, its women, and its mixed-race children are often figured as part of the history that preceded the adoption of children like Trenka and her sister, they are not necessarily understood as something that, in fact, produced them. In relegating the camptown to the periphery of their analyses, adoption studies scholars have missed an opportunity to more fully explore how constructions of the Korean birth mother as prostitute and Korean children as sons or daughters of prostitutes became central to the spearheading and maintenance of international adoption from South Korea. Instead, they have relied too heavily on the understanding that Koreans were discriminatory towards mixed children—too racist and patriarchal to accept these individuals as part of the nation—a fact that, ironically, reifies American exceptionalist versions of these events as well as the very notions of rescue that critical adoption scholars write against in the first place.[10]

Similarly, while studies on camptowns might sometimes mention the existence of mixed-race children or adoption, their almost exclusive

focus on the issue of sex work around US bases leaves much to explore—including, for instance, a more in-depth consideration of the histories of motherhood and childhood within these spaces and how this shaped the discourse and policies surrounding international adoption in the twentieth century.[11] Addressing these gaps and bridging the disconnect between these two bodies of scholarly literature, this article shows how it was the camptown and the military sex industry in particular—or at least the optics of that space—that informed US citizen's insistence to adopt children from South Korea at the precise historical moment when the practice was being popularized, fought for, and legalized in the United States. In doing so, it complicates our present narrative of international adoption's origins and brings into sharp focus the manifestations of its hypersexualized[12] roots on the lives of actual people—that is, Korean birth mothers and adopted children themselves—who have been constructed in the American imagination as bodies that are both perpetually and pathologically linked to military prostitution in spite of their actual proximity to the camptown, as well as (at least in the latter group's case) their immigration and assimilation into US society.

If indeed the camptown is central to, or at least, one of the origin sites of Korean adoption as this essay suggests, then it is the logics and culture of that space that have governed the ways that birth mothers and adoptees have been coded in the American psyche ever since. Uncovering the camptown origins of international adoption, then, has major implications for our understanding of how the practice emerged in the postwar era as well as the lived historical experiences of Korean adoptees themselves. It helps to explain, for instance, why so many Korean women recall being told as young girls that they would have become prostitutes like their mothers, even when the camptown became mostly depleted of adoptable children in the 1960s and adoption expanded to other segments of Korean society in later years, as was the case with Trenka and her sister.[13] Particularly useful here is historian Ji-Yeon Yuh's concept of the "camptown shadow," which she deploys in her groundbreaking study on Korean military brides to describe how Korean women who marry US servicemen are often assumed to have been former military prostitutes, regardless of whether or not this is true. Yuh makes clear that while some military brides were in fact former sex workers who met their husbands in camptown establishments in South Korea, many other wives—perhaps the vast majority—were not and had met their spouses in other settings. Just as military brides are assumed by Americans to have escaped prostitution through their marriage to a GI husband, young Korean girls are assumed to have done just the same through their adoption to American families.

Such an image of the hypersexualized Korean orphan persists in spite of an adoptees actual proximity to or distance from the camptown, not dissimilar from the "camptown shadow" that follows military brides and informs the way they are seen by others, no matter where they go.

In what follows, this essay advances two interrelated arguments: first, about international adoption's militarized and sexualized roots, and second, about how that very history that produced adoption out of US military camptowns in the 1950s and 1960s shaped the lives of generations of Korean children in their new American environments. To do so, I begin with a preliminary discussion of the camptown's formation in the US Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK, 1945–1948) years, making clear how the ideological construction of Korean women and girls as prostitutes did not begin with adoptive families, nor with social workers working on their cases, but rather, with the US military upon its first arrival in southern Korea. While there were larger geopolitical and humanitarian incentives for rescuing Korea's mixed-race children that aligned with the broader imperatives of the US government in the early Cold War years, this has already been explored to some degree in the existing scholarship.[14] Thus, the second section of this essay focuses instead on how adoption was ultimately made possible through the ideological erasure of the birth mother and subsequent transformation of mixed-race Koreans into adoptable orphans.[15] In emphasizing the hypersexualized image of the camptown, Americans were successful in stripping Korean women of their maternal rights—claiming that they were lowly and duplicitous prostitutes unable to provide for, care for, or even love their own children—and therefore constructing mixed-race Korean children as motherless orphans available to US families stateside. The discourse adoption advocates created about Korean women and their mixed-race children soon trickled into the media reports, social work, and congressional hearings that would eventually help to bring a flood of these children into adoptive American homes and make international adoption a permanent feature of US society, expanding to include children of even full-Korean parentage in later years. Finally, in the third and final part of this essay, I examine how an acute awareness of the camptown and generalizations about adoptee's origins there continued to shape the way they were perceived by their American families and communities even upon placement in the United States, in spite of the fact that adoption was supposed to erase mixed Koreans of their illicit origins and reform them into proper American children. To shed light on these lived historical experiences, this last section features the stories of several mixed-race adult adoptee women who were placed into US families during the mid-to-late 1950s and early 1960s and who recall being hypersexualized,

even as young children. Unfortunately, their experiences of emotional, physical, and sexual abuse are not exceptional, but rather common among adoptee women of this era and beyond. When considered altogether, this essay helps us reconsider the camptown origins of international adoption and the hypersexualization of Korean children.

The Camptown Military Sex Industry and Korean Women as Perpetual Prostitutes

Within the American imagination, the construction of Korean women and girls as perpetual prostitutes did not begin with international adoption practice, but rather with the US military's efforts to manage intimacy on the Korean peninsula beginning in 1945. Military prostitution has been a staple of the US-Korea military relationship since the first 72,000 US troops arrived at the port of Inchŏn to transfer power from the devastated Japanese empire in the aftermath of World War II.[16] At that time, however, the camptown—a designated recreational space where off-duty troops could obtain sexual services from local Korean women—had not yet officially formed. Between the years 1910 and 1945, Korea was formally colonized by the Empire of Japan, and preceding the US presence on the peninsula there already existed a system of public sex work that catered to Japanese expatriates as well as imperial government and military officials.[17] In line with the imperial government's goals to reform and modernize the Korean people into respectable colonial subjects, the Japanese had laid out an aggressive public health infrastructure, including routine venereal disease (VD) testing for registered prostitutes.[18] When the USAMGIK took over all facilities previously utilized by the Japanese in September of 1945, US servicemen were allowed to frequent such houses of prostitution, which were concentrated in urban areas, like the Seoul neighborhood of It'aewŏn, housing Yongsan Garrison (historically the headquarters to both foreign militaries).[19]

In the early years of USAMGIK rule, the sexual health of Korean women working in those establishments continued to be monitored within the existing institutions and public health policies set up by the Japanese.[20] However, as those systems crumbled in the social chaos of the postcolonial era, VD rates among Korean prostitutes, and subsequently US servicemen, began to increase.[21] Additionally, new modes of informal sex work began to crop up wherever the US military erected new encampments. Unregulated streetwalking by camp followers impoverished after years of oppressive colonial rule resulted in soaring VD rates among US troops, which was immediately noticed by military commanders as a major problem for American forces on the Korean peninsula.

The need to consolidate prostitution so as to curb the spread of infectious diseases among its personnel prompted the US military to map out the coordinates of a recreational space that would be within the complete purview of Americans—the camptown. Establishments compliant with regular sexual health examinations of their workers were deemed to be authorized spaces where soldiers could rest and recuperate, while those businesses noncompliant with VD control procedures were deemed "off-limits" to US servicemen.[22] Camptown districts differed from the previous modes of public prostitution in Korea, in the sense that all women working in close proximity to foreign soldiers—not just sex workers—were subject to regular VD testing. As prostitutes and hostesses specifically reserved for US military personnel were rounded up for screenings alongside secretaries, clerical assistances, typists, librarians, hairdressers, laundresses, translators, and other women found in close proximity to the base, Korean women were, in many ways, prostitutes until proven "innocent" in the minds of American authorities.[23] Being the governing body of southern Korea, USAMGIK, of course, had a direct role in establishing the VD control regime, instructing local officials to set up health clinics near bases specifically for camptown women, rather than the general population.[24] Military records reveal that the US government directed numerous provincial hospitals and health centers to carry out examinations, dispensing adequate quantities of sulfonamides, mepharsin, bismuth, and penicillin for the testing and treatment of women who were detained and "removed from circulation"[25] until their infections cleared and they were deemed safe for consumption by US soldiers.[26]

The aggressive VD control regime introduced in southern Korea by the US military was not dissimilar from the way they were managing fraternization between locals and their servicemen in other parts of the world, including, for instance, Occupied Japan, which was also part of the US military's Far East Command.[27] However, there were several distinctions that made the Korean case unique and constructions of Korean women as prostitutes more severe and enduring. First, the US military occupation of southern Korea was never intended to be a permanent occupation in the initial years of USAMGIK. And indeed, by 1949, after the Republic of Korea had held its elections and named US-backed Syngman Rhee as the new nation's first president, tens of thousands of US troops were withdrawn from the country, leaving just a small military advisory group of 500 officials.[28] The temporary nature of the US occupation in these years meant that Korea never evolved beyond what the military categorized a "restricted area," or a "hardship tour" in today's language.[29] The onset of perpetual war in 1950 and the continued division of the Korean peninsula to this

day mean that South Korea maintains such designation. As a result, the material conditions in South Korea have historically resembled that of a war zone, with single unaccompanied soldiers living in makeshift barracks or Quonset huts on short year-long stints.[30]

These environments drastically differed from what existed in Occupied Japan at the same time, where as early as 1946 the US military had brought with it "Levittown," building American suburbs—complete with shopping malls, bowling alleys, movie theatres, single-family homes, landscaped yards, and sidewalks—and welcoming military spouses and dependents to accompany and help the long-term efforts of the occupiers.[31] Indeed, the permanent nature of the occupation reflected this sense that Japan would be a "workshop of democracy" from which the United States hoped to develop a democratic stronghold to counter communist ambitions in Asia.[32] Korea, on the other hand, figured as a mere afterthought—useful only in bolstering that primary goal.[33] US servicemen and families stationed in Occupied Japan could stay for several years, where more meaningful relationships between locals and Americans formed and were eventually accepted as an inevitable reality. Such conditions created a more family-oriented culture than what existed in the bachelor's society of USAMGIK, where prostitution was one of the only forms of recreation available to US servicemen off duty and remained the dominant lens through which military commanders saw local women. In other words, while Occupied Japan had a parallel military sex industry and also faced similar concerns about VD control, particularly in areas where the living conditions matched those of southern Korea,[34] the possibility of something more meant that the image of Japanese women eventually softened beyond that of local prostitute, allowing for them to also eventually be wife and mother to Americans. In Korea, however, the issue of VD control and subsequent formation of the camptown, as well as emphasis on military prostitution as one of the only forms of recreation for soldiers, shaped a more rigid image of Korean women as perpetual prostitutes.[35]

Indeed, many Japanese women soon became wives of military servicemen, bore their children, and had military dependents that were recognized and supported by the US military. Many also immigrated to the United States as the legitimate spouses of US citizens and military personnel through a series of temporary laws for Asian war brides.[36] This is evidenced in the sheer number of marriage migrations pouring out of Occupied Japan in the late 1940s and the fact that the US military meticulously documented the marriages and even the pregnancies of these couples, offering them military benefits ranging from medical care to base access and dependent housing.[37]

In South Korea, by comparison, nothing of the like occurred. US immigration statistics record no entries of a Korean military bride until the 1950s, when their numbers still remained far below that of their Japanese counterparts in spite of the fact that many US servicemen had petitioned their commanders for permission to marry these women.[38] Although the military policies and immigration laws of the time should have allowed for Korean women to migrate to the United States alongside Japanese brides, the image of Korean women as prostitutes was so cemented in the minds of US military officials that they regularly ignored applications and petitions on behalf of their servicemen to marry those women.[39] This refusal occurred even in the incidence of a child, which helps to explain (alongside the devastation of the Korean War) why the situation for mixed-race Koreans was eventually believed by Americans stateside to be much more severe than it was for their counterparts in Japan, where mixed-race children were born into families legitimated by American authorities or adopted to military couples stationed abroad, eventually finding some place and acceptance within Occupied society.[40]

Some US servicemen in southern Korea protested these injustices, marrying their wives in accordance with local laws instead. But without the US military's approval, marriages of this kind were considered meaningless to the US embassy. In some cases, the soldiers were even punished for being in "violation of a standing order," a career-shattering marker of insubordination that served as grounds for permanent ineligibility for promotion within military ranks.[41] In other cases, they were immediately reassigned out of southern Korea on their next tour of duty. The US military separated countless Korean American families in these ways and continued to do so well into the 1960s, while ironically (and simultaneously) allowing for the formation of Japanese American families in Occupied Japan. As a result, a number of mixed-race children remained in South Korea with their single mothers, who were not all prostitutes (although some had been), but were, in many cases, the separated wives and fiancées of military personnel. Field studies produced by international child experts in camptowns during the era regularly confirmed this fact, noting that "the true prostitute does not have babies" and that "the girl who has a baby is usually going steady with the father (the relationship being that of a mistress rather than a prostitute)," although few Americans would see it this way.[42]

To Save the Mixed-Race Children of Camptowns

While the experience of South Korean camptown families varied greatly, conventional and scholarly knowledge has emphasized that Korean moth-

ers and their mixed-race children were outcaste members of South Korean society. The mothers were assumed by locals to be prostitutes (therefore unable to maintain respectable positions within their families and communities, find stable work, or provide for their sons or daughters). And the children—without Korean fathers or male heads of households to register them onto the family registry (the source of South Korean citizenship)—were deemed stateless nonentities without the rights and privileges of any nation.[43] As discriminated, pitiful members of postwar society, rejected by even their closest of kin, neither had any hope nor future in South Korea. But adoption, at least in the case of the children, provided a logical and opportune solution that some Americans grasped to express the dominant American ideologies of rescue that necessitated the Cold War imperatives of the era. This narrative, while compelling and useful in understanding how Korean adoptees have been linked to camptown prostitution within American imaginations, is only partially, if not marginally, true.

In the mid-1950s, international adoption from South Korea took off as part of a larger effort to save the mixed-race children of camptowns. By utilizing this narrative of rescue, Americans were able to strip birth mothers of their maternal rights, lay claim to their children, and create a system whereby Korean children were funneled from camptowns to adoptive US homes. Yet many mixed-race Koreans and their mothers were not so in need of saving as Americans have emphasized. While it is true that some of these families became the targets of local hostilities—causing Korean mothers to shield their children from the outside world, oftentimes disguising their mixed-race appearances by coloring their eyebrows, eyelashes, and hair with black dye[44]—in the communities around US bases where the sight of mixed-race children was actually very common, their presence was not viewed as an anomaly, but rather, was accepted as a regular part of the scenery.[45]

In fact, relative to the generally impoverished and war-torn population, the mothers of mixed-race children were financially secure and viewed by other camptown residents as a privileged class of Koreans much like the in-between social status occupied by native wives, concubines, and Eurasian children in other imperial contexts.[46] In fact, many mixed-race children born in the 1950s and later sent to the United States for adoption remember their mothers being generous members of their families and communities, often lending money to parents, siblings, and neighbors or offering warm meals to those who were homeless or begging on the streets.[47] Given the general wealth one could encounter by working on base or at least in close proximity to a base catering to Americans, this was the case even when the US fathers of their children left Korea or ceased sending

remittances (although many GI fathers continued to send money to their Korean families for years even upon separation). Of course, not all mothers of mixed-race Koreans were so respected or lucky. Some lived in poverty and squalor, much like the rest of the Korean population at the time, and had in fact been rejected by their families and communities for fraternizing with foreign soldiers. In these severe cases, mothers of mixed-race Koreans often made the difficult decision to give up their children, leaving them on "the doorsteps of foreign missions, hospitals, and orphanages," while others kept their children close, using their privilege and proximity to the US military to provide a decent life in spite of the difficulties confronted in postwar society.[48]

Yet despite all this, no major US efforts were extended towards these families until the mid-to-late 1950s and, in fact, the vast majority of Americans spearheading the postwar recovery of South Korea took little notice of mixed-race Koreans. This either reflected a lack of concern for these children or was a deliberate effort to not draw attention to some of the US military's disreputable Cold War practices and behaviors, including the condoning of military prostitution and the separation of Korean wives and children from their American fathers. However, to international audiences, the Korean War had brought the nation's children into sharp visibility, and Americans back home began imagining the efforts of their government in this far-off land not through the devastation of civilian life wrought by the US military,[49] but rather through redeeming images of American soldiers, missionaries, and humanitarians feeding and caring for Korea's youth.[50] Through culturally produced images published in *Life* or *Time* magazine or showcased before primetime television audiences on *The Loretta Young Show*, Americans saw South Korea as a childlike and feminized nation in need of rescue by its paternal and masculine protector.[51]

Nonetheless, for many years after the war, the actual adopting of Korean children by US citizens was uncommon, as were the adoptions of children from abroad more generally. While some international placements were made possible through a series of temporary laws aimed at addressing the widespread human suffering experienced in the immediate aftermath of World War II (such as The Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which included provisions for a limited number of European adoptees, and—more importantly—the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, which replaced the former law and continued its orphan program while also racially expanding provisions to include Asian children), Americans mostly provided for alien children of war by making donations to local church or aid groups, sending missions to Korea, or signing up for monthly sponsorship programs.[52] This all changed in 1955, when at a publicity event for one of these humanitarian efforts, a

wealthy Oregon farmer learned about the plight of mixed-race Koreans in the direst circumstances and was captivated by their story and American heritage.[53] In the coming years, this individual and his family would thrust Korean children into the national spotlight, earning allies in prospective adoptive parents from all over the country who would vow to rescue these outcaste children from the ravages of war. The man responsible was Harry Holt, who would go on to found Holt Adoption Program (now known as Holt International), which remains one of the most prominent international adoption agencies in the United States today.

Scholars of Korean adoption have debated the significance of the Holt origin story, arguing that the role of this family has been overemphasized and elided the fact that some children were adopted before 1955 and that there were a number of other historical actors that participated in these early placements. It is true that by the time the Holts arrived on the scene, a small number of Korean orphans (mixed-race included) had already been placed into US families alongside children from other European and Asian nations via the 1948 and 1953 refugee laws mentioned earlier; but these adoptions were really exceptional—oftentimes involving US military personnel, missionaries, or philanthropists who were already in South Korea at the time and who had personally met these children during their efforts in the postwar recovery campaign. This, in combination with the complicated bureaucratic red tape and a lack of adoption or child welfare agencies (both domestic and international) operating in South Korea at the time, meant that the entire process was virtually unnavigable to ordinary Americans back at home. Further, when and if the processes did become lucid, adoptions occurred on an individual case-by-case basis rather than on a larger, systematic level. In other words, the first adoptions of Korean children before Holt were only possible to a very select group of prospective adoptive parents who were already in South Korea at the time and had the time and resources to see the lengthy and difficult processes through to the end. Harry Holt and his family changed this when their own highly publicized efforts to welcome eight mixed-race children into their home and convictions to help other Americans do the same led to a more institutionalized system whereby Korean children, and mixed-race children in particular, could be funneled from South Korea into ordinary and working-class American homes en masse.

Between the years 1955 and 1961, the Holt Adoption Program would eventually help place hundreds of mixed-race Koreans into US families through a controversial method called proxy adoption, whereby Holt traveled to South Korea and adopted children in the adoptive parent's stead via a power of attorney.[54] Thus, much of the infrastructure for large-scale

adoption practice either emerged and expanded to support the Holts and their efforts, or formed to circumvent their monopoly on Korean children's welfare in the years thereafter. For instance, the South Korean government established their own Child Placement Services in 1954 to help assist in the Korean side of the social work, while other organizations like International Social Services began participating in adoption to provide more "sound methods" for placing mixed-race Koreans into US families.[55] Further, because this all occurred on the heels of the Refugee Relief Act's impending expiration in 1956, the "race against time"[56] to adopt as many mixed-race Korean children while still legally possible helped to bring "the problem of the mixed blood child" to the forefront of American consciousness and also created a sense of urgency among adoption advocates, leading to a massive national campaign to make international adoption a permanent feature of US society.[57] Between 1957 and 1960, three public laws[58] temporarily extended the orphan provisions of the Refugee Relief Act until a permanent amendment was made to US immigration law in 1961.[59] However, each time one of these temporary laws expired, there was a period of several months where it looked as if the adoption program and Holt's efforts would be permanently cut off. It was during these interim moments that adoption advocates panicked and began constructing the figure of the abandoned and mistreated mixed-race orphan to lobby the US Congress for the quick passage of new legislation.

Although Holt remained one of the most authoritative voices and popular figures on the topic during this critical period of legislative insecurity, he was soon joined in Korea by the likes of other missionaries and voluntary aid organizations participating in these early adoptions, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, the National Catholic Welfare Committee, Welcome House, and the United Presbyterian Mission, among others.[60] From the get-go, adoption was complicated by the fact that many of these children were "not [actually] orphans, but living with their mothers."[61] In fact, when Holt first arrived in South Korea, he had great difficulty finding the mixed-race Koreans that initially piqued his humanitarian interests. Rather than assuming that this meant such children were well cared-for and content, Holt proclaimed that mixed-race Koreans "were being hidden by ashamed Korean mothers" and devised strategies to enter the camptowns to seek out and recruit them for adoption.[62] With his lead, Americans began to frame mixed-race children as unloved orphans in need of rescue from their prostitute mothers, and used this narrative to advocate the children's removal from South Korea. Journalists and adoption advocates reported that the "half-American children abandoned by their GI fathers and Korean mothers" were "detested by Koreans" and "dying like flies in orphanages"

as they awaited Congress's approval of pending legislation.[63] In fact, according to some American accounts, Korean mothers "left [their children] to die as soon as they were born" and even had "the right to kill them."[64] In orphanages, mixed-race Koreans were reportedly found "stoned to death" by their full Korean playmates.[65] By similar accounts, nurse aides working in childcare facilities reportedly "with[held] food from these babies of mixed origin," saving what scarce resources existed for those of full Korean parentage instead.[66] On the streets, mixed-race children were supposedly "mobbed" and "murdered" by South Koreans, their bodies left "to be found in irrigation ditches or washed up on beaches."[67] As a result of this violence, US newspapers claimed that "ninety per cent of the children of mixed parentage in Korea perish," experiencing either "a slow death from disease or sudden death at the hands of their Korean countrymen who refuse to accept them."[68] As "children who knew only life in a Korean orphanage" and had "never known the love and affection of real mothers," champions of mixed Koreans called upon ordinary citizens to rescue these innocent "half-Americans" from a life of misery and imminent death.[69]

It is clear now that such claims were distortions—Orientalist caricatures of South Korea as a static and insular culture and of its people as barbaric and inhumane, all in an effort to lay claim on Korean women's children. While adoption advocates had explained the dire situation by describing Korea as a traditional society of "five thousand years old … isolated … and priding itself upon the purity of its racial lineage," there had long been evidence that the social conditions for mixed-race Koreans were not actually so bad.[70] As early as 1955, the *Tonga Ilbo*—a South Korean daily newspaper—reported on a South Korean institution caring for seventeen children of both mixed-race and full Korean background. The caretaker, Kim Jung Ja, claimed that all the children were "one happy family of brothers and sisters."[71] "Just because they are mixed race," she observed, "they are not any different … they blend in well with the Korean orphans and eat the same way."[72] Such an account of mixed-race and fully Korean children, living harmoniously with one another under the protective custody of a South Korean caretaker, provided a direct counter to the claims made by Americans that mixed-race children were abused, starved, and killed in Korean orphanages. While one might argue that this singular Korean account cannot speak on its own, such ideas were also corroborated in non-Korean sources. In 1958, for instance, one international agency that was critical of the Holts' activities claimed that "it is difficult to perceive in most cases any discrimination against these children on part of family or friends or other children."[73] By the early 1960s, the same international agency would note that mixed-race Koreans were "generally well-cared for," "insulated from

prejudice," and receiving "plenty of love from their own mothers as well as from the others."[74] They appeared "relaxed, content, and emotionally secure," and their material conditions were described as "better than in the average Korean family."[75]

Such insights are also reflected in many mixed-race Koreans' own recollections of their early lives. They remember strong emotional bonds with their mothers and having American goods in the household—items that were the source of envy and viewed by most as incredible luxuries. But instead the figure of the pathetic half-American child, tormented and rejected by a racist and backwards Korean society and abandoned by its prostitute mother helped to advocate the continuation of a refugee orphan program in this era of legislative insecurity.

Indeed, claims of Korea being a backwards, traditional culture helped not only to explain racism towards mixed-race individuals but also to frame the problem of prostitution and illegitimate children as an issue of South Korea's Confucian culture and societal structure that made it difficult for women to get jobs but "very easy for them to become prostitutes," rather than a problem of US empire.[76] Coupled with descriptions of the United States as a "multicultural" and "heterogenous" nation, such juxtaposition not only furthered American claims of its own racial pluralism and Cold War liberalism, but also blurred the US military's own imperial, patriarchal, and prejudicial practices (like the condoning of military prostitution and the separating of interracial families) that had contributed to "the problem of the mixed blood child" in the first place.[77]

The deliberate undermining of Korean mothers' maternal rights depended, in large part, on the discursive framing of these women as camptown military sex workers. For instance, in one report produced by an adoption agency, a social worker noted, "most of the mixed racial children in Korea are illegitimate because their mothers are casual or regular prostitutes of foreign servicemen."[78] Such claims built upon the US military's understandings of Korean women as temporary sexual companions rather than legitimate mothers or wives, which justified separating Korean brides from their GI husbands in earlier years. With complete ignorance of the actual challenges faced by interracial couples in legitimizing their marriages to the US military in the 1950s and 1960s, the social worker claimed "the girl leads the man on, with no intention of leaving her way of life ... she blames legal offices, friends, and welfare workers as excuses for her own indecision."[79] In the social worker's view, mixed-race children were "not loved by the mother," but were "held for blackmail purposes" to collect "money for debts, living expenses, and school fees."[80] In this narrative, the US military was scarcely to blame for the problems facing mixed-race chil-

dren. Instead, the questionable morals and conniving behavior of Korean prostitutes were primary causes for their troubles. These constructions of Korean women—not only as prostitutes, but also as selfish, hardened professionals that did not even love their own children—justified adoption by suggesting that mixed-race children would be best off separated from their mothers and placed into American families instead. Such narratives not only upheld the institution of international adoption that was forming during these years, but also caused actual harm to mixed-race Koreans and their mothers.

One example of this occurred in June of 1958, when a Korean pediatrician expressed to an international agency serious reservations about some of the Holt Adoption Program's questionable methods for procuring children. The doctor stated "that she had witnessed on three different occasions the mothers actually being physically forced to give up their children."[81] A 1958 case file involving a Korean mother seeking assistance in dealing with the Holt Adoption Program corroborates the physician's claim and provides us further insight:

> Although Miss Kang knew that Kyung-ok had already been adopted by proxy and was scheduled to leave Korea the following day, she went on that same Tuesday to the Holt Agency to ask that Kyung-ok be given back to her ... However, yesterday she came again to the office in my absence, her face swollen and bruised and alleged to Mrs. Rhee that she had been struck by Miss Holt and by a GI who is Miss Holt's boy friend ... I called the chaplain when I later learnt this. He told me that Miss Holt and her friend had admitted to striking Miss Kang as a measure to stop the hysteria she displayed at not having her child returned to her. The Chaplain seemed to accept this explanation though I made it clear I could see no excuse for slapping Miss Kang even though she was hysterical.[82]

Such calloused behavior on the part of the Holts, the GI friend, and the military chaplain reveals how many Americans operated the adoption program with a complete lack of sympathy and concern towards Korean birth mothers during these years. Rather than offer women who had just made life-altering decisions to relinquish their mixed-race children counseling services or other forms of support, Americans seemed only to be interested in these women as long as they had children to provide them.

In truth, many Korean women, when approached by US authorities, were "not wishing to give up their children for adoption" both because local attitudes were not as bad as Americans made them seem and because these women had strong "affectional relationships" with their children.[83]

Yet, Americans continually ignored such evidence of progress and, instead, the reluctance of mothers to relinquish their children deeply frustrated adoption advocates who were trying to make a case in the US Congress that there were still thousands of abandoned and mistreated orphans available for placement and in need of loving homes in the United States. These desires of Korean mothers to keep their children were believed by Americans to be lacking in foresight—after all, in their eyes, many of these women were just lowly uneducated prostitutes who did not know what was in the best interests of their own children. To counteract this, adoption agencies began employing more coercive tactics to procure children while they were still young and desirable to adoptive families stateside. This was further exacerbated by an increased demand for mixed-race children amidst such an aggressive public relations campaign and shortage of domestically adoptable children back home.[84] To create more orphans, adoption advocates entered camptowns, where they went "to the front lines" on "baby hunts" and confronted Korean mothers with mixed-race children.[85] Rumors began circulating that some organizations were even so "desirous of securing the mixed blood" that they had begun paying their mothers for their release.[86] Some adoptees recall their own mother's insistence that they not step outside alone during these years. Although the dominant American framing of these events might have one assume that this was based on a fear that the child could encounter prejudicial behavior in public, there was actually a fear of "Holt"—or an abduction by an adoption agency.[87] Rumors also circulated that mixed-race children were being stolen in delivery rooms at hospitals.[88] Some believed that doctors were deceiving Korean mothers, claiming that they had delivered a stillborn child while later releasing a healthy infant to an adoption agency.[89] While it is impossible to evaluate the validity of these rumors now, what they do tell us is that many Korean mothers had developed an extreme distrust of American adoption advocates in the latter half of the 1950s, and that there is good reason to believe that this distrust was warranted considering the ways that Americans viewed and treated these women.

As a consequence of this, adoption agencies began hiring and sending Korean staff into camptowns instead. Women, and particularly those who were mothers themselves, proved to be the most successful in gaining a birth mother's trust. But while the optics of using Koreans to conduct American business were far better, the tactics were just as coercive.[90] One single mother was approached three times to relinquish her mixed-race daughter. Although not physically or monetarily intimidated, she was told that loving her child meant giving them up for a better life in America. In the face of economic hardship, she eventually relented. Days later,

however, the mother went back to the social worker, informing them of her change of heart. At that time, the adoption agency informed her that her daughter had already been sent to the United States. Decades later, when the mother and daughter were reunited, it was revealed that her child had still been in South Korea at that time and the adoption agency had lied. To make matters worse, the American family the daughter was placed into had not been properly vetted by child welfare professionals and turned out to be totally inadequate—verbally, emotionally, and sexually abusive—a complete and total departure from her life in South Korea where she was loved by her mother and cherished by her extended family. In fact, she was listed on her maternal grandfather's registry as his daughter (granting her citizenship and legal status in South Korea) and was made to eat every meal from his lap. Later, when the Korean family eventually immigrated to the United States via a military bride marriage in the family, the grandfather was often found to be scanning the faces of American children in large crowds. When confronted and asked what he was doing, he would silently mutter his granddaughter's name under his breath and look down in shame to acknowledge the foolhardiness of such act. For years, he never stopped looking for his granddaughter that had been taken from their family.[91]

Adopted Girls and the "Camptown Shadow"

For mixed-race Korean women adopted by US families, a "camptown shadow" lingered in their new American environments.[92] Even as young children, many female adoptees remember being told by their adoptive parents that their birth mothers were most likely prostitutes for the US military. One mixed-race woman, adopted at the age of four, recalls the following scene:

> When I was seven or eight years old I asked for a red dress to wear to a Christmas party. I wanted this red dress in the worst way and I literally threw myself on the floor and had a crying tantrum because I wanted this dress. I was told "no, because it'll make you look like a whore, like your real mother. You should be grateful because if we hadn't adopted you, you would have lived the life of poverty and probably been a prostitute like your mother."[93]

Another oral history narrator remembers a similar scene, although from an older age:

> There are some things children should never be told. When I was 12 years old my mother told me that my birth mother was a prostitute and that my father was someone in the Army who came back to America and probably didn't even know that I existed. She told me that if she hadn't adopted me I would have just been another Korean prostitute like my mother. Those were her exact words. And it was told to me out of anger.[94]

This often escalated into assumptions on the part of adoptive parents that their daughters were of questionable morals and deviant sexual behavior, and became most pronounced when a young girl approached adolescence. One mixed-race Korean woman suspects that her adoptive parents' assumptions that her mother had been a prostitute were reflected in their strict efforts to keep her "chaste."[95] Another remembers:

> My mother would chastise me for the way I did my hair, the way I dressed. She'd tell me that I looked like a whore and make me go change. I think underlying that was this feeling that my birth mother had been a whore and that's how I had been created. I guess, in her mind, she was trying to break me from being that kind of person. So, she beat me, or she made me look plain jane ugly. And this was my mother's way of preventing me from being that kind of woman.[96]

While it is unclear why adoptive mothers might have shared this information with such young children or acted in this severe way, one oral history narrator theorizes that her adoptive mother resented the way that others in the community saw their family given the presence of a mixed-race child—that it was clear she did not belong to her white adoptive mother, but was the product of war.[97] Such insight might point to the ways the "camptown shadow" was even cast on the entire adoptive family unit. Considering it was not uncommon for US servicemen to have second or third families from their military tours abroad, such an assumption by observers would have been fair. Motivated to adopt for various personal, religious, humanitarian, or political reasons, when the luster of American expression (read: rescue) wore off, what remained for the adoptive family was the specter of military prostitution and a haunting, uncomfortable reminder of the camptown.

Unfortunately, not only were constructions of adopted children as prostitutes used to inflict emotional abuse onto mixed-race women, but also many female adoptees report being survivors of sexual abuse by American family members:

> My adoptive father was a truck driver and when he'd be out driving, I'd be sent on the road with him. The excuse that I remember being told was because I could stay up as many hours as he needed to stay awake for driving. One of the things I do remember my adoptive sister telling me was that those truck rides were part of why she left our family ... because she didn't like what would go on during those trips. Well, because I was so much younger at that time, my memory of those drives is really spotty. But I do remember that I hated storms, lighting, thunder—it all scared me so bad. And my father would volunteer to come sleep with me in my bed so that I wouldn't be scared. But then I remember I wouldn't like what would happen when he would come to sleep with me. Because of the touching. I must have been 4 or 5 when that started. It was not an easy childhood ... and it continued until I was 14 when one night I was told I had to sleep in my father's bed. I woke up the next morning and I knew I was no longer a virgin. That's when I got put up in a hospital because I finally told my parents that I would kill myself.[98]

This occurred not only within the intimate confines of the home but also in the broader communities adoptees became a part of, and seems to be more prevalent among children placed into strictly religious homes or within small rural towns where sexual abuse was more easily veiled and remained an unspoken, although ever-present occurrence. This is demonstrated in the following accounts by four different oral history narrators:

> I was told that little girls in Korea sit on grown men's lap and fetch candy out of their pockets, and that that was the norm and that it was okay. The men in my church expected me to do the same.[99]

> When my brother raped me and I told my adoptive mother about it she said, "well, at least he's not your real brother" and walked away from me ... I was 11 and that's when I started running away from home.[100]

> During the holidays the Seventh Day Adventist church has something called "in gathering" where everybody in the church has a set goal that you're supposed to collect, or if they work they can just pay it as a check to the church during the holidays for spreading the gospel. At that time, it was about 200 dollars a year. Well, not working and being in the ninth grade, I had two options. I could either go out in front of stores, stand there, and ask people for money or I could go out in a car load of people to different neighborhoods where we could go

> door to door. This is winter, it's night, pitch dark out and here we are wandering the street going door to door. Well one night, it was super cold and when I went back to the van, there was my friend's father. I sat down in the back seat but he told me to get up in the front so he could get me warm faster. I was 14 at the time. The next thing I know, I had a tongue down my throat, a hand under my top, another hand going down in my pants. So, of course when I got back to the church and was counting up my money, I was pretty much in shock. And when I got home I wasn't going to tell them what happened. So, I just more or less kept it to myself. But I talked to this other girl who was also an adoptee and she mentioned the same thing had basically happened to her after he took her home from a school function.[101]

> I left home when I was 15 years old because some bad things happened to me. My best friend from ninth grade—her brother served in Vietnam. And when he got back from Vietnam, because it was a small town, he thought he could get away doing some of the things he did to the girls over there to me. So, he did some bad things to me that my parents didn't know about. And I wasn't happy at home, so I decided to marry him and leave.[102]

While childhood sexual abuse within families and close-knit communities is a common experience among too many American women, there is something to be said about the ways in which Korean adoptees in particular have been coded as sexually available to American men, even as young girls and even to their family members. Across all these examples, it seems that Americans who interacted closely with Korean children maintained an acute, subconscious awareness of the happenings within the camptown, linking the bodies of adopted women in particular to a pathological, pervasive, militarized sexuality in ways that traumatically shaped their lived historical experiences.

When I asked one mixed-race Korean where she thought her adoptive family had gotten the idea that her Korean birth mother had been a prostitute, she responded, "That's what it said on my paperwork. It listed her profession as 'prostitute.'"[103] Later, when reunited with her biological family through a DNA match, this adoptee learned from her aunt that her mother had not actually been a prostitute, but was in a steady, long-term relationship with her biological father. For the first three years of her life, she, her mom, and her dad all lived together in a house her father had built near Camp Casey. He was lucky in the sense that he received three back-to-back tours to South Korea that enabled him to stay with his Korean family

for so long. When he left for the last time, however, he did so with a plan to divorce his American wife back at home once and for all. However, as that process became drawn out, the Korean mother became panicked and was pressured by all those around her to give her daughter up for adoption. At the time, she worked in a textile factory. Nonetheless, on the child study the mother's profession was listed as prostitute. Whether this was done in error—the result of sloppy record-keeping—or was the outcome of a more deliberate, widespread stereotyping remains unclear. However, what is evident is that this documentation, which was reviewed by the case workers and made available to the adoptive family, would color this narrator's perspective on her own biological mother for years to come, all the while informing the way others saw her as well—that is, as a daughter and child of the camptowns. Countless other mixed-race Korean adoptees have such paperwork that lists their mother's profession as prostitute. And for many, this is all they will ever have or know about their biological origins.

As adoption continued and expanded out of the camptowns into other segments of Korean society in the 1960s, constructions of Korean birth mothers as sex workers, or better yet, adopted girls as rescued and rehabilitated prostitutes continued to surface in the US press. While American adoption advocates in South Korea publicized the most extreme stories of mixed-race children's plight, these stories came to represent more than just the children of camptowns, standing as the dominant representation of Korean orphans broadly. Throughout the 1960s Americans read about "little girls, eight and 10 years old" who "become prostitutes … or they die."[104] The story of one "half-caste" teenager turned sex worker even made it into *Time* magazine, providing millions of Americans a glimpse into the lives of children that South Koreans "would rather forget about," but whom American humanitarians were assisting.[105] The article, titled "Confucius' Outcasts," began with this haunting anecdote:

> At six, she followed her Korean mother to a ramshackle bar and discovered that her mother was for sale to US servicemen. On the way home, alone, the little girl had an even more traumatic experience: a man lured her into an alley and assaulted her. At eight, she learned why classmates jeered "half-caste!" at her: her father had been a white GI. At 16, she was a full-fledged prostitute working among American soldiers who liked her slim Occidental legs and ample breasts. Now, at 19, after six abortions and uncounted liaisons with every variety of GI, Annie Park is the most-talked-about girl in South Korea.[106]

Written to shore up interest in Korean adoption at a time when the camptown had mostly been depleted of mixed-race children, "Confucius'

Outcasts" relied upon the hypersexualized and militarized image of this space to construct the possibility of rescue via adoption. The article, which was shared amongst the social welfare community in South Korea, was immediately criticized by South Koreans and those foreign agencies working alongside indigenous organizations for "misrepresent[ing] the plight of these children" to the American public.[107] One international agency believed that "the Annie Parks are relatively few" and that "in the past three years … there have been virtually no racially-mixed children begging on the street."[108] They claimed that "the old Confucian values are giving way as South Korea joins the modern world," and that "the country is assimilating the relatively few racially mixed children in her midst" at an "astonishing rapid pace."[109] In fact, mixed-race Koreans were now "accepted in the public school" and "their community acceptance depends less on their appearance than it does on the stability of the family with whom they are living—like children anywhere."[110] Important efforts to extend "a helping hand … to mothers still entertaining" soldiers were also being made by responsible social welfare agencies.[111] However, in spite of this criticism, the story was never corrected before an American audience, and in many ways, the narrative endures to this day.

Conclusion

In the initial years of the adoption program's operation, as many as 92 percent of the children adopted from South Korea were of mixed race. By 1959, that percentage had declined to 39 percent.[112] In total, as many as 2,600 mixed-race Koreans were adopted by American families between 1956 and 1961—the years marked by legislative uncertainly before international adoption was permanently written into the nation's immigration laws.[113] By the latter half of the 1960s, American efforts to rescue mixed-race Koreans had become so successful that the camptown became virtually depleted of its children. As a result, many mixed-race Koreans who grew up around US bases during this time recall seeing few if any other children like them around. This drastically differed from earlier years, where the villages near military encampments were described by onlookers as "crawling" with the children of mixed racial parentage.[114] Despite this, American demands for Korean children did not relent. And soon adoption professionals expanded beyond the camptown to other segments of Korean society, sending children of full-Korean parentage to the United States in mixed-race Koreans' stead. But the laws and ideologies that governed international adoption were not rewritten in those transitionary moments. And the discourse American reformers created about mixed-race Koreans—the children of

camptowns—would continue to inform the social work taking place across borders. Therefore, without an understanding of international adoption's camptown origins, it is impossible to make full sense of the lived historical experiences of the tens of thousands of Korean adoptees who arrived in the United States in the decades following the first-wave of mixed-race Korean adoptions—individuals like Jane Jeong Trenka, introduced at the beginning of this essay, whose birth in the 1970s could not have been further from the camptown, yet whose body was still intimately understood in relation to that space, its militarized culture, and its historical inhabitants.

Notes

1. Jane Jeong Trenka, *The Language of Blood: A Memoir* (St. Paul, MN: Borealis Books, 2003), 121.
2. This fact, although alarming, has been observed by a number of scholars and providers working on Korean adoptions. One anthropologist explains, "These salvation narratives require adoptees to be grateful for having been rescued from a life of abjection." For more, see: Eleana Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham, NC: Duke U. Press, 2010), 255.
3. Studies by scholars such as Caroline Chung Simpson, Ji-Yeon Yuh, Christina Klein, Naoko Shibusawa, Susan Zeiger, and Yen Le Espiritu demonstrate how Asian waifs, military brides, orphans, and refugees became multifaceted prisms through which ordinary US citizens sought to understand Asia's place in the Cold War and justify US imperial ventures there. See: Caroline Chung Simpson, *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American Culture, 1945-1960* (Durham, NC: Duke U. Press, 2001); Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown* (New York: New York U. Press, 2002); Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: U. California Press, 2003); Naoko Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 2006); Susan Zeiger, *Entangling Alliances: Foreign War Brides and American Soldiers in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York U. Press, 2010); Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (Oakland: U. California Press, 2014).
4. Historian Elaine Tyler May's work has shown how the formation of white middle-class domesticity was central to the US state's broader Cold War politics and foreign policy goals. See: Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).
5. In the last decade, a number of important studies on Korean adoption have surfaced. See: Kim, *Adopted Territory* (above, n. 2); Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Global Families: A History of Asian International Adoption in America* (New York: New York U. Press, 2013); SooJin Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee: US Empire and Genealogies of Korean Adoption* (Minneapolis, MN: U. Min-

nesota Press, 2014); Arissa Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U. Press, 2015); Kim Park Nelson, *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers U. Press, 2016); Kimberly D. McKee, *Disrupting Kinship: Transnational Politics of Korean Adoption in the United States* (Champaign, IL: U. Illinois Press, 2019); Susie Woo, *Framed by War: Korean Children and Women at the Crossroads of Empire* (New York: New York U. Press, 2019); Kori A. Graves, *A War Born Family: African American Adoption in the Wake of the Korean War* (New York: New York U. Press, 2020).

6. Although Korean adoptees are currently the largest population of internationally adopted individuals in the United States, the current position of China as the world's foremost source of adoptive children means that their numbers will soon be surpassed: Kimberly D. McKee, "Monetary Flows and the Movements of Children: The Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex," *Journal of Korean Studies* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2016), 137.
7. The image of the "war orphan" is so pervasive that it even belies basic logical considerations with regards to Korean adoptees. Such was the case of Deann Borshay Liem, who was repeatedly told by her parents that she was a "war orphan" despite childhood memories of a Korean family and her birth occurring several years after the ceasefire agreement. See: *First Person* Plural, directed by Deann Borshay Liem (San Francisco: Center for Asian American Media, 2000).
8. The Korean War is still, technically, ongoing. The Armistice Agreement that was signed in 1953 marked a mere cessation of hostilities, rather than a formal peace treaty.
9. There are, of course, a few Korean adoption scholars that go beyond this superficial engagement with the camptown's past in order to draw out the practice's more militaristic roots. See: Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee* (above, n. 5); Hosu Kim and Grace M. Cho, "The Kinship of Violence," in *Mothering in East Asian Communities: Politics and Practices*, eds. Patty Duncan and Gina Wong (Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2014), 31–52.
10. Citing ideologies like *tanil minjok* (a unitary ethnic nation), which emerged in the 1930s as a reaction to Japanese colonialism—or President Syngman Rhee's policy of *ilguk, ilminju* (one nation, one race), which served as justification for the reunification of the Korean peninsula in the postwar era, many scholars have emphasized ethnic nationalism in explaining South Korea's historic rejection of mixed-race persons. In adoption studies, for instance, Eleana Kim and Arissa Oh have written about the mixed-race origins of intercountry adoption. Kim has argued that sending mixed-race Koreans abroad for adoption is an example of state racism on the part of the South Korean government. Oh shares a similar understanding of adoption as a race-based evacuation, but also acknowledges that South Korea's desires for a racially pure nation aligned well with US interests to

rescue these children. See: chap. 1 in Kim, *Adopted Territory* (above, n. 2), as well as chaps. 1 and 2 in Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea* (above, n. 5).

11. Important scholarly works on camptowns include: Bruce Cumings, "Silent but Deadly: Sexual Subordination in the US-Korea Relationship," in *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the US Military in Asia*, eds. Saundra Pollack and Brenda Stoltzfus (New York: New Press, 1992), 169–75; Katharine Moon, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in US-Korea Relations* (New York: Columbia U. Press, 1997); chap. 1 in Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown* (above, n. 3); Seungsook Moon, "Regulating Desire, Managing Empire: US Military Prostitution in South Korea, 1945–1970," in *Over There: Living with the US Military Empire from World War Two to Present*, eds. Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon (Durham, NC: Duke U. Press, 2010), 39–77; Jeong-Mi Park, " A Historical Sociology of the Korean Government's Policies on Military Prostitution in US Camptowns, 1953–1995: Biopolitics, State of Exception, and the Paradox of Sovereignty under the Cold War," *Korean Journal of Sociology* 49, no. 2 (April 2014), 1–33; Na-Young Lee, "Un/forgettable Histories of US Camptown Prostitution in South Korea: Women's Experiences of Sexual Labor and Government Policies," *Sexualities* 21, no. 5–6 (2018), 751–75.
12. I use the term "hypersexualization" building off of Celine Parreñas Shimizu's important work, in which she argues "Asian/American women's hypersexuality, as 'naturally' excessive and extreme against a white female norm, directly attaches to a specific race and gender ontology... the Asian woman, presented as culturally prone to sexual adventure and exotic difference, emerges from the colonial encounter of war." See: Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (Durham, NC: Duke U. Press, 2007), 143.
13. See: Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown* (above, n. 3).
14. See note 5 for examples.
15. For more on how international adoption depends upon the ideological destruction and erasure of the birth family, see: Laura Briggs, *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption* (Durham, NC: Duke U. Press, 2012).
16. Moon, "Regulating Desire, Managing Empire," (above, n. 11), p. 41.
17. "Venereal Control Program in South Korea," July 27, 1948, United States Army Forces in Korea (USAFIK) Adjutant General, General Correspondence (Decimal Files) 1945–1949, National Archives at College Park (NARA), Records of General Headquarters, Far East Command, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, and United Nations Command (RG 554), Box 147.
18. Crawford F. Sams, *Medic: The Mission of an American Military Doctor in Occupied Japan and Wartorn Korea* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1998), 108.
19. Edward Grant Meade, *American Military Government in Korea* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1951): 220.

20. "Venereal Control Program in South Korea" (above, n. 17).
21. Park, "A Historical Sociology of the Korean Government's Policies on Military Prostitution in US Camptowns, 1953–1995" (above, n. 11), p. 8.
22. "Report: VD Control Council, 15 February–15 March 1948," April 11, 1948, USAFIK, Decimal Files, NARA, RG 554, Box 147.
23. "Report of Meeting of Venereal Disease Council," April 19, 1948, USAFIK, Decimal Files, NARA, RG 554, Box 147.
24. "Venereal Control Program in South Korea" (above, n. 17).
25. I borrow this verbiage from US military documents, reflecting a poignant view on the part of US military officials of Korean women as mere commodities.
26. Sams, *Medic* (above, n. 18), p. 107.
27. For a larger comparative survey of military prostitution in both Asia and Europe, see: Höhn and Moon, *Over There* (above, n. 11).
28. These 500 men would remain as part of the Korean Military Advisory Group: Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), p. 212.
29. "Major General John J. Binns to Mr. Carl W. Strom, April 30, 1956," Eighth US Army (EUSA) 1944–56, Adjutant General Section (Decimal Files), NARA, Records of US Army Operational, Tactical, and Support Organizations World War II and Thereafter (RG 338), Box 645.
30. Taejin Hwang, "Militarized Landscapes of Yongsan: From Japanese Imperial to Little Americas in Early Cold War Korea," *Korea Journal* 58, no. 1 (Spring 2018): p. 126.
31. Michael Cullen Green, *Black Yanks in the Pacific: Race in the Making of American Military Empire After World War II* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U. Press, 2010), 30–59.
32. Michiko Takeuchi, "'Pan-Pan Girls' Performing and Resisting Neocolonialism(s) in the Pacific Theater: US Military Prostitution in Occupied Japan, 1945–1952," in Höhn and Moon, eds., *Over There* (above, n. 11), p. 95.
33. Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: NY, Modern Library, 2011), 209.
34. "General Headquarters Far East Command Character Guidelines," Feb 9, 1949, Adjutant General's Section Operations Division, NARA, RG 554, Box 168.
35. An example of this difference (at least in the minds of Black US servicemen) can be gleaned in Milton Smith, "GIs Spurn Korean Gals, Wait for Jap Lassies," *Chicago Defender*, Dec. 16, 1950.
36. The War Brides Act of 1945 was passed to allow for the wives of US servicemen to emigrate to the United States all the while upholding the racial restrictions on immigration set by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1924, barring virtually all Asians from entry into the United States. In 1947, Public Law 213, an amendment to the War Brides Act of 1945, lifted the

racial restrictions on Asian brides for a brief 30-day period in the summer of 1947. Although this law allowed for Korean brides' entry into the United States legally, military officials only applied this policy to Japanese women, and more specifically to Nissei soldiers requesting permission to marry co-ethnic women. As a result, no Korean military brides are recorded in immigration statistics as having come to the United States in the 1940s and it was not until 1950, with the passage of Public Law 717 (another law temporarily permitting Asian brides' entry into the United States) that immigration statistics record the entry of a single Korean military bride. This law was followed by an extension in 1951, and then, more importantly, the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, which repealed racial exclusions for spouses and dependents of US citizens and provided these individuals non-quota visa status.

37. Examples of some of these monthly reports, titled "Report of Pregnant Japanese National Wives of Department of Army Civilian Employees and Military Personnel," can be found in EUSA, Decimal Files, NARA, RG 338, Box 361.
38. For statistics on military bride migrations, see: "Asian Women Immigrants Admitted to US as Wives of American Citizens by Country of Origin and Year," US Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, Annual Reports, 1947–77, Table 6 (Washington, D.C.), reprinted in Bok-Lim Kim, *Women in Shadows: A Handbook for Service Providers Working with Asian Wives of US Military Personnel* (La Jolla, CA: National Committee Concerned with Asian Wives of US Servicemen, 1981), p. 12.
39. To compare how military policies differed between Japanese and Korean women, see files pertaining to marriage (decimal 291.1) in: EUSA, Decimal Files, NARA, RG 338; USAFIK, Decimal Files, NARA, RG 554.
40. One social worker of the era captures this sentiment in Susan T. Petiss, "Effect of Adoption of Foreign Children on US Adoption Standards and Practices," *Child Welfare* 37 (1958), 27–32.
41. "Request for Permission to Marry," April 11, 1949, USAFIK, Decimal Files, NARA, RG 554, Box 17.
42. The historical records of the International Social Service, USA Branch, Inc. (ISS-USA, Baltimore, MD) are held by the Social Welfare History Archives at the University of Minnesota (SWHA in Minneapolis, MN). Permission for their use in this research project was granted by ISS-USA. For more information, see http://www.iss-usa.org and http://special.lib.umn.edu/swha. Further, points of view in this book are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or polices of ISS-USA. For this example, see: "Report of Visit to Korea, June 18 to July 13, 1962," Box 35, Folder 26, ISS-USA Papers, SWHA.
43. Indeed, this narrative is reproduced in almost all scholarship on the topic. For examples beyond previously mentioned works in adoption studies, see: Margo Okazawa-Rey, "Amerasian Children of GI Town: A Legacy of

US Militarism in South Korea," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 3 (1997): 71–102; Sue-Je Lee Gage, "The Amerasian Problem: Blood, Duty, and Race," *International Relations* 21, no. 1 (2007): 86–102; Sue-Je Lee Gage, "Pure Mixed Blood: The Multiple Identities of Amerasians in South Korea" (PhD diss., Indiana U., 2007); Yuri Doolan, "Being Amerasian in South Korea: Purebloodness, Multiculturalism, and Living Alongside the US Military Empire" (Honors thesis, Ohio State U., 2012); Mary Lee, "Mixed Race Peoples in the Korean National Imaginary and Family," *Korean Studies* 32 (2008): 56–85; W. Taejin Hwang, "The 'Amerasian' Knot: Transpacific Crossings of 'GI Babies' from Korea to the United States" in *Race and Racism in Modern East Asia [Vol. II]: Interactions, Nationalism, Gender and Lineage*, eds. Rotem Kowner and Walter Demel (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2015): 504–26.

44. Margaret A. Valk, "Adjustment of Korean-American Children in their American Adoptive Homes," undated 1957, Box 10, Folder 2, ISS-USA Papers, SWHA.
45. "ISS Korea to ISS New York, June 2, 1958," Box 34, Folder 21, ISS-USA Papers, SWHA.
46. For more on Eurasians, see: Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: U. California Press, 2002); Durba Ghosh, *Sex and Family in Colonial India: The Making of Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge U. Press, 2006); David Pomfret, *Youth and Empire: Trans-Colonial Childhoods in British and French Asia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford U. Press, 2015).
47. This observation was gleaned from multiple oral history interviews. Another example of this is recorded in the story of one mixed-race woman born in 1962, who recalls her mother even being asked by her school teachers for luxury American goods, including a "made in the USA wig" and a "US-made refrigerator." See: Lily Lee Lu, "Growing Up in Korea," in Cerissa Kim et al., *Mixed Korean: Our Stories, An Anthology* (Bloomfield, IN: Trupeny Publishing Co., 2018), p. 61.
48. "Visit to Korea: November 21st-30th, 1956," Box 35, Folder 28, ISS-USA Papers, SWHA.
49. For a concise consideration of the Korean War, see: Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War* (above, n. 33).
50. This, in fact, is the topic of a fantastic new book in Asian American studies. See: Woo, *Framed by War* (above, n. 5).
51. Some of the best examples of this Cold War narrative can be found in: "A War Bride Named 'Blue' Comes Home," *Life*, Nov. 5, 1951, 40–41; Michael Rougier, "The Little Boy Who Wouldn't Smile," *Life*, July 23, 1951, 91–98; *The Loretta Young Show*, "Dateline Korea," episode 5430, National Broadcasting Company, March 13, 1955.
52. For examples, see: Leonard W. Mayo, "2,000 Reasons to Help South Korea," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, August 2, 1953; Dr. J. Calvitt Clarke, "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 1952.

53. For a firsthand account of how the Holt family came to be involved in the plight of mixed-race Koreans, see: Bertha Holt, *Bring My Sons from Afar: The Unfolding of Harry Holt's Dream* (Eugene, OR: Holt International Children's Services, 1986).
54. Ultimately, between 1956 and 1961, as many as 2,600 mixed-race Koreans had been adopted by American families; more than half of these had been placed by Holt. These percentages are based on the statistics compiled in the report: "An Analysis of the United Presbyterian Position on Orphans in Korea," May 1961, Box 35, Folder 16, ISS-USA Papers, SWHA.
55. "Visit to Korea: November 21st-30th, 1956" (above, n. 48).
56. William Hilliard, "Holt Pushes Waif Airlift—Creswell Farmer Races Against Time, Government Redtape in Mercy Plan," *Oregonian*, Dec. 15, 1956.
57. "The problem of the mixed blood child" was an expression commonly used by adoption advocates and other American humanitarians during the 1950s and 1960s. This verbiage appears in numerous social work documents cited throughout this essay.
58. These were Public Law 316 passed in Sept. 1957, Public Law 253 passed in Sept. 1959, and Public Law 648 passed in July 1960.
59. After Public Law 648 expired on July 30, 1961, it was not until Sept. 26, 1961, that Congress passed Public Law 301. The law ended proxy adoptions, and amended the existing Immigration and Nationality Act in order to make permanently possible an unlimited number of non-quota immigrant visas for children adopted abroad by US citizens or entering the US to be adopted.
60. It is no coincidence that there were so many religious organizations affiliated with the postwar recovery effort, and the campaign to adopt Korean children in particular. Useful for understanding this phenomenon is historian Arissa Oh's concept of "Christian Americanism," which she defines as "vaguely Christian principles with values identified as exceptionally 'American:' an expansive sense of responsibility and a strong belief in the importance of family. Although it was never fully articulated as a doctrine, American churches, the government, and the mainstream media promoted it, and it took hold in white, middle-class America—the segment that adopted the majority of the GI babies. Christian Americanism encapsulated the prevailing attitude that equated being a good Christian with being a good American." For more, see: Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea* (above, n. 5), 79–80.
61. "Report of Visit to Korea, June 18 to July 13, 1962" (above, n. 42).
62. Rev. H. P. Sconce, "Operation Babylift," *Guideposts Magazine* 11, no. 7 (Sept. 1956).
63. Jay Racusin, "Pearl Buck Pleads for Orphans: 'Half -Americans Dying in Korea,'" *New York Herald Tribune*, Jan. 7, 1959.
64. "Dove M. Kull (Alaska Department of Public Welfare, Child Welfare Worker) to Suzanne M. Tierney (ISS-USA, Case Consultant), January 12, 1960," Case

No. 591535, Box 115, ISS-USA Case Records, SWHA; "Holt Press Release," Oct. 14, 1955, private collection of Molly Holt (chairperson of Holt Children's Services, Ilsan, South Korea), cited in Susie Woo, "A New American Comes 'Home'": Race, Nation, and the Immigration of Korean War Adoptees, 'GI Babies,' and Brides" (PhD diss., Yale U., 2010), p. 136.

65. Anne Norman, "Babies GIs Left Behind Are Tragic Aftermath of Wars: War Baby Tragedy," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 23, 1957.
66. "Brown Babies Under Hardship in Orient," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Feb. 1, 1955.
67. Sconce, "Operation Babylift" (above, n. 62).
68. "Plight of Korean Homeless: Orphans Not Wanted," *New York Herald Tribune*, Oct. 23,1957; Anne Norman, "Babies GIs Left Behind" (above, n. 65).
69. Inez Robb, "A Fairy Story Come True," *Boston Globe*, Dec. 24, 1955; William Hilliard, "Children Die in Holt's Korean Orphanage While Congress Holds up Relief Legislation," *Oregonian*, July 7, 1957.
70. Margaret A. Valk, "Adjustment of Korean-American Children in their American Adoptive Homes," undated 1957, Box 10, Folder 2, ISS-USA Papers, SWHA.
71. My translation: Kim Jung Ja, "My Work Report: The Mother of 17 Children," *Tonga Ilbo*, Oct. 10, 1955.
72. Ibid.
73. "ISS Korea to ISS New York, June 2, 1958" (above, n. 45).
74. "Notes on Field Visit-ISS Korea Staff, July 12, 1962," Box 35, Folder 26, ISS-USA Papers, SWHA.
75. "Report of Visit to Korea, June 18 to July 13, 1962" (above, n. 42).
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Anne Davison's report, titled "The Mixed Racial Child," was published in Korean Child Welfare Committee, *Handicapped Children's Survey Report, Korea, 1961* (Seoul, KR: Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 1961).
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. "Susan Pettiss to Files, June 6, 1958," Box 34, Folder 21, ISS-USA Papers, SWHA.
82. In this case "Miss Holt" refers to one of the Holts' daughters, most likely Molly Holt, Mrs. Rhee is a Korean ISS staff member, and names of birth mothers and children have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities: "ISS Korea to ISS New York, March 28, 1958," Case No. 36608, Box 17, ISS-USA Case Records, SWHA.
83. "Report of Visit to Korea, June 18 to July 13, 1962" (above, n. 42).
84. According to a professional welfare spokesman in 1959, nearly 800,000 more American families wished to adopt than there were adoptable children. This is echoed in "An Analysis of the United Presbyterian Position on Orphans in Korea," (above, n. 54). Of course, this statement really

only applied to white children, and similarly Korean-white children. For example, while there was a shortage of adoptable white children both in the United States and South Korean camptowns, the same could not be said of Black and Korean-Black children respectively.

85. Gage, "Pure Mixed Blood" (above, n. 43), 72, 98.
86. "ISS Korea to ISS New York, June 2, 1958" (above, n. 45).
87. All oral histories interviews cited in this essay were conducted by the author between the years 2017 and 2020 as part of a larger book project entitled *The First Amerasians: Mixed Race Koreans from Camptowns to America* (forthcoming, Oxford U. Press). The interlocuters are all mixed-race Korean adoptees placed into US homes during the 1950s and 1960s. The oral history testimonies that appear in this essay are coded to protect the anonymity of those interviewed, and are cited in accordance with the larger book project from which they are drawn: Oral History 19.
88. Oral History 11.
89. Ibid.
90. The memoir of one Korean social worker illustrates this point. She regretfully recalls: "I really believed, in my youth and naïveté, that I was doing the best I could for these children. I was giving them a better chance. I misunderstood my job and thought I was supposed to make the birth mothers relinquish their children; I pushed those mothers to sign the papers." For more, see: Hyun Sook Han, *Many Lives Intertwined* (St. Paul, MN: Yeong & Yeong, 2004).
91. Oral History 21.
92. Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown* (above, n. 3).
93. Oral History 21.
94. Oral History 4.
95. Oral History 25.
96. Oral History 1.
97. Oral History 21.
98. Oral History 1.
99. Oral History 7.
100. Oral History 21.
101. Oral History 1.
102. Oral History 16.
103. Oral History 21.
104. Harry Golden, "Only In America: Children for Adoption," *Chicago Daily Defender*, May 3, 1965.
105. "South Korea: Confucius' Outcasts," *Time*, Dec. 10, 1965.
106. Ibid.
107. "Gardner M. Munro (ISS Korea, Director) to Edna Weber (Headquarters ISS Geneva, Executive Director), December 11, 1965," Box 35, Folder 2, ISS-USA Papers, SWHA.
108. Ibid.

109. Ibid.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid.
112. These numbers are based on the official figures provided by the Ministry of Health and Welfare (Republic of Korea).
113. These figures are from the report, "An Analysis of the United Presbyterian Position on Orphans in Korea" (above, n. 54).
114. Bruce Cumings, "Silent But Deadly" (above, n. 11), p. 171.