

**Concrete July:
Forging a Critical Peace in Korea from Fragments of the Past**

by
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For the millions,
and the millions before and after them,
laboring to come home to a better world.

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할머니, 할아버지, 삼촌, 외숙모 — 고맙고 사랑해요.

엄마, 아빠 — 언제나 사랑해요; 이런 기회줘서 고마워요. 잘 쓸게요.

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Preface: Concrete July

“The area around an American base is like an island between Korea and the U.S.”
— Kang Sok-Kyong, “Days and Dreams”¹

In May of 2022, *Concrete July* was originally conceived as a “geopolitical analysis of a people’s rights to sovereignty and the complex form that such sovereignty takes via U.S.² militarization [and a militarized landscape] within the Korean peninsula” via investigation of U.S. military fixtures on Korean land. Fixtures, seemed, to me, one of the most physically striking and obvious sign of the domination and exploitation of Korean land and people: they were signed directly over from Japanese imperial forces after WWII, marking a continued claim on Korean land by non-Koreans³; they are sites of brutal and unpunished civilian deaths⁴; and they host the third-largest American troop presence in the world at 28,500 soldiers.⁵ South Korea pays an extravagant price for this external presence: U.S. military base operations in Korea cost S.Korea \$5.8 billion. The U.S. Department of Defense pays \$13.4,⁶ leaving Korean civilians paying 30% to host an army that is not theirs, and one that contributes to the in economic and physical degradation of environments, sexual harassment of Korean women, and a certain foreclosure of new dreams of land and defense. Asking “what can we learn about ‘sovereignty’ when a supposedly ‘sovereign’ country is funneling billions into a foreign military force and denied control of mass swathes of land?,” on a starkly territorialized peninsula, I had initially intended to study the materialities of these bases and their continued impacts on Korean people living around them. Parts of this initial idea are still included here.

Somewhere along the way, I moved away from bases, militarism, and sovereignty, instead finding an interest in the psychic legacies that fueled grassroots resistance to U.S. military presence. I wanted to learn about how Koreans were forging out new futures, rather than to draw conclusions from structures primarily controlled by the U.S. Thus, an interrogation that once largely centered on territorialization, then militarization, then geopolitics (even as their contours are murky), eventually turned into a broader interrogation into the concept and framework of *peace*, as I found fascinating how it seemed to permeate discourses, actions, and relations of power—encompassing and including (or “included within”) all of the very same things I once focused on.

¹ Sok-kyong Kang, “Days and Dreams.” In *Words of Farewell: Stories by Korean Women Writers*, ed. and trans Bruce Fulton and Ju-Chan Fulton (Seattle: Seal Press, 1989), 23, quoted in Grace Cho, “Diaspora of Camptown: The Forgotten War’s Monstrous Family.” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1/2 (2006): 316.

² I type U.S. with periods to make it much more amenable to an online Ctrl+F search.

³ Tanner Greer. “American Bases in Japan Are Sitting Ducks,” *Foreign Policy*, September 4, 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/04/american-bases-in-japan-are-sitting-ducks>.

⁴ Don Kirk. “Road accident galvanizes the country: Deaths in Korea ignite anti-American passion.” *New York Times*, July 31, 2002. <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/07/31/news/road-accident-galvanizes-the-country-deaths-in-korea-ignite.html>.

⁵ Hyonhee Shin and Joyce Lee. “Factbox: U.S. and South Korea’s security arrangement, cost of troops.” *Reuters*, March 7, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southkorea-usa-alliance/factbox-u-s-and-south-koreas-security-arrangement-cost-of-troops-idUSKBN2AZ0S0>.

⁶ Government Accountability Office, *Burden Sharing: Benefits and Costs Associated with the U.S. Military Presence in Japan and South Korea*, by Jason L. Bair and Diana Maurer. GAO-21-270, Washington, D.C.: GAO, 2021, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-270>.

This work's subtitle has gone through multiple transformations, beginning as "Forging Peace in Korea from Fragments of the Past," then turning into "Forging a Critical Peace Through Korea." I made this first change because, to some degree, I found distasteful the idea that these fragments of visions of a better, more "peaceful" future were rooted solely in the past. Crudely, however, it was largely because one fit it better as a professional academic title. It is now a portmanteau of both.

Bowed by two turbulent years full of massive loss punctuated by unimaginable joy that have transformed my peers' and my own relationship to everyday existence, I offer you a much, much more modest work than I had initially expected: but nonetheless the start of an elaboration on how violence and loss is crystallized through time, and my [our] insistence that our work must assert its role in the struggle for a better day.

All translations are mine unless noted. I largely follow the Revised Romanization of Korean system. For the sake of brevity, I interchange South Korea and the Republic of Korea (ROK). I also interchange North Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

Any questions about this thesis and my other work can be directed to sheeenkim@gmail.com (three e's).
Thank you for reading.

Introduction

“This land is not the United States’ war machine! Oppose war! Toward a peaceful present!”

—The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, August 2022⁷

On August 13, 2022, thousands of Koreans marched through the streets of Seoul, chanting for the end of the Ulchi Freedom Shield war rehearsals by a joint US-Japanese-South Korean force on Korean lands, air, and sea—the first large-scale joint US-South Korean military exercises since 2017. Coming upon the eve of the 77th anniversary of Korea’s liberation from Japan, it was a show of mass resistance against an escalation of military tensions by the conservative Yoon Suk Yul regime.⁸ It was also a collectivized resistance, organized by two of the largest trade unions in Korea as well as various progressive organizations that called for de-escalation, dissolution of military alliances, and dialogue between the North and South Korea.⁹ It went largely uncovered by US media (Appendix A).

It was two months after the victory of the conservative majority party People Power’s candidate, Yoon Suk Yeol, office through a hyper-pro-U.S., anti-feminist platform that threatened the backtracking of prior president Moon Jae-in’s comparatively liberal and conciliatory legacies; a victory that read as a continuation of a legacy of hegemonic U.S. interference and ideological struggle on the peninsula and between Koreans.¹⁰ In forming this work, I was grappling with what it meant for my siblings across the ocean in their struggle against mass exploitation and precarity. Korea, as land, is trodden with deep and multiple conflicts. From warring kingdoms, an annexation

⁷ Korean Confederation of Trade Unions. “8.15 전국노동자대회, 2022년 8월 13일(토) 오후 2시, 승례문. [8.15 National Workers’ Congress, August 13, 2022 (Sat.), 2PM, Sungnyemun].” KCTU, July 22, 2022, translation mine. http://nodong.org/index.php?mid=notice&page=4&document_srl=7808521.

⁸ Tim Shorrock, “US Media Ignored Major Anti-US Military Protest in South Korea,” *Responsible Statecraft*, August 23, 2022, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/08/23/us-media-ignored-major-anti-us-military-protest-in-south-korea/>.

⁹ 참여연대 [People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy], “‘담대한 구상’을 실현하려면 한미연합군사연습부터 중단해야 합니다 - 참여연대 - 평화군축센터 [For the ‘Bold Plan’ to Come to Fruition, We Must Stop the U.S.-South Korea-Japan Military Exercises.],” 참여연대 (blog), August 19, 2022, <https://www.peoplepower21.org/peace/1904181>.

¹⁰ Amy Gunia. “How South Korea’s Next President Capitalized on Anti-Feminist Backlash,” *Time*, March 10, 2022, <https://time.com/6156537/south-korea-president-yoon-suk-yeol-sexism/>.

and struggle for liberation from Japanese colonialism amid war, and the “hot” Korean War, Koreans have been overlaid by violence in its myriad definitions—the latter of which is my focus here. In a broad sense, the Cold War led to a massive expansion of the US’s overseas military presence, marking a shift from colonial domination to less overt forms of political and economic interference.¹¹ The August 2022 protesters critique not just an active US military presence and resulting economic and physical exploitation of residents, but also of militarism’s connections to Korean neoliberal policy and inequality—and the pain that such systems bring.

Korea presents an odd case for peace, given its wartime legacies and ever-present military tensions¹² but absence of overt open warfare on the peninsula. It is not overtly at war or embroiled in overt violence but is portrayed in constant conflict and competition with the DPRK; embroiled in the conflict between China and the US; and otherwise, an “ally” state in unfortunate geopolitical circumstance (Appendix B). Others see the military presence as necessary on the peninsula, echoing hegemonic ideas of the US as staunch ally and protector, while representing the spatial and political fragmentation of opinion within the ROK itself (Appendix C). The details of this specific ideological conflict are not within the scope of this paper, but they are necessary for the foregrounding of an emergent struggle.

I return to, and place great importance on, the August protestors’ calls for a “*peaceful*” present. These protesters, alongside other Koreans such as the Reunification Brigade of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, a leftist labor confederacy in Korea, are forging different definitions of peace that seem to confront the deep scars of war and intervention on the peninsula. My exploration, then, is what the varied and myriad “peaces”—and pieces, fragments of, peace—that

¹¹ Matthew Farish. “Illuminating the Terrain.” In *The Contours of America’s Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 51-99.

¹² In this case, of the two Koreas consistently opposed to each other. See Appendix C tangentially, where the “two Koreas” are consistently presented as opposed to each other, and the presence of North Korea in US media as a general bad threat. See, for coverage: Andray Abrahamian. “The American Media,” *38North*, August 15, 2017, <https://www.38north.org/2017/08/aabrahamian081517/>.

they and other Koreans—both on and off the peninsula—are calling for, and what that may teach us of an ultimate world where Koreans’ calls for a different, better presents are realized.

I abstract “better,” in this case, to both reflect its contested nature (as parallel and corollary of/from contested peace). Borrowing from Christopher Courtheyn’s opposition to postmodernist aversion to definitive assertions, I broadly and tentatively articulate “better” as formulations toward “that” world that allows people to be free from harm, premature death, and exploitation—one preceded by *both* a destruction of the current systems (ideological and material)¹³ and reparations of billions lost within them. Or, to draw Korean liberation fighter Ahn Jung-geun, it is that world where we and our elders can dance and shout hurrah in heaven based on a defined liberation.¹⁴

I first give broad context on the Korean War (“Historical Context”), focusing on the years from 1945-1953 to contextualize this thesis. I then move to “Concretion,” where I ground a critical feminist methodology that encompasses, but also moves through, with, and beyond geographies of [] alone. I then situate *Concrete July* in existing discussions of critical geopolitics, geographies of peace, and geographies of memory, among others, and explain my methods.

In discussing how discourses and ideologies of peace emerge through my fieldwork and research with people-landscapes, I find it useful to turn to the metaphors of concrete and glass.¹⁵ Themes of the former, within my title as a reference to the concrete bases are physically built on, run through my first and main empirical chapter “*Gwi-hyang*, or, Homecoming.” Here, I “read” two sites of Korean War memorialization: one of the current Republic of Korea’s hegemonic narrative of war

¹³ As a matter of transparency, I name these systems as those of capitalism.

¹⁴ “I will dance and shout hurrah when I hear the news of Korea’s independence in heaven.” qtd. in Park Ji-won, “Ballet explores independence fighter’s last moments,” *The Korea Times*, August 13, 2021.

https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2022/08/690_313834.html?utm_source=WA

¹⁵ To be considered with their layperson associations and their role in the actual physical building of apparatuses.

[and peace], and one of a suppressed anti-Communist massacre in 1948, immediately preceding the official start of the war.

In my second, shorter chapter, “As Fragments to Be Forged,” enclosed within my Conclusions section, I explain how Koreans in the present day (broadly ~2000s to today) are grappling with the messy stratas of post-war history, memory, and trauma—ranging from everyday Koreans grappling by militarized sites to organized Koreans. I speak with diasporic peace organization Women Cross DMZ and briefly reflect on autoethnography with the KCTU. Here, I argue Koreans both within Korea and beyond are creating definitions of peace made murkier by the reaches of memory and foreign presence; taking shattered glass and working it even as the shadow of the War and its losses grow longer and longer.

I conclude with the claim that new futures are happening, rooted in what is a combined affective-political maneuvering. Hundreds of thousands of Koreans, and other peoples who have withstood the pain of war, refuse the “blank space”—enforced forgetting, permanent division without end, the denial of the right to a history of resistance and unity. If we are all subjects interpellated by ideologies that present us with diverging paths toward the future, I know there is that we can learn from Koreans asserting a profoundly anti-American future and rooted in a dedication to the Korean *nation* in the myriad forms it takes.¹⁶

¹⁶ Fieldwork. December 2022-January 2023.

Historical Context

*“Ah, there will be no return
Once I fall into sleep,
unless struggling and writhing with mad burning eyes never
to the wind-raging road
with my brothers
as a traveler, never again.”*

— Excerpt from “There Will Be No Return” by Kim Chi-ha¹⁷

How the Korean War and its surrounding events are told create a device of “Korea,” one that ultimately pins and creates further notions of power and resolution surrounding the war. Popular and enduring depictions of the war from South Korean and U.S. official sources have frequently misrepresented or underplayed the violent events leading up to the war.¹⁸ Prevailing hegemonic narratives around the U.S. role in the war suppress and simplify multiscalar dimensions of the conflict and violence on everyday citizens during and around this period into a Manichean narrative of U.S. heroism against evil communists.¹⁹

A ‘complete’ history of U.S. intervention or the origins of the War is beyond the purview of this thesis. My analysis, specifically, focuses on what I consider two “flashpoints” of Korean history. I first discuss the approximately eight-year period between 1945-1953, determined broadly by Korean liberation from Japan; provisionary governments and fragments of a unified Korean government; and the outset and diplomatic pausing of the Korean War. I then use this period to contextualize

¹⁷ Chiha Kim, “Five Poems.” Translated by Lee Young-Jun. *Azalea: Journal of Korean Literature & Culture* 1, no. 1 (2007): 283–88, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aza.0.0002>. Chiha, born 1941, was a Korean dissident poet arrested in 1970 in violation of the Anti-Communism Law during Syngman Rhee’s dictatorship.

¹⁸ Bruce Cumings. *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2011). According to Annelise Orleck, this book is regarded as the standard of critical Korean history in the U.S. Much, if not all, of my history here is covered in his work.

¹⁹ Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

modern day (broadly ~2010-present) movements toward, defined, and shaped by various dreams and interventions into what is a ROK-US state mode of “peace” in later chapters.

1945-1953: Division, Brutality, and Experience in the Radius of the Korean War

*“When she gave birth to my son
Children were born in Korea
They looked like sunflower seeds
MacArthur slayed them all
They perished, without having had their mother’s milk”
— Excerpt from “Birth” by Nazım Hikmet²⁰*

August 15, 1945 marks the liberation of Korea from Japan after its post-WWII surrender in what is known in Korea as the 광복절 (*Gwangbeokjeol*), or the Day of the Restoration of Light, in South Korea, and the 조국해방 (*Joguk haebang*), or the Liberation of the Fatherland in the North. This period was marked by a deep decolonial hope: one in which Koreans would be able to determine the future of their reclaimed land as a part of a thoroughly national project.²¹

Materially, however, Koreans reckoned with the difficulties that arise from mass colonial infrastructure and exploitation, and the sudden vanishing of that structure. Post-liberation Korea was marked by a large population of a dispossessed lumpenproletariat, as well as lingering ideological and class struggle between Koreans who had collaborated and profited off of Japanese empire and nationalist liberation fighters who sought the destruction of that system.

Geopolitically, the territory of “Korea” also remained a shatterbelt within broader tensions of the Cold War. Alongside Manchuria, it was a key strategic point in the East, ripe for incorporation

²⁰ “Doğum,” TurkceBilgi, last modified 2021, <https://www.turkcebilgi.org/sairler-ve-siirleri/nazim-hikmet-ran/dogum-38594.html>. Translated by Kaya Çolakoğlu.

²¹ While I understand that the word “nation” is fraught with rightful concerns of state violence and human division, I use it throughout this thesis to refer to this same moment of “decolonial hope” as an intermediary project and relation. See also: Frantz Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Contance Farrington and Grove Weidenfeld (New York: Grove Press, 1968): 34-106.

within the Communist and capitalist blocs. Within the 1943 Cairo Conference, the USSR, US, and Britain marked it as a “matter of concern,”²² discussing it as a territory that would eventually be afforded its independence with the guidance of “larger” powers.

What the parties at the Cairo Conference failed to—or refused to—recognize was the matter that Korea would win its independence eventually, and required no such guidance. Koreans had already been dreaming of a sovereign state. The first visions and sparks of what could be a unified Korea took place within the short-lived (1945-46) People’s Republic of Korea (PRK) by an ideologically-wide coalition of liberation fighters: It detailed revolutionary policies of complete land reform from Japanese and collaborator claims, redistribution of wealth and land, nationalization of industries, labor laws, as well as universal franchise across genders. The PRK was defined by sets of regional “people’s committees,” that served as local governments, in what would be the first imaginations of a collective Korean state.²³ The US, which had arrived in Korea in the September of 1945, designated this government as Communist, sensing a threat to global capitalism, and outlawed the people’s committees South of the 38th parallel, while the USSR recognized the committees in the north.²⁴ It would also be a mistake to assert that the PRK was fully supported on the peninsula: dispossessed landowners and wealthy Korean elite found disaffection with the PRK’s policies. Pak Hon-yong, chairman of the Korean Communist Party from 1945-46, a key party actor in the establishment of the committees, conceded that Korean leftists were unable to take advantage of mass uprisings after liberation.²⁵

²² “NEW NATIONAL STRATEGIES SPARKED BY CAIRO CONFERENCE, POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION TOLD | UN Press,” accessed May 30, 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/1996/19960227.pop610.html>.

²³ Michael Robinson, *Twentieth-Century Odyssey: A Short History* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 105.

²⁴ Cumings, Bruce. *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005); Cumings, *The Korean War*.

²⁵ Pak Hŏn-yŏng, “Hyŏnjŏngse wa uri ūi immu,” from Ijŏng Pak Hŏn-yŏng Chŏnjip P’yŏnjip Wiwŏnhoe, *Ijŏng Pak Hŏn-yŏng Chŏnjip*, vol. 2. qtd. in Yumi Moon, “Korean Uprisings in 1946: Was the US Occupation Responsible for the Korean War?,” *Wilson Center*, June 18, 2020. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/korean-uprisings-1946-was-us-occupation-responsible-korean-war>.

The crackdown on the PRK was accompanied by the establishing of the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK)—which would largely rehabilitate collaborator Koreans and maintain colonial economic and policing structures.²⁶ Division would ultimately progress into the concretion of the two provisional governments in the North and South that would eventually become the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in the ensuing conflict.

Much of the violence around the war lays here at its flashpoint: this Red Scare led to indiscriminate killings of Koreans perceived as sympathetic to socialism, and the lawlessness around the two competing governments. While narratives point to geopolitical histories of military aggression, the sheer number of atrocities, aggressive actions, and discriminatory killings by the U.S. outnumber those of the DPRK—a narrative that the U.S. and South Korea have largely buried. It was, also, a stunningly cruel division: instead of liberating Korea after colonization:

“two young military officers were assigned by the US State and War Departments to divide Korea. The two officers tore out a map from National Geographic and literally drew a line across the thirty-eighth parallel because it placed Seoul in the US zone. President Harry S. Truman sent a memo to Joseph Stalin informing him that the Soviets could take Pyongyang and the area north of the thirty-eighth parallel, and that the US would take Seoul and the region south of it. It is through this arbitrary, imperial border-making process that Korea became divided over seventy years ago and still remains divided.”²⁷

The Korean War, which officially began in 1950, also known as the “Forgotten War,” has largely disappeared from the American psyche—despite its allowance for the continuation of U.S. military

²⁶ Cumings, *The Korean War*. 85% of the 23,000 imperial Japanese forces were retained by the military government. See also Mark J. Scher, “U.S. Policy in Korea 1945–1948: A Neo-Colonial Model Takes Shape,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 5, no. 4 (December 1973): 17–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.1973.10406346>.

²⁷ Ahn, Christine. “Disrupting War: Women Cross the Korean DMZ.” *American Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2019): 1045. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2019.0075>.

presence and hegemony in East Asia, maintenance of Korean separation. Some scholars mark the beginning of the war and its related mechanisms as a pivotal point in the transcontinental post-war US empire, kickstarting what was new tactics of foreign military occupation, aggressive political maneuvering, and geopolitical pressure in a manner that has led to mass deaths under the guise of anti-communism, freedom, and “peace.”²⁸ In popular media and geopolitical discussions, Korea is often referred to only in terms of power and political maneuvering, with little conversation about those fighting to receive the resolution that they deserve; it is not “peopled,” or accompanied by a “sense of how the politics based on those scripts affect and are affected by the daily lives (and resistance) of the non-elites.”²⁹ This emptiness, or failure to discuss or content with the state level of a violence that led to the deaths of millions and mass physical and psychic destruction remains. Grace Cho, for example, describes how lack of closure from the war, and especially for those who suffered from sexual violence, continues to “haunt” survivors through guilt, trauma, and a simply inability to process properly the events that occurred.³⁰ Yet, to this broader state geopolitical perspective, Korea was but “a pawn to be sacrificed in a bigger game, a gambit offered as in chess,” within the discourses of a bigger game in which the US’s role continues to be downplayed or overtly transformed.³¹

Amid these interlocking geopolitical “games” and the smaller-scale pain of civilian Koreans who suffered through the destruction of the war, the dominant understanding of Korean War history is what Clara Seunghei Hong describes as a “6/25 Narrative,” a narrative of American rescue of *all* Korea preceded by a North Korean invasion, and then a “rise to grace” (quote mine) via [South]

²⁸ Jang Jip Choi, “Political Cleavages in South Korea,” in *State and Society in Contemporary Korea*, edited by Hagen Koo. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): pp. 15-50.

²⁹ Sara Koopman, “Alter-Geopolitics: Other Securities Are Happening,” *Geoforum* 42, no. 3 (June 2011): 274–84, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2011.01.007>.

³⁰ Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*.

³¹ I.F. Stone, *The Hidden History of the Korean War* (New York: Monthly Review, 2023).

Korean perseverance.³² Yet, U.S. forces were responsible for the “wholesale slaughter” of thousands of Koreans during the war with relative impunity, and had a much deeper and complex interest and role in the bloody affair.³³

It is for this reason that, for this thesis, I avoid a focus on the Communist bloc. Presenting the Communist bloc and the varied individual and collective person-actors that it subsumes as “villains” with the same objectives and tactics (destructive conquer and suppression) as the US is false, and risks falling into the same pitfalls as the hegemonic, traditional-geopolitical, that already define the war and simplify the conflict and its lasting scars. If there were unlawful and naked massacres of anti-US Koreans (and any and all Koreans that were marked as such) during the war, such as Jeju and Nogun-ri, the all-good narrative renders this violence and the US’s neocolonial histories in Korea fully incommensurable. Portraying the Korean War as a simple ahistorical ‘invasion’ eliminates the explanation that we have for the following popular struggle – rather, it is a history of intervention, buried violence, and physical and psychic legacies.

The “July” of “Concrete July” refers specifically to July 1953, the month in which the Korean Armistice Agreement was signed by the US-led United Nations Command, the Korean People’s Army, and the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army to “end” the Korean War. The agreement ended hostilities on the peninsula and created the Demilitarized Zone—a four-kilometer wide buffer zone around the 38th parallel. South Korea has never signed the armistice, a decision some attribute to then-president Syngman Rhee’s desire to eventually unify the entirety of Korea by force. Even if July 1953 marked the armistice that “ended,” the Korean War, the continuation of this memorial legacy buries a still-running river of pain.

³² Seunghei Clara Hong, “Silenced in Memoriam: Consuming Memory at the Nogunri Peace Park,” *Cross-Currents (Honolulu, Hawaii)*, no. 14 (2015): 183.

³³ Sang-Hu Choe, Charles J. Hanley, and Martha Mendoza. “U.S. Massacre of Civilians in Korean War Described,” *Associated Press*, September 30, 1999, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/daily/sept99/skorea30.htm>.

For sake of time and space, I will not cover the ensuing 60 year chunk of Korean history, which can broadly be described as a military dictatorship under the transfer of power from the USAMGIK to Rhee Syngman, who used “military confrontation with North Korea was used as an excuse to justify violations of human rights and the suppression of political dissidents” and implemented bans on speech (the National Security Act) that still lead to the arrests of Communist or leftist Koreans today³⁴; a 1961 coup d’etat by Park Chung-hee, who declared martial law and developed Korea at the cost of mass loss of life; brutal student struggles for democracy in the 1980s in Gwangju³⁵; and, throughout, a deep dependence on the U.S. for developmental funding and military protection.³⁶

The sheer violence of the war, the chaos and upheaval within the war that led to millions of families separated or fractured, and sudden denials to ancestral lands and self-governance are made incommensurable without a focus on the U.S.’s darker deigns and blocks to “peace,” or what Koreans called, then, *haebang* 해방 (freedom or liberation). If the “Korean War is at war with itself,” and continues to be so, what does it mean that state relations, mythos, and histories are built upon it?

³⁴ Bove, Riley. “FROM STOLEN LAND TO RICHES: US NEO-COLONIALISM IN SOUTH KOREA.” *Hampton Think*, January 8, 2020. <https://www.hamptonthink.org/read/from-stolen-land-to-riches-us-neo-colonialism-in-south-korea>.

³⁵ See Timothy Shorrock’s work on this matter.

³⁶ Bove, “From Stolen Land to Riches.”

Concretion: Conceptual Framework

Methodologies

*“In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away
from a conformism that is about to overpower it.”*
— Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*

I focus my discussion on the term “peace” not because I believe it can encompass the range of exploitation and mass violence from the War and from interventions unto Korean sovereignty as-is or on-its-own, but because it encompasses a wide range of ideologies and maneuverings, ranging from its usage to justify mass foreign intervention to the calls of those who are still moving with the trauma of the war.

Critical feminist methodologies one such mode I move through this field with, understanding that war and suffering is (1) an inherently affective domain neglected both in the masculinist “game” and seen as invalid modes of knowledge, and (2) that actual processes of the healing from and moving away from that war lies within experiences. More specifically, I read peace as connected to relationships of power and knowledge in an adjacent manner to those of feminist geographies³⁷ and in a similar struggle against marginalization.

On Power

At the same time, peace is a discussion of power: a power that has its flows determined by and rooted within not just brute force; military mechanisms; and capitalist control—but that hegemonic psyche, memories of the war and voids borne of violence. I borrow from Louise Amoore’s definition of power from the *SAGE Handbook of Human Geography* to mention that it is a

³⁷ Heidi J. Nast, “Women in the Field: Critical Feminist Methodologies and Theoretical Perspectives: Opening Remarks on ‘Women in the Field.’” *The Professional geographer* 46, no. 1 (1994): 55.

“normalizing [relational] force that works its way through people’s lives.”³⁸ Foucault foregrounds this work in power, saying that “one is always inside power, there is no escaping it,” noting that power relationships depend on “points of resistance present everywhere in the power network.”³⁹ Foucault, then, argues for a *dearth* of a great Refusal, but rather a plurality of resistances.

My discussion moves with this same understanding of the plurality of power, and that disparate movements of peace within Korea make *up* these same loci. Power, then, is not something held solely in the state and is not conflated with sheer military or economic might, but in relations that *normalize*. I read this normalization and this relation and argue that Koreans move through both power relations and what Foucault calls their opposite in resistance, matriculating and negating relations. That is, the potential to make an alternative normal is assumed as squarely within a realm of possibility.

Archaeologies and Abstractions

At the same time, I do not commit to the range of geographies (myriad geographies of x , or x geographies) as the only way to understand spatial relations and their political implications. While critical geographers have emerged to topple the imperial foundations of geography, or present alternatives to them via non white and heteronormative practices, the discipline seems to risk being stretched to its limits. For example, I turn to Sarah de Leeuw’s and Harriet Hawkins’s work on critical geographies and a “critical re/turn” to introduce “feminist, queer, anti-racist and anti-colonial ways of being in and thinking about the world,” a vital task.⁴⁰ Yet, to embrace those radical geographies seem, at times, to stretch away from Geography⁴¹; thus my analysis may reveal power

³⁸ Louise Amoore. “Power” in *The SAGE Handbook of Human Geography* (2015): 571.

³⁹ Michel Foucault. *La Volonté de savoir Vol. 1 of Histoire de la sexualité* (1976). Trans. Robert Hurley as *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (NY: Pantheon, 1978): 96.

⁴⁰ Sarah de Leeuw and Harriet Hawkins. “Critical Geographies and Geography’s Creative Re/turn: Poetics and Practices for New Disciplinary Spaces.” *Gender, place and culture: a journal of feminist geography* 24, no. 3 (2017): 303–324.

⁴¹ E.g. a geography of art versus simple art critique and analysis.

and peace relations in a differently-spatial form (or perhaps this is simply a geography of not-geography). I concurrently draw upon Foucault's concept of the archaeology:

the *episteme* in which “knowledge envisaged art from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the space of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an ‘archaeology.’”⁴²

My argument is fundamentally against accumulation: the accumulation of pain, trauma, and engrained systems in opposition to peace. Thus possibility is perceived as omnipresent, because it has to be.

I echo my fellow scholar-organizer Mariana Peñaloza Morales: that “the discipline is the limit we must go beyond,” and borrowing from Wynter, that we must think of new languages to bring about that epistemological break.⁴³ Instead, I attract Geography into the seams, rather than considering it the initial terrain of analysis.

Finally, in doing this work, I welcome abstraction with arms held wide. The critique that abstraction can be simplifying notwithstanding, I agree with McCormack that abstraction is “a technique of foregrounding aspects of lived experiences in ways that would otherwise not be possible;” that it allows a “speculative abstraction,”⁴⁴ and, I add, necessary for understanding patterns of power and exploitation—and share in resistance to them. As a socialist, I agree that Marxian abstractions aid in “pinning down” capitalism. In the case of the Korean War, I offer that

⁴² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972): 42.

⁴³ Mariana Peñaloza Morales, “Weatherin(g) the City: Countertopographies of Abolition in the Wake of Catastrophe.” (Senior Undergraduate Honors Thesis, Dartmouth College, 2022), 19.

⁴⁴ Derek McCormack. “Geography and abstraction: Towards an affirmative critique.” *Progress in Human Geography* 36, no. 6 (2012): 715–734. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132512437074>

often, abstraction is all that is possible; that the unsettled, the floating, the *alienation* and loss is precisely what marks its presence and elucidation.

At the same time; I also draw on Wynter who draws on Fanon to argue we must “introduc[e] intervention into existence. The buck stops with us.”⁴⁵ Abstraction works alongside its exact opposite, in making open space for that intervening. As such, I may draw on abstraction to describe this already-abstracting experience, and intervene with a faith in my own situated knowledge.

Or, to borrow from Walter Rodney, Guyanese Marxist historian, on his notes of purpose: The purpose has been to connect and aid the analysis of my fellow Koreans who are in this battle, “rather than to satisfy the standard set by our oppressors and their spokesmen in the academic world,”⁴⁶ that may cause marginalized or critical thinkers to stay stagnant within too-defined definition. Instead, in what I call “defragmentation,” I accept atemporality, aspatiality and, at times, a-describability as its own intervention.

⁴⁵ Sylvia Wynter. “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument.” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 257-337.

⁴⁶ Walter Rodney. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. (London, England: Verso Books, 1972).

Literature Review

Critical Geopolitics

I pin classical, traditional geopolitics as one system that has led to grassroots Korean resistance, and thus a system to be challenged—and one that is being challenged by/as discourses of ideologies of peace emerge through the landscape and the people that march on it who have had their lives intersected by forceful and blatant militarism,

Traditional geopolitical discourses surrounding Korea have centered on the state as distinct from the people. Branches of critical geopolitical theory have exposed that not only do such theories solve a distinct state purpose (allowing for the simplistic division of states into “evil” and “good” to manufacture popular consent for intervention), but that such theories are not reflective of the myriad levels at which (geo)politics is performed and shaped, nor as objective as they purport to be.⁴⁷ Feminist political geographers have done much to reveal how more intimate resistances to myriad forms of conflict can reveal alternative, nonviolent visions of security—ones not concerned with security at the “national” level—and agency of peoples at the “smaller” scale, in turn.⁴⁸ I situate my work alongside the critique of those such as Koopman, Hyndman, and Dowler & Sharp: classical, state geopolitical perspectives of Korea have consistently renarrated histories of U.S. interventionism in the peninsula, whereas grassroots resistance has much to reveal about new futures for security and thus the state and sovereignty.

⁴⁷ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, “POSTMODERN GEOPOLITICS?: The Modern Geopolitical Imagination and Beyond,” in *Rethinking Geopolitics* (Routledge, 1998); Vanessa A. Massaro and Jill Williams, “Feminist Geopolitics,” *Geography Compass* 7, no. 8 (August 2013): 567–77, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12054>.

⁴⁸ Sara Koopman “Alter-geopolitics: Other securities are happening,” *Geoforum* 42, 3 (2011): 274–284.; Sara Koopman, “Let’s Take Peace to Pieces,” *Political Geography* 30, no. 4 (May 2011): 193–94, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.04>.; Hyndman, Jennifer. 2019. “Unsettling Feminist Geopolitics: Forging Feminist Political Geographies of Violence and Displacement.” *Gender, Place and Culture : A Journal of Feminist Geography* 26 (1): 3–29.; Audrey Kobayashi, “Geographies of Peace and Armed Conflict: Introduction,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99, no. 5 (October 30, 2009): 819–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00045600903279358>.

At the same time, critical geographies can flatten the state as a normatively bad fixture, and may also risk loosening a commitment to “a dialectical and historical logic underlying the material economic structures of contemporary neoliberal capitalism and capitalist globalization.”⁴⁹ For example, What is easily understood by a layperson as economic, political, social (etc.) power, in the context of the Korean War, was largely consolidated in the hands of the colonial elite and the non-Korean party states—the United States, China, and the USSR. But my intention in this somewhat-misleading equation of power is not to create notions of “fairness,” within the geopolitical system. Rather, my argument is that the geopolitical system itself is upheld and created by those that most profit from its exploitation; its schemes and mechanisms—and primarily that geopolitical notions of “peace,” “warming,” “development”, and the “state” itself are largely unreflective of where power is supposed to lie. Power lies within the people, as other scholars recognize and assert. No more does it do so than a place like Korea, which is so intensely and visibly marked by decades of popular resistance against both governmental and extra-governmental force.

Geographies of Peace

Recent work in geographies of peace have done much to challenge “peace-as is,” and have instead reoriented it toward that struggle for a “better world” in its various definitions.⁵⁰ Courtheyn, for example, argues for a “‘radical trans-relational peace’ – ecological dignity and solidarity through trans-community networks” to analyze the visions of the “many peaces” that have formed through intimate work, often into movements *within* the margins of states as in the case of Koopman’s 2011

⁴⁹ Harry Bregazzi and Mark Jackson, “Agonism, critical political geography, and the new geographies of peace,” *Progress in Human Geography* 42, vol. 1 (2018): 72-91.

⁵⁰ Audrey Kobayashi, “Geographies of Peace and Armed Conflict: Introduction,”; Philippa Williams and Fiona McConnell, “Critical Geographies of Peace,” *Antipode* 43, no. 4 (2011): 927–31, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2011.00913.x>.

work with the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador.⁵¹ Peace, they recognize, is not simply the *end* of violence, active “hot” tensions, as created through diplomatic agreement as assumed within the traditional domain of security. In other words, feminist and peace geographies refuse that “chess game,” that Stone mentioned prior. Such scholars draw inspiration from Megoran’s call to “develop the tools to identify and explore transformative possibilities for peace.”⁵²

Thus, forming a critical peace is a larger project that is multiscalar, or actually blurs these scales in their entirety. Peace is actively defined through, amid, and around subjects that have been interpellated and-also actively defined by those who have been dispossessed, even as that dispossession itself is in constant interrogation—but it denies a flat classification of “not war.”

Peace, to this extent, is understood as a “blank space” that has myriad subjective and contested meanings, but Koopman broadly calls it “a) is a spatial process, rather than a fixed condition; b) is entangled with processes of violence; c) has diverse interpretations; d) shapes and is shaped by political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics; and e) functions as a political discourse, which can be employed for repressive as well as liberatory ends.”⁵³

Geographies of Memory, Haunting, Ruin — the Spectral

Peace, then, is inherently tied with memory and thus understandings of space and connection, or refusals to alienation. Much work on the Korean War takes place within what I broadly classify as [studies of] geographies of memory, haunting, and ruin: These same critical views seek to elucidate the blank spaces within South Korea history and its violent handholding with U.S. empire and capitalism; ghosts of the past that “haunt” the peninsula and cleave Koreans from their lands.⁵⁴ As

⁵¹ Christopher Courtheyn, “Peace Geographies: Expanding from Modern-Liberal Peace to Radical Trans-Relational Peace,” *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 5 (October 1, 2018): 741–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132517727605>.

⁵² Megoran 2010, 382.

⁵³ Koopman 744 qtd. Courtheyn, “Peace Geographies.”

⁵⁴ Cho, “Diaspora of Camptown.”

Stoler argues, ruins and the spaces on which they lie and define (even as they are not “in ruin”, and their underlying relations) must be read as “relations of force.”⁵⁵ Similar works, such as Lee’s in the construction of memory within Korea, argue that *time* has a deep role in this haunting, acting as a “principle of impossibility,” borrowing from Jacques Rancière.⁵⁶ Drozdewski et al. argue for this geography as an inherent definer of identity, reproducing notions of place, nation, and personhood and an ensuing “*politics of memory*.”⁵⁷ I also take inspiration from “memory work,” and the understanding that memory is shaped by spaces and places, and the people and institutions who have shaped that memory, and that “dislocation of spaces, places, visibilities, and memories” in what Rhodes calls a “spectral geography.”⁵⁹

To take from Gramsci, if ideology is a terrain of struggle, and memory is connected to ideology, we can unify these lines of discussion on memory and the formation of an ensuing ideology of peace. If the end of critical geopolitics is to work toward a world that does not reproduce exploitative structures of power, there is a dearth of discussion on what the relations that define that world may be, and what the closest concept we have to that (“peace,” even if through/with the state), may take shape. Some have attempted to define and elaborate on peace geographies in a Cold War-era moment of reckoning, but there has been rightful critique that this “peace” serves as an untheorized, vague call for a “better world” that is in itself undefined, and often it is “sentimentally idealized as either simply not-war, or all that is good”. My work here aims to both assert a definition as well as its willingness to bend.

⁵⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

⁵⁶ Namhee Lee, *Memory Construction and the Politics of Time in Neoliberal South Korea*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022).

⁵⁷ Danielle Drozdewski, Sarah De Nardi, and Emma Waterton, “Geographies of Memory, Place and Identity: Intersections in Remembering War and Conflict,” *Geography Compass* 10, no. 11 (November 2016): 447–56.

Fundamentally, this thesis asks: what does Korea—one of the most starkly territorialized and militarized spaces in the world—teach us about creations, visions, and frictions of “peace”? While such differing political ideals are not uncommon worldwide, they take unique form in Korea in that they come after mass communist-capitalist fracture, decades of [continued] historical erasure, and a continued territorial split that remains exceptional in post-Cold War geography. Thus, these alternative projects are not simply a reorienting of history, but a re-establishing of it.

What the Korean War uniquely shows us is how the void left in the mass violence surrounding the war; calculated tactics to wipe out any dissent and obscure historical factors behind the war and the divided Korea; and the ensuing “forgetting,” surrounding it, or the inability to imagine what could have been—challenges the idea “peace,” at its most radical form, as not simply a ceasing of the worst and most violent excesses of imperialist war. The continuous struggle of Koreans fighting for a peninsula free of violence, ranging from calls to expel U.S.-backed anti-missile systems in Soseongri to peace organizations calling for the formal end of the war today, by their very existence and fervor, destabilize the 6/25 Narrative,⁵⁸ and mark an attempt to fill in a certain “blank space” in a Korean collective memory.⁵⁹

I argue the Korean War and its resulting blank spaces in the collective memory, and the land that holds that memory has maintained a continued violence that challenges notions of a traditional geopolitics’ notion of peace. “Resolving,” or working to end the rifts of this conflict brings with it a deep urgency, as those from the Korean War slowly die off and current Koreans are foreclosed to the possibility of such a future.

⁵⁸ Song, Dae-Han. 2017. “Soseong-ri: An Outpost for Peace Against Thaad.” ISC. <https://www.goisc.org/englishblog/2017/05/29/thaad>; Korea Peace Now. 2022. “Korean Americans Across the Country Mobilize to End the Korean War.”

<https://koreapeacenow.org/korean-americans-across-the-country-mobilize-to-end-the-korean-war-2/>.

⁵⁹ Grace M. Cho, “Haunting the Korean Diaspora,” Book, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/haunting-the-korean-diaspora>.

Methods

If blank spaces in the collective memory of the War and the U.S., and the land that hold memories and fragments of peace, as well as continued violence that challenge traditional “peace,” I analyze that space and impacts of memory in two ways:

1. Analyzing how historic narratives of Korea and peace are written into the landscape (“*Gwi-hyang*”);
2. Analyzing a small section of how Korean activists & everyday peoples closest to the sites of the continued peace work operate (while the latter has been omitted due to time constraints, “Fragments to be Forged” features the former)

My methods are summarized below:

METHOD	#	DESCRIPTION
Semi-structured interviews	10	Performed with a range of actors: civilians by military bases, military contracted labor, organizers
Participant observation	NA	Peripheries of the sites listed below, as well as metropolitan Seoul, etc.; organizing meetings.; seminars and public events on Korean peace
In-depth spatial (site) analysis	4	War Memorial of Korea (Itaewon); Yongsan Family Park (Itaewon); Jeju 4·3 Peace Park (Jeju); Osan Air Force Base (Pyongtaek)
Document/discourse analysis	NA	Popular media (news: Yonhap, Hankyoreh, Herald); <u>USINDOPACOM</u> military documents, Korean popular history documents (ex. textbooks)

Autoethnography and Participant Observation

I have performed 10 semi-structured and/or informal interviews, both with Koreans adjacent to sites where this militarism is most evident, such as those near bases; as well as members of organizing groups. My questioning largely focused on individuals' ideas of peace and understandings of history, as well as their visions of Korea. The bulk of my interview content has come from three members of the peace organizing group Korean Peace Now!, as well as Korean civilians within or peripheral to military sites or US government institutions (one contracted construction worker, one recreation center worker in the military town of Pyeongtaek, one US embassy worker, one wife of a military tech worker), one American soldier in the base, and a Korean-English translator for various Korean leftist organizations. My interviews, in particular, revolve around my subjects' visions of peace in what Laura Ogden may refer to as “speculative wonder,” albeit in the context of geopolitics rather than environmental ontologies.⁶⁰

In doing so, I attempted to tap into the “everyday” of wartime memory—or, as the majority of my interlocutors did not have direct memories of the war, how the “everyday” in Korea was actually lain on wartime memory.⁶¹

Landscape Analysis — Topographies

I have also performed participant observations and in-depth site analysis of military, memorial, and political significant sites such as the Jeju 4*3 Peace Park, the Korean War Memorial, various US military installations (the Osan Air Force base; Pyeongtaek, a city in the northwest of South Korea where a large number of US bases are consolidated; the Yongsan Family Park, a former US military golf course reclaimed by the Yongsan District and civilian use; as well as the Demilitarized Zone). I believe that such sites are the best ways in which to both see state-sanctioned descriptions of the war

⁶⁰ Laura, Ogden. *Loss and Wonder at the World's End*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021.)

⁶¹ Drozdewski et al. “Geographies of Memory.”

and perspectives of peace, as well as conflict (ex. protests around military bases) that reveal more about political resistance, shaping, and blurrings of scales within such narratives.

While I perform what is an *internal* topography of these places to understand their “mutual and broader relationships,” and suggest possibilities of those counter-topographies of resistance; and in the case of the Peace Park, that it is a counter-topography to some extent in itself over a larger area.⁶² These sites of major loss, or “conflict-scapes,” can also evoke “presences, dreams, and hopes for the future” and “place” series of memory practice that can, for us, show what relief and a possible pathway to peace may appear as.⁶³

Textual Analysis

I supplement my ethnographic work with document and discourse analysis, ranging from popular Korean and Western media, military or UN documents, and Korean popular history documents such as textbooks or social media postings to corroborate and contextualize findings. I have largely looked at official government documents, websites of my sites, and some primary source military documents to name the words through which agents speak of peace.

⁶² Cindi Katz, “On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement,” *Signs* 26, no. 4 (Summer 2001): 1228, quoted in Peñaloza Morales, Mariana, “Weatherin(g) the City,” 18.

⁶³ Drozdewski et al., “Geographies of Memory.”

귀향 (歸鄉, *gwi-hyang*), or,

Homecoming

Introduction: Pieces of Home

“Imperial relations are relations of force.”

— Ann Stoler, *Imperial Ruins*.

Memory, violence, and peace are united, blurred, codefinite. Just as glass and concrete cannot be distinguished from each other in crushed gravel, memories of the war and its aftermath both shape, foreclose, and allow for dreams of “better” futures.

This chapter on the intentional memorializations of events and agents surrounding the war is divided into two. I ask: what conflicting narratives of “Korea” and “peace” exist on Korean “land”? How is the state hegemonic narrative expressed and emitted, and what counter narratives run counter and alongside it and challenge it? If the way in which the Korean War and its surrounding conflicts is remembered shape the meanings of “peace” on the peninsula (one that is shaped by, and also shapes, sovereignty and the nation) then the struggle for peace is the struggle over memory. Then, the memorialization of the war serve as still-living ruins that “draw on residual pasts to make claims on futures... [and] can also create a sense of irretrievability or of futures lost.”⁶⁴

I do so through two sites: the War Memorial of Korea (or WMOK, an ROK Department of Defense- owned public museum, and an example of overarching state hegemonic history that denies Koreans closure for Western violence), and the Jeju 4•3 Peace Park (or Peace Park, an NGO-run public monument dedicated to remembrance of the Jeju Massacre from 1948 that presents counternarratives to ROK hegemony). These sites demonstrate the incommensurability of the South Korean logics that happily associate with Western capitalist violence, and an ensuing confused legacy.

⁶⁴ Stoler, *Imperial Debris*, 202.

Korea, as imaginary, is in amalgamation of force relations, and the very *material* structures that simultaneously represent them, are built by them, and radiate omnidirectionally from them: a parallel slashed across the body of the peninsula, neat rows of soldiers staring each other down on the concrete of the DMZ, barbed wire fences and brick walls neatly cordoning US military bases. In contrast to other states, it is an openly bifurcated body, with anecdotal stories referring to it as “cut at the hip.” If “imperfect war,” was classically seen as a relationship of force between nations,⁶⁵ then this force emanates beyond nations. To quote Patricia Lopez, war is a permanent social relationship, beyond peace.⁶⁶

I argue the way in which the War, and the Korea and US role within it, is remembered, shape various meanings of ‘peace’ on the peninsula, and of a sovereign peninsula and the nation itself, in tandem. That is, the struggle for peace is the struggle over memory, which itself is a terrain of power; something some of my informants may call “history” or “education.” That is, for geopolitics to encompass more than itself. Ruins, as they “make claims on futures... also create a sense of irretrievability or of futures lost.”⁶⁷

While July of 1953 marked the temporary pause of the still on-going Korean War, its effects continue to reverberate throughout time. South Korea remains one of the largest legacies of U.S. Cold War empire, with about 28,500 soldiers currently stationed on its soil; and war “remains” on Korea in a myriad of ways, from the lack of an armistice [geopolitical] to the physical impacts (the border, the inability to travel). There is a deep pool of literature on the deep human effects of the war, ranging from the physical land claimages of bases; government suppression of searches into massacres by US soldiers; and the physical and mental distress that comes from a lack of reckoning with the loss.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Bas v. Tingy, 4 Dall. 37, 40 1 L. Ed. 731 (1800).

⁶⁶ Patricia J. Lopez, “Waging War,” (Draft of Presentation).

⁶⁷ Stoler, “Imperial Ruins,” 202.

⁶⁸ Martin 2018; Nisa 2019; Hanley 2010; Kim 2009; Hong 2015; Kim 2012; Kim 2017

In this chapter, I confront two primary sites. One, the War Memorial of Korea (WMoK), is a ROK Department of Defense-run museum that I use as a representation of a hegemonic postwar memory: one that upholds the narrative of US as savior of South Korea and thus as the defender of a true, capitalist Korea that positions itself squarely against communism and deems the DPRK as non-Korean heretics. The second, the Jeju 4·3 Peace Park (Peace Park), represents myriad counternarratives to what is an ahistoric, myopic, and singular-scaled perspective of the ROK and state sovereignty more broadly. The Peace Park focuses on the remembrance of the massacre by US forces and Korean collaborators of over 30,000 Koreans during the War, challenging ROK-US narratives of blamelessness, demonstrating how the terror of the war has left a traumatic collective gap in the national memory, and asserting that this same national and class struggle remains alive—if not even more so—today. I further analyze various bases and histories of bases, those still-living ruins that show how written the US presence is in the land. I ground my analysis in what Shin and Jin call “anchors” of mourning, but I also add that these sites are far more than places of mourning alone: they are crucibles in which new dreams of history are formed.⁶⁹

Derrida asks, in his discussion of spectres: “without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who are not there, of those who are no longer or who are not present and living, what sense would there to be ask the question ‘where?’ ‘where tomorrow?’ ‘whither?’”⁷⁰

		
<p>War Memorial of Korea (WMOK)</p> <p>ROK Department of Defense-owned public museum. Example of overarching state hegemonic history that denies Koreans closure for Western violence.</p>	<p>Jeju 4·3 Peace Park (Peace Park)</p> <p>Jeju NGO-run public monument dedicated to remembrance of the Jeju Massacre from 1948 that presents counternarratives to ROK hegemony</p>	<p>Various military sites and bases</p> <p>Sites owned and operated [or formerly] by the U.S. Army in Korea: Osan Air Force Base, Yongsan Family Park, Pyongtaek army town, the DMZ</p>

⁶⁹ HaeRan Shin and Yerin Jin “The Politics of Forgetting: Unmaking Memories and Reacting to Memory-Place-Making.” *Geographical Research* 59 no. 3 (2021): 439–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12467>.

⁷⁰ Jacques Derrida. *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new International*. (London, 1994): 3030.

FIGURE: For the purposes of this chapter, I will only be focusing on the first two sites.

Concrete Encasings: The War Memorial of Korea

“In 1950, when communist invasion put my beloved homeland in peril, America’s sons and daughters fought together and sacrificed their lives to defend the freedom of a country they never knew.”

— Republic of Korea President Yoon Seok-yeol, to US President Joe Biden at a May 2022 diplomatic dinner.

Yoon’s quote to Biden here succinctly sums up the narrative that the South Korean government consistently places forward in regard to policy: one of a continued 6/25 narrative, and one accompanied by a deep subservience and gratitude to the actions of US military forces. In this way, the ROK can continue its geopolitical positioning within the global market, and avoid the label of “communism” that has led to sanctions for the north. Instead, in a conciliatory manner, ROK pushes forward the message of a pro-peace, antiwar stance, all while supporting and upholding forces that are in opposition to its own claims.

One place where these cracks and contradictions can be seen is Yongsan-dong, or the Yongsan district. Yongsan is a significantly militarized site, known far more as the Yongsan Garrison rather than the neighborhood itself. Immediately north of the Han River and thus closer to the DPRK, it has its roots as the first footholds of capitalism on the peninsula, as a commercial port city during the Joseon Dynasty and eventually a community of foreign missionaries. As the Japanese established their military headquarters in Yongsan, decolonization and entrance into the Korean War led to US soldiers taking over former Japanese military bases in the Yongsan Garrison in the mid-1950s.⁷¹ Thus, a history of association and dependence on the US military, their commerce, and their bases have defined Yongsan, and more specifically Itaewon, one of the more populated areas.

When I visited in 2022, however, Itaewon was reeling from a number of crises, from the COVID-19 lockdowns—but most of all, the closing of the Itaewon Garrison and the migration of its soldiers to

⁷¹ “USAG Yongsan-Casey | Base Overview & Info | MilitaryINSTALLATIONS,” accessed March 18, 2021, <https://installations.militaryonesource.mil/in-depth-overview/usag-yongsan-casey>.

Camp Humphreys, down south in Pyeongtaek. “It’s died down a lot out there,” my aunts and uncles would agree, and as I stood there in the sweltering air, I found that the hordes of foreigners, so large that I’d be squished up against the walls as I passed through in my childhood, were nowhere to be seen. “Itaewon’s not what it used to be,” mentioned David, a Korean owner of Patrick’s Bar, an Irish-themed pub, who had spent the bulk of his life in Germany and the US before migrating to Korea. When asked to elaborate, “all the Koreans are coming in and gentrifying it, so it’s becoming more like an upscale Korean district than what Itaewon is supposed to be.” Embedded within what David says is a set of discourses on “Korea”—as a bar owner who profits off military presence, military presence becomes associated with a sort of “Americanness” that is then equated to “what Itaewon is supposed to be”—that is to say, not Korean.

The War Memorial of Korea, established in 1989 stands alongside a slew of other public museums (the Yongsan History Museum, the National Hangeul Museum, the Museum of Japanese Colonial History in Korea, among others). It is a sprawling, beautiful complex. When I visited, protestors from the Korean Government Employees' Union (a union part of the progressive Korean Confederation of Trade Unions) and the Federation of Public Officials Unions were demonstrating immediately in front of the park’s entrance condemning the Yoon Seok-yeol government’s austerity policies and fighting for an increase in pay (“everything has risen except for our wages! Civil servants are not slaves!”). It is also managed by South Korea’s Department of Defense, situated almost directly in front of the building and was the former site of the Army Headquarters in Korea, built in 1964 under the Park Chung-hee government.⁷²

The Memorial’s main entrance is a broad circular promenade, flying the flags of all the countries that came to South Korea’s aid as a part of the UN Police Action at the advent of the Cold

⁷² “Seoul’s Best Museums | CNNGo.Com,” accessed May 30, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120928105016/http://www.cnn.go.com/seoul/play/seouls-best-museums-060516>.

War. It is a place that squarely positions South Korea as a global ally; grateful to those who aided its current creation, and consistently creating a Korea in-debt. The entrance is surrounded by a number of monuments, many of which show more of this allyship: a Korean soldier hugs a US soldier atop of a mound, a faceless and nationless soldier hugs a Korean child—and one of the larger sculptures there, an intermingled line of non-Korean, Korean soldiers, and Korean civilians move forward, a Korean soldier at the front foisting a cloth up. Plaques make sure to thank foreign forces, building a narrative of unity and, what I argue, a sovereignty that is dependent on the “kindness” and recognition of other capitalist nations, in a relation of power where South Korea sees itself as beholden to the others, and to a greater global anti-communist struggle. It is an idealized and heroic notion of this struggle.

Alongside this spectacle of military might and unity are works revealing undercurrents of the creators’ own ideas of hope and “peace.” WMoK, on its website, states its mission to be: “a journey of peace taken together beyond the memories of war.” What emerges, however, from its stories even simply before entering the building itself, is that a state narrative of “peace” takes comfort in its failure to confront the bloodshed of the past. As military tanks and planes are juxtaposed to imaginaries of an undefined “reunification and peace,” with little word given to popular movements, gendered labor, or any domain that falls beyond military history of geopolitical movements, the WMoK reveals that, in this perspective, “peace” is always an unattainable goal that justifies continued spending and trade in international war, and continues to fuel mass hysteria and threat of attack from the DPRK. A tall black tower of rubble with, with two girls standing atop of it, one grabbing onto the other, who is leaning onto the other, reads: “50 years, 6 months, 25 days” as of when I was there.

“Erecting the Clock Tower:
Symbolizing War and Peace
a Twin Clock Tower
Points to a new time of New Millennium [sic]
on a pile of rusty arms
Stopped clock wrecked by the Korean War
Here a Clock Tower is erected
for the day of reunification
again beating like the hearts of two girls”

Immediately next to the clock tower is a large steel analog clock that claims itself as “The Clock of Hope for Peaceful Reunification,” noting that “Someday when reunification is realized, this Clock will be put on the Clock Tower and will indicate the time of final Reunification.”

I read this as evidence that to the South Korean state, reunification and peace within its narratives are not a contradiction. However, its own narrative renders the narrative of peace and reunification uprooted, dependent on liberal ideas of peace that give little path on a road to reunification, little imaginaries *of* reunification beyond romanticized, personified ideal, and fails to reckon with the mass legacies of trauma and western interference that led to the conflict at all. It, thus, also idealizes peace as “simply not-war, or all that is good.”⁷³ Similar to global IR and peace studies, it follows a Westphalian view of the world proven to be unreflexive of the multi-scalar studies of power in real life, and further engages in.

The innards of the Memorial follow this same logics: detailed exhibits cover the devices of military conquest, such as the planes and guns used in the war. Moving in chronological order, the museum greets visitors on its first floor with a *premodern* history of Korea, noting how the Goguryeo era (37BC) was that first “unified Korea.” This lays the groundwork for the later flexible position that the North Koreans were not the “true will of the Korean people,” but instead foreign actors or

⁷³ Koopman, “Let’s Take Peace to Pieces.”

influenced by myriads of foreign actors; South Korea is that which has been preserved as Korea. In diving into the war, it very much repeats the 6/25 Narrative: cutouts of Stalin, Mao, and Kim Jong-un stare disapprovingly down from a plaque that focuses on the role of Communist aggression in the war. Later, a bloody hammer and sickle appears next to an account of atrocities by North Korean soldiers. There are no mentions of US atrocities within the war, the USAMGIK's coup against the PRK, or of the rehabilitation of collaborators.⁷⁴

For example, in discussions of the diplomatic beginnings of the war, the memorial notes that “Kim Il-Sung requests Stalin’s approval to invade the Republic of Korea” on the March of 1949 and that Mao and Stalin “agree to an *invasion* of the ROK” in 1950 (emphasis mine); not only are the slow processes of division, such as the US’s arbitrary drawing of the parallel mentioned, but forgotten further are people’s voices, the US mass suppression of the leftist People’s Committees that formed in what would be the closest image of reunification post-Japanese liberation, and a line drawn from the start that Kim was never “Korean” (despite his presence in the liberation army). Further, these portraits of war and peace are foremost portraits of agency and power exercised by the primary Cold War antagonists: the DPRK “receives approval,” the South “gets support,” whereas the mechanisms of co-create and co-governance (that in themselves challenge the previously mentioned idea of that “communal spirit for the national security”) destabilize the narrative of Korean agency that the WMoK dances around. Even the postwar establishment of UN Command draws individual Koreans and their legacies out of the story, with the image shown as the “UN resolv[ing] to install the United Nations Command... in order to prevent the Soviet Union from occupying the whole Korean peninsula.”

⁷⁴ The Associated Press, “G.I.’s Tell of a U.S. Massacre in Korean War,” *The New York Times*, September 30, 1999, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/09/30/world/gi-s-tell-of-a-us-massacre-in-korean-war.html>.; See also Cumings, *The Korean War*.

The WMoK is more overt about the relationship between the state, sovereignty, and peace, succinctly summarizing its underlying ideology in a board on “War and Community Spirit for the National Security” as it approaches discussion about the war.

“The freedom and happiness of the people are dependent upon the existence of a nation-state. Preserving the wholeness of a nation intact is a never-ending challenge for us with countless foreign invasions and on the cost of our lives for the sake of tomorrow. Defending our country is the value with the utmost priority, transcending statutes, genders, ages, ideological and religious conflicts. The strong will to defend our homeland, in other words, the communal spirit for the national security is the greatest virtue that people must have.”

For its idealization of rescue, the WMOK places much of its analysis in violence: Immediately next to the sculptures is a large zone set out to display military vehicles previously used by or against the ROK in the Korean War and beyond. Lines and lines of tanks, stationed planes, and boats fill the grounds. One boat, for example, was used against the Vietcong in the Vietnam War. A line of K-1 tanks are marked as “the main battle tanks of the North Korean army.”⁷⁵ A semi-submarine boasts that it “sank a North Korean semi-submersible that infiltrated the Dadaepo Coast of Busan in December 1983.” Human costs of death are forgotten, and the Clock Tower’s claims of reunification and hearty peace seem far too light next to the Memorial’s assertions of a violence. “Even if weapons are not needed for use for a hundred years, they should always been in place,” quotes the museum from Jeong Yak-yong (1762-1836) on a large white wall near the end of one room, next to an exhibit proudly displaying how South Korea now works as an ally of the UN,

⁷⁵ South Korea saw its aid of the U.S. and UN in Vietnam as a way to gain international recognition, leading to internal Korean disagreement on as to *why*. (“At the height of discussions about the third deployment, Republican Party Chairman Chŏng Kuyŏng told Ri Tongwŏn, “The Vietminh is just conducting a nationalist movement. But why do we have to aim at each other rather than help them?”” Dongil Shin, “To Realize Our Decolonization: South Korea’s Deployment of Troops to Vietnam,” *International Journal of Korean History* 27 no. 1 (2022): 213-244.”)

dispersing its forces all over the world. I do not mean, here, that the presence of *militarism* itself is on its own contrary to processes of peace. It is that this militarism is backed by a history that ignores the losses of the war, and this same history that seeps into Korean failures to investigate atrocities, years of repression of confronting the US presence in Korea, and its continued pressures upon Koreans that makes the WMOK's depictions so insidious.

Peace as asserted by the WMOK as the ROK "state" narrative, is a Sisyphean, exhausting task—to consistently fend off invaders, to lead all its people toward a constant state of anxiety of their brothers, to drive efforts toward the national cause, from national conscriptions to the normalization of mass base presences as (one informant states). "Defense" of the country is another lingering ghost; and so is the "country"—Korea has reached the point of "transcendence," it claims. It is an easy story to get behind, given years of anti-communist repression⁷⁶ and lines up with what Foucault refers to "peace... [as] a coded war."⁷⁷

Instead, the WMOK reflects what has become a "totality of relations" that constitute that legal and political superstructure of a *lack* of peace on Korea.⁷⁸ Borrowing from Wendy Brown: Social memory is "culturally reconstructed, with the decisive roles played by the trinity of agents of memory, collective practices of recollection, and the creation of spaces through which such memory is expressed and conveyed."⁷⁹ If all apparatchiks of a state are aimed toward that "greatest virtue of national security," —a security that asserts a peace built on uneasy tensions of violence, then there is left no space for those who diverge from it and its creation myth. An absent void resulting from the lack of voices of those who have suffered from war and its continuations has been made itself the object of spectacle, denying memories themselves.

⁷⁶ Taylor 2007.

⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*. (New York: Picador, 2003): 51.

⁷⁸ Stoler, *Imperial Ruins*.

⁷⁹ Wendy Brown, "Wounded Attachments," *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (August 1, 1993): 390–410, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591793021003003>.

Excavating Memory: The Jeju 4.3 Peace Park

“증조할아버지 또 올게요. / *Great-grandfather, I will return.*”

— An visitor’s entry at the Jeju 4.3 Memorial Service Altar

“To ceaselessly re-remember 4·3 is a task of the utmost importance.

*What I mean by ‘re-remember’ is this: the work of reviving the historic memory and
unceasingly ruminating upon it;*

the work that ensures that the inexperienced generation inherits this memory.”

— Author Hyun Ki-young (현기영) at the Peace Park (translation mine).

The April 3 Jeju uprising of 1948 is one violent event from the pre-USAMGIK period that continues to leave thousands of residents of Jeju Island, a small island on the southern coast of the ROK within its jurisdiction, with scars of the past. It was a series of anti-US uprisings and protests by Jeju Koreans, beginning with the US-backed Korean military police opening fire on civilians in March 1, 1947, and culminating on 4/3 when the Jeju chapter of the South Korean Labor Party began an island-wide general strike and uprising. The resistance was largely caused by opposition to the USAMGIK’s elections in the South, with claims by islanders that it was unrepresentative of Korea. Jeju Island was soon thereafter marked as the “Red Island” due to their support of a unified government and their large agrarian population, accused of harboring mass communist sentiment, and thus marked as an extralegal territory where the killing of civilians was sanctioned or unchallenged. As General William L. Roberts declared: “I’m not interested in the cause of the uprising, my mission is to crack down only.”⁸⁰

The massacre was massively brutal, killing a minimum of 30,000 civilians, or 1/9 of the total population. 130 villages, or 1/10th of villages on the island were scorched, completely wiped off the

⁸⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “Final report of Investigation of Jeju April 3 Incident,” *United States Institute of Peace*, April 18, 2012, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2012/04/truth-commission-south-korea-2005>, 536.

island.⁸¹ The massacre led to the killings of 25,000-35,000 Jeju residents by Republic of Korean police and the Northwest Youth Association, a paramilitary group primarily formed by Korean youth who had been dispossessed of their land during the peoples' committees redistributions in the North. This marked approximately 10% of the island's population, with killings and other injuries inflicted in extremely brutal manners. Even the slightest political dissent, or suspicion of such dissent, such as [common] familial ties to then-established-North Korea, could lead to the red marker of "communist," and thus death. The massacre was illegal to discuss until the late 1980s, and an official investigation did not occur until 2000. Throughout these 50 years, Jeju Koreans and their relatives have been forced to live with a traumatic gap: unable to receive relief for their pain or a proper explanation of sheer violent terror that occurred on this island, they have instead rallied around the remembrance of this massacre and accountability from the government between 2000 and now.

After an official presidential apology in 2006, the Jeju 4·3 Peace Park (Peace Park) was formed after broad public support in 2018. I refer to it as an antithesis of sorts to the WMOK. It is an extremely large complex out of the way in the center of the island, closer to Mt. Halla, serving as a combination of a political educational center, arts center, and intimate memorial space for the massacre.), represents myriad counternarratives to what is an ahistoric, myopic, and singular-scaled perspective of the ROK and state sovereignty more broadly. The Peace Park focuses on the remembrance of the massacre by US forces and Korean collaborators of over 30,000 Koreans during the War, challenging ROK-US narratives of blamelessness, demonstrating how the terror of the war has left a traumatic collective gap in the national memory, and asserting that this same national and class struggle remains alive—if not even more so—today.

⁸¹ Hyun Ki-Young, "Forum 5.2 // Literature of Memory Struggle." *The Abusable Past* (blog), April 5, 2021. <https://www.radicalhistoryreview.org/abusablepast/literature-of-memory-struggle/>.

“All memorial landscapes engage in absent presence. The very act of memorializing something, of embedding memory into space and place, implies an absence,” writes Mark Rhodes.⁸² Jejuans, in this case, have come together in collective memory of an event so stunningly violent it has left many of them without a say. The Jeju 4.3 Park is a gorgeously large park, hidden deeper in the forests away from the mass gentrification at the fringes of the island. It consists of a large educational center for children, numerous statues on the tragedy, and a meandering park through its center. At its fringes are yards and yards of gravestones; and at its center, a Buddhist-style burial hall hosting the victims of the massacre.

In the case of Jeju, victims were quite literally banished from official memory in the way that Cho argues leads to “gaps,” which “come to be lived as transgenerational haunting.”⁸³ Jeju author Hyun Ki-Young, from his work in finding eyewitness accounts of the 4.3 Uprising, writes:

“The collective memory of the people seemed to have been ruthlessly shattered by the policy to obliterate the memory of the incident from the people’s minds. Nearly three decades of policies to deliberately crush memories of the Massacre by successive dictatorships have frozen the lips of the islanders. The majority voluntarily killed the memories themselves since it was virtually impossible to live on without trying to erase the brutal scenes from mind.”⁸⁴

Much of the Peace Park and the stories of survivors of the brutalities entail mass violence on the part of US police and South Korean paramilitary youth—a brutality so stark it has left them with a blank space of that *loss*. In my initial search for a branch of geography that could approximate this sudden taking; this kinetic shock (geographies of loss? geographies of absence?), I was unsuccessful in finding a parallel case for this sort of sheer rending that victims and survivors went through. As

⁸² rhodes https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337772158_Memory

⁸³ Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, 173.

⁸⁴ Hyun, “Forum 5.2.”

one walks through the memorial, enumerated all throughout are accounts of unsanctioned violence, through videos and artifacts:

“She’s a female! If a female member of the Great Youth association comes out, spear her!” An elderly woman describes hearing, hiding within her house.

“I don’t know why they died. The Southwest Youth association would storm in and drag people out of their homes... there was no reason for it. We just lived farming... what reason is there for these farmers to die?” reports one elder through shaky, grayed video, her voice cracking.

“We had planned to put 100 of 200 people on a boat and escape, but the next day we had to clean their blood coagulated on the deck.” says the man after her.

The brutality is stunning in its sensory nature. The Peace Park’s museum describes an “Auschwitz-style concentration camp,” the recent excavation of the Darangshi cave—where refugees took shelter in during the 1948 massacre, paramilitary youth collapsed the cave with a grenade, and killed the refugees while burying their bodies in rubble until almost 50 years later, in 1992. Balibar describes how violence is a force that “dissects: it disjoins, divides, breaks up lives and bodies, the communities, the environment.”⁸⁵ In Jeju’s case, it is a stark dissection in which the largest remnant is *absence*; one so emotionally taxing that it prevents even considering “what actually happened.”

But the Park goes beyond shock, and makes a distinct accusation onto the US that starkly counters the ROK hegemonic narrative of heroism and humanitarianism (or violence-fo-life). Instead, the Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation, consisting of a number of local Jeju community groups and

⁸⁵ Étienne Balibar. “Violence and Civility: On the Limits of Political Anthropology,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 & 3 (2009): 15.

Jeju branches of Korean workplaces, demand apologies, official recognition and apology, and a “lasting peace and reconciliation.”⁸⁶ While they have succeeded in the sense that they have received a South Korean governmental apology in 2003, and have been declared “an island of world peace” in 2005, there is little elaboration on what such a recognition may mean *from the side of the South Korean government*. Instead, scale is collapsed; the Jeju Massacre can be “resolved,” as was the War, even as absence holds the greatest presence.

For example, the U.S. has yet to take accountability for this crime, having granted a “license to kill” to even the lowest-ranking snipers during the massacre.⁸⁷ Jejuans recognize this, and narratives of history throughout the museum pin the division of Korea itself as a foreign interference, instead insisting that, much like during the PRK—there already were fragments of a peace predicated on a reunification and self-governance. In an English language pamphlet I picked up from the front desk of the museum that summarized the reasons of the massacre, there was a fiery challenge and condemnation at its conclusion:

“What Jeju islanders wanted to achieve was a **united and peaceful country** without the threat of war. Unfortunately, their efforts failed and now, the Korean peninsula is one of the countries with the highest risk of a possible war. The political situation is unstable because we do not know when a war might break out. If a unified country had only been established 70 years ago, these tensions and anxiety would not exist. This is why the April 3rd Uprising and Massacre is an ongoing issue.

By any chance, do you know how much the South Korean defense budget is? As of 2017, it is around 40 trillion Korean Won (=40 billion USD). Can you imagine how big this number is? 40 trillion Korean Won equates to a salary for 1 million people with an annual income of 40,000

⁸⁶ Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation, “Neverending massacre: Unresolved issues,” *Jeju 4.3*, 2018, http://jeju43peace.org/peace-the-future/peace-and-the-future_1/.

⁸⁷ Hyun, Forum 5.2.

USD. Currently, youth unemployment is very high in South Korea. If the country was not divided into two, we could have used a large portion of the national defense budget for social welfare. Then, people's lives could have been filled with more happiness than now.

'The April 3rd Uprising and Massacre is still ongoing. It is between people who insist on 'starting a war' and 'no war.' Which side are you going to be on?'"⁸⁸

Thus, those on the island collectivize for both the remembrance of this loss, asserting a different peace not based in military spending or division—one that suggests reunification and a rejection of a liberal "peace" that South Korea exerts as it ramps up its military spending. Korea, as nation, state, and nation-state, is defined by a series of contesting imaginaries, heightened and intensified by the legacies of the Cold War. In South Korea, this manifests as incommensurability: the need for state-led hegemony to obscure, cover up, or downplay the legacies of Western (capitalist) violence throughout the war—and thus a wall to all those who have lost so much in this violence. The WMOK demonstrates this confused legacy, and the Peace Park shows how those fighting for recognition both offer counternarratives but are also swept up in the broader hegemonic narrative. Peace, then, is inextricably linked to memory, which is inextricably linked to recognition and power; peace entails the repossession of the things people have been dispossessed of.

⁸⁸ Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation, "What is the Jeju April 3rd Uprising and Massacre?" *Jeju 4.3 Peace Park*. Pamphlet. 6.

As a part of my visit, I enter the memorial hall at the very top of the hill on which the Park is built. A black marble pillar greets visitors with the following inscription:

여기는 한라산 거친 오름 기슭
4.3으로 희생된 영령들이
좌정하신 곳
인류의 영원인 평화와 상생의 기운을
한데모아 진혼의 불을 지녔으니
그 불꽃은 언 가슴을 녹이고
닫힌 마음을 활짝 열리라
자애로운 숨결은 훈풍으로 흐르고
용서와 화해의 꽃은 영원하리니
여기는 평화의 정토
세계 평화가 이로부터 발원하리라

*This is whereupon those souls of those who perished during 4.3
in the rough Jeju mountain Hallasan come to rest
The energy of peace and coexistence eternal to mankind
Hold together the fire of a requiem:
let the flame melt that frozen chest
And open that closed mind wide
A loving breath flows with the warm spring wind
And that flower of forgiveness and reconciliation lasts for eternity
Here is the purified land of peace
Let world peace spring from her
(translation mine.)*

I light incense and pray, and enter. It is a large, open dome, thousand of black plaques with names engraved on them as I enter.⁸⁹ I am surprised to see scattered families standing in front of relatives' names on the walls, leaving flowers and saying grace.

While authors on geographies of peace⁹⁰ are keen in identifying the spatial and discursive natures of peace and its underlying processes, there is less contention with peace's relation to aspatiality and temporality. Jones, quoting Tom Mels's work on the reanimation and re-materialisation of places, notes that "memory 'fragments space' and time, and builds us from those reworked fragments."⁹¹ For the victims and those related to the massacre; the time and space of the deaths seem to be eliminated. Rather, it was what Balibar refers to as a "dispossession of their own death[s]... industrial, anonymous death administered in masse" by US-ROK forces.⁹²

Jeju starkly reveals what ia a "hauntology" implicit in this memory: "What is a ghost?... How to comprehend in fact the discourse of the end or the discourse about the end? Can the extremity of the extreme ever be comprehended?"⁹³ I leave this question open ended in considering the confluences of memory and violence inscribed both onto the land and a people. I could say that this loss leaves a "blank space" of where home should be, but I am not sure this is accurate: Jejuans leaving flowers at the park, Jejuans fighting for recognition of the massacre up until just a few years ago, and Jejuans insisting in pamphlets today that Korea should be one, demonstrates that there is a forming broader contours of "peace," or at least a homeland on which peace can happen. In Korea, after all, ghosts are family; given life and offering in *jaesa*.

⁸⁹ A picture can be found on the Jeju 4.3 home page here: <http://jeju43peace.org/>.

⁹⁰ See articles on note 48.

⁹¹ Tom Mels. "Lineages of Geographies of Rhythms." In *Reanimating Places: A Geography of Rhythm* (Oxford: Ashgate, 2004: 3-42). quoted in Jones, "Geography, Memory," 880.

⁹² Balibar, "Violence and Civility," 15.

⁹³ Jacques Derrida. *Specters of Marx*. (New York: Routledge, 1994): 10.

Conclusions

Peace Forged by People

So-seongri Elder Do Geum-yeun once said in a [2010] viral BBC interview: “I hate all American presidents.”⁹⁴ She was one of hundreds of villagers in protest of the installation of THAAD, a US-owned anti-missile system. Villagers were protesting for a variety of reasons, ranging from the geopolitical reasonings of increased tensions between North and South Korea to the demand that the system was being built on what was Korean land, and Korean ancestral farmlands. If this were any other sovereignty on US soil, such a move may be trumpeted as a large-scale invasion. Nonetheless, such incidents are commonplace in South Korea. Millions of dollars are used to host US soldiers; taxpayers pay for extravagant bases for US Soldiers⁹⁵; and even past, callous, cold-hearted killings of Korean civilians by US Soldiers have gone largely unrecognized. While militarism is one obvious aspect of what many Koreans consider not-peace, or at the very least, not wanted, movements for peace interact into and leak into other relations of power, from desires to be allowed back onto the other side of their homeland to a simple desire to live free of that rubbing against the everyday.

Koreans in the present day are grappling with a specific, named, political peace. As part of my research in looking into how Koreans are actively, openly, and politically mobilizing around that banner of peace, I spoke with diasporic peace organization Women Cross DMZ and observed KCTU at a mass strike event against Yoon Suk Yeol’s anti-worker policies, albeit somewhat unrelated to peace. In either case, Koreans are collaborating and looking toward a shared but not completely-same vision of peace, forging it out together.

⁹⁴ “I Hate All American Presidents,” *BBC News*, accessed March 18, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-41896202>.

⁹⁵ One of my interviewees, a construction manager, reported that U.S. construction managers use expensive materials with the excuse that Koreans are paying for them

My main interviews were with three members of Women Cross DMZ, a Hawai'i-based NGO dedicated to realizing a feminist peace in Korea. It largely consists of *gyopo*, or Korean-Americans, in regional chapters and collaborates with other local peace organizations. I interviewed Elisha Choi (the former Policy and Organizing Director), Cathi Choi (current Policy and Organizing Director), and Christine Ahn (the Founder and Executive Director of WCDMZ). I have been prior involved in WCDMZ, having interned for their Korea Peace Now! campaign in the summer. I wish to conclude with some of the answers and reasonings that they have given to me on *peace* and reunification, letting their voices speak for themselves—in placing their answers together, perhaps we can abstract a vision of a peace that lies in similar contours and edges.

Elisha, when asked about peace, responded with a definition: peace “is an immediate de-escalation of tensions and great power contradiction over the Korean peninsula; redefining these two nations with actual and genuine human security, which does not look like militarization; divesting from all those things, using those resources funneling it back into human security and human [well-being].”

Cathi explains reunification, important within peace to her as a “healing; a moving forward to heal a divide that was done to a people—done to a land; to allow reunification to allow the freedom of movement to allow the reunification of families, including my own.” She and Cathi, specifically, elucidated a *different* role for Koreans in the diaspora than those in the mainland. Elisha mentions: “it’s a folly to think that U.S. legislation will ultimately lead to peace,” but that they are important for relief along the way.

Christine mentions an anecdote from her time in the DPRK as reason to challenge national security, to her an opposition to “peace,” speaking about how the sanctions from the US on the North have deadly impacts onto the same Korean people in the North, preventing them from

receiving adequate healthcare. “And I think that's where we have to really challenge like, the whole concept of national security, and really bring it back to the things that actually give people a sense of dignity. And you know, it's also like, Korea, why is Korea 70 years after divisions still occupied militarily by foreign power?” She asks me.

There is much more to unpack in my conversations with these wonderful organizers, but they show how Koreans are sharing a dream of that better world in multiple ways, even as their “proximities” to loss are different—but perhaps this is also collapsed. All three of them, however, placed a timer on their “peace,” stressing a specific *urgency* as those who have suffered the most directly from the war are slowly dying off, their dreams of the freedom to return unfulfilled. In this sense, peace is forged as that healing, but also has a deep dimension with time, and specifically with time and violence.

Everyday Koreans who either find void in their collective history and hold diverse understandings contra to or in accordance with dominant histories of Korea as concept and state find inherent contradictions when the same US military and government that has caused these violences present themselves as sole arbiters of peace—and thus position themselves as blockades to certain national reimaginings of reunification and/or demilitarization. The Peace Park and its myriad underlying stories assert that ROK state proposals of peace, as suggested by the WMoK, are incommensurable with rememberings of postwar history and colonial trauma.

The continuous struggle of Koreans fighting for a peninsula free of violence, ranging from calls to expel U.S.-backed anti-missile systems in Soseongri to peace organizations calling for the formal end of the war. This accounts for the “blank space,” in Korean history, where much of the destruction, trauma, and political instability of post-liberation Korea can be attributed to the U.S. and capitalist fear mongering, but the portrayal of U.S. as savior makes its past violences seem blurry,

murky, if not incommensurable—and contributes to the erasure of the losses that Koreans seek to recoup. Accordingly, much of the public discourse and teachings around the war have leaned toward this binary narrative. However, a range of critical geographies that allow us to understand these alternative, “peaceful” futures and the ideological struggles they entail, from an alter-geopolitics of mutual safety and cooperative resistance, and its feminist geopolitical relations. These same critical views seek to elucidate the blank spaces within South Korea history and its violent hand-holding with U.S. empire and capitalism; ghosts of the past that “haunt” the peninsula and cleave Koreans from their lands. Investigating relations of memory and its erasure of violence, and how Koreans combat it to “perform” geopolitics and make a different state, offer much for geographies of peace and our relations to the land. Furthermore, Korea can offer possibilities beyond and adjacent to such intimate geographies, and gives deep interrogation into the nature of a particularly violent and excised memory—and how it can inspire dreams of that peace.

I have one last fragment from the KCTU strike in October of 2022: as union leaders took turns speaking to support striking coal workers, a small woman from the coal union came up and grabbed the mike. “I want to live!” She yelled. “I want to live! I want to live!”

Afterword: seeds and sickles in our home's garden

"When my son reaches my age

I won't be here in this Earth

But this Earth will be a delightful crib

Rocking all babies back and forth

Black, white, yellow

A crib of blue atlas"

— Excerpt of "Birth," Nazim Hikmet

Shortly before writing this, on April 28, I went to a protest led by the New England Chapter of Korea Peace Now! and Massachusetts Peace Action against Yoon's visit to the Harvard Kennedy Business School, coming off of what multiple Koreans say is an embarrassing White House visit in which Yoon sang American Pie and served as a domestic laughingstock.⁹⁶ At this protest, I gave short, three-minute statement openly blasting this very fact, Yoon's all-too-happy willingness to allow US nuclear weapons back into South Korea and heighten already-high nuclear tensions, and of a "capitalism of death" that has seen so many of my siblings in the peninsula suffer. Portions of my statement, I found, later went viral on a popular Korean political YouTuber's channel, amassing almost 360K views and 1000 comments as of today, May 11.⁹⁷

But what I was saying was not controversial: the comments, I found, were overwhelmingly positive; calling those of us at the protest the "awakened citizens," the "true patriots," the "conscious *gyopos*" (Korean Americans), expressing their pride at those of us doing work in the US and of the pitiful state of domestic South Korean politics.

It is true that there is a good deal of a diversity of thought in the Korean reckoning with the divide. At this same protest, a Korean woman brandished the South Korean *taeukgi* flag, telling me

⁹⁶ Matt Berg, "Yoon Woos White House with 'American Pie' Rendition," POLITICO, April 27, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/04/27/south-korean-president-american-pie-00094154>.

⁹⁷ 이선생 칼럼 (Teacher Lee's Column), ◆언론에 보도되지 않은 것들 (*Things Not Reported in the Media*), 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53lJ_JMDoCg.

that she did not want to be “mistaken as a Communist or a North Korean.” Had the YouTuber recorded the portion of my speech where I yelled about capitalism and the US’S military history in the peninsula, perhaps the comments may have been very different.

But perhaps they wouldn’t have been.

I move backward in time to the words of one of the very first Korean “freedom fighters”:

“Even if my fingernails are torn out, my nose and ears are ripped apart, and my legs and arms are crushed, this physical pain does not compare to the pain of losing my nation. My only remorse is not being able to do more than dedicating my life to my country,” said Yu Gwan-sun, before her death from Japanese torture in prison.⁹⁸

At only 16, Yu saw not just flashes but the very real presence of a decolonized Korea that would be able to reclaim what it had been stripped of during a brutal, violent, and still-alive (in ghosts, in flows, in the margins of, ever-being-revived) Japanese colonial rule. She saw flashes of a liberation that she wanted a hand in, and a dream for Koreans to be able to live without exploitation—a common thread today.

We dream of better futures: one where we can see our families across the border, dream and dance, where we can sit and drink makgeolli with our elders while looking at the Baekdusan. *Toojaeng!*⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Inyoung Kang, “Overlooked No More: Yu Gwan-Sun, a Korean Independence Activist Who Defied Japanese Rule,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 2018, sec. Obituaries, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/28/obituaries/overlooked-yu-gwan-sun.html>.

⁹⁹ “Struggle!” A chant called by union members and Korean leftists. At the strike, every sentence was punctuated with thousands yelling *toojaeng!*

Fragments

I have placed here a couple snippets from my fieldnotes from various interviews that I did not have time to dissect in depth, but do believe they stand on their own in reflecting the complex grappling with peace and U.S. presence within Korea. Much of my initial work was interviews around bases—a remnant of the first rendition of this project.

- As “Eun-bi,” one of my correspondents who was a contracted construction manager within the Korean army, languished that the bases were paid by Korean tax dollars: that they build ever larger and larger bases because they do not come out of US tax dollars; prioritize only US soldiers, never Koreans in the surroundings. At one point, she stares at me on the Zoom call, and goes “do you really think North Korea is going to invade us?” Like? Really?” Status of the United States Armed Forces and Burden Sharing agreements further place pressures onto Korean people for hosting these bases, many of which have brought either environmental degradation or ecological crisis, directly coming to blows with Korean lives (COVID soldiers partying).
- There are also fractures and frictions within everyday Koreans navigating this militarized landscape: “Sunny,” who was raised within the military, worked for 19 years within the US and now works off base in the CS. He argued that there was one history of *bukgak* (북악), or the northern evil: that he did not really wish anything onto the US, and argued that their role was democratic. “Yong-taek,” another employee of a cultural arts center in Pyeongtaek who introduced visitors, echoed the same, noting that he was happy to have the base here. “Yuri,” the wife of a ROK computer specialist who lived on a base, noted that she was also happier to have the US base there than not. “Yuna,” a Korea manager at the US embassy, expressed that she liked America a lot, and that much of her work was with these issues. She expressed that “it seems that they protect us... and are making Pyeongtaek better,” even as she “understands the issues that arise.”
- Eun-bi said she gets angry looking at the nice status of the streets around the base: “I think I laid that street with my taxes.” She noted a feeling of resentment, longingness, and a distinct powerlessness: that, for example, South Korea could not even enter the G8, that the threat from the North Korea had passed (so still upholding that history), and that we simply could not attain the Korea that we wanted to without reunification, because (*ddang*) 땅 is (*him*) 힘. Land is power.
- Yuri, the wife of a military IT specialist, on base, noted: of course, reunification was necessary for peace. Upon my asking what the U.S. would think about reunification, she paused for a moment. Although she had expressed her preference for having the U.S. military in Korea rather than not, she responded: “But they wouldn’t like that... right?”

Appendix

Appendix A. The KCTU's announcement flyer for the 8.15 protests. The middle text (blue column), reads “End the policy of confrontation and the Korea-U.S.-Japanese military alliance that will call for war! 77th Anniversary of Korea’s National Liberation Day, 8.15 Independent Peace and Reunification Convention, August 13, 2022, 3 PM at the Sungnyemun (a historic gate in central Seoul). (translation mine). / *This land is not the U.S.’s war base! Destruction of livelihoods and peace! Condemn Yoon Seok-yeol’s policy of confrontation! Halt the Korea-U.S. joint military exercises! Oppose the Korea-U.S. Japan Military Alliance! Oppose war! Toward a peaceful present!*” (Translation mine.)

8.15 전국노동자대회
2022년 8월 13일(토) 오후 2시, 숭례문

문석열, '대북 선제타격' 구체화... '3축 체계' 조기 복원하겠다
강력한 대북억제력이 평화 보장

전쟁을 부르는 대결정책과 한미일 군사협력을 멈춰라!
광복 77주년 8.15자주평화통일대회
2022년 8월 13일(토) 오후 3시, 숭례문

“北도발에 강력 대응 3국 협력 강화” 4년 9개월 만에 한미일 정상회담

“유사사 참수작전” 한미 특전사, 美 첫 연합훈련
마린 주한미군 특수전 사령관 “목숨가는 경험 해보는 게 중요...”
“쾅쾅 들어 실훈련 기회 가져”

한-미 8월 22일부터 연합훈련
아이 실기동 훈련 실시할 듯
훈련 명칭 ‘동맹’ 검토

한-미 8월 22일부터 연합훈련
아이 실기동 훈련 실시할 듯
훈련 명칭 ‘동맹’ 검토

한미연합군사연습 중단! 한미일 군사협력 반대! 전쟁반대! 평화실현!

한국판 인도태평양 전략 세운다 美인태전략과 점점 닮아들
한미 정상정상 포함 “쾅 쾅 관심 한방” 공동성명에 반영
맞는 한국 정책 가입엔 신중

올맨 삼성, 갈맨 현대차 만난 바이트... 대들 '노조' 꺼낸 이유

사드 환경영향평가 다음 달 돌입... 연내 기지 정상화

연합사령관 “한미일 훈련, 일본에서라도 해야”... '실기동' 훈련도 강조

조지산언 이념! 평화합정 체결! 연평합선언 이념! 평화합정 체결!
조지산언 이념! 평화합정 체결! 연평합선언 이념! 평화합정 체결!

Korean Confederation of Trade Unions. 2022. “8.15 전국노동자대회, 2022년 8월 13일(토) 오후 2시, 숭례문.” (Translation mine: 8.15 National Workers' Congress, August 13, 2022 (Sat.), 2PM, Sungnyemun.)

From http://nodong.org/index.php?mid=notice&page=4&document_srl=7808521.

Appendix B. English news reports of the 8/13/2022 protests. Longtime Korea journalist Timothy Shorrock notes that “the only global media to report on this massive display in South Korea of opposition to militarism were Iran's Press TV and China's CGTN.” (@TimothyS Twitter Account, from <https://twitter.com/timothys/status/1560279787251253248?lang=en>.) See also: Shorrock, Tim. “US media ignored military protest in South Korea.” *Responsible Statecraft*, 23 August 2022. <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/08/23/us-media-ignored-major-anti-us-military-protest-in-south-korea/>. Accessed 13 November 2022.

- “South Korean unionists protest US-South Korea war games.” *Press TV*, 13 August 2022. <https://www.presstv.ir/Detail/2022/08/13/687322/South-Korean-unionists-protest-US-South-Korea-war-games>. Accessed 13 November 2022.
- “South Korean protestors in Seoul demand U.S. forces’ withdrawal.” *CGTN* (YouTube), 16 August 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOfwt9BsriU>. Accessed 13 November 2022.

Appendix C. I turn to foreign policy think tanks for example of such state perspectives. See a few examples below (emphasis mine):

- “The end of the Cold War in 1990, however, opened a new horizon of *peace and prosperity* on the Korean Peninsula. Under the *blessing of a unipolar moment of American hegemony*, South Korea could normalise diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union and China.” (Moon, Chung-in, “South Korea’s Geopolitics: Challenges and Strategic Choices.” *Asia-Pacific Leadership Network*, 18 March 2022. https://www.apln.network/news/member_activities/south-koreas-geopolitics-challenges-and-strategic-choices. Accessed 13 November 2022.)
- “The [Moon administration’s] policy is also focused on uncontroversial areas of cooperation; even its peace pillar, which covers political and security cooperation, only includes neutral efforts to increase high-level diplomatic exchanges and address nontraditional security issues like climate change.” Note the lack of definition of peace and focuses on inter-Korean peace alone. (Botto, Kathryn. “South Korea Beyond Northeast Asia: How Seoul Is Deepening Ties With India and ASEAN.” *Carnegie Endowment for National Peace*. 19 October 2021.) <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/10/19/south-korea-beyond-northeast-asia-how-seoul-is-deepening-ties-with-india-and-asean-pub-85572>. Accessed 13 November 2022.)
- “On the other side, both Koreas have interests and motivations that hinder their relations, but those same interests and political willingness make up for the sufficient base to consistently come to negotiate, they are *forced to try to at least cohabit peacefully*.” (Oses, Jon Paris, Jokin de Carlos Sola, and Túlio Dias de Assis. “Amidst the Dragon and the Bald Eagle: A geopolitical approach to the Republic of Korea.” *Center for Global Affairs and Strategic Studies*. 14 June 2021. https://www.unav.edu/documents/16800098/17755721/DT-02-2021_South-Korea-TFG_Tulio-Jolin-Jon+%281%29.pdf. Accessed 13 November 2022).

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