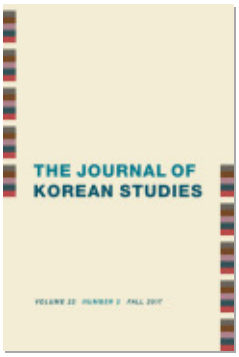
Wandering Ghosts of the Cold War: Military Sex Workers in the *Film Tour of Duty (Kŏmi ŭi ttang) Jeehey Kim*



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Wandering Ghosts of the Cold War: Military Sex Workers in the Film *Tour of Duty (Kŏmi ŭi ttang)*

Jeehey Kim

This paper explores the memories of military prostitutes in US camptowns in South Korea through the film titled Tour of Duty (Kŏmi ŭi ttang, 2012). *The film experiments with a genre of documentary, showcasing stories of three ex-prostitutes who struggle with their past experiences with US GIs. One of them carries on numerous dialogues with evil spirits, which give her physical and psychological pains that haunt her endlessly. Another woman keeps wandering in search of traces of her mother and friend, both of whom were prostitutes for US soldiers. She traces her memory of them around the ruins of what was called the* monkey house*, where US military prostitutes with venereal diseases were relocated. The film shows three women haunted by ghosts of the Cold War while remaining invisible and often forced to be silent within Korean society. The paper deals with gendered memory of the Cold War through the stories of wandering ghosts in the dilapidated streets of US camptown sites in South Korea. Pak Kyŏngt'ae and Kim Tongnyŏng, the directors of the film, challenge the boundaries of documentary film, experimenting with various filmic strategies such as interviews, monologues, fantasies, and personal memories.*

Keywords: Cold War, Korean documentary film, military sex worker, US camptown, spectrality

On a deserted US army base, we see a woman who appears to be in her sixties wielding a stick and cursing into the air. She is Pak Insun, a former military sex worker who roams the hillsides, alleys, and streets of this former camptown where she met her American husband. Conversing with invisible beings that subjected her to physical and psychological pain, she lives alone, surrounded by the

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paintings she makes every night. Insun curses the pimps who exploited her and talks to her absent daughter Priscilla, who lives far from this ghost town to which Insun has returned from the United States. As she passes English-language signboards—Club Las Vegas, Player, Best, Amazing—Insun tells her daughter that she lives in the town where she worked as a woman of the streets and explains how she wishes to die on a mountain where she might devour the ghosts of all who harassed her. The pimps and johns and government officials who abused Insun may be invisible to us, but they are powerfully present in Insun's mind.

This essay explores memories of former sex workers in US military camptowns of South Korea through the lens of the film *Tour of Duty* (*Kŏmi ŭi ttang*, 2012) and in so doing addresses gendered memories of the Cold War. *Tour of Duty* experiments with the documentary genre as it tells the stories of three former sex workers who suffered at the hands of the Korean government and US GIs. Directors Pak Kyŏngt'ae and Kim Tongnyŏng challenge the boundaries of documentary filmmaking by intermingling conventional filmic strategies with interviews, monologues, fantasies, and personal memories as they seek to produce a work that avoids objectifying the women who are at the film's center. One woman, Pak Myoyŏn, who is in her seventies, agrees to be interviewed about her life as a sex worker who underwent twenty-six abortions. Pak Insun, the ranting woman, shows paintings she has made in order to come to terms with the traumas of her past. An Sŏngja, the third woman in the film, also in her sixties, offers a dance to tell her story. The Korean title of the film, *Kŏmi ŭi ttang* (Land of Spiders) is derived from Myoyŏn's oft-repeated adage-like statement, "Women work like ants and disappear like spiders." While the film's English-language title suggests the legacy of US GIs stationed in Korea, the directors told me in an e-mail correspondence that they took their title from the name of a website created by US veterans who served in Korea in order to share their memories and upload photographs taken with Korean sex workers.[1] At the same time, the English-language title refers to the process of filmmaking as a journey of social responsibility for the directors, as they were obliged to travel to the past in order to understand and present their topic.

Tour of Duty departs from the usual documentary format of relying solely on factual evidence in that it allows its subjects to speak for themselves through various modes of self-representation: fantasies, performances, and fictional monologues that stand outside any single narrative that might have been offered by the directors. The film challenges the taboo against incorporating the "nonfactual" into documentary, a technique that has been assumed to risk inauthenticity. In her argument against documentary as a style, Trinh T. Minh-ha observes:

> When, in a world of reification, truth is widely equated with fact, any explicit use of the magic, poetic, or irrational qualities specific to the film medium itself would have to be excluded a priori as nonfactual. . . . The documentary can easily thus become a "style": it no longer constitutes a mode of production or an attitude toward life, but

> proves to be only an element of aesthetics (or anti-aesthetics), which at best, and without acknowledging it, it tends to be in any case when, within its own factual limits, it reduces itself to a mere category, or a set of persuasive techniques.[2]

Rather than being provided with statistics or sociological analyses of camptown sex workers, the film's audience may find Sŏngja's dance and Insun's paintings speak more powerfully to the truth of their lives. But to be receptive, the audience must suspend critical distinctions between fact and fiction. Trinh articulates how fictionality functions in documentary filmmaking:

> A documentary aware of its own artifice is one that remains sensitive to the flow between fact and fiction. It does not work to conceal or exclude what is normalized as "non-factual," for it understands the mutual dependence of realism and "artificiality" in the process of filmmaking. . . . Documentary reduced to a mere vehicle of facts may be used to advocate a cause, but it does not constitute one in itself; hence the perpetuation of the bipartite system of division in the content-versus-form rationale.[3]

Tour of Duty does not pretend to be a sociological or ethnographic record of the Other but instead offers the audience an opportunity to engage with the histories and memories of the film's subjects.

CAMPTOWN AS RUIN AND PALIMPSEST

Tour of Duty opens with multiple landscape views of camptowns, including gravesites of sex workers and the interiors of abandoned dance halls. While the history of the US military in South Korea follows the history of the Cold War, one practice harks back to the Japanese colonial period: the system of military prostitution surrounding camptowns, or *kijich'on*. Katharine H. S. Moon warns against a dichotomous understanding of those who lived in and around camptowns, eschewing such polarities as exploitative American men and ill-treated South Korean women.[4] She contends that *kijich'on* were not simply a consequence of a politically and economically dominant country controlling the bodies of women of weaker nations but instead derived from complex interactions among individual actors of different ethnic, class, gender, religious, and economic backgrounds. She also contends that sex workers were not merely the outgrowth of power disparities between the United States and South Korea, as in the case of Imperial Japan. Instead, the Korean government was an active participant in a system in which sex workers in US camptowns were different from the forced-labor comfort women of the Japanese colonial period in that they were exploited and abused by their *own* government as tools of foreign policy.

My first personal encounter with *kijich'on* came when visiting a friend's home when I was nine years old. As my father was a professional soldier, I spent most of

my childhood living on or near Korean military bases. I lived in Ŭijŏngbu at the time, which was near one of the three main US military bases and where Insun in *Tour of Duty* lives. I was often invited to my friend's home on weekends, where I met my first African American, a GI spending time with a young woman my friend called *ŏnni* (older sister). This woman was not actually my friend's sibling; she was one of many *ŏnni* in her neighborhood, a prostitute. I envied my friend because these relationships afforded her opportunities to practice spoken English and because the town was bustling with activity, in contrast to the quiet and orderly community of the army base. But it was to be my last visit. After telling my mother about meeting these *ŏnni*, I was forbidden to meet this friend or enter this neighborhood again, although I did not understand why. I didn't know the term *kijich'on*, much less *military sex worker*, but the presence of these *ŏnni*, who wore heavy makeup and garish clothing, was an ordinary sight in towns whose economy relied on military bases, and as my father was reposted often, I began to see a pattern: military life was always accompanied by a gendered system that relegated women to subordinate status. *Tour of Duty* revived my personal memories of these women whose lives were barely given notice in the collective consciousness of Korea and American militarization of the peninsula.

Pup'yŏng, a small town on the west coast of Korea, near Inch'ŏn, was the first US camptown, established in 1945 following the country's independence from Japan. The Korean War (1950–1953) led to more camptowns, including Pusan, Songt'an, Tongduch'ŏn, and the It'aewŏn district of Seoul. By the 1960s, about thirty thousand women were catering to sixty thousand US soldiers.[5]

P'aju is the camptown where Myoyŏn and Sŏngja live. Once called the GI's Kingdom, situated near the DMZ, it held the greatest concentration of US troops in Korea from 1953 to 1971.[6] The redeployment of those troops left the town deserted. The film depicts neglected tombstones, derelict buildings, empty dancehalls, and government banners promising the redevelopment of the site. P'aju is a ruin of the Cold War, a silent relic of the traces of United States-Korea relations. The directors often accompany these images of decay with the sounds of close-order drills emanating from a nearby Korean military base as the voices of invisible soldiers echo through nameless buildings and across desolate and anonymous hillsides. Throughout the film, the three former sex workers roam the alleyways, dance halls, and shanties that once were alive with US GIs and camptown girls.

The directors avoid presenting this former GI's Kingdom as a spectacle. *Kijich'on* as ruins of the Cold War resist fetishization. According to Jacques Derrida, ruin is "experience itself" and triggers the act of seeing in the context of memory.[7] The audience is confronted with close-ups of crumbling stairs, abandoned furniture, and collapsed walls without explanation of the purposes these sites served or description of the people who once occupied them. Instead, we see three elderly women wander the barren landscape, engaging memories of their lives as military sex workers.

Tour of Duty follows the journey of the three former sex workers in search of traces of their displacement amid the remnants of the Cold War. The ruins depicted are not European visions of nostalgia and romance; they serve instead to reveal a process of dislocating and traumatizing a group of people in the name of peace. Ann Laura Stoler emphasizes *ruin* as a verb rather than a noun in her rumination on imperial debris when she writes, "Ruin as a violent verb . . . unites apparently disparate moments, places, and objects."[8] Thus, ruination is crucial in that it focuses on the process rather than dealing with a finished past. As Stoler uses the concept to explore imperial traces still occupying and structuring postcolonial societies, I see the Cold War structured through the process of ruination. Discourse on ruination prevents deploying the context of hybridity in discussing the spaces where these women have been living.[9] Instead, the process of ruin creates a spatial and temporal palimpsest in postcolonial Korean society where the gendered system of the nation-state continued to exploit female bodies. *Kijich'on* serve as a palimpsest of colonial traces and memories overwritten by the US imperial desire for military expansion into East Asia under the guise of the Cold War. The process of ruination not only interweaves the past and the present of the three former sex workers, it also blurs the boundary between the two. Ruin and palimpsest counteract cultural and political tendency toward forgetting in the name of necessary sacrifice and movement toward the future rather than holding onto traumatic memories reinscribed on the bodies of those who have lived in *kijich'on*.

Myoyŏn's snack-bar menu is written in Korean pasted over the original English-language menu. The Korean menu includes traditional noodles as well as hamburgers, while the English underneath includes sweet-and-sour pork and fried rice. The snack bar might once have served Asian meals to American GIs before serving Korean food for local people and American food for sex workers. Thus, the snack bar serves as a palimpsest of indelible traces of the past and a sign of the current social makeup of the community.

Ruins dehisce invisible, silenced layers of history, breaking the seams where personal history was stitched to official history. Empty dance halls, abandoned whorehouses, and barren alleys draw attention to the most fragmented and indecipherable pages of the Cold War to go beyond the tragic voices of minority identities: these ruins annul the inertia that fosters life within boundaries created by institutional memory.

TALES OF MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

Kijich'on sex workers were marginalized in South Korea by various derogatory appellations: *yanggongju* (Western princess), *yanggalbo* (Western whore), and *yangbuin* (Western lady). These terms distinguished women engaged in sexual labor with foreign soldiers from those who catered to Korean men. By analyzing popular and radical texts published in left-wing and anti-American journals, Hyun

Sook Kim explores the ways in which military sex workers serving US GIs were categorized as the lowest and most marginalized members of society.[10] Kim seeks to show that, contrary to the nationalist feminist view of *kijich'on* sex workers as victims of imperialism and militarism, these women had the agency to act against a capitalist-military patriarchy.

Tour of Duty is not simply about camptown sex workers; it is also the story of three Korean women experiencing difficulties as mothers and daughters. The protagonists reveal their stories through different modes of representation.

Myoyŏn opens her shabby snack bar; old and sick, she supports herself by selling hamburgers and noodles. She tells the story of her relationships with GIs; one proposed marriage but refused to accept her child from another relationship with a GI. After declining the proposal, and later another one from a Korean man, she raised two boys on her own, one of whom was the abandoned child of another sex worker.

Insun paints a portrait of a younger sex worker sitting next to a US GI in the camptown where she met her American husband. Insun's life as a sex worker was doubly traumatized by having to leave her two daughters in the United States when she returned to Korea after her failed marriage to a GI. Insun narrates her story as if she were writing a letter to them. She explains how her daughters were born and why she left them behind, addressing them directly and asking them to find her in Korea.

Sŏngja is the daughter of an African American GI and a Korean sex worker. Her mother, a sex worker for US GIs in the 1950s, appears in the film through black-and-white photographs of sex workers accompanying US GIs, as well as through Sŏngja speaking to her imagined presence. Sŏngja became a sex worker after fleeing an orphanage. She considers herself to be a mother to her pet dog while she searches for the mother who abandoned her. Sŏngja married a man born to a US GI and a Korean sex worker, and both husband and wife have endured prejudice as persons of mixed race. There is a scene in which Sŏngja's husband sings the well-known Korean song *Pomnal ŭn kanda* (Spring Days Are Passing). Lamenting the passing of a young woman's prime of life, the song was written in 1953, during the Korean War, in memory of the lyricist's mother. In a darkened room of their house, Sŏngja lies on the floor listening to the song, perhaps relating it to the loss of her own mother, who suffered traumatic events during the war.

The experiences of being a daughter, a mother, and a wife left these women with indelible memories of hardships, and the film serves as their autobiographies, giving them the opportunity to speak about their lives as well as to revisit their pasts. This self-representation resists the silencing of its marginalized subjects. Their performances disrupt any attempt to categorize them merely as victims of particular historical moments. Instead, the film offers multiple dynamic selves assembling and disassembling memories of their lives in *kijich'on*.

Insun and Sŏngja repeat their own names throughout the film, names that have been omitted from the official history of the Korean War and the collective

memory of the Cold War. Through their voices, the names of camptown sex workers are memorialized. Walking through snowy alleyways, Insun addresses her daughter in voice-over: "Priscilla, please find my name. My name is Pak Insun." Sŏngja tells her mother, "If you can see me some day, just tell me you are my mother, mother of Sŏngja. People say my name is An Sŏngja. I don't think it's my real name. You know it. An means comfort, Sŏng means holy, and Ja means a child. In my teens and twenties, I called myself as gypsy. But I am not a gypsy anymore."[11]

The protagonists' preoccupation with names conjures the No Name Woman in Maxine Hong Kingston's novel *The Woman Warrior*.[12] Kingston's paternal aunt dies aggrieved, yet no one mourns her: she is forgotten, silenced, and effaced by her family. Because she bore a daughter conceived outside her marriage, her family was humiliated when a group of villagers invaded her home to deride her. She killed herself and her baby afterwards. Her death could not be mourned publicly but had to remain a family secret. Kingston's mother makes the aunt visible to the niece of No Name Woman, and Kingston relates the story despite her mother's request not to tell anyone. Insun and Sŏngja also ask us to remember their names, and their memories are made tangible through the visuality of film.

Sŏngja searches for traces of her mother and her friend Sera, both of whom were sex workers in the same town. She visits an abandoned building that was used as a "monkey house," where prostitutes with venereal diseases were detained in cage-like rooms. Sŏngja narrates the memory of her mother, who left her in an orphanage with a promise that she would return when the girl turned eleven. But Sŏngja's mother did not return, so she and Sera ran away from the orphanage, settling in the same camptown to service US GIs, as it was impossible for her to find other ways to survive as a teenage girl of mixed African American and Korean race. She ended up in the camptown where her mother had met her father. The camera slowly pans up a black-and-white photograph of a Korean woman and a US soldier but stops at their chests. In a dialogue between the director and Sŏngja, the directors say that viewers want to see the faces, but Sŏngja refuses, explaining that people will forget her face immediately after seeing it. Sŏngja's attitude foregrounds how representations of the Other can become mere spectacle: she does not want us to objectify her, her mother, or her friend.

Sŏngja also tells the story of Sera, a friend and military sex worker who was sent to a monkey house. In the 1960s, the rise in the number of camptown sex workers infected with sexually transmitted diseases led the Korean government to enforce routine medical checkups.[13] Infected women were quarantined in detention centers where they were injected with penicillin. This control of women's bodies became more coercive during the 1970s, when the Camptown Clean-Up Campaign was launched by the United States Forces, Korea (USFK), and the Korean government.[14] The shift of Cold War politics from the 1960s to the 1970s had led to the instability in US-Korea relations. Due to its contribution of troops to the Vietnam War and its geostrategic importance as a noncommunist country in

Asia, the Korean government had increased leverage in its relationship with the US. However, with the advent of the Nixon doctrine and the drawdown of US troops from the peninsula, the government contrived to alter the image of Korea as a country plagued with a high rate of venereal disease and racial discrimination by giving the USFK control over the residents surrounding US military bases, particularly in regard to gendered policies. Camptown prostitutes were required to carry health cards and wear numbered identification tags while neither the local Korean authorities nor the USFK educated GIs about condom use.[15]

Camptown sex workers were required to attend etiquette and good-conduct lectures, during which they were instructed to engage in their work with pride, as they were "patriots" who increased the flow of foreign revenue.[16] Another facet of patriotism forced on the camptown sex workers was the notion of *hŭisaeng* (sacrifice), which served to sustain the official history that claims that the hardships of these women were the inescapable consequences of establishing a better nation. It is bitterly ironic, then, that camptown sex workers have been ignored by national memorialization and relegated to oblivion, as monkey houses and other evidence have been buried under urban development. Sŏngja resists this erasure of history by telling us the story of Sera.

The film follows Sŏngja's search for the spiritual traces of Sera in an abandoned building that served as a monkey house and in a crumbling brothel where Sera last worked. Wearing a white gown and holding a candle, Sŏngja opens a door to a monkey-house cage where the daily schedule for detained sex workers is affixed. The schedule consists of medical examinations and treatments, education, and hours of meals and sleep. In the abandoned brothel, the director narrates in Sŏngja's words, "Paegu-ri P'och'ŏn, Kyŏnggi Province. In 1978, when Sera disappeared for good, I received her last letter from here. At last she was sold to a town near DMZ. The narrow alley was divided into black and white sections. Sera worked at a whorehouse for whites only. Each day she had to accept as many as fifteen customers. She was called as 'nineteen' instead of her name."

She picks up a dress and cosmetics in the abandoned house where she seeks traces of Sera. Putting on the dress, she reaches an area with an English-language sign stating, "No Entry; Only authorized personnel are allowed to enter this military property. Director of Environment Remediation Service for USFK Base." The site was recently returned to the Korean government by the US military and awaits repurposing. Roaming the area filled with overgrown grass, Sŏngja yells into the air:

> Here is Sera, I am Sera, surprise? Who are you? Why do you interfere? Why do you despise me? Do I look like a hooker? A US whore? Do you know how old I am? I was born in the era of President Rhee. Do you know him? I do, too. That old bastard called me pooch! What is wrong with pooch? Get out! I hate you. Oh, it's you! You old sucker. You son of a bitch fooled me. I was born because of you. You goddamn it. You raped my mom, didn't you? Dare to fight? Follow me.

The more she narrates the memories of friend and mother, the more doubtful the stories become. Sŏngja seems to be telling her own story in the guise of her friend and her mother. Wearing the dress she picked up from the abandoned brothel, she moves on to an empty dance hall. Looking at herself in a mirror, she apologizes to an imaginary Sera for coming too late. Then, in Sera's voice, Sŏngja asks Annie (Sŏngja's American name) to apply makeup. Annie tells Sera that she lost her face, but Sera keeps asking Annie to apply makeup. Annie begins to apply makeup while facing the back of a handheld mirror. Annie begins to dance to "Calling You," Bob Telson's song performed by Jevetta Steele in the 1988 film *Bagdad Café*, directed by Percy Adlon, in which the African American female protagonist develops a friendship with a German woman who visits the café in the Mojave Desert. Myoyŏn's snack bar serves as a place where she and Sŏngja share memories of hardship, while the dance hall is the place where Annie and Sera find traces of each other.

LETTER FROM THE PAST/SPEAKING TO THE PRESENT

Epistolary devices run through the film. Letters to Sera allow Sŏngja to tell of her past life as a sex worker and the harsh reality of the monkey houses. While lying on the floor of a dance hall, she explains that Sera danced her entire life, as if begging for something, and that she sometimes thought about a tiny black baby. Over this scene, one of the directors narrates, "Suddenly, as though a light turns on in her mind, Sŏngja remembers something. The memory is like a letter sent from the past to the future as a means of remembering particular moments in time. She alone waits for this letter."

Insun tells the viewers about her life by addressing her daughters as if she were writing them a letter. She narrates in English, speaking to her daughters living in the United States:

> My daughter Priscilla and Kunti. I miss you. My name is Pak Insun. Your daddy flirted, I don't like. That's why I came to Korea. I am so angry for your daddy flirted with another woman. I didn't like it. He give me VD. I go hospital, shots. . . . Too much hurt. You don't understand Priscilla and Kunti. Nobody understands. I tell you truth. You must know, Priscilla and Kunti. I miss you, Priscilla and Kunti. I miss both of you.

Many camptown sex workers dreamed of going to America through marriage to GIs as a way to free themselves from sexual labor and social ostracism within Korean society. About one hundred thousand Korean women immigrated to the United States as GI brides from the 1950s to the 1990s. Some of them encountered anti-Asian discrimination and abuse by their American husbands, while others established companionship with other GI brides, negotiating their Korean identity

with familial and communal lives.[17] Insun married an American soldier and moved to the United States as a GI bride. Myoyŏn explains that she hoped to marry a US GI who impregnated her, but she declined his proposal when he rejected her child from another GI. Sŏngja's friend Sera attempted suicide after receiving a letter from a US GI who broke off their engagement once he had returned to the United States. Insun's failed marriage and return to the camptown reflect the complex challenges GI brides faced, making it impossible to categorize GI brides as a single group. Back in her own country, Insun's illiteracy frustrates her attempt to participate in a religious service as a Buddhist nun asks her to write her name and address. Standing before a statue of Buddha, she narrates, "My pimp took advantage of me because I didn't know how to read. I was starving but she gave me just one bowl of rice. It was no use earning dollars for her. She always told me I owed her a lot of money. I will chew them up into pieces, those fucking pimps! If I die I will become an eagle and will scoop out her eyes! You bitch!"

Insun's monologues and her letters to her daughters are offered not as written texts but as voice-overs.[18] *Tour of Duty* empowers the female voice through voice-over narration in epistolary form, rendering the experience of watching the film analogous to participating in an event rather than reading a text. As Insun speaks to her daughters, the audience sees her painting grotesque images, such as a spider with a woman's head. In another scene, she rummages through garbage cans in a *kijich'on* alley while the audience hears her voice-over: "Priscilla, you must know. You must remember. Priscilla, my daughter, if you wanna find me, come Paetbul. I'll wait for you. If you don't wanna, it's up to you. No problem." In a scene in which Insun roams the alleys of *kijich'on* imbued with music from clubs, the audience hears her in voice-over: "You give me hard time? You get the fuck out of my face! Get away from me. It's up to me. I go. It's up to me!" These women who once catered to male pleasure now confront the viewer with speech that collapses the spatial and temporal boundary of *kijich'on*. Their voices detached from their bodies resound through the visualscape of the film, haunting the memoryscape of the Cold War.

The directors also address the power of letters. In a voice-over accompanying a scene of abandoned *kijich'on*, one of the directors says:

> After the war of giants was over, people sent women up to the mountain. They had to get something to eat. As women got paid by comforting soldiers, people started forming villages under the mountain and made arrangements to equip separate rooms. After some time lives were conceived on the mountain and started to be born. Villagers cursed those babies as filthy blood. They buried living babies underground and made women put on red clothes. Children had to run away unnoticed from the village and women were left alone in their red outfits. They worked like ants and disappeared like spiders. The past comes back again someday. Before the past disappeared, it left a letter to a distant future, saying "let's meet again."

The use of epistolary rhetoric engages the viewer more deeply than would voyeuristic narratives and images, emphasizing the relationality between the film's subjects and their listeners. The gist of the letter, "let's meet again," implies that the women's stories have been repeated for as long as military sex workers have been present in Korea.

The directors also engage in dialogue with the three women. Against a slideshow of black-and-white photographs of camptown sex workers dancing and picnicking with American GIs, the following conversation is heard:

DIRECTOR: Ms. An Sŏngja, is this the girl you are looking for?

AN SŎNGJA: No, she's here.

DIRECTOR: Look at those women with permed hair, thick permed hair and small eyes. Look closely.

AN SŎNGJA: That's not possible, my mom should be here.

DIRECTOR: Then why are they covering their faces?

AN SŎNGJA: Maybe because of the sun.

DIRECTOR: Then is she the one?

AN SŎNGJA: No, she just tries to make a living.

The conversation is odd in that some of Sŏngja's responses seem disconnected from the questions. The seemingly failed conversation between the director and Sŏngja is a gesture of speaking *to* instead of speaking *about* the Other. Thus, Sŏngja's search for her mother and her friend resists becoming spectacle, serving instead as a form of self-representation. As Trinh T. Minh-ha's observation on the study of third-world women elucidates, the film avoids serving as a sociological study of camptown sex workers, which might have resulted in silencing them further.

> A conversation of "us" with "us" about "them" is a conversation in which "them" is silenced. "Them" always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence. . . . Anthropology is finally better defined as "gossip." . . . Gossip's pretensions to truth. . . . The kind of truth it claims to disclose is a confidential truth that requires commitment from both the speaker and the listener. He who lends an ear to gossip already accepts either sympathizing with or being an accomplice of the gossiper.[19]

Rather than acting as observers, the directors collaborate with and assist the three women, thus *Tour of Duty* is an example of practicing "solidarity," according to Chandra Talpade Mohanty:

> I define solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities. Rather than

> assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here—to be acknowledged, not erased in the building of alliance.[20]

The directors have worked as social activists, advocating on behalf of camptown women and their children. In 2003, Pak Kyŏngt'ae made his first full-length documentary about Insun, whom he met while volunteering at Turebang, "My Sister's Place," a human rights center established in 1986 to assist camptown women in need. The film, *Me and the Owl*, shows Insun in art-therapy class to address her alcohol abuse. The *Owl* of the title, derived from a painting Insun made in class, refers to "ladies of the night." The film intercalates interviews with military prostitutes, therapists, and social workers in an attempt to illuminate the harsh reality of the camptowns. Pak later recognized the limitations of *Me and the Owl*, as it tended to objectify the women and even suggested a happy ending for Insun. Kim Tongnyŏng, the other director of *Tour of Duty*, volunteered as an interpreter during research into human-rights violations against foreign women in South Korea. In 2008, Kim made a documentary film titled *American Alley* about Uzbekistani women who worked as military prostitutes in camptowns of South Korea.[21]

In *Tour of Duty*, the two directors adopt multiple roles while recognizing the limits of each one. They engage in dialogues with the three former sex workers, play the role of Sŏngja in voice-overs, and provide the historical background of *kijich'on* in voice-over narration. They become both writer and recipient of letters within the film while providing a space in which the three women can write letters to themselves as well as to the audience. But the directors are visually absent from the film. This strategy places them in the same position as the audience, thereby creating a space in which the audience can become the recipients of the letters. Thus, the epistolary rhetoric of the film encourages empathic participation: audience members are asked to commune with the letter writer, inclining them toward rumination on their relationship to the speaker.

SPECTERS OF THE COLD WAR

The film is inhabited by specters. Several public cemeteries are shown, and what appear to be abandoned gravesites are the final resting places of military sex workers. The women in the film also live spectral lives as the marginalized and silenced within Korean society. To the question of whether he believes in ghosts, Derrida responds, "Contrary to what we might believe, the experience of ghosts is not tied to a bygone historical period, like the landscape of Scottish manors, etc., but on the contrary, is accentuated, accelerated by modern technologies like film, television, the telephone. These technologies inhabit, as it were, a phantom structure. Cinema is the art of phantoms."[22]

Thus, rather than serving as a tool for an objective record of the Other, the filmic experience amplifies the spectral quality of these women. The theatricality of *Tour of Duty* facilitates these women's efforts to communicate diverse layers of memory. As Walter Benjamin wrote, "Memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theatre. It is the medium of past experience, just as the earth is the medium in which dead cities lie buried."[23]

Sŏngja and Insun are haunted by specters at which they direct their invective. Sŏngja wanders around wearing a white gown as if she were a theatrical ghost. She sings a hymn while washing a blanket in the form of a US flag. This is the only scene in which she speaks the word *father* when narrating that "God the Father" embraces her, which contrasts with a scene in which she curses her birth father, who allegedly raped her mother, by calling for his spirit at an abandoned military base.

At the beginning of the film, one of the directors alludes to *Tour of Duty* as a journey with ghosts:

> As people die with deep pains, they have more chance to turn into kinetic energy. They become little memory particles, roaming around the place they used to live. They cause depression to the living. People call them as ghosts, phantom or goblins. Ghosts delivered letters from the past and knocked on living people's doors. Letters contained who the addressee was and where he/she came from. And this made people tense and depressed. To fight against the depression transmitted by ghosts, people built walls of delusion and hid under the dark oblivion. Some people stayed under darkness and waited for the ghost. When the ghost finally knocked on their door, they willingly opened the door and went on journey holding hands.

In Korea, it is commonly believed that those who die a natural death and leave behind family will achieve an afterlife in the Great Beyond, while those who die in shame or violence—murder victims, suicides, the young, the unmarried—are doomed to wander the earth, haunting the living. Thus, the living are surrounded by nameless and faceless wandering spirits. The invisible presence of specters shown throughout *Tour of Duty* "rescue(s) the massive history of 'bad death' from the state of coerced oblivion."[24] These silenced and forgotten deaths are recalled through familial and communal endeavours to "restore the past for the living and to secure the future for the dead."[25]

Why do these women live in this ghost town rather than somewhere they might avoid the traces of their past? Seungsook Moon explains that the town is a "comfort zone" free of the ostracism they would encounter elsewhere in Korean society.[26] But these women look anything but comfortable, as being haunted by specters from the past only exacerbates the sadness and pain of their losses.

The phenomenon of haunting by specters plays a pivotal role in Grace Cho's studies of *yanggongju* and *kijich'on*, as well as in Heinz Insu Fenkl's autobiographic novel about the experience of a mixed-race child of a *yanggongju* and

a US GI.[27] Focusing on transgenerational haunting, Cho traces the appearances and disappearances of *yanggongju* as spectral entities haunting the Korean diaspora in the United States as the traumatic experiences of *yanggongju* cast a shadow over their lives. Based on his childhood in the *kijich'on* of Pup'yŏng during the 1960s and '70s, Insu, the book's narrator, depicts a boyhood filled with prostitution, suicides, and ghosts. Insu converses with a number of ghosts around him, including specters of American soldiers, biracial children, and a Japanese colonel, most of whom are participants in the tragic history of Korea. *Tour of Duty* is also filled with spectral beings forced to be invisible in Korean history, yet never quite disappearing.

The film employs two motifs that connect the memories of the three women with past and present iterations of the Cold War: ruin and specter. As Derrida notes in *Memoirs of the Blind*, "What *remains* and *returns* as a specter from the moment one first looks at oneself and a figuration is eclipsed. The figure, the face, then sees its visibility being eaten away, it loses its integrity without disintegrating."[28] The directors show the women's faces, hands, and other body parts in close-up, overlapping with images of abandoned military bases and clubs where they worked—ruin serves as these women's self-portraits. At the same time, these body parts suggest the fragmented subjectivity of the three former sex workers as a metaphor of broken representations of themselves. The experience of displacement revealed as they decenter themselves allows these women to reappear in the landscape of the Cold War, foregrounding them in the historical scene of *kijich'on*.

Spectrality is manifested in the film at the aural level as well, particularly through the presence of invisible male figures. The sounds of close-order drills of Korean soldiers implies a presence of patriarchal order in the daily lives of *kijich'on* residents and thus remind the viewer that psychological trauma came not only from sexual violence and exploitation by US GIs but also from Korean pimps, Korean police, and Korean government officials whose voices sound endlessly in the memories of the three former sex workers.

FILMING *KIJICH'ON* AND THE COLD WAR

Tour of Duty has been screened at several film festivals, including the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival (2013), where it was awarded a Special Prize. In an e-mail interview with the author, the directors described how the three women responded to the film's release. Pak Insun attended the film festivals, laughing aloud at every scene in which she appears; she was especially delighted to see the audience listen to her curses. Myoyŏn also attended several screenings, although she could only listen to the soundtrack, as she has lost her sight to advanced diabetes. Sŏngja participated in the editing of the film and remarked that she found her performance beautiful.

In the 1990s, the issue of *kijich'on* women drew the attention of social activists and scholars, and *Tour of Duty* is not the only film dealing with stories of camptown prostitutes in South Korea. *Silver Stallion* (1991), a feature film based on An Chŏnghyo's novel of the same title, tells the story of a war widow and mother of two children becoming a military prostitute after being raped by an American soldier during the Korean War. *Camp Arirang* (1996), a documentary directed by Diana S. Lee and Grace Yoon-Kyung Lee, reveals the heterosexual and patriarchal militarism of the Cold War through the voice of a former camptown prostitute who became a Christian missionary advocating for the human rights of military prostitutes in South Korea. The film reveals that the women were subject to governmental control, while Korean men became citizen-soldiers. *The Women Outside* (1996) is a PBS documentary on Korean military prostitutes, directed by J. T. Orinne Takagi and Hye Jung Park. These two documentaries provide historical background on the US presence in Korea, military prostitution, and the Korean government's collusion with a culture that has led more than one million Korean women to service US troops since the end of the Korean War. Despite these efforts, military sex workers have been relegated to the status of objects of sociological study, merely answering questions posed by interviewers rather than speaking in their own voices.

Even before the 1990s, representations of camptown sex workers appeared in popular culture in Korea, including novels and films. A number of feature films presented the phenomenon of military camptowns and their residents as historical and political backgrounds, often reifying the lives of sex workers catering to US GIs. In these films, *kijich'on* are corrupt places of crime, greed, and desire that symbolize the power disparities between the United States and South Korea. Feature films present camptown sex workers wearing heavy makeup and gaudy clothes and suggest that they are victims of inescapable destiny, powerless and passive.[29] A patriarchal view of *kijich'on* sex workers dominates the films addressing post–Korean War society, and sexual service to American soldiers is depicted as inescapable for women who had to be breadwinners as mothers or sisters. The sexual violence they endured is intended to represent the hardship the nation-state suffered as a weaker country.[30]

In *Tour of Duty*, there is a scene in which Insun paints a portrait of a young sex worker in a camptown. The two women seem to have established a deep friendship, and it is a rare scene of Insun comfortably interacting with others. Conversing about the painting made on the cover of a tin box, the young woman greets a third person who is out of frame, alluding to him as an American GI back from duty in Iraq. The scene suggests the continuation of warfare throughout the globe, as the audience is confronted with the reality that the next generation of military sex workers is already being formed in the Middle East.

These three women offer a countermemory of the Cold War, showing the complexity of historical reality, as Heonik Kwon stresses in his deconstruction of the Cold War.[31] The communication between the living and the dead facilitated by

this film reveals that the Cold War has resulted in diverse, and often tragic, consequences of violence in Korean society. In *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt points out the continuation of violence after the Second World War: "The Second World War was not followed by peace but by a cold war and the establishment of the military-industrial-labor complex"[32] And the Cold War has not ended; it has structured the national identity of Korea in such a way as to silence the voices of wandering ghosts and to make these living sex workers spectral. Rumors, myths, and fantasies of the dead haunt the living. In his interpretation of the Cold War as an imagined reality, Hajimu Masuda calls for attention to be paid to popular myths as elements structuring the Cold War.[33] Whether fictive or autobiographical, the narrated and visualized stories in *Tour of Duty* illuminate the ways in which Koreans have been structuring an imagined fear and desire in terms of the Cold War.

Distinguishing power from violence, Arendt asserts, "Power, far from being the means to an end, is actually the very condition enabling a group of people to think and act in terms of the means-end category."[34] *Tour of Duty* offers one of many steps that may enable military sex workers to acquire power through various forms of self-representation. The film reveals the spectrality of individual actors who have sustained the Cold War system of gender in Korean society; it follows the traces to show that Pak Myoyŏn, Pak Insun, and An Sŏngja have been driven into invisibility. But now, thanks to the filmmakers, the women engage in dialogue with us, the viewers, through dancing, painting, and wandering through *kijich'on* as they undergo the process of ruination. The film ends with Insun's voice-over of her wish to be a ghost: "If I get sick, I will go and die in a mountain. I want to be a ghost. Then I can fly around and eat any fruits I love. I will fly here and there and devour all the bastards who tormented me. Priscilla, I hope you will find my name. My name is Pak Insun."

NOTES

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1. E-mail interview with author.
2. Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Documentary Is/Not a Name," 85–86.
3. Ibid., 89.
4. Katharine H. S. Moon, "Prostitute Bodies."
5. Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, 19–21.
6. Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex among Allies*, 29.
7. Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 69.
8. Ann Laura Stoler, "'The Rot Remains,'" 7.
9. Homi Bhabha presents "hybridity" as a way to overcome the dichotomy of the colonizer and the colonized. According to Bhabha, hybridity is an ambivalent space and

moment in which the colonized are able to enact their political agency to subvert the authority of the colonizer. Nevertheless, it is not the colonizer but the colonized who gain the strategies of mimicry and hybridity, thus still maintaining the binary equation. On the other hand, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak warns against "too uncritical a celebration of the 'hybrid,' which inadvertently legitimizes the 'pure' by reversal" in the age of globalization. See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*; Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 65. Kate A. F. Crehan also points out that the term implies that ideas and objects never lose the trace of their roots, forever allowing one to make a distinction between what is pure and what is hybrid. See Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture, and Anthropology*, 58–67.

10. Hyun Sook Kim, "*Yanggongju* as an Allegory."

11. The film is in Korean, with some voice-overs spoken in broken English. I saw a version that was subtitled in English (I am bilingual). In the excerpted quotes, there are numerous grammatical errors, but they are accurate replications of the words spoken or written in the subtitles.

12. Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*.

13. For more on the operation of detention centers, see Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex among Allies.*

14. Katharine H. S. Moon, "Prostitute Bodies."

15. Ibid., 163–65.

16. For more on the relationship between the economic plan of the government and the regulation of US military prostitution in South Korea, See Seungsook Moon, "Regulating Desire."

17. Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*.

18. For more on acoustic effect in narrative cinema, see Mary Ann Doane, "The Voice in the Cinema," and Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror.*

19. Trinh T. Minh-Ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, 67–68.

20. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders*, 7.

21. Kim Nahyŏn, "[Maegŏjin M] tak'yu '*Kŏmi ŭi ttang*'. . . kijich'on, kŭ kot'ong ŭi kiŏk" [[Magazine M] documentary film "Tour of Duty". . . memory of pain in camptowns], *Chungang ilbo*, January 18, 2016, http://news.joins.com/article/19432774.

22. Mark Lewis and Andrew Payne, "The Ghost Dance," 61.

23. Walter Benjamin, "A Berlin Chronicle (1932)," 611.

24. I am borrowing this phrase from Heonik Kwon's book on the wandering souls of the Vietnam War. Kwon, *After the Massacre*, 27.

25. Ibid., 81.

26. Seungsook Moon, "Regulating Desire," 54.

27. Grace Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*; Heinz Insu Fenkl, *Memories of My Ghost Brother.*

28. Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind*, 68.

29. Kim Yunji, "Toguhwadoen t'aja, kijich'on yŏsŏng kwa Han'guk yŏnghwa [Instrumentalized other, Korean military prostitutes, and Korea cinema: Movies about Korean military prostitutes after the Korean War]," 105–6.

30. Ibid., 105–122.

31. Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, 136.

32. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, 9.

33. Hajimu Masuda, *Cold War Crucible*.

34. Arendt, *On Violence*, 51.

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