

Being Amerasian in South Korea: Purebloodness, Multiculturalism, and Living
Alongside the U.S. Military Empire

Honors Research Thesis

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Yuri W. Doolan

The Ohio State University
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Project Adviser: Professor Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, Departments of History and
Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

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Preface

The year is 1992 and it is a cold winter night in the city of Songtan, South Korea. At this moment an American GI is pacing outside of a clay-roofed house where his two young children lay sleeping. Was it true what he had heard? Was their mother really going to run away with them at daybreak? If he did not act now, would he ever see his children again? If he took them to America, if the divorce was to happen in the states, the courts would surely grant custody to their mother. He would lose his two boys either way, but at least they would be Americans—he had seen how the Korean children bullied his mixed race kids in school, at the park, and in the playgrounds. It was better if they were American, he thought.

At the same moment a Korean woman has drifted to sleep, her dreams full of fear and anxiety for the morning to come. Estranged from her family for having married an American man, how could she raise these two boys alone? Where could she go so that her husband will not find them, so he cannot take her children from her? She knows that if the divorce is to happen on Korean soil, she will be stripped of her motherhood in accordance to the Korean Family Law—a law that gives automatic custodial rights to the father in cases of divorce. If the father were to take her children to America, could she ever find them again? Would she ever see their faces?

“Be quiet, come with me. Don’t wake up your mother,” the father urges to his children. The sun rises, and the woman awakes to find that they are gone. Their father has taken them to America. The Korean mother soon followed—she would not lose this battle so easily. Little did she know that this would be the last time in the country of her

birth, and that no one in the family would make the journey back to the motherland for twenty years to come.

In America, my parents divorced and my mother won custody of my brother and I. And it was here, where race became central to the way in which I viewed and experienced the world. From a very early age, I knew that I was different from my Caucasian and Black peers in the Midwestern Ohio neighborhood where I came of age. My older brother and I were the only Asian Americans in our school district. I never felt the white privilege of my absent father—I believed myself to be Korean because my mother was and additionally because of my experiences as a highly racialized other within my community. I grew up believing that I did not belong in Ohio or America. I was convinced that I was a displaced person, foreign, and alien. To me, Korea was the land of my childhood and the place of my first memories; it was my homeland; it was where I believed I belonged. At night, I would close my eyes and try to remember our house in Songtan; I imagined it as a refuge and safe haven—the place where my face would not matter.

When I was twenty-two years old, I returned to South Korea for the first time since the night my father took my brother and I to the states. I journeyed to South Korea as part of my honors thesis project: an attempt to write a history and ethnography of mixed race Koreans since the Korean War. It was an idea conceived out of the desire to know the life I could have lived had I remained and grown up in South Korea. During my time in Seoul, I interviewed twenty mixed race individuals from the military neighborhood in which I lived and other similar neighborhoods. In this thesis, seven of their voices are showcased.

It was during this time when I met a man named Han, who was my age and had grown up in Songtan near Osan Air Force Base, my Korean hometown. He told me: “I am glad for you. I am glad that your father loved you enough to take you to America.”¹ Han was referring to the fact that when he was one year old his father had left Korea and never returned for him or his mother. He told me that when he was younger, he dreamt of America at night. It was the place *he* believed his fate would not matter, where *he* believed he belonged. “Not Korea, where everyone calls you foreigner, American, Yankee, or mixed-blood,” Han told me.² Although his English was not perfect, and my Korean was not either, I understood Han more than I should have. It was at that moment I realized that we were both staring at the person we could have been.

¹ “Han,” Personal Interview by author, Seoul, June 25, 2011.

² Ibid.

Introduction

Seoul, the capital of South Korea, is the second largest city in the world following only Tokyo in population. With more than 20 million people, or almost half of the nation's citizens living in an area just a fraction of the size of New York City, it is a cosmopolitan megacity.³ Here, the majority of advertisements plastered on billboards, subways, and street signs are of American rather than Korean faces. Seoul is a place where one could find a McDonald's, Burger King, Starbucks, or Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise on any given street corner. Seoul is home to some of the world's largest churches: the Yoido Full Gospel Church, with over one million members, is the largest Pentecostal Christian congregation in the world.⁴ Seoul is a place that valorizes Hollywood and American popular culture; where one could see the latest movie premiere the same day as people in the United States and then see those movie fashions being sold in subway stations the next day. In Seoul, an American is not expected to speak Korean and could survive without any Korean language skills. Instead, the chic Korean urbanites walking past on crowded sidewalks are expected to be able to converse sufficiently in English, despite the fact that English has never been apart of the cultural heritage or history of Korea. Today, the streets of Seoul reveal the profound impact that the U.S. has had on South Korea since the Korean War, when Koreans began to share their peninsula with the U.S. military empire.

³ "Current population of the Seoul National Capital Area," Statistics Korea, accessed May 13, 2012, http://www.index.go.kr/egams/stts/jsp/potal/stts/PO_STTS_IdxMain.jsp?idx_cd=2729.

⁴ "Special Report on Religion and Family Life: O come all ye faithful," *The Economist*, November 3, 2007, 6, accessed May 13, 2012, http://www.economist.com/node/10015239?story_id=10015239&CFID=25385374.

This thesis focuses on the history of U.S. imperialism in South Korea through the lens of mixed race Amerasians—a population regarded and understood to have been produced through the liaisons between South Korean women and American military personnel. The existence of mixed race Amerasians in Korea is a direct result of the legacies of the Korean War and the massive U.S. military presence that has continued in South Korea over the past six decades. Using Amerasians as the focus of my study allows for a critical understanding of this history from the perspectives of those most vulnerable to the U.S.-ROK relationship and who, to the Korean people, symbolize this neo-colonial relationship. Amerasians are assumed to be the sons and daughters of Korean prostitutes employed in the red light districts of military camptowns—embodiments of national degradation and foreign autonomy over Korean bodies. Because of this stigmatization, Amerasians in Korea are pushed to the lower rungs of society and the government has even historically tried to eradicate their presence. Amerasians are viewed as outsiders in a nation that has a deep sense and pride of their racial homogeneity. Additionally, those without Korean fathers (which is the vast majority) have historically been denied citizenship rights because of patriarchal constructions of nationality. Yet there is a deeper complexity to the status and identities of mixed race Amerasians. One that is intimately connected to a history of forgetting and denying Korea's status as a subjugated state under the U.S. military. This thesis is an effort to make that connection.

The current occupation of South Korea by U.S. military forces is owed to the legacies of multiple wars. U.S. military presence in Korea began in September of 1945 following World War II, when 72,000 soldiers from the Twenty-Fourth Army Corps

arrived to transfer power from the devastated Japanese imperial government.⁵ An agreement by the Allied Forces to split Korea into northern and southern halves would mean that Japanese occupation would be followed by yet another occupation, this time, by Americans in the South. This allowed for the continued arrival of hundreds of thousands of additional U.S. troops to the Korean peninsula that ultimately led to the Korean War.⁶

U.S. involvement in the Korean War was controversial from the very start and the costs were tremendous. President Harry S. Truman decided to enter into the war without the approval of U.S Congress or the United Nations. Cold War historians have noted that the Korean War seemed an experimental ground for the United States to “try out” its newly inherited power.⁷ The costs of the Korean War were vast; the war claimed over three million lives in just the three-year span from 1950 to 1953. Intense carpet-bombing, the experimental use of napalm and guerilla warfare left the Korean peninsula in absolute ruins.⁸ And after all of the devastation, the war ended right where it began—in a stalemate—and Korea remained divided into Northern and Southern halves.⁹ By this time war, death, and the imaginary border drawn across the Korean peninsula had already separated millions of families.

But the consequences of the Korean War do not just end there; as international and domestic audiences watched America’s war in Korea closely they also wondered

⁵ Maria Houhn and Seungsook Moon, *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 41.

⁶ Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History*, (New York: Modern Library, 2010).

⁷ Ibid.; Slater LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1996*, (New York: Wiley, 1967).

⁸ Susie Woo, “A New American Comes Home: Race, Nation, and the Immigration of Korean War Adoptees, GI Babies, and Brides” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2010), 13.

⁹ Bruce Cummings, *The Origins of the Korean War, Volume II: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

how the U.S. would repair the tremendous devastation of the war.¹⁰ In order to mitigate the destruction and additionally to maintain their presence and militarized sovereignty over an otherwise communist region, the U.S. government did two things. First, they developed the U.S- ROK Mutual Defense Treaty, which gave U.S. military autonomy under the agreement that the United States would defend South Korea against external aggressors.¹¹ In addition to this the U.S also made drastic efforts to rebuild South Korea's infrastructure and economy.¹² However, not only did American wealth flow into Korea in the years following the war but ideas about American's superiority also permeated into Korean society. The relationship between the U.S. and Korea would take on a gendered dimension and South Koreans became apart of a feminine nation in need of a masculine (American) protector.

Historian Susie Woo points out that following the Korean War it was not only the U.S government that partook in this nation-state rebuilding process. Private American citizens also wanted to be apart of the Cold War effort:

Many Americans had come to believe it their duty to modernize, Christianize, and democratize (a patriotic triumvirate) the world by way of transporting Western civilization which included everything from New Deal inspired infrastructural building projects to a slew of cultural, social religious and economic lessons.¹³

Thus, following the Korean War, thousands of U.S. missionaries, philanthropists, voluntary aid workers, and social welfare professionals traveled to Korea to begin their

¹⁰ Susie Woo, "A New American Comes Home: Race Nation, and Immigration of Korean War Adoptees, GI Babies, and Brides," 13.

¹¹ "Background Note: South Korea," U.S. Department of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, April 12, 2012, accessed May 13, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2800.htm>.

¹² Susie Woo, "A New American Comes Home: Race Nation, and Immigration of Korean War Adoptees, GI Babies, and Brides," 15.

¹³ Ibid., 14.

benevolent project of proselytizing, modernizing, and saving Korea from itself.¹⁴

Together with their government, they left deep imprints on Korean society that have reverberated into today and shaped the ways Koreans have lived alongside Americans for the past six decades. U.S. neo-colonial rule in South Korea has indoctrinated Korean society with Western structures of governance, culture, and religion.¹⁵ To this date there are still 28,500 U.S. troops stationed in Korea, and the United States still governs Korea's wartime operational control.¹⁶ In other words, the U.S. military still exercises authority over the South Korean military, which highlights the persistence of this neo-colonial relationship in contemporary setting.

In this study, when I employ the use of the word "neo-colonial" I am referring to the term that was coined by Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president post-independence. Nkrumah suggests:

The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subjected to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.¹⁷

I apply Nkrumah's neo-colonialism to understand the long-term effects of U.S. influence in Korea. Nkrumah proposes that with neo-colonialism, the relationship between the colonial powers and the colonized state are never equal even after the nation is granted "sovereignty." He continues by saying that:

Neo-colonialism is also the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. In the days of old-fashioned

¹⁴ Ibid., 15.

¹⁵ Ibid., 28.

¹⁶ "Background Note: South Korea," U.S. Department of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, April 12, 2012, accessed May 13, 2012. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2800.htm>.

¹⁷ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism*, (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd.), ix.

colonialism, the imperial power had at least to explain and justify at home the actions it was taking abroad. In the colony those who served the ruling imperial power could at least look to its protection against any violent move by their opponents. With neo-colonialism neither is the case.¹⁸

In other words, being a neo-colony is worse than being an actual colony, for it is harder to fight indirect control than it is direct. In the context of Korea, the impact of the U.S. war and the continued U.S. military presence on the peninsula is immeasurable. It is a presence that Koreans experience in their everyday lives, but it is also a presence that is not fully recognized or understood by the thousands of Seoul urbanites traversing the busy streets of their cosmopolitan megacity. Understanding the profound ramifications that this American presence has on Korea today is difficult for Koreans because it means accepting South Korea's role as a subjugated nation, one that has never truly been sovereign or independent. But it is a perspective that is essential to understanding the Korean War from a more critical perspective than scholars have treated in the past.

While much of the scholarship on the Korean War has been focused on diplomatic and military histories, such as the research of Bruce Cumings, within more recent years, scholars of Asian American and transnational studies have critically assessed cultural and social impacts of the war. Historians Ji-Yeon Yuh, Arissa Oh, and Susie Woo have employed feminist and transnational frameworks to trace the lasting legacies of the Korean War through the lens of war orphans, transracial adoptees, military brides, and other "Korean War" immigrants in America.¹⁹ Additionally, Korean feminist scholars such as Katherine H.S. Moon and Seungsook Moon have extensively researched

¹⁸ Ibid., xi.

¹⁹ Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America*, (New York: New York University Press 2002); Arissa Hyun Jung Oh, "Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008); Susie Woo, "A New American Comes Home: Race Nation, and Immigration of Korean War Adoptees, GI Babies, and Brides."

the Korean camptown and the institutionalization of militarized prostitution for U.S. soldiers.²⁰ The history of Amerasians is another lens from which to view this legacy of war and research on this mixed race population, despite its historical presence in Korea, has just recently begun. However, it is the belief of scholars in the field of Critical Mixed Race Studies that studying the history of Amerasians has profound implications for modern Korean and U.S. history that fuels projects like this one. To date, prominent studies on Amerasians published in English include anthropologist Margo Okazawa Rey's ethnography of the Tonguducheon camptown, anthropologist Su-je Lee Gage's dissertation based off of a year of fieldwork in that same camptown, and cultural critic Mary Lee's work that employs the oral histories of Amerasians (as recorded by historian Kyung-Tae Park) to trace the production of mixed-race subjectivity in South Korea.²¹ Additionally scholars of Korean intercountry adoption studies such as Eleana Kim and Arissa Oh have already done extensive archival work uncovering the origins of intercountry adoption as a method employed by the Korean government to excise the presence of mixed race GI babies in post-war Korea.²²

Studying the histories of mixed race Amerasians is intertwined with the broader history of the Korean War and the effort made in recent scholarship to trace the long-

²⁰Maria Houn and Seungsook Moon. *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*; Seungsook Moon, "Begetting the Nation," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine Kim, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 33-66; Katherine H.S. Moon, "Prostitute Bodies and Gendered States," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine Kim, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 141-174.

²¹ Su-Je Lee Gage, "Pure Mixed-Blood: The Multiple Identities of Amerasians in South Korea," (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2007); Mary Lee, "Mixed Race Peoples in the Korean National Imaginary and Family," *Korean Studies* 32 (2009): 56-85; Kyung-Tae Park, "Left Behind: Amerasians Living in Korea," in Conference Proceeding: "The Korean Nation and Its 'Others' in the Age of Globalization and Democratization," Univ. of Hawaii Center for Korean Studies, Apr. 20-21, 2007; Margo Okazawa-Rey, "Amerasian Children of GI Town: A Legacy of U.S. Militarism in South Korea." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 3:1 (1997): 71-102.

²² Arissa Hyun Jung Oh, "Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption;" Eleana Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

lasting legacies and human consequences of the war. I am building off of these aforementioned works while additionally opening new spaces for analysis by filling gaps within literature on mixed race Koreans. Of these studies on mixed race Korea, none have traced or documented the Amerasian experience beyond the narrative of the camptown. For example, those ethnographies of mixed race Amerasians do not speak to the experiences of Amerasians who also have experiences living in America. Additionally, researchers have yet to go beyond the camptown to look for their subjects, giving an inaccurate representation of who Amerasians are.

The people I interviewed for this study come from a diverse array of backgrounds; some lived completely integrated within Korean society, some on military bases, and some in both America and Korea. Additionally, my work focuses on the neo-colonial aspect of the U.S.-ROK relationship as a force that is uniquely connected to Amerasian identity and status in Korea. Currently, the legacies of pureblooded nationalism and patriarchal constructions of citizenship dominate the literature on mixed race Koreans. While this paper does not ignore these notions or the experiences of Amerasians under these ideologies, it builds upon the existing scholarship and analysis on these topics to offer a more extensive explanation to the problem of mixed race in Korea.

My research project also offers a comparative analysis of a new mixed race group in Korea called *Kosians*. Where Koreans understand themselves to be a different race than the inhabitants of neighboring East Asian, Southeast Asian, and South Asian nations, *Kosians* are the offspring of Korean and these other “Asian” peoples. According to a press release made this past June by the Government Central Statistics Office in Daejeon,

these *Kosians* comprised one-third of the population of Korean babies born in 2010.²³

The large demographic shift in the Korean population has sparked a conversation that is changing the way Korean society is imagined; Korea has had to modify categories of belonging in order to account for a projected future of even higher numbers in this *Kosian* demographic. Offering this comparison allows for me to discuss the true complexities of Amerasian status and identity in Korea by extending the scholarship and discourse of mixed race Korea beyond a mixed/pure-blooded binary.

My paper historically situates mixed race Koreans between two particular moments of Korea's past: intercountry adoption policy formations in the years immediately following the Korean War and multicultural policy initiatives that emerged in state discourse in 2005. In this paper, I focus on the country's intercountry adoption program because it represents the first official state response to mixed race Koreans. I examine how Korean society sought to excise the presence of Amerasians following the Korean War as the country embraced the concept of purebloodedness. I also look towards today's multicultural policy in order to understand how the status of mixed race Amerasians has changed over the past six decades. I argue that multicultural policy is primarily one of assimilation rather than a recognition of cultural and racial differences. The policy targets these *Koisans*, deemed a more "passable" mixed race demographic, in order to fulfill government political agendas. As the term *Kosian* is understood in contemporary thought to mean those with Korean fathers, Amerasians, or those understood to have Korean mothers and non-Korean fathers, are largely excluded from multicultural policies. I acknowledge the gendered dimensions of these mixed race

²³ "2010 Housing & Population Census Data," Statistics Korea: Government Central Statistics Office, News release, June 2011.

identities and make sure to distinguish between Amerasians and *Koisans* accordingly. Although Korean feminist and women's movements have fought to remove androcentric discourse from Korean Family Law and Nationality Law in a series of amendments accumulating to 2008, it seems that these concepts are reemerging in Korea's new multicultural policy formations.²⁴ However, my analysis does not stop there. Beyond this, I argue that the ultimate distinction between mixed race Amerasians and *Kosians* are the geopolitical relationships that they symbolize. The latter have gained privilege through South Korean multicultural policy formations.

In 2006, the Korean government officially announced "The Grand Plan" or Korea's first multicultural policy. As apart of this, multicultural families received benefits and assistance to integrate into Korean society from the government. In compliance with this, the Department of Education made it so that Korean history and civics textbooks were rewritten to incorporate the histories and experiences of these multicultural families.²⁵ In other words, the histories of *Kosians* have been accepted as apart of the broader historical narrative of Korea while the histories of Amerasians are still largely ignored and absent from standardized education. The existing argument that the marginal status of mixed race individuals in Korea is solely due to the nation's proclaimed racial homogeneity is not consistent with current multicultural policies that aid in *Kosians'* acceptance and integration into Korean society despite their "impure" blood. While pureblooded nationalism certainly still affects the ways in which mixed race individuals are perceived within the national imaginary, it does not explain completely

²⁴ Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi, *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, (New York: Routledge, 1998).

²⁵ Jungmin Lee, "Multicultural education in South Korean public elementary schools: An analysis of teachers' experiences and perspectives and school curriculum," (Ph.D. diss., Purdue University, 2008).

why *Kosians* are being embraced and assimilated. I argue that this is due to the geopolitical relationship that the *Kosian* body represents. As the sons and daughters of migrant workers and brides from other Asian nations, *Kosians* frame Korea as a masculine protector of these displaced immigrants by offering them integration and assimilation into a “multicultural” society. The history of Southeast Asian immigration to Korea highlights Korea’s capital success and rise to power as one of the world’s leading economies. Conversely, acknowledging the Amerasian as apart of the broader narrative of Korean history would mean to recognize that South Korea is still a feminine state subjugated under the U.S. military empire. The resistance to recognizing mixed race Amerasians as Korean is a refusal to accept and acknowledge Korea’s neo-colonial status.

Drawing upon multiple sources, this paper explains the historical and contemporary social status of Amerasians. Primary sources for this study include legal and government documents, popular media representations, interviews with pureblooded Koreans, as well as oral histories of Amerasians that I conducted in Korea during the summer of 2011. I will be selecting oral history samples from a pool of twenty interviews I conducted over the course of three months. All of the interviewees were of legal age (19), were residing in Seoul and/or the metropolitan area surrounding Seoul, had lived the majority (if not their entire) lives in Korea, and had Korean mothers and American fathers. They came from various socio-economic backgrounds. Four interviewees had been raised by single mothers, while sixteen had some form of substantial contact with their American fathers during childhood. They had varying racial backgrounds. Two identified as Latino, three as African-American, and ten as Caucasian; the remaining five did not identify with a particular racial category. Fifteen of those interviewed were

American citizens, while only five were Korean citizens (or had dual Korean citizenship). Twelve of the interviewees were female, while only eight of the interviewees were male. Thirteen of those interviewed had parents working for the U.S. government. Additionally, the vast majority of my subjects were in their twenties. I was interested in this age demographic because this was the generation that had come of age during the emergence of Korea's multicultural policies. I wanted to understand if and how multicultural policies in Korea had affected or improved Amerasians' lived experiences.

This project is organized into two chapters based on chronology. The first chapter focuses on mixed race Koreans in the post-war era. I am interested in understanding how pureblooded conceptualizations of national identity, intercountry adoption policies, militarized prostitution, and patriarchal constructions of citizenship formed mixed race subjectivity in Korea. Additionally, I analyze how these concepts reverberate into Korean society today, continuing to marginalize mixed race Amerasians in their everyday lived experiences. In the second chapter I focus on mixed race Koreans in this contemporary multicultural era, offering a critique of current multicultural policies. I discuss the role of *Kosians* and multicultural families as political actors within state discourse. I argue that multicultural policies have had negative consequences for Amerasians, who remain excluded from these laws. It is also here, where I discuss how white privilege operates in South Korea today to garner American foreigners (regardless of race or gender) status and privilege, while simultaneously placing some mixed race Amerasians at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Why do certain Amerasians enjoy white privilege in Korea while others remain at the lowest rungs of Korean society? I use the contemporary oral histories of mixed race Amerasians throughout both chapters to illuminate how these individuals

come to understand their identities and social statuses amidst these tensions. I conclude by offering what I hope will be a deeper understanding of why the status of mixed race Amerasians has not changed much since the Korean War, but instead has remained relatively constant.

A Note on Terminology

In this study, the term “Amerasian” is applied when referring to persons of mixed Korean/American ancestry. “Amerasian” is a U.S. legal term and the official definition was formalized by Public Law 97-359, more commonly known as *The Amerasian Act of 1982*. This defined the Amerasian as an individual “fathered by a U.S. citizen...in Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, or Thailand,” after December 31, 1950, and before October 22, 1982.²⁶ Although the legal term sets chronological boundaries to the category of Amerasian, the word connotes a political relationship to the history of U.S. militarism in East Asia. Therefore, for lack of better terminology, this study employs the use of “Amerasian” to describe mixed race Korean/Americans, including those born pre-1950 and post-1982. Additionally, I utilize “Amerasian,” rather a Korean word because a Korean equivalent that captures the geopolitical, militarized, and neo-colonial identities of mixed race Korean/Americans does not exist. In Korean language, the term *honyeol* means “mixed blood.” While this term can be used to refer to Korean/American persons, it does not explicitly mean this particular racial mixture. Instead, *honhyeol* can be used to describe any individual who is mixed across various racial or ethnic categories. The term *twiggi* is another existing Korean language term. While this word is more commonly used to refer to Korean/Americans specifically, it is extremely derogatory and is considered a racial slur. While an exact English translation of the word *twiggi* does not exist, some would say that the term means “devil-child,” “mule,” or “crossbreed.” The lack of a Korean language term for mixed race Korean/American individuals reflects the

²⁶ *Amerasian Act of 1982*, Public Law 97-359, S.1698, Bill Summary and Status.

illegitimacy of “Amerasian” as a category of identity in South Korea. Contrarily, the term *Kosian* is used to legally define individuals of mixed Korean/Asian heritage. The existence of this legal term in multicultural policy formations reflects the authenticity and legitimacy privileged to mixed race Korean/Asian individuals by the state.

Chapter One

Introduction

Amerasians have long been marginalized members of South Korean society. The government estimates that the total number of Amerasians born in Korea (since the Korean War) is between twenty thousand and sixty thousand. However, considering that Amerasians were not officially monitored or classified by the state, historians agree that this number is probably much higher.²⁷ Statistical data indicates that mixed race Amerasians have historically achieved lower education levels, earned lower incomes, held higher debts, and exhibited higher rates of unemployment.²⁸ In 2002, a survey taken by Pearl S. Buck International, a nonprofit adoption agency, indicated that 9.4 percent of Amerasians in Korea failed to enter or graduate from primary school, while 17.5 percent failed to complete compulsory middle school. Additionally, approximately 56 percent of Amerasians are currently unemployed; 33 percent of those employed are in manual labor positions. The study also found that no Amerasian person holds a government job.²⁹

This chapter of my thesis historically contextualizes the history of mixed race Korea in order to offer a critique of contemporary multicultural policies, which is the subject of Chapter Two. In this section of my thesis, I look at the various ways mixed race subjectivity has been shaped and how Amerasian individuals have historically been

²⁷ Mary Lee, "Mixed Race Peoples in the Korean National Imaginary and Family," *Korean Studies* 32 (2009): 60.

²⁸ Ibid.; Kyung-Tae Park, "Left Behind: Amerasians Living in Korea," in Conference Proceeding: "The Korean Nation and Its 'Others' in the Age of Globalization and Democratization," Univ. of Hawaii Center for Korean Studies, Apr. 20-21, 2007, 42.

²⁹ Hyung-jin Lee, "Amerasians, Legacy of U.S. Military Presence, Live Under Prejudice," *Yonhap News*, March 14, 2004, accessed May 2, 2012, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/koreanadopteesarchive/message/1303>.

regarded by the state. First, I investigate the origins of *danil minjok* (“pureblooded Korean race”) as a social construction that emerged during the post-colonial and post-war nation-state building processes. Next, I examine how Korean society sought to excise the presence of Amerasians following the Korean War as the country embraced the concept of purebloodedness. Here, I focus on the country’s intercountry adoption program, which represents the first official state response to Amerasians. In conjunction with this, I discuss the stigmatizations surrounding Amerasians in Korea by looking towards the history of Korean camptowns and the institutionalization of militarized prostitution. Finally, I examine patriarchal constructions of family and citizenship in the Korean Family and Nationality Laws. I will supplement my analysis of these topics with oral histories of Amerasians in contemporary setting. These oral histories reveal the ways in which de facto forms of marginalization continue to occur in the everyday lived experiences of mixed race Amerasians. This has persisted although Korea has presently departed from pureblooded constructions of identity, intercountry adoption policy as a means to exile mixed race persons, institutionalized militarized prostitution, citizenship based on patrilineal jus sanguinis, and embraced multiculturalism. Still, the legacies of these ideologies and legal policies continue to affect the lives of Amerasians living in today’s “multicultural” society.

Pureblooded Constructions of Race

In the past five years, contemporary Korea has politically departed from its historical emphasis of *danil minjok* by defining the country and its people as a multicultural terrain. As migrant workers from other Asian nations migrate to South Korea for better economic opportunities, Korea’s globalization has created an urgency to

adapt to an increased presence of different cultures. The diversification of a perceived homogenous Korean society has been a problem that the government has recently confronted. However, despite the emphasis on multiculturalism, the perception that Korea is a pureblooded nation has been hard to break. Despite the government's efforts to abolish this ideology in contemporary times, many Koreans continue to believe that they are historically a pureblooded people, citing the nation's foundation myth and the pure blood of *Dangun*,³⁰ the man whom all Koreans allegedly descend. I asked a college-aged Korean woman what she thought of the term *danil minjok*:

I first heard *danil minjok* sometime in elementary school during civics class. The term *danil minjok* means that we, the Korean people, are all descendants of *Dangun*...I think it's definitely true and I think that it's a source of pride for us Koreans. We are the only country in the world that has maintained a pureblood line since the beginning of our history.³¹

As demonstrated in the passage above, there are Koreans today who still accept this notion of pureblooded society. To many, (pure) blood is the basic ingredient and prime factor in determining "correct" or "authentic" Koreanness.

When I asked the (pureblooded) woman in the passage above what the word *danil minjok* meant to her, she proudly cited *Dangun*. According to myth, *Dangun* was the

³⁰ According to the legend of *Dangun*, which is included as one of the folktales of the collection titled *Samguk Yuksa* ("Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms"): Five millennia ago, Hwanung, the illegitimate son of Hwanin, the Lord of the Heavens, asked his father if he could descend onto the human world and rule the people living there. His father agreed, and allowed Hwanung's rule of the Earth, sending him with three thousand followers. On Earth, Hwanung instituted laws and taught humans how to live. A tiger and bear living together in a cave prayed to Hwanung that they might become human. Hwanung heard their prayers and visited their cave, presenting the couple with twenty gloves of garlic and a bundle of spirited mugwort. "Eat this food, and remain in this cave. Do not let your eyes see the sunlight for one hundred days. After the one hundredth day, if you follow these instructions, you will become human." The tiger grew weary and failed to observe Hwanung's command, however, the bear patiently followed and on the hundredth day, she became human. The woman prayed for a child, but because the tiger had not become human, she had no husband. Deeply moved by her prayers, Hwanung married the woman and the two begot a son, named Dangun. Dangun was the first Korean, the founder of the Korean nation. And so Korean history began, and so the blood of Dangun has remained unbroken and pure since the beginning of the Korean people.

³¹ "Jaeyoung," Personal Interview by author, Seoul, June 11, 2011.

offspring of a half-god half-human and a bear-woman. Despite his hybrid background, *Dangun*'s blood is viewed as pure and remains the basis of Korean national, ethnic, and racial identity. Scholars have long acknowledged the historical inaccuracy and even fictional origins of this pureblooded Korean myth, but still this concept remains deeply embedded within the Korean national imaginary.³²

It is no surprise then that scholars often refer to Korea as an ethnonationalist terrain.³³ This term implies that Korean nationality has historically been conceived in racial terms. In other words, race, ethnicity, and nation are conflated and this is reflective in the Korean word *minjok*, which can be used interchangeably to mean race, ethnicity, and/or nation.³⁴ While race is understood to mean "innate phenotypic and genotypic characteristics," and ethnicity is regarded as "a cultural phenomena based on a common language and history," Koreans since the early twentieth century have thought of these concepts as the same.³⁵ Sociologist Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Chang state that in the context of Korea, "race has served as a marker that strengthened ethnic identity, which in turn was instrumental in defining the nation."³⁶

In 2007, the Ministry of Education removed the term *danil minjok* from Korean textbooks in accordance to multicultural policies.³⁷ But for many Amerasians, their first encounters with the term *danil minjok* happened in elementary school, before the official

³² Kyung-Koo Han, "The Archaeology of the Ethnically Homogenous Nation-State and Multiculturalism in Korea," *Korea Journal*, Winter 2007: 9-31.

³³ Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*. Stanford, (CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

³⁴ Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Y. Chang, "The Politics of Nationalism in U.S.-Korean Relations," *Asian Perspective* 28, no. 4 (2004): 122.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ 김종성, "단일민족 표현, 왜 국사교과서에서 빠졌나," *OhmyNews*, November 14, 2007, accessed May 2, 2012, http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000764629.

omission of the term from national curriculum. Han, a twenty-three year old man
recollects:

I heard the word *danil minjok* first in elementary school. I remember feeling very embarrassed after the teacher explained that it meant all Korean people are pureblooded. A few of the students started whispering and pointing at my direction. The teacher caught on that the class was curious. “Teacher, teacher what about him? Is he apart of *danil minjok*?” My teacher laughed and she said “No class, he is *honhyeol* (“mixed blood”). *Honhyeols* have American fathers, they are American, the *minjok* is only for Korean people.” From that day on everyone would call me Yankee. “Look there’s Yankee! There’s Yankee! Look at the *miguk dwaeji* (“American pig”)!”³⁸

Han reveals that to not be apart of the *minjok* renders him foreign. In other words, being pureblooded is the only way to be Korean, revealing that *danil minjok* operates in similar ways that the American practice of hypodescent (or “one drop rule”) operated in Jim Crow era South to disenfranchise mixed race African-American/white individuals. Mixed race individuals in Korea are automatically regarded as American despite their lived experiences in Korea just based on the logic of purebloodedism. Yookyung, a twenty-one year old woman had similar experiences with the term:

At first I didn’t know what *danil minjok* meant. But then the teacher explained the story of *Dangun*. From that day on, I noticed that everyone treated me differently. I was the only mixed blood at my school. I felt like I had dirty blood, like I was impure. You would think the teacher would know better than to teach something like that when you have a mixed blood girl in the class, but they still taught it.³⁹

Han and Yookyung give insight to the ways in which *danil minjok* came to define who they were to their peers and even to themselves. After their first encounters with the term, the two began to regard themselves as “no longer Korean.”⁴⁰ Yookyung states, “I

³⁸ “Han,” Personal Interview by author, Seoul, June 25, 2011.

³⁹ “Yookyung,” Personal Interview by author, Seoul, June 17, 2011.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

thought I was Korean before that, but I was wrong.”⁴¹ She continues, “even though I’ve never been to America. I still think of myself as American because I am different from other Koreans,” highlighting an understanding of herself as a racial “other” within the pureblooded Korean imaginary.⁴² Han recalls:

I remember going home to my mother that afternoon and asking her why she gave birth to a *Han-Mi* (“Korean-American”) person. I just wanted to be Korean like everyone else.⁴³

Unlike the U.S., the South Korean government does not request racial identification in official documents, census, surveys, or forms. Instead, one is either “Korean” or “foreign.” Amerasians do not fall neatly into either category. They are not “foreign” as some have Korean citizenship and have never been outside of South Korea (this is the case for Han and Yookyung), but at the same time they are not viewed as Korean. An emphasis on pureblood means that most Korean nationals would view ethnic Koreans living abroad (with no lived experiences in Korea) Korean before a mixed race Amerasians who has lived in Korea his/her entire life.

Both Han and Yookyung’s experiences were unique amongst my interviews but not amongst the broader population of Amerasians in South Korea. What I mean by this is that, they were both raised by single Korean mothers and had grown up confronting mainstream Korean society on a daily basis. Unlike many of my other interviewees, they matriculated through the Korean public school system because of the absence of their fathers, which meant they were denied American citizenship rights in addition to schooling on a multicultural military base. Finding Amerasians to interview with

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Han,” Personal Interview by author, Seoul, June 25, 2011.

experiences like Han and Yookyung was difficult because neither of them were a part of these larger communities of Amerasians. The Amerasians that were members of military base communities knew each other, and referred one another to me.

Han and Yookyung's experiences were distinct in the sense that although they grew up in close proximity to camptowns and military bases, the absence of their American fathers rendered them no choice but to attempt to integrate within Korean society. Han's father had returned to America when Han was one year old. Since his departure, he has not been in contact with Han. Additionally, Han's father had never married his mother or admitted legally that Han was his son. Yookyung was also unable to acquire U.S. citizenship because of similar circumstances. The absence of their fathers meant that neither Han nor Yookyung would inherit the white privilege that most Americans in South Korea enjoy. Instead, they would confront issues of discrimination based on the fact that they were not members of the racial majority in South Korea. I will expand upon why some Amerasians inherit white privilege, while those like Han and Yookyung do not, in the subsequent Chapter.

For Han and Yookyung, confronting mainstream homogenous Korean society when one is viewed as such a highly racialized other was extremely difficult. Han admits that he was unable to complete his schooling, disclosing that his formal education ended at the fourth grade and that the prime factor in his decision to dropout of school at that age was the racialized bullying he experienced on a daily basis. "The teachers were no help either," he states suggesting that they too were prejudice against him for his mixed race background.⁴⁴ Han's life opportunities have been dictated since by his premature

⁴⁴ Ibid.

commencement with formal education, but it was a decision that he believed he had no choice:

My mother was very concerned for my health. Everyday I would come home with bruises from being beat up by students. I was just a child, but I wasn't happy. Everyday they called me "American pig." They would tell me to go back to America. But I had never been to America...So my mom took me out of school because she thought that I was too stressed as a child...and since then I have taught myself.⁴⁵

Han and Yookyung did not have the luxury to attend international and military schools or the ability to retreat into protective communities more familiar with diversity like other Amerasians who benefitted from the presence of their American fathers. In the 1980s, Korea had yet to adopt any sort of multicultural policy, and the concept of *danil minjok* was widely embraced. It was these interactions with the Korean public school system that informed Han and Yookyung of their "othered" status. Today, while *danil minjok* has officially been removed from schoolbooks, it still remains prevalent within the Korean imaginary and regarded as an important part of Korea's unique ethnic and cultural heritage. Although mixed race Amerasians today may not have the same encounters with *danil minjok* in such formalized educational settings, the emphasis on Korea's pureblooded heritage is still present.

Even in a multicultural era, *Dangun's* birthday, called *Gaechonjeol* ("National Foundation Day"), still remains commemorated every third day in October as a celebration of the birth of the Korean race and people. This holiday constructs *Dangun* as the first Korean and the man whom all Koreans descend, therefore reinforcing the legitimacy and prevalence of pureblooded constructions of identity within the Korean national imaginary. Despite the state's attempt to depart from the ideology of *danil*

⁴⁵ Ibid.

minjok in contemporary multicultural policy formations, the *Gaecheonjeol* holiday will continue to be celebrated. Many Koreans believe that to abolish the holiday in light of multicultural efforts would be to attack Korea's cultural heritage.⁴⁶ This illustrates how Korean national and ethnic identity still remains very much intertwined with this imagined racial homogeneity. The myth of the pureblooded Korean people remains accepted uncritically as historical fact, maintained, and institutionalized through the commemoration of holidays like *Gaecheonjeol*.

The construct of a pureblooded nation is central to the ways in which Koreans view themselves which has clashed with multicultural initiatives. In 2005, the Grand National Party suggested a revision of the current nationality law to grant citizenship for all those who are born in South Korea. Currently, Korean citizenship is bestowed by *jus sanguinis* meaning that one must be born to an ethnic Korean in order to inherit citizenship. The 2005 proposition would have allowed citizenship to those individuals born on Korean soil regardless of the race or nationality of their parents. However, the idea was discarded quickly due to public disapproval, as the concept of allowing "foreigners" citizenship appalled many.⁴⁷ Six years later (with subsequent multicultural initiatives) a survey conducted in December of 2011 by Korea's Ministry of Gender Equality and Family found that 63.8 percent of Koreans were opposed to cultural diversity and multicultural policies.⁴⁸ This indicates that many Koreans still view the presence of foreigners in Korea negatively (mixed race persons are also regarded as

⁴⁶ "Jaeyoung," Personal Interview by author, Seoul, June 11, 2011.

⁴⁷ Chung-a Park, "Myth of Pure-Blood Nationalism Blocks Multi-Ethnic Society," *The Korea Times*, August 14, 2006, accessed May 2, 2012, http://www.dhseol.org/activity/ein2006_06.html.

⁴⁸ "The 2 Faces of Multiculturalism" *The Choson Ilbo*, April 19, 2012, accessed May 2, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/04/19/2012041900821.html.

“foreign”), indicating that not much has changed since multicultural policies conception. Despite its salience within Korean society, this pureblooded conceptualization of race should be understood as a social construction that emerged in response to twentieth century rewritings of Korean history and modern formations of national identity, rather than something that has a historical precedent that extends far into Korea’s ancient past.⁴⁹

Political scientist Benedict Anderson points out, that nationalism and national consciousness are modern and imagined concepts—oftentimes absent from earlier ancient histories.⁵⁰ Anthropologist Kyung-Koo Han states that Korean nationalism was based on a profound sense of cultural distinctiveness and superiority:

Such expressions as ‘We Koreans, the descendants of Dangun,’ which is now touted as the proof of the consanguinity of the Korean people, was first introduced not to emphasize the blood relationship of Koreans, but to emphasize the history of Korean political and cultural life as being old as that of China.⁵¹

In the case of Korea, this seemingly “timeless” *danil minjok* was no different—it was the Korean nation’s twentieth century response to rising concepts of nationhood and nationalism.⁵² Chaehoe Shin, a widely recognized Korean historian, first invoked the term *minjok* in 1908.⁵³ Shin published “A New Reading of History” in that year citing *Dangun* as the founder of the Korean nation. Using the *Dangun* legend varied from previous conceptualizations of the nation’s origins, as another foundational myth existed at the time: the story of Kija who was ethnically Chinese. Kija had fled the Zhou dynasty, and

⁴⁹ Henry Em, “Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Ch'aeho's Historiography,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-Wook Shin et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), 336-61.

⁵⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991.

⁵¹ Kyung-Koo Han, “The Archaeology of the Ethnically Homogenous Nation-State and Multiculturalism in Korea,” 12.

⁵² Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Chang, “The Politics of Nationalism in U.S.-Korean Relations,” 124.

⁵³ Andre Schmid, *Korea between Empires, 1895-1919*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 175.

established the first Korean kingdom, Old Choson.⁵⁴ Shin chose to ignore the Kija myth because it represented the Korean race as a derivative of the Chinese.⁵⁵ Instead, he was influenced by Social Darwinism in Europe and America.⁵⁶ Favoring *Dangun* would allow Shin to engage with prominent international and regional scholars of the time by suggesting Koreans vigilance in keeping foreign aggressors from contaminating their bloodline. The concept of *danil minjok*, in this way arose and ensured for Korea's integration into the modern world system.⁵⁷

Historically, this idea of purebloodness is particularly heightened when Koreans attempt to construct a sense of difference between themselves and others. For example, the need to assert this Social Darwinistic take on the Korean race became even more relevant during the Japanese Occupation (1910-1945), especially as the Japanese government enacted assimilation policies on its colonized subjects.⁵⁸ The Japanese claimed that the Korean race shared common origins with Japan; however, Koreans would always be lesser and therefore subordinate.⁵⁹ Politically, Koreans were excluded and demoted to second-class citizens within their own country.⁶⁰ By claiming and asserting their unique racial origins, Koreans were able to resist this attempted cultural genocide. Scholar Cynthia Enloe writes, "colonialism is an especially fertile ground for nationalist ideas because it gives an otherwise divided people such a potent shared experience of foreign domination."⁶¹ Koreans stressed during this time that they are

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Chang, "The Politics of Nationalism in U.S.-Korean Relations," 121.

⁵⁷ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 6.

⁵⁸ Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Chang, "The Politics of Nationalism in U.S.-Korean Relations," 122.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Cynthia H. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches & Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 45.

“without a doubt a unitary nation (*tanil han minjok*) in blood and culture.”⁶² The concept of *danil minjok* is therefore embedded within anti-imperialistic rhetoric. As Shin notes, “Korean national identity based on ethnic homogeneity should be understood as a product of particular historical processes.”⁶³ Challenging this imagined homogeneity triggers emotions and memories of Korea’s past as subjects of colonization.

Danil minjok persists as ethnonationalist rhetoric since South Korea’s founding following the Korean War.⁶⁴ Beginning with Syngman Rhee (1948-1960) and continuing under his successor Park Chung Hee (1969-1979), pureblooded ideologies solidified themselves within national discourse in post-war nation-state building as U.S. neo-colonial rule echoed notions of Japanese colonialism.⁶⁵ The Southern regime was renamed *daehan minguk* (“The Nation of the Great Han Race”), where the Han race referred to *Dangun*’s bloodline, and Rhee’s *ilmin chuui* (“one race, one nation”) became state policy, further intertwining the concepts of race and nation.⁶⁶ *Ilmin Chuui* would be aggressively implemented as Rhee utilized this ideology to argue against the North Korean government and underscore the legitimacy and sovereignty of his rule in the South.⁶⁷ With *ilmin chuui* Rhee conveyed his aggressive anti-communist stance and confirmed his agenda to reunify the Korean peninsula. Rhee described communism as “a disease that broke the unity of the homogenous Korean national community.”⁶⁸ However, it was the U.S. military rule in Korea that severed the nation in two and additionally

⁶² Kwangsu Yi, “Theory of Korean Nation”, in *Collection of Yi Kwangsu’s Writings*, Vol. 17 (Seoul: Samjungdang, 1933/1962), 326-32.

⁶³ Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 3.

⁶⁴ Gi-Wook Shin and Paul Chang, “The Politics of Nationalism in U.S.-Korean Relations,” 125.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 99-102.

⁶⁸ Social Welfare Society, Inc, *The 5 Decades of SWS: A Love Nest (Since 1954-2003)*, (Seoul: Social Welfare Society, 2004), 38-9.

created a new problem for the homogeneity of the *minjok* in this post-war era: mixed race Amerasians.

U.S. military encampments in Korea starting in 1945 would facilitate the contact between Americans and Koreans that would result in the production of mixed race persons. Soon camptowns, or the entertainment and recreation neighborhoods surrounding U.S. military bases would be erected to buffer ordinary Korean society from the U.S. military. To a young and severed nation struggling to find its own national identity amidst imperial forces, the presence of Amerasians were viewed to break the homogeneity of the Korean national community. Therefore, mixed race persons, not unlike communism, would also be regarded as diseases. They were determined to be detrimental to Rhee's regime and political goal of reunification that emphasized purebloodedism. However, the South Korean government, in post-war devastation could not afford to lose the protection of the U.S. military. Instead, intercountry adoption policies, fully functioning by 1954, would form to purge the nation of these impurities and pureblooded ethnonationalist rhetoric would persist.

The G.I. Baby and Camptowns

The presence of mixed race G.I. babies disrupted existing conceptions of national, racial, and ethnic identity in the Korean national imaginary. However, despite the relative infancy of these pureblooded ideologies, the Korean government made its stance on mixed race GI babies known; these children were not to be considered Korean, and Korea's presumed racial homogeneity would not be questioned by their continued

presence.⁶⁹ Rhee's government had no intention of reimagining a national identity that they viewed as vital to legitimizing their regime over North Korea and the political goal of reunification.⁷⁰ The urgency with which the Rhee regime viewed the problem of mixed race G.I. babies is best illustrated in a report of Rhee exclaiming that he wanted the Korean-white children removed "even if we have to drop them in the Pacific Ocean."⁷¹

Ironically, the visible presence of G.I. babies along the demilitarized zone was largely an effect of the Korean government establishing *kijichon* ("camptowns"): the prostitution industries surrounding U.S. military encampments to "service" American soldiers. These camptowns were responsible for the stigmatization that mixed race Amerasians were the children of Korean women whom, in post-war devastation, turned to prostitution as a means of survival. Sociologist Seungsook Moon has researched the origins of Korean camptowns, which were first called *tusu wianso* ("comfort station"), tracing the earliest documented installation of a comfort station to the city of Masan. On August 11, 1950 an article published in the Pusan Daily reported:

The municipal authorities have already issued the approval for establishing UN comfort stations in return for the Allied Forces' toil. In a few days, five stations will be set up in the downtown areas of new and old Masan. The authorities are asking citizens to give much cooperation in coming days.⁷²

⁶⁹Rosemary C. Sarri, Penoak Baik and Marti Bombyk, "Goal Displacement and Dependency in South Korean-United States Intercountry Adoption," *Children and Youth Services Review* 20, nos. 1-2 (1998): 91.

⁷⁰ Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 99-102.

⁷¹ Pearl Buck quoted in Clare Golden to Orville Crays cited in Arissa Oh, "Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption," 103.

⁷² Maria Houhn and Seungsook Moon, *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 51.

While the passage above refers to “UN comfort stations” as catering to the Allied Forces, some clarification is needed: excepting the Republic of Korea, the American military commitment during the Korean War was ten times that of all other coalition members combined.⁷³ In other words, these comfort stations were largely established for U.S. military personnel. Moon explains that civilian and military leaders of the new Korea borrowed the idea of the “comfort station” from Japan’s use of military “comfort women.”⁷⁴ It was said that these “comfort stations” would protect respectable Korean women from foreign soldiers in addition to thanking the servicemen for their sacrifices defending the Korean nation⁷⁵. As an exchange, Korea would be protected from foreign aggressors. Although only fragmentary pieces of information on the origins of these comfort stations exist, Moon suggests that these prostitution districts, established in conjunction with the first U.S. military encampments, were erected as early as 1945.⁷⁶ Upon the signing of the Mutual Defense Treaty in 1953, Moon explains that the growth of camptowns accelerated around semi-permanent U.S. military bases.⁷⁷

In the years following the American military’s marked presence in South Korea, the Korean government would be pressured by the U.S. to clean up these prostitution districts.⁷⁸ With the looming fear of losing protection from the U.S. military with the application of the Nixon Doctrine (which would remove troops and lessen U.S. military commitment in the East Asian region), the Korean government would fully fund a

⁷³ Michael Cullen Green, *Black Yanks in the Pacific: Race in the Making of American Military Empire after World War II*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 111.

⁷⁴ Seungsook Moon, *Over There*, 51.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Seungsook Moon, *Over There*, 41.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁷⁸ Katherine H.S. Moon, "Prostitute Bodies and Gendered States," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine Kim, et al. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 141-74.

“Camptown Purification Act” in 1971 to improve the quality of American G.I. life in Korea.⁷⁹ The “Camptown Purification Act” was a state-sponsored movement to formally organize camptown prostitution for U.S. servicemen.⁸⁰ From the perspective of the Korean government, Korean prostitutes were believed to be instrumental to improving the daily life of U.S. soldiers stationed in Korea.⁸¹ Conversely, the U.S. government believed that these women aggravated race relations overseas by refusing services to African-American soldiers.⁸² Political scientist Katherine Moon tells us that although there is no doubt that many Korean prostitutes demonstrated prejudiced behavior toward African-American soldiers as such a behavior was a survival tactic:

The women’s social stratification and self-identities within the camptowns were significantly influenced by the larger racial stratification among Americans. Women who fraternized with or sold sexual services to black men were themselves labeled “black.”⁸³

Being labeled “black” meant that these women would be outcaste from “white” districts, as camptowns remained segregated de facto well into the 1970s.⁸⁴ The U.S. military viewed this and other camptown issues, such as the spread of venereal diseases among GIs, Korea’s responsibility to solve.⁸⁵ Women became required to register at a clinic for an inspection card (which would serve as a license to legally prostitute) and submit to regular venereal disease testing. Testing positive for a venereal disease meant that a women’s license to work in bars and brothels would be revoked. If a woman were caught

⁷⁹ Ibid., 151.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 143-147.

⁸¹ Ibid., 151.

⁸² Ibid., 144.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Nadia Kim, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA*, (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press 2008), 93-95.

⁸⁵ Katherine H.S. Moon, “Prostitute Bodies and Gendered States,” 147-55.

working without a license, she would be jailed.⁸⁶ This was a part of a process to maintain and improve these prostitution districts. Without doing this, the Korean government believed they were risking the security of their nation.⁸⁷ These prostitutes were lauded as “patriots;” their bodies were exploited as instruments of South Korean national security.⁸⁸ The “Camptown Purification Act” consolidated military camptown prostitution and solved these issues of “national security” while creating a new national crisis: the problem of G.I. babies. Considering that the Korean government established, funded, and encouraged the continued operation of these camptowns, it is ironic that intercountry adoption policies formed to exile mixed race Koreans, rather than abolish the formalized prostitution districts that provided the space for these encounters.

G.I. babies, in these ways became metaphors of Korea’s ambivalence towards American military aid; the uncertainty surrounding U.S. military presence in Korea was that protection from the U.S. came with a price: it marked a neo-colonial era. Like U.S. encampments, Amerasians were regarded as an undesirable and embarrassing side effect of geopolitical stability. However, unlike the U.S. military, G.I. babies could be taken out of Korea without risking national security or U.S.-Korean relations. Camptowns are still largely present in Korean society today and stigmatizations surrounding these areas follow Amerasians in their everyday lives.

In July, when I mentioned that I was going to go interview one of my subjects in the city of Songtan, home of Osan Air Force Base, a Korean friend sincerely warned me: “be careful, that city is dangerous. I heard all of the women who live in that city and have

⁸⁶ Seungsook Moon, *Over There*, 63-64.

⁸⁷ Katherine H.S. Moon, “Prostitute Bodies and Gendered States,” 147-55.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

mixed blooded children are prostitutes.”⁸⁹ This warning, which was spoken to me almost reflexively, was indicative as to how persistent within the Korean imaginary this perception of mixed race Amerasians and their Korean mothers still is. During that awkward conversation, I myself failed to inform my friend that Songtan was my own Korean hometown. Because I was a mixed race Amerasian from Songtan, she had just (unknowingly) confidently proclaimed that my own family was linked to militarized prostitution.

In historian Ji-Yeon Yuh’s groundbreaking study on Korean military brides, she investigates the life narratives of Korean women who marry American men.⁹⁰ She discusses how Korean women who intermarry, can never live *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*; the assumption that one who intermarries is a prostitute regardless of whether or not her husband is even affiliated with the U.S. military. Yuh informs us that even women whom are just living in the city of Dongducheon, home to five major U.S. military installations, have difficulties marrying based on the stigmatization of the nearby camptown.

Since 1945 the U.S. military has employed Korean nationals on military bases.⁹¹ On a tour of Yongsan Army Base in Seoul, home of the headquarters for the U.S. Military presence in Korea (known as United States Forces Korea), I found that the majority of the workers employed on the military bases were Korean. Korean men and women were employed in restaurants as cooks, dishwashers, and waitresses. They also worked in cafes, salons, grocery stores, schools, offices, and served as interpreters and

⁸⁹ “Jiyong,” Personal Interview by author, Seoul, June 24, 2011.

⁹⁰ Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America*, (New York: New York University Press 2002).

⁹¹ Susie Woo, “A New American Comes Home: Race, Nation, and the Immigration of Korean War Adoptees, GI Babies, and Brides,” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2010), 74.

linguists. The interactions between Korean women and American men in these settings has also contributed to the hundreds of thousands of marriages that lead to the production of mixed race Amerasians.⁹² However, all of the women in these marriages are assumed to have been camptown prostitutes, even though for many, this is not the case.

Amerasians also inherit the same stigmas surrounding their mothers: they are assumed to have been born in camptowns out of liaisons symbolizing Korea's subjugation under the U.S. military empire. However, Koreans do not recognize this when they harbor negative feelings towards mixed race persons and camptown women. Instead this relationship between the Korean woman and American G.I. is regarded as an indication of the low social and moral character of the camptown prostitute rather the neo-colonial status of the Korean nation. You can see this idea embedded in the warning I received about Songtan by my friend: I was warned to be careful during my trip because the city was dangerous. To her, the women who partook in prostitution made the city dangerous and she felt compelled to warn me about my safety. She even indicated to me that she once had a friend who lived in that city but her mother forbade her to go for precisely the same reasons: those women are viewed to be criminal-like.

In her study, Yuh argues that the camptown women "symbolize all the humiliations that Korea suffers at the hands of the United States," meaning the neo-colonial relationship between the U.S. and Korea is best symbolized through these women's bodies.⁹³ However, seeing these women as victims under the U.S. military empire means acknowledging that Korea is a feminine state. Yuh explains that because the identity of a sovereign nation is a masculine one, acknowledging these women as

⁹² Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America.*"

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 37.

victims subjugated under the U.S. military means “shattering a self-conception of Korea as a sovereign nation.”⁹⁴ In other words, it is much easier to understand these women as criminals and treat their mixed race children accordingly: as the sons and daughters of delinquents, not to be included, but rather excluded and outcaste. Ultimately, what this indicates is that there is a refusal on part of the Korean people to recognize the complete and complex history of the Korean nation. Korea’s subordination under an imperialist America is denied through their dismissal of military brides and Amerasians as major historical actors a part of the broader history of Korea.

Intercountry Adoption

Mixed race Koreans contradicted political pureblooded conceptualizations of the Korean nation, and simultaneously symbolized foreign domination. The G.I. baby was a metaphor of continued national degradation, representing American military presence and the gendered nature of the relationship between the United States and Korea. Amerasians underscored how American foreign policy framed Korea as a feminized colonial subject in need of a masculine protector. By the end of the Korean War, the exact number of mixed race children or “size of the problem” was unknown, although it was estimated by The Korean Ministry of Health and Social Affairs that by 1954, there were more than 400 mixed race children in Korea, the majority of these Amerasians concentrated along the demilitarized zone, where there was a large presence of U.S. military installments.⁹⁵ Contrarily, the International Social Service (ISS), an American NGO, noted that up to 5000 mixed race G.I. babies were in Korea at this time with the disclaimer that “no one

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Margaret Valk, “Adoption Program–Korea,” cited in Arissa Oh, “Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption,” 93.

has any accurate idea as to how many GI babies there are in Korea.”⁹⁶ Historian Arissa Oh suggests that “as the widely varying estimates of the GI baby population suggest, the perception that Korea might be overrun with ‘half-caste’ or ‘half-breed’ children loomed large.”⁹⁷

Intercountry adoption was thus established to rid the nation of these “non-Korean” persons.⁹⁸ In 1952, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs produced the first Korean (domestic) adoption law. By 1954, the Korean government decreed that “Aliens...can legally adopt Korean nationals.”⁹⁹ The United States government also cooperated fully with the Rhee administration to operate Korean intercountry adoption, accepting its role as the main receiver of these G.I. babies.¹⁰⁰ In 1953, U.S. Congress passed the 1953 Refugee Relief Act, allowing the immigration of 4000 adopted Korean orphans. This was significant as the quota system of the 1924 Immigration and Naturalization Act had until that point limited Korean immigration to 100 persons per year. The U.S. Embassy stated that it attached “importance to the GI baby problem for political reasons, and is attempting to get as many of them as possible removed from Korea under the provisions of the Refugee Relief Act.”¹⁰¹ In 1954 Korea’s intercountry adoption program was fully functioning, as Korea’s Ministry of Health and Social Affairs established Child Placement Service (CPS).¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Carl Strom to Rober J.G. McClurkin cited in Arissa Oh, “Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption,” 93.

⁹⁷ Arissa Hyun Jung Oh, “Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption,” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2008), 94.

⁹⁸ Arissa Oh, “Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption,” 92.

⁹⁹ Republic of Korea to U.S. Embassy, cited in Arissa Oh, “Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption,” 108.

¹⁰⁰ Arissa Oh, “Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption,” 109.

¹⁰¹ Carl Strom to Charles C. Diggs, Jr., cited in Arissa Oh, “Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption,” 109.

¹⁰² Oh, “Into the Arms of America: The Korean Roots of International Adoption,” 110.

Korea's intercountry adoption policy was criticized as not having the G.I. baby's best interest at heart, however it proved to be a successful mechanism to purge the nation of these impurities.¹⁰³ Consequently, intercountry adoption furthered the nationalist imaginaries of both South Korea and United States. With these policies, South Koreans were able to maintain their purebloodedness and sense of autonomy, while the U.S. was able to maintain its image of a humanitarian power and its need to "protect" Asians in light of Cold War politics. ISS social worker Margaret Valk suspected cynicism on part of the Korean government who neglected exploring other possibilities to solve the problem of G.I. babies.¹⁰⁴ The goal was simply to expedite the process: to get as many of these mixed race persons out of Korea, and as fast as possible.¹⁰⁵ Although it was argued by a small minority that the G.I. baby should not be taken out of the land of the births or out of the arms of their mothers, the Rhee administration made it clear that they viewed the exile of mixed race persons from Korea, the only way that they would direct their efforts and resources.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, after social workers from ISS and CPS suggested intercountry adoption for war orphans of pureblooded Korean background, Rhee made it lucid that "children considered will be those of mixed blood," confirming that adoption was created and intended only for mixed race babies.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, CPS and ISS maintained policies until the 1960s preventing the adoption of full-blooded Koreans.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Helen Wilson to Augusta Mayerson, cited in Arissa Oh, "Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption," 135.

¹⁰⁴ Valk, Margaret, "Adopto Program-Korea," cited in Arissa Oh, "Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption," 112.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Oh, "Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption," 131; Ibid., 92.

¹⁰⁷ Memo for record, [30 Aug 1954], cited in Arissa Oh, "Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption," 112.

¹⁰⁸ Oh, "Into the Arms of America: the Korean Roots of International Adoption," 113.

The Korean government would justify their actions by emphasizing how G.I. babies were not Korean, because they had American fathers. Therefore, removing this “threatening presence” from Korea, would not weaken the nation, but instead would remove an impurity, further strengthening Korea’s imagined homogeneity. As the Korean Ministry of Health would maintain statistics on Korean orphans sent abroad via intercountry adoption, Amerasians would be categorized as “disabled,” codifying the belief that being born of mixed race was akin to a genetic defect.¹⁰⁹ An intercountry adoption system would provide the “racial cleansing mechanism and outlet” Koreans believed they needed.¹¹⁰ In the years 1955-57, 1,216 G.I. babies would be exiled abroad.¹¹¹ For those Amerasians left behind in South Korea, patriarchal constructions of citizenship and family would prevent them from becoming fully functioning members of Korean society until 1998.

Gendered Citizenship and Korean Family Law

The “G.I. baby problem” could have easily been solved had Korea altered their Nationality and Family Laws to allow for the mothers of Amerasians to establish kinship ties and pass on citizenship rights to their children. This would have made possible for the official integration and acceptance of mixed race individuals within Korean society. However, by keeping the Amerasian illegitimate, Koreans were able to argue for their forced removal via intercountry adoption. The legacies of Korean Nationality and Family Laws contributed to solidifying racialized understandings of mixed race Amerasians as

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Rosemary C. Sarri, Penoak Baik and Marti Bombyk, “Goal Displacement and Dependency in South Korean-United States Intercountry Adoption,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 20, nos. 1-2 (1998): 91.

¹¹¹ Kim, Eleana., *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging*, (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 35.

“foreigners” and “others—” impeding those who remained in Korea from access to social legitimacy.

The Nationality Law of 1948 codified paternal *jus sanguinis*, reflecting the Neo-Confucian principle of patrilineality and patriarchal ancestor worship. This meant that Korean men’s children could obtain Korean citizenship regardless of their mother’s nationality or ethnic background, while “children born to Korean women and foreign men could not.”¹¹² With the increasing population of mixed race children in a U.S. occupied Korea, this created a confusing situation for Korean mothers and Korean society more generally. Reverend Sveinung Moen, who performed outreach work in Korea for the Amerasian community in the 1970s describes that:

suddenly, with no special prearrangements or formal bindings, children started to be born and a new situation came into existence...no one knew how to cope with the situation, neither the mother, nor the family, neither the father, nor the government.¹¹³

Revisions to Nationality Law occurred in 1962, 1963, and 1973; however patriarchal constructions of citizenship remained intact until 1997. The 1997 revision led to a new nationality law based on bilateral *jus sanguinis*, and this was applied to all persons born after January 1, 1998.

However, all mixed race Amerasians born before 1998 remained stateless nonpersons with no legal or social standing in Korea. If the American father of an Amerasian child did not claim him/her as his own, then the child would be ineligible for American citizenship as well. Anthropologist Su-Je Lee Gage observes that “in many ways, this lack of national identification and national security justified the adoption of

¹¹² Hyun Choe, “National Identity and Citizenship in China and Korea,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 19 (2006): 102.

¹¹³ Rev. Sv. J. Moen, *The Amerasians: a Study and Research on Interracial Children in Korea*, (Seoul: Taewon, 1974), 21.

Amerasians for all parties involved, even if the mother did not want to give up her child.”¹¹⁴ With no legal rights in Korea, many Korean women felt that their mixed race children would be better off in the United States. Without citizenship, their children would have no access to public education, healthcare, or employment opportunities.

Additionally, many mothers believed that at least abandoning their children would give them access to some form of national security. According to Nationality Law a child found abandoned in the territory of South Korea automatically gains citizenship. This detail that is included in Article 2.(1) of Nationality Law indicates that before 1998, an orphan had more legal rights than a child descended from a Korean mother. Many mothers felt the pressure to relinquish their children based out of love and concern. Some mothers were even forced and pressured as Gage reports that social workers from intercountry adoption agencies engaged in “baby hunting” to search for children who looked American.¹¹⁵ Mary Holt recalls that her mother, Bertha Holt (founder of Holt International), would go to “the front lines” (camptowns) herself to ask mothers if they were interested in relinquishing their mixed race children.¹¹⁶ These social workers believed that they were doing the right thing for these Amerasians, as the Rhee regime had made it clear that there was no place for these persons within Korea’s imagined homogeneity.

In conjunction with the Nationality Law, South Korea’s Family Law between the years 1948 to 1991, would contribute to the marginalization of Amerasians. The Family Law, which refers to Parts Four and Five of Korea’s Civil Code, regulates kinship and

¹¹⁴ Su-Je Lee Gage, “Pure Mixed-Blood: The Multiple Identities of Amerasians in South Korea,” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2007), 97.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

inheritance of property via *hoju* (“family register”).¹¹⁷ Until 1991, only a male could be the head of household. Being added onto a family register at birth by a male head of household is the source of identification, legal documents, and marks one's citizenship in Korea. Until its 1991 revision, the law denoted the husband as the head of household, and gave legal command of one's family register strictly to this male provider. The head of household is granted a series of rights over persons within his family register. These rights included but were not limited to: the right to accept or refuse an individual's entry into the family register, expel a member from the register, exercise primary custody over children in the case of divorce, and admit an illegitimate child he begot with another woman onto his family register without the consent of his wife.¹¹⁸ In some cases, the mother of an Amerasian could get around these policies by asking their fathers or brothers to register her mixed race child under their names; therefore, the child would gain citizenship through his/her grandfather or uncle.

James and his mother's situation is an example of how women were able to exercise resourceful methods in order to ensure state representation for their children.¹¹⁹ James is a twenty-two year old born in 1989 before the revisions to Korean Family or Nationality Law. He explains that his mother and biological father were never married, but his father had stayed with the family until James was one year old. James' mother, Soonja, did not register James for Korean citizenship when he was born. Instead, she assumed based on the concept of patrilineality that the child was American because of his father. James recalls: “My mother was waiting for my father to register me with the U.S.

¹¹⁷ Seungsook Moon, "Begetting the Nation," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine Kim, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1998), 52-3.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ “James,” Personal Interview by author, Seoul, July 22, 2011.

embassy. But he didn't want to."¹²⁰ James explains that his father did not want to claim him for fear that he would be financially responsible for James' upbringings. Registering James with the U.S. embassy would mean that James' father would be required to pay child support to Soonja—a monthly allotment to help her raise their son. James' story indicates how American fathers had the luxury of not claiming their children. Simultaneously the mothers of Amerasians, based on their inability to claim their children, were confronting issues that neither the South Korean government nor the U.S. was prepared to deal with. These mixed race children were left in an extremely unfavorable position if their American fathers decided not to legally acknowledge them. Unable to gain South Korean citizenship through their mothers, they would grow up to be illegitimate and stateless. Additionally, they would have no chance to immigrate to the United States either. James describes that his mother went to try to register him on her own but "it was impossible because of the law."¹²¹ He explains that his mother was finally able to convince her own father to list James on his family register. Legally James is Soonja's brother instead of her son. However, this was necessary to ensure that James would be a fully functioning member of Korean society. Although he experiences racial discrimination regularly, "at least I have an identification number....There are so many of us who don't have it and they can't do anything...no school...they can only work under the table....They have miserable lives."¹²²

The 1991 revision in Family Law granted Korean women the right to enter children onto their family registers without needing to petition the respective male head. However, the law still prohibited marriage between persons with the same (paternal)

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

family name. Considering that until 2005, it was illegal for persons to take their mother's surname over their father's, Seungsook Moon argues that "the marriage prohibition is an extreme manifestation of exogamy based on patrilineage."¹²³ Marriage to a person with the same surname as your mother was legal; the assumption behind this being that one's identity was determined by his/her father's blood and therefore marrying someone of the same paternal surname was incestuous, while the mother's surname was safe. Bearing in mind this idea that a father's blood was considered to determine one's identity, the inabilities of Korean mothers to pass down her own Korean blood meant that her Amerasian child would never be considered Korean by others even if the child was to acquire Korean citizenship. In 2005, the revision in Family Law finally allowed for a mother to pass on her surname to her child. In addition, the marriage ban between persons who shared the same paternal surnames was abandoned, as the father's surname was determined to be no more of an actual indicator of a person's blood or identity than that of Korean mothers.

In 2008, the entire head of household (*hoju*) system was abolished upon feminist lobbying and the government's acknowledgement that the traditional law remained inconsistent with the gender equality ensured by the Korean Constitution. Over the past fifteen years the revisions in Korean Nationality and Family Laws have allowed for mixed race Amerasians some form of official state recognition and integration into Korean society. However, there are many Amerasians who were born before these revisions. While the laws have changed, their status as "foreigners," stateless, and illegitimate have not. The law cannot be applied retroactively if an Amerasian has already

¹²³ Moon, "Begetting the Nation," 53.

turned the legal age of 19. Amerasians like Sarah, a twenty-year old woman, cite their lack of legitimate Korean blood when asked why it is people do not perceive them as Korean.¹²⁴ “My father is American, and so to Koreans I am American...I guess I am American,” she states.¹²⁵ What Sarah’s insight reveals is that way in which this concept of paternal Korean blood as an indicator of Koreanness continues to be emphasized in contemporary setting. In other words, despite these changes in law, dominant understandings of paternalism and Korean blood still continue to operate in the national imaginary as if the laws had remained the same.

Informally, I met a mixed race Korean of Italian background; his father was Korean and his mother was Italian. Although I did not formally interview him because he was not American, I decided to ask him how he identified in terms of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Because he had always had Korean citizenship he had always thought of himself as racially, ethnically (despite his lived experiences in Italy), and nationally Korean. Additionally, although his phenotypes marked him as an “other” in Korea, he informed me that once he told people that he had a Korean father, they did not further contest his Korean identity. In other words, having a Korean father secured immediate respect and acceptance of him as “authentically” and “correctly” Korean. I found the confidence and ease at which this individual claimed his Korean identity starkly contrasting my formal interviewees, all of whom had lived in Korea longer, but had Korean mothers rather Korean fathers. When they told people they were Korean, and confirmed their citizenship status, they were still scrutinized, presumably because it was their mothers who were Korean; this was not viewed as strong evidence of “Koreanness.”

¹²⁴ “Sarah,” Personal Interview by author, Seoul, July 03, 2011.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Because of this, they could not confidently proclaim that they were Korean to me. Instead they would respond as Sarah did: “I guess I am American,” choosing to identify with their American side by default.¹²⁶

Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced the historical production of mixed race subjectivity in South Korea through an analysis of purebloodedism (*danil minjok*), U.S. militarism and the subsequent production of camptown neighborhoods, intercountry adoption policies, and androcentric Family and Nationality Laws. Immediately following the Korean War, the Korean government made it clear that mixed race individuals were not Korean because they did not have Korean fathers. The total rejection and construction of Amerasians as American allowed for Koreans to frame themselves still as a pureblooded nation—one that has been vigilant in protecting their race from foreign invaders. This therefore allowed them to ignore the implications of U.S. military presence and what it meant to South Koreans in terms of being a sovereign and independent nation. Through an analysis of intercountry adoption policies, we see the ways in which the Korean government sought to erase and eradicate the presence and history mixed race Koreans. This is obvious in the sense that for many decades the South Korean government maintained adoption policies, Nationality, and Family Laws instead of developing institutionalized ways for mixed race persons be incorporated into Korean society. Despite the revision in Korean Family and Nationality Laws, androcentricism still operates within Korean society. On a more official level, recent multicultural policy formations, emphasizing patrilineality, privilege *Kosians* but continue to exclude

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Amerasians (without Korean fathers) from inclusion under these policies. This is partially due to this historical construction of mixed race Koreans as feminine as described in this chapter, where, in the context of a patriarchal nation, translates to inferior and lesser.

Additionally this can be attributed to the reluctance to accept this effeminized population as apart of Korea's broader history, for doing so would indicate to Koreans that they are a neo-colony of the U.S. empire. Consequently, Amerasians living today continue to be affected by these former ideologies and laws in addition to the new policy formations of multiculturalism as will be further explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 2

Introduction

Almost immediately following the 2006 Super Bowl, South Korea awkwardly, abruptly, and publicly embraced Pittsburgh Steelers' Hines Ward as an honorary Korean. Ward, a mixed race Amerasian born to a Korean mother and African American U.S. serviceman in 1976, was virtually unknown to most South Koreans before his football accomplishments. The extravagant attention and public hype surrounding Hines Ward during this time have been characterized by some as "more than a bit ironic given the long and very intense discrimination by Koreans against 'mixed-blood' children and their mothers."¹²⁷ In a report that aired in the U.S. by the Entertainment Sports Programming Network (ESPN), Ward recalls, "when my mom walked out in Korea people would call her names, spit on her...that's how bad in Korea it is."¹²⁸ Because of the social stigmatization facing mixed race children and their mothers during this time Ward and his family chose to immigrate to the United States. In America, Ward testifies that he continued to experience racism for both his Korean and African American background stating:

Going to school Black kids teased me because I was Korean...it was hard to try to fit in with Black kids because they'd always made fun of my Korean side. Well, trying to hang out with the Korean kids, they'd always tease me because I was Black. Try to hang out with the White kids and they'd tease me because I was Black and Korean.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Timothy Lim, "Rethinking Belongingness in Korea: Transnational Migration, "Migrant Marriages" and the Politics of Multiculturalism," *Public Affairs*, 1st ser., 83 (March 2010): 51-71.

¹²⁸ "Hines Ward Biracial Behind the Lines Report," A television special that aired on ESPN, June 11, 2009, Web, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zs8AqkYGF8w>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Although football was not popular in South Korea, Ward's story of redemption fascinated Koreans: he had overcome his struggles as *honhyeol* ("mixed blood") in both South Korea and the United States to receive the Super Bowl's most valuable player award. Ward's victory marked unprecedented success in a major arena of American popular culture and Koreans were eager to claim him as their own. Subsequently, Ward was invited to Seoul following his team's victory. During the final days of his visit, in a nationally televised ceremony, the mayor of Seoul granted Ward honorary citizenship. In tears, Ward apologized for ever having denounced his Korean heritage stating: "I used to be ashamed to say I was Korean, today I just want to thank you guys...I apologize to you for being ashamed to say I was Korean."¹³⁰ The presentation of honorary citizenship to Ward from the mayor of Seoul was significant in the sense that Ward had been denied this at birth because of his mixed race status. But, it also had a deliberate message: just as Ward was sorry for having denounced Korea, Koreans too were sorry for having denounced Ward and his mother. Scholar Mary Lee argues that the media coverage Ward received in 2006 is "an attempt to achieve some sort of expedited closure on the issue of long-standing discrimination against interracial people."¹³¹

The attention Ward received in South Korea in 2006 was followed shortly with the announcement of "The Grand Plan," the first state-sponsored multicultural policy in Korea. This gives the illusion that Ward's visit to Korea was responsible for sparking a nation-wide conversation about the treatment of mixed race persons and their mothers. In fact, this is how Hines Ward's visit is remembered and how it was reported in the media. However, conversations surrounding mixed race *Kosian* ("half Korean and half "Asian")

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Mary Lee, "Mixed Race Peoples in the Korean National Imaginary and Family," *Korean Studies* 32 (2009): 57.

persons and multiculturalism started as early as 2005. And given the steady increase in population of migrant brides (and laborers) from other Asian nations, conversations surrounding foreigners in South Korea had begun as early as the 1990s. In 2005, the government began looking towards the assimilation of *Kosians* as a means to address issues surrounding the aging population and low birth rate. However, any mention of Amerasians was absent within these conversations.

Hines Ward's visit to Korea was timely, staged, and therefore used as government self-promotion. By honoring Hines Ward and embracing him as Korean, South Korea was now self-proclaiming that it was global and progressive. By focusing on Ward's multiraciality, Koreans were able to use him as a symbol for all multiracial persons, thereby grouping Amerasians and *Kosians* into one category. This allows for South Koreans to proclaim that they have created a society accepting of all mixed race individuals despite the fact that the real beneficiaries of multiculturalism are *Kosian* individuals specifically. Marketing Ward as the face of a multicultural society distracts South Koreans from the initial reasons for these policy formations or the fact that they are merely assimilation policies. Now, the continued disenfranchisement of Amerasian individuals is disguised under a fashionable multicultural aesthetic rather than through the public methods of state-racism used in the past. I focus on Ward in the introduction of this Chapter because his embrace by South Koreans serves as a larger metaphor for mixed race Amerasians in South Korea. While people continue to believe that the status of these individuals is improving or changing under multicultural ideologies, this is not the case. In fact, multicultural policy in South Korea has ramifications in the popular culture and the lived realities of Amerasian people.

This chapter of my thesis discusses contemporary mixed race identity and relies heavily on analysis of popular culture, oral histories, and my own experiences during fieldwork to frame my argument. I start with a critique of current multicultural policies. I argue that multiculturalism in Korea is actually an assimilation policy directed towards the “Koreanization” of mixed race *Kosian* persons. Despite the government’s efforts to create the illusion of a multicultural society through staged and awkward public celebrations of mixed race persons such as Hines Ward, Korean society still largely remains an isolating and oppressive society for mixed race Amerasians. I continue by discussing the consequences that these laws have on the popular culture and lived experiences of mixed race Amerasians. I do so by examining Whiteness and Blackness through the lens of white privilege in Korea. I ask: to what extent does it operate in South Korea and what is the significance of its salience within Korean society? Why is it that some Amerasians experience white privilege while others do not? What my analysis of these topics reveals is that mixed race Amerasian status has not changed much since the Korean War, and that their “foreignness” continues to be perpetuated through popular culture, the media, and by the state.

A “Multicultural” Era

Prior to the attention Hines Ward received by the South Korean media in 2006, government documents and officials had been referring to migrant brides from other Asian countries and their *Kosian* children as “an object that can be used to resolve Korea’s low birth and aging society crisis.”¹³² The emergence of Korea’s first multicultural policy or “The Grand Plan” was a product of discussions surrounding

¹³² Hyun Mee Kim, “The State and Migrant Women,” *Korea Journal*, Winter 2007, 107.

foreign migrants in South Korea since the 1990s. Although Hines Ward was Amerasian and these policies did not apply to him, it seems as if the government wanted to project this image. The national attention Ward received undoubtedly created public support for the integration of migrant brides and their *Kosian* children (via multicultural policy). However, it was done by focusing Koreans' attention on Amerasians. Although multicultural policies seem to have improved the lived experiences of *Kosians* and their migrant mothers, this section of Chapter 2 focuses on the negative implications these policy formations have had for mixed race Amerasians. I begin by giving a brief overview of the history of foreign migrant laborers and brides in South Korea and the formation of multicultural policies. I continue by examining legal definitions of citizenship in this multicultural era. I pay attention particularly to laws that define the relationship between family, welfare, and citizenship rights as well as eligibility for the military. While South Korean society self-proclaims itself to be a multicultural terrain, Amerasians still remain ignored and excluded from South Korean society, while their *Kosian* counterparts are assimilated and integrated.

In the 1990s, foreign migrants began traveling to South Korea in large numbers: men came as migrant workers en masse as “industry trainees” and women came as apart of the “Getting Rural Bachelors Married” project.¹³³ At this time, the Korean government was interested in cheap foreign labor and additionally addressing issues of a declining birth rate and a gender imbalance in the rural areas of South Korean society.¹³⁴ The “Getting Rural Bachelors Married” project facilitated the development of commercial international marriage brokerage systems and migrant brides’ immigrations were

¹³³ Yongok Kim, “New ‘Citizens’ and Multiculturalism in Korea,” *Women in Action* 3 (2007): 41; Kim, Hyun Mee. “The State and Migrant Women,” 101.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

subsequently facilitated through mail-order-bride systems. Feminist Youngok Kim explains:

The neoliberal notion of agency, which implies self-improvement and self governance, and the changes in the labor market, including the growing competitiveness of the knowledge-based society, make people regard marriage and childrearing as a “project.”¹³⁵

Kim’s analysis of how marriage and childrearing are viewed as “projects” explains why the Korean government began looking towards migrant brides resources to solve issues of declining birthrate starting in the 1990s. Sociologist Hyun Mee Kim observes that as international marriages increased in the 1990s, the central government was initially not too concerned about their integration within Korean society, and policies for migrant women had not formed. Because there were regional and class dimensions to these international marriages and no support law existed at the time, the difficulty of these migrant women’s integration within Korean society was intensified.¹³⁶ Multiculturalism in South Korea attempts to improve the experiences of foreign brides in South Korea.

Since the 1990s, marriages between Korean citizens and migrants have dramatically increased and the Korean government has begun to pay attention to the difficulties these families face. In 2005, the Korean National Statistical Office announced that there were 240,755 international marriages between the years 1990 and 2005.¹³⁷ Among these 159,942 marriages were between Korean men and foreign women.¹³⁸ It is also predicted that by the year 2020 the number of households with such interracial marriages will comprise twenty percent of the total number of households in South

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Kim, "The State and Migrant Women," 107.

¹³⁷ Kim, "New 'Citizens' and Multiculturalism in Korea," 45.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

Korea.¹³⁹ These statistics further tell us that although international marriages were initially facilitated between migrant brides and men in rural geographies, in the twenty-first century these marriages and families have extended their presence into larger metropolitan areas, mainly Seoul. Additionally these statistics indicate that although the government supported the marriage of migrant brides through marriage brokers, a large portion of foreign marriages are also between Korean women and foreign migrant men. Starting in 2005, the government began to respond to this increasing demographic. They introduced the “healthy family law,” which again focused its attention to the persistent problems of a low birth rate and an aging society by looking towards these migrant brides and their children as an easily mobilized resource to solve such social problems.¹⁴⁰ The focus was to Koreanize them, and as my analysis of this topic will reveal, the South Korean government’s anxieties to assimilate such a large portion of their population was the driving force behind these multicultural policies.

The reason for the marriage and childrearing project is due to the fact that Korea is currently the second oldest nation in the world following Japan; the current birthrate of South Korea is 8.55 births/1,000 population with 15.7 percent of the population under the age of 14 and 11.4 percent of the population older than 65.¹⁴¹ Mary Lee explains:

The problems of low birth rate relate to many aspects of life in the age of late capital and neoliberal principles. With the increased privatization of social services and the inflated cost of real estate and education, many families are simply not having children or choosing to have only one.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Kim, “The State and Migrant Women,” 101.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁴¹ “The World Factbook,” Central Intelligence Agency, accessed May 13, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>.

¹⁴² Lee, “Mixed Race Peoples in the Korean National Imaginary and Family,” 57.

Simultaneous with the introduction of the “healthy family law,” state discourse began referring to the *Kosians* born to migrant mothers as potential national assets. As a result, in 2005 the Roh government announced the Act on Aging and Low Birth Rate, which aimed to “maintain the proper population composition and to improve its quality in view of maintaining the state’s growth.” Additionally, the act’s goals are to “implement appropriate population politics on the basis of reasoned prediction on population change.”¹⁴³ What this confirms is that the policy formation of multiculturalism was not a product of the discourse surrounding the treatment of mixed race individuals as sparked by Hines Ward’s visit to South Korea, but rather a response to a low birth rate and the issue of an aging Korean nation.

This past year *Kosians* comprised one-third of the babies born in Korea. *Kosian* is a term that has come to largely be understood by contemporary Korean society to mean “mixed race,” as Koreans understand other Asian nations to be of different races than them. *Kosians* are also understood to be children fathered by Koreans and mothered by foreigners. With access to Korean fathers, this new mixed race demographic is privileged by the same patriarchal/patrilineal logic that marginalized and disenfranchised Amerasians in the Nationality and Family Law. In other words, mixed race *Kosians* did not have to struggle to find ways to ensure their state representation as Amerasians did, as citizenship had always been readily available to them because of their Korean fathers.

With this increasing demographic of *Kosians* in mind, the “Plan for Promoting the Social Integration of Migrant Women, Biracial people, and Immigrants” became a subpart of multicultural policy in 2006. This policy was a multicultural family support

¹⁴³ Hui-Jung Kim, “Official Multiculturalism Revisited,” in Conference Proceedings: “The Realities and Issues of Multiculturalism in Korea,” Village Without Borders Arts and Sciences Debate Forum, Ansan, Feb. 28, 2007.

plan. The law defined the multicultural family as “formed by a Korean citizen and a legally residing marriage migrant or foreign worker through matrimony, kinship, or adoption.”¹⁴⁴ In the past “multicultural family” was used as an umbrella term to refer not only to *Kosian* families but also to marriages between foreigners who migrated to Korea and marriages between South Koreans and North Korean defectors. However, the law actually limited its support only to “legal marriage migrants” which was defined to exclusively mean migrant brides.¹⁴⁵ Therefore it became obvious that the only kind of “multicultural family” that would benefit from this support plan would be those marriages between foreign women and Korean men. The “legal marriage migrant” receives benefits, such as education in Korean history, Korean language, traditional Korean etiquette, and counseling services in child-rearing and marriage. Because these services are available only to migrant brides, the gendered nature of multicultural family law is clear.

These state-sponsored initiatives support the “assimilation” of foreign women within Korean society and therefore assure the government that these foreign women will reproduce proper “Korean” offspring. The policy further states that:

Providing a contact network for marriage migrants through the state and local governments, or similar measures to support their preservation of culture and language, is not desirable at all as it will hinder their integration into Korean society.¹⁴⁶

This statement disguises the policy’s disinterest to preserve the cultural identities of migrant women with concerns for their well being within Korean society. However, this can be read instead as the nation-state’s anxiety about the production of “non-Korean”

¹⁴⁴ Jong-bo Park and Yongman Cho, “Research Report on the Preparation of the Multicultural Family Support Law,” Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2006.

¹⁴⁵ Kim, “The State and Migrant Women,” 106.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

families should assimilation of the foreign bride fail to occur. I would like to highlight that foreign men, including migrant workers who marry Korean women, are not supported by these multicultural policies. In other words, the offspring of Korean women and foreign men cannot be properly “Koreanized” or assimilated—the mixed race children and their non-Korean fathers cannot benefit from these state-sponsored initiatives. This reveals that the Korean government continues to believe that Korean children with foreign fathers inherit their father’s political and cultural identity. The same patrilineal beliefs justified intercountry adoption policy formation and impeded Amerasians’ access to social legitimacy until 1998.

The Korean government’s policy focuses not on multiculturalism but rather on the maintenance and reproduction of the Korean family as defined through patrilineage.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, these policies illustrate how a migrant woman’s access to certain governmental resources is only allowed as mothers to children with Korean fathers. Their rights in Korea depend on how successfully they have fulfilled their purpose in housekeeping, childbearing, and child-rearing.¹⁴⁸ The Korean government in this way ensures that the migrant bride must bear children, which helps assure that she is helping the nation-state solve the issue of a declining birth rate. Still Korea’s multicultural policy has been celebrated and praised by the Korean media for creating a tolerant society and abolishing pureblooded conceptualizations of the Korean race. However the government’s concern appears to be for nation-state building, rather than for multicultural beliefs and values. Another example of this can be seen in South Korea’s military law.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 109.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

In accordance to multicultural policy, in 2005 a revision was made in Korean military law to allow mixed race persons to serve legally and openly as mixed race. Previously, the only persons of mixed race that were able to serve, were those who had been able to racially pass as pureblooded and had not disclosed to the government their status as mixed. Military service is mandatory for all Korean men of legal age. Exempting Amerasians puts them into the same category as “the less educated, the indigent, criminals, the disabled, the mentally retarded or ill, the physically unfit, the illegitimate, the women.”¹⁴⁹ Mary Lee argues that “to exclude mixed-race persons from military service on account of their hybridity reveals the symbiotic relationship between masculinity and national belonging and facilitates the inappropriate sexuality of mixed-race men.”¹⁵⁰ In this context, the 2005 revision in military law allowing for mixed race men to serve can be read as an attempt to legitimize or masculinize mixed race Koreans—a correction to the system that has historically encouraged feminized notions of identity and national belonging for Amerasians. However, it is essential to note that the change in law still excludes “males with prominent mixed-race background appearances” from military service.¹⁵¹ In other words, Amerasians with Korean citizenship were still prevented from serving in the military based upon their racial backgrounds and more noticeably different “skin-tones.”¹⁵² Thus, they remained a feminized identity, while their *Kosian* counterparts, who more feasibly passed as “pureblooded Korean” gained a masculinized identity and legitimate access to fully functioning national belonging.

¹⁴⁹ Insook Swon, “Militarism in My Heart: Militarization of Women’s Consciousness and Culture in South Korea,” (Ph.D Diss., Clark Univ., 2000).

¹⁵⁰ Lee, “Mixed Race Peoples in the Korean National Imaginary and Family,” 75.

¹⁵¹ Geun-young Kwon, “New Limits Placed on Military Exemptions,” *Joong Ang Ilbo* (Seoul, Korea), July 2, 2003.

¹⁵² Sung-ki Jung, “Military Prepares for Multicultural Army Barracks,” *The Korea Times* (Seoul, Korea), June 23, 2009.

Additionally, in January of 2010 the Ministry of Defense removed the term *minjok* from the military oath. “To protect the country and *minjok* (‘pureblooded race’) was changed to “protect the country and people.” A press release in conjunction with the change in the military oath made by the Ministry of Defense further emphasizes that the removal of the phrase “to protect the *minjok*” was specifically made to cater to the future generation of serving *Kosians*. Translated from Korean, the press release explains the logic behind the change in oath, stating that “in 2010, there were only 350 mixed race (*Kosian* and Ameriasian) men in the country of legal age to serve. Of these, only 100 (*Kosian*) were actually serving in the military.”¹⁵³ Furthermore, the public service announcement includes a chart with the projected number of *Kosians* of legal age to serve in the military in all of the years from 2011 to 2028. The chart projects that by 2028, there will be 40,000 *Kosian* men of age to serve in the military. Given the large demographic presence of *Kosians*, it seems that if the Korean government feared a dramatic hindrance to national security if they did not remove the term *minjok* within military oath. Perhaps, evoking emotions of the pureblooded race in military oath was viewed to be detrimental to the national identities of these mixed race *Kosian* men. Instead, the need to foster a sense of legitimate Korean identity within these *Kosians* was essential to secure the continued nation-building project of, literally, national defense. Amerasians, excluded from this law because of their noticeable mixed race appearance, are still categorized with the illegitimate, the disabled, and women although the military oath no longer contains racialized language. The marginalized status of Amerasians today is clear in the ways that they remain excluded from military service: still feminine, still

¹⁵³ "징병검사 받는 다문화가정 출신 남자," 국방부, News Release May 15, 2011; “뉴스 이주민: 다문화 장병에 대해 아시나요,” accessed May 13, 2012, <http://alive-law.com/12>.

disabled, still ineligible to partake in the national rite of passage, and therefore reinforcing an image of “perpetually foreign.”

Through state-sponsored initiatives to masculinize and therefore legitimize *Kosians* within Korean society, multicultural policy alarmingly reestablishes state-sponsored gendered oppression that the earlier decades of Korean feminists sought to abolish. Although these migrant brides from Asia are not quite “Korean,” the state has made it clear as to how they regard these mothers through their multicultural initiatives; they are primarily wombs of the nation and their status as potential child bearers allow them to obtain national security and state benefits only after having a Korean husband and child respectively. Because the foreign “blood” of these mothers is disregarded and her children still have access to legitimate Korean identity, multicultural policy echoes that of the pre-2005 Family Law. Seungsook Moon’s feminist critique that the pre-2005 Family Law marginalized the Korean woman and the Korean woman’s blood can be applied to multicultural policy. These policies disregard the identities of these foreign mothers and emphasizes the importance of the Korean father’s blood. Therefore, the *Kosian* is regarded by the state as Korean because of the paternal Korean blood running through his veins.

Additionally, to make a full critique of South Korean multiculturalism, it is essential to understand that Korea’s multicultural initiatives are still lacking in the qualities that scholars have agreed government multicultural policies should possess. The discourse surrounding multiculturalism has suggested that state policies may include, but are not limited to: recognition of dual or multiple citizenships; government support for newspapers and radio and television programs in minority languages; support for

multicultural education in which funding for minority language education is provided; adoption of multiculturalism in school curricula; support for minority festivals, celebrations, and holidays; support for music and arts of minority cultures; acceptance of traditional and religious dress and other accessories in schools, the military, and society in general; programs to encourage ethnic representations in politics and media; programs to encourage ethnic representation in education, science, engineering, and the work force.¹⁵⁴ It is evident through my analysis of South Korea's multicultural policies that the Korean government has paid little attention to these important dimensions and characteristics of multiculturalism. Instead, multiculturalism in the context of Korea can be understood not as "a set of ideals that exalt the virtues of tolerance and mutual respect" of differing cultures, but instead an assimilation policy intended to ensure that migrant brides to Korean men have the tools and maneuvers to successfully "Koreanize" their *Kosian* children. In the eyes of the Korean government, this proper child rearing will ensure the production of the next generation of passable Korean persons. Feminist Susan Okin has discussed how assimilationist expectation is oppressive,¹⁵⁵ and "multicultural" policy in Korea should be understood as that. Additionally, sociologist Andrew Kim criticizes the frequent usage of the concepts "multicultural society" and "multiculturalism" in Korean media and academia because they are often misunderstood and misused. He points out that:

Multiculturalism, as advanced by the Korean government, seems to represent a type of image-framing by the government, which seeks to give

¹⁵⁴ Tariq Modod, *Multiculturalism: a Civic Idea*. Cambridge, (UK: Polity Press, 2007); Bhikhu C. Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory*, (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) cited in Andrew Kim, "Korean Multiculturalism: The Genealogy of the Concept, Shifting Meanings, Issues and Implications," *아세아연구* 53:2 (2010),124.

¹⁵⁵ Susan Moller Okin, Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard, and Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

the impression of interethnic harmony...Korean perception of multiculturalism should be understood as a form of interculturalism, which stresses intercultural understanding and appreciation rather than intercultural equality.¹⁵⁶

The Korean government, experiencing anxieties of an increasingly diverse nation has aggressively implemented policies to ensure the “Koreanization” of *Kosians*, and specifically *Kosians* with Korean fathers and foreign mothers. They use these methods, previously employed against Amerasians to ensure for the integration of *Kosian* individuals. This is best illustrated in the ways in which multicultural family laws have limited services to multicultural families in situations where the father is foreign and the mother is Korean. In this context, it seems that Koreans still support the notion that Korean blood is passed on through the father. Amerasians with American fathers, and *Kosians* with migrant fathers do not benefit from multicultural policies, because of the ways in which multicultural policy reflects this patrilineal privilege. However, some *Kosians* with Korean mothers are still able to gain privilege through the social stigmatization and popular understanding that the majority of *Kosians* do in fact have Korean fathers, in addition to their more passable phenotypic traits. Examples of this privilege are in the ways military service has been extended to “all” mixed race persons. Although this extension to “all” mixed race persons has occurred, Amerasians remain excluded because of their distinct mixed race appearances that legally prevent them from serving in this national rite of passage. Amerasians still largely remain disenfranchised in various aspects of Korean society.

Although we cannot ignore the physical differences between Amerasians and *Kosians*, the “Asian” appearance helping the *Kosian* to more successfully racially pass as

¹⁵⁶ Kim, "Korean Multiculturalism: The Genealogy of the Concept, Shifting Meanings, Issues and Implications," 125-126.

Korean, this marginalized status is still compounded by the racialized, geo-politicized, and gendered identity that has been historically crafted for Amerasians over the past six decades. Despite a shift into a “multicultural” era, the limited application of “multiculturalism,” or rather Korea’s assimilation policy, further marginalizes the status of Amerasians in Korea, as now they are not only “perpetual foreigners” within the lands of their births, but foreigners viewed as “unassimilable” by the Korean government. In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss how Amerasians are only accepted if they are viewed as foreigners. Because this is precisely how South Korean multiculturalism has racialized these persons in contemporary era, my analysis focuses on the implications these policies have had on popular culture and their everyday lived experiences of Amerasians.

White Privilege in Contemporary South Korean Society

Before I arrived in South Korea during the summer of 2011 to conduct fieldwork for this project, younger generations of Korean Americans and Koreans told me that people in Korea would embrace me for my multiracial background. I was told that Koreans loved mixed race persons and the titles of movies that featured handsome mixed race Korean/American actors were recited to me. My fifty year old mother, on the other hand, advised me to hold my head high and prepare myself for a mentally exhaustive summer: “You are Korean if you want to be, and don’t let what others say bother you. You are not any lower than them,” she assured me. She even suggested that I tell others that my mother was educated and had been to college in Korea and refrain from telling them that my father was formerly in the United States Air Force. This reflected her

knowledge of popular South Korean assumptions of who mixed race Amerasians and their mothers are.

How was it that I was offered two incredibly different insights to what my trip to Korea might be like? Which one was right? Which one was wrong? Was discrimination against mixed race persons a thing of the past that Hines Ward's visit to South Korea had solved? Did Amerasians now enjoy status at the very top of the Korean social hierarchy because the mixed race look was currently in vogue? Or did they continue to be marginalized members of Korean society? What I found in Korea did not contradict the statements made by younger generations of Korean/Americans nor my mother's. Instead, I found evidence that explained precisely why it was I received these two vastly differing opinions about mixed race Korea.

In South Korea, where military bases have facilitated the contact between Koreans and Americans since the 1950s, white privilege permeates the streets of Seoul—halfway around the world from the United States. Scholars of Korean Studies agree that since the Korean War, South Koreans have been exposed to U.S. racial ideologies.¹⁵⁷

Sociologist Nadia Kim writes:

“Race” is also central insofar as U.S. rule abroad has relied on a military that, on balance, has positioned Whites over Blacks...By way of its White-Black order, the United States racially “Americanizes” other countries.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Maria Houhn and Seungsook Moon, *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010); Seungsook Moon, "Begetting the Nation," in *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, ed. Elaine Kim, et. al. (New York: Routledge, 1998); Susie Woo, "A New American Comes Home: Race, Nation, and the Immigration of Korean War Adoptees, GI Babies, and Brides" (PhD diss., Yale University, 2010); Yuh, Ji-Yeon. *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America*, (New York: New York University Press 2002).

¹⁵⁸ Nadia Kim, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA*, (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press 2008), 8.

As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the legacy of institutionalized racial segregation in the U.S. military meant that camptowns would remain that way (de facto) well into the 1970s even after the de jure practice was abolished. Korean women catering to U.S. military personnel learned about Whiteness and Blackness in these ways. They were racialized depending on whether or not they worked in White or Black clubs and it was certain that those women who catered to Black soldiers were deemed as lower classed than those “White” camptown prostitutes. While, military camptown neighborhoods were created to serve the purposes of “containing unhealthy American influences” from mainstream Korean society and additionally provide a “way for a subjected government to cater to the dominant country,” these influences have permeated into mainstream Korean society.¹⁵⁹

Koreans in camptowns are not the only ones who have been exposed to U.S. racial ideologies. Kim suggests that the U.S. military’s influence has permeated beyond its intended boundaries. She argues that globalization, or the influence of American mass media in South Korea, has also informed Koreans understanding of race and explains why it is that even mainstream Koreans have adopted American racial ideologies:

Globalization involves not just the spread of military, capital, and goods but also the flows of images and ideas. In addition to the indelible impact of the U.S. armed forces, South Koreans have been profoundly affected by U.S. mass media saturation, whether in the form of pro-military programs on American Forces Korea Network, *Gone With The Wind*, commercials for Uncle Ben’s rice, *Mission Impossible III*, *Peyton Place*, or CNN’s coverage of the 1992 LA unrest. In fact, Koreans often interpret the superpower status of White America through cultural tropes in U.S. mass media.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America*, 24.

¹⁶⁰ Kim, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race fro Seoul to LA*, 9.

What is interesting about Kim's observation is the fact that Koreans' exposure to U.S. cultural productions were facilitated by the U.S. military. Meaning that these mediums had American and white supremacy embedded within them. In the years immediately following the Korean War, the U.S. military was responsible for defending the Korean nation from any foreign aggressors. This relationship therefore, automatically became hierarchical. Additionally, the U.S. government continued throughout the remainder of the twentieth century to rebuild South Korea's economy and infrastructure. Because the relationship between the U.S. and South Korea has remained existent upon this power dynamic, these cultural tropes and images first permeated into Korea society imbued with hierarchy. In other words, the messages South Koreans were exposed to seemed to be powerful and superior, having come from a nation like the United States. This has resulted in South Korea importing America's racial stratification, conflating English language with power, and believing that (white) American cultural icons are the standard for beauty. These images were powerful juxtaposed against a devastated post-war Korea. In this sense, camptowns have failed in their purposes to keep American cultural influences out of South Korea because the country has been shaped by their interactions with the U.S. military and the invisible forces of colonial as well as neo-colonial rule.

What is most significant about Koreans' interactions with U.S. racial ideology is that they have done more than just observe—they have also adopted it as their own. This includes, understanding Whiteness and Blackness, and factoring themselves into this system of social stratification. And like any colonized nation—they occupy the servile position. This is why white privilege operates in a country like South Korea. The relationship between the U.S. and South Korea therefore remains paternal and

hierarchical even as U.S. forces have withdrawn in numbers from the Korean peninsula since the Korean War. These ideas about power have historically become apart of South Korea; therefore it is difficult for Koreans to break free from the their neo-colonial rulers, and they continue to be subjected to these ideas about Whiteness on their own soil. In Seoul, foreigners have higher social status than Korean citizens, and the outsiders are revered for their English speaking abilities.

It is here in South Korea where an American can walk into a Starbucks to order a drink, and do so in English. If the cashier does not understand the English command rattled off to him, the American has the power and white privilege to stare blankly at the Korean worker as if he is stupid. The American has the ability to make that waiter feel utterly humiliated, stupid, and incompetent for not knowing English as a first language, and apologize profusely to the American customer for daring not know the language of his colonizer. This scenario that I have outlined is precisely one I witnessed first hand in Seoul. I too, stood speechless, not knowing what to do at this moment. I wanted to point out to the American that we were in Korea and that he was wrong for speaking English, and that he should not expect the Korean workers to know English—that English has never been apart of the cultural identity or heritage of the Korean people. But I was horrified to realize that I was wrong. In fact, I understood the profound implication of what I had just witnessed: ignoring the privilege the American felt and had in that Starbucks would be ignoring the ways Koreans have become culturally colonized by English language and other American influences since the Korean War. It was a privilege I had to acknowledge and accept as apart of the social order on this neo-colonial terrain.

The dominance of the English language is evident in Seoul. Here, the street signs are written in English. When they are written in the Korean script *hangul*, the Romanized letters appear bolder and larger. People say that stores with names written in Korean look old fashioned, while those with names in English look “hip” and “cool.” In Seoul, they say older generations cannot communicate effectively with younger generations, for the mixing of English with Korean in colloquial speech has become such a large part of what is deemed mainstream and normal. Seoul is a place where people commonly make grammatical mistakes in their everyday Korean speaking and writing, but are not lacking in English tutors. To many, English language education is more important than Korean, and parents will do anything to give their children a “competitive edge,” even if this means investing thousands of dollars monthly on their children’s private tutors, tuition for high school institutions that focus primarily on English education, and English conversation partners.¹⁶¹ Although English language is apart of the national curriculum, according to a report made by the Samsung Economic Research Institute (SERI), South South Koreans spend 15 trillion won (\$15.8 billion) per year on these extra English learning materials.¹⁶² All of this, just so when it is time their child can pay exorbitant amounts of money to attend a second-tier American higher education institution.¹⁶³ Korea

¹⁶¹ Eun-gyong Kim, “History of English Education in Korea,” *The Korea Times* (Seoul, Korea), April 2, 2008, accessed May 14, 2012,

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2012/04/181_21843.html; “Education Gap Between Rich and Poor Growing,” *The Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul, Korea), August, 1 2009, accessed May 14, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2009/08/01/2009080100250.html

¹⁶² “Is There Enough English Education?” *The Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul, Korea), December 22, 2008, accessed May 14, 2012,

http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2008/12/22/2008122261029.html.

¹⁶³ “Number of Korean Students in U.S. Universities Hits Record High,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, (Seoul, Korea), November 18, 2009, accessed May 14, 2012,

http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2009/11/18/2009111800792.html;

is a place where what was once called “American fever”—the obsession over everything American—is not recognized as a glorification of American cultural and political hegemony, but regarded as intertwined with essential Koreanness in a new globalized world order. In other words, it is an invisible force that drives Koreans to submit to American standards of education, beauty, and culture. But because it is indirect, it is hard to identify and resist.

As American media influences continue to saturate South Korea, the standard of beauty has also has changed. Women receive plastic surgery to have more “Western” looking eyes, noses, jaw lines, and cheekbones.¹⁶⁴ Plastic surgeon Byung-gun Kim reports to that his patients tell him “that they want to have faces like Americans.” Kim continues:

The idea of beauty is more westernized recently. That means the Asian people want to have a little less Asian, more westernized appearance. They don’t like big cheekbones or small eyes. They want to have big, bright eye with slender, nice facial bones.¹⁶⁵

In response to a poll conducted by *The Korea Times* (a daily South Korean newspaper) suggesting that 30 percent of college students (men and women) seek cosmetic surgery, columnist, Jon Huer responds by stating:

No point in telling them that their Asiatic eyelines, or no eyelines, are just as beautiful as double-lined eyes; they have the money and the desire, and other members of the heard are already in full gallop.¹⁶⁶

“Fewer Korean Students Make It to Ivy League,” *The Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul, Korea), April 26, 2010, accessed May 14, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/04/26/2010042600488.html.

¹⁶⁴ Jon Huer, “Is Korea Mecca of Cosmetic Surgery?” *The Korea Times* (Seoul, Korea), August 14, 2009, accessed May 14, 2012,

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinon/2012/05/137_50131.html; Kyung Lah, “Plastic surgery boom as Asians seek ‘western’ look,” *CNN World*, May 23, 2011, accessed May 14, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/asiapcf/05/19/korea.beauty/index.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Lah, Kyung, “Plastic surgery boom as Asians seek ‘western’ look.”

¹⁶⁶ Huer, Jon. “Is Korea Mecca of Cosmetic Surgery?”

Another poll, conducted in 2012 by the Seoul city government reported that over 50 percent of women under the age of 30 living in South Korea's capital city had cosmetic surgery.¹⁶⁷ In some districts of Seoul you will see subway walls plastered with ads upon ads of competing cosmetic surgeons, showcasing their best surgeries through before and after pictures of their patients. In these advertisements there could be a young woman who is phenotypically identifiable as Korean on the left, and a woman that looks “exotic” (“like she might be mixed race,” one woman commented) on the right. You would never know that they were the same person if the advertisement did not tell you. If you ask why it is that she looks “exotic” someone might explain that it is because of her double eye-lids, sharp jaw-line, small face, and high nose, characteristics that are all accepted by the mainstream to be beautiful. These are also the characteristics commonly used when describing Americans, white people, or Koreans of mixed Korean/American ancestry.

This new standard of beauty is especially evident when you take a look at South Korean cinema, music, dramas, billboards, and commercials—all of which are all crowded with faces of mixed race Korean/Caucasian models. Korean/American celebrities like Dennis Oh and Daniel Henney dominate Korean films despite their lack of Korean speaking ability. Instead, roles are written for them, entire scripts altered so that they may be included, because producers know that the mixed face—familiar enough to be claimed as Korean when convenient, yet different enough to be exotic—sells.

Following this logic, it would seem that Korea is a place where multiracial

Korean/Americans are celebrated; lauded as the new face of a modern, globalized, and

¹⁶⁷ Kelly Frances and Park Jin-Seung, “Game Changer,” *The Korea Times* (Seoul, Korea), April 8, 2012, accessed May 14, 2012, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2012/04/147_108586.html.

open society. Is it enough to conclude that all mixed race Korean/Americans benefit from English language skills and from an Americanized standard for beauty?

Considering, the standard of beauty is predominantly a White one, and not all Amerasians are have White fathers, this is not an accurate assessment. For example, because South Korea imported U.S. racial ideologies, African Americans or Amerasians with Black fathers, are regarded as lower than White Amerasians. We can see this in the ways that mixed race White/Korean celebrities land mainstream roles in Korean dramas and movies, whereas African American/Koreans are never present in films. To date, an Amerasian of African ancestry has never been starred or featured in a major Korean movie production. This is because the White Amerasian enjoys a white-washed standard of beauty, and this particular mixture is regarded as beautiful.¹⁶⁸

African American Amerasians instead, not unlike Hines Ward, are racialized as athletes and hip-hop singers. Singers like T (Tasha) and Insooni are exoticized and believed to have powerful Black voices good for hip-hop and R&B, but they are not as popularly regarded as pretty or beautiful like their white counterparts.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, there are currently no famous Black/Koreans who perform any other genres besides those racialized as inherently African American in style. Anthropologist Su-je Lee Gage comments on a performance by she witnessed in Seoul during the field work for her study on Amerasians in South Korea:

The Amerasian male who performed at the Pearl S. Buck summer camp in 2002 sang songs in English, but he does not speak English. His “Blackness” is marketed and commodified with his shimmery gold clothes and song,

¹⁶⁸ Su-Je Lee Gage, “Pure Mixed-Blood: The Multiple Identities of Amerasians in South Korea,” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2007), 131.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

with his signing and performing style replicating African American performers in the U.S. like Michael Jackson.¹⁷⁰

Additionally, Moon Tae-Young and his brother Moon Tae-Jong are regarded as having powerful Black bodies that make them some of Korea's best basketball stars. Although this has privileged them with membership on South Korea's National Basketball Team in addition to Korean citizenship, it is a form of marginalization in the sense that their bodies are objectified, exoticized, and commodified for their Blackness.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, there are certainly mixed race Amerasians who cannot speak English. Therefore, not all mixed race Amerasians inherit white privilege equally or at all. To conclude that white privilege operates the same way or at all in the lives of all Amerasians ignores the histories of earlier generations of mixed race Koreans and the diversity of the Amerasian demographic.

There is a deeper complexity to what is happening in Korea and academics such as Susan Koshy and Jeffrey Santa Ana both offer an explanation. Their work suggest that in contemporary times "the multiracial body is now imbued with a neo-exotic festishization that depoliticizes the consequences of transnational capitalism and conceals race-sex hierarchies under a fashionable multicultural aesthetic."¹⁷² In other words, these mixed race celebrities are being used to frame Korea as a multicultural society, one in which difference is accepted and embraced. By doing this Koreans are ignoring the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 135.

¹⁷¹ "Half-Korean Basketballers Become Korean Citizens," *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul, Korea), June 22, 2011., accessed May 13, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/07/22/2011072201045.html.

¹⁷² Susan Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization: Asian Americans and Miscegenation*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Jeffrey Santa Ana, "Affect-Identity: The Emotions of Assimilation, Multiraciality, and Asian American Subjectivity," in *Asian North American Identities: Beyond the Hyphen*, ed. Eleanor Ty, et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 15-42 paraphrased by Perry Miller, "The Military Camptown in Retrospect: Multiracial Korean American Subject Formation Along the Black-White Binary," (MA thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2007).

history of U.S. militarization that connects South Korea to mixed race persons. By focusing on the “exotic” looks of mixed race models and movie stars, Koreans can highlight that these celebrities are in fact “foreign” and American—they are the products of Korea and the world: babies of “globalization,” rather GIs. Admitting that Amerasians are Korean or accepting them as Korean complicates the self-image Korea has of itself. It would mean acknowledging the gendered dynamics of the U.S.-Korean relation, which challenge Korea’s sovereignty. It also would be admitting that Korea is a racist society and that Amerasians have been victims of state-racism since the very first policies against Amerasians were enacted via intercountry adoption. Amerasian celebrities like Dennis Oh and Daniel Henney are frequently referred to in Korean print media as “American.” Emphasizing the Amerasian celebrity’s “foreignness” rather “Koreanness” allows Korea to ignore the history of Amerasians that informs its status as a nation subjugated under the U.S. military empire since the 1950s.

But not all Amerasians are categorized with celebrities like Daniel Henney and Dennis Oh. First, these two are white males who have grown up in America. They have English fluency, U.S. citizenship, and were born in a setting far enough away in distance and time to not be considered connected to the U.S. military. Therefore, these individuals are not viewed as Amerasian, but instead, they are thought of as completely foreign or completely white American. This is reflective in the roles they play. They have not depicted a Korean person in their movies or dramas, but instead they have portrayed American characters. In these ways they are able to prevent their Korean side from clashing with their American side. This then creates the illusion that mixed race persons

are accepted and embraced, and incorporated into Korean society, when in fact they are portrayed and perceived as foreigners.

Amerasians who are not protected by the privileges of English language, U.S. citizenship, and being born outside of South Korea continue to face discrimination and intolerance in their everyday lives. Amerasians all have grown up under varying circumstances. For example, some are raised on military bases with their American fathers and Korean mothers. They have English language skills, and U.S. citizenship. While others were abandoned by their American fathers, did not receive U.S. citizenship, and also did not learn English language skills from their fathers. This, James Kang-McCann, founder and president of the Amerasian Christian Academy, says is the worst scenario for Amerasian children.¹⁷³

The Amerasian Christian Academy in Dongducheon is the only school in Korea for mixed race Korean/American individuals. The school was built in 1999 in an attempt to address the issue of Amerasians performing poorly in school, by creating a positive learning environment free of racial discrimination and bullying. Additionally, the school attempts to empower Amerasian individuals through promoting the English language:

English language education is very important. Not only does it give Amerasians a competitive edge, but also it protects them. If an Amerasian child can't speak English and the children around him notice, they will know that the child is fatherless. They think that this means the child has been abandoned by his father, is a bastard, and that his mother was a prostitute.¹⁷⁴

The school regularly offers scholarships to low-income families, children with single-mothers, and even Amerasian orphans. McCann testifies that many Amerasians who had given up on the public school system successfully matriculate through his school.

¹⁷³ "James Kang-McCann," Personal Interview by author, Seoul, July 12, 2011.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

However, the Korean government has yet to recognize the Amerasian Christian Academy as a legitimate primary and secondary degree granting institution. This means that although children may attend the Amerasian Christian Academy, they must take the respective elementary, middle, and high school competency exams, which are similar to America's version of a General Education Development (GED) test. The Amerasian Christian Academy, has tried since 1999 to be recognized by the state, but has failed to in its thirteen years of existence because of the government's disinterest in the school's mission.¹⁷⁵ This means that even if an Amerasian graduates from the academy, their opportunities for attending college in Korea are very slim for they are regarded as having a second-class education. However, McCann emphasizes that English language will somewhat shield his students from much of the intolerance that they would experience otherwise, and is a good alternative to persons like Han and Yookyung, whom we learned about in Chapter 1.¹⁷⁶

Contrarily, Korean language skills are not as empowering as English language skills, and do not secure an Amerasian's status in South Korean society—I learned this from talking with Han and Yookyung. Additionally, all of the Amerasians I spoke with had at least some level of fluency in Korean. For the majority of my subjects, they were equally as comfortable with English as they were with Korean, and a small fraction were actually better with Korean language than they were with English. However, although

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ As described in Chapter 1, both Han and Yookyung are White/Korean whom were raised by single-mothers. Because they did not have contact with their American fathers they did not grow up in close proximity to American ethnic communities/military bases. Instead they were forced to confront mainstream Korean society on a daily basis, away from the protection that a military community offers some Amerasian individuals. This means that neither attended international schools or schools on military bases, and instead both Han and Yookyung enrolled in the Korean public education system and were the only racial others within their entire schools. Both Han and Yookyung experienced racialized bullying during their encounters with Korean public education. Additionally, neither spoke English as a first language or with native-fluency.

they speak Korean with perfect native accents, they are continuously asked why and how it is that they speak Korean so well. While Korean language skills are generally viewed as just as strong of a marker of ethnic Korean identity as purebloodedness, Korean fluency does not empower Amerasians. Instead, these language skills clash with the non-pureblooded appearance of Amerasians like Han and Yookyung, whom “look white” to most Korean persons.

I witnessed the ways Korean language and mixed-bloodness clash by watching an interaction Han had with a Korean man. After our interview, Han was kind enough to help me look for my old house in Songtan, near Osan Air Force Base. Because the city has been heavily industrialized since the early nineties, I could not recognize anything. Additionally, my family did not remember the address to our old home. The only information I had was that our house used to be near a seafood restaurant called *Jin Haemultang*. Han and I stopped to ask for leads at a real estate agency. As the agent was giving Han instructions on where the old *Haemultang* restaurant used to be, he stopped mid-sentence and asked Han: “Do you understand Korean?” At this point, Han had been conversing with the man for at least two minutes, yet the man still had a difficult time believing that Han understood all of what he said. The agent continued where he left off, only to ask Han one more time if he was sure he could understand Korean. “You have such an American accent when you speak,” he told Han. Han just laughed and winked at me. We both knew that Han did not have an American accent. This fascinated me, because not only was Han’s Korean flawless, but Han also never spoke any English as a child. In fact, he had just begun learning English language from a textbook two years prior. Although he had practically gained fluency in English, it was accented with Korean.

It was amazing to me that Han had never been to America, and yet in his everyday encounters he was consistently identified as American and told he spoke Korean with an American accent. It becomes evident then, why someone like Han, who is so obviously Korean (to me), would self-identify and be identified by others as American just based on his experiences as a racialized other in South Korea. To his identity, his Korean citizenship is insignificant, as is his fluency in Korean because they mean nothing to mainstream Korean society that continues to regard him as “foreign.” In other words, these ethnic markers of Koreanness still do not override Han’s “American” appearance or ensure his inclusion and acceptance within mainstream Korean society.

However, this is not to say that those who inherit privileges like American citizenship and English language competency are completely guarded from racial discrimination in South Korea. In Chapter 1, I discussed how Amerasians like Han and Yookyung first discovered their racial differences during their encounters with the Korean public education system. For Amerasians with American citizenship they are allowed access to military and international schools, and therefore their experiences with racism seem to happen in different, more public settings. Michael, twenty-four years of age, and Minna, nineteen, both have memories of the exact moment that they realized that they were a racial others in Korea. For Michael, this happened when he was eight years old:

The first time I realized I was different was when someone called me a half-breed...I was only seven or eight years old, and I was waiting to catch the bus. When the bus came I tried to ride it. But the bus driver took one look at me and said “No dirty half-breeds allowed on my bus! Go back to America, foreigner!” And then he shut the door in my face and drove off. I

couldn't believe it...looking back on it I still can't believe it...I was only a kid and the bus driver was an adult.¹⁷⁷

Michael grew up near Yongsan Army base and attended military school for all of his primary and secondary education. Because of this, he admits, he was sheltered. He describes military community and lifestyle as “a protective bubble.” Here, he explains all of the children are Amerasian, and they all have Korean mothers and American fathers. “It’s when you leave base when there’s a problem,” he says.¹⁷⁸

Minna agrees with Michael and also expresses her reservations in leaving the military base. She says this is especially the case “if you go off base without your mother...people will stare at you. And you can hear them talking about you in Korean...they can't tell if you're Korean or a foreigner so they whisper in case you can understand.”¹⁷⁹ When I asked Minna of the first time she realized she was Amerasian (and what that meant) she told me this story from when she was six years old:

My mom took us to a park near the Han River. I was playing on the playground...I made friends with one of the little girls there that day...All I remember is that we were having fun, when all of a sudden the girl's mom went up to her and told her not to play with me because I was a *twiggi*. I didn't know what that word meant so I started crying and I ran to my mom...we left. My mom didn't tell me what the word meant but I know now.¹⁸⁰

Twiggi is a derogatory word for a person of mixed ancestry which “translates into mule, crossbreed, devil-child, dirty...stupid,” all in one, Minna explained.¹⁸¹ The discomfort of the mother (who called Minna a *twiggi*) at her daughter's choice in playmate illustrates how even a mixed race child is thought to be dangerous and morally corrupt. Perhaps the

¹⁷⁷ “Michael,” Personal Interview by author, Seoul, July 09, 2011.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ “Minna,” Personal Interview by author, Seoul, June 30, 2011.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

mother was scared that by her daughter's mere affiliation with Minna on a playground, that they both would somehow be stigmatized and connected to the history surrounding Amerasian individuals. Minna's story indicates how even a mixed race Amerasian child playing on a playground can become a sight of memory for camptowns and militarized prostitution. Because of these uncomfortable confrontations, Minna admits that she and her mixed race friends avoid going into mainstream Korean society and stick to the military base and surrounding areas. It is better when they go out with their parents she says, as there is less whispering, and people just assume that they are an American family.

Michael and Minna both agree that Koreans do not see them as Korean, although they themselves would identify as Korean if others saw them this way. "I've never been to America," Minna says "so it's hard for me to say that I am American. But I know that Koreans don't think of me as Korean either. But I guess if I had to pick one, I would say...I'm an American living in Korea who has never been to America, if that makes sense."¹⁸² Michael's perspective is similar "I've never considered myself Korean ever since that incident with the Korean bus driver."¹⁸³ However, despite his reluctance to claim a Korean identity, Michael admits that he is more comfortable with speaking in Korean language rather English. Additionally he states that he prefers Korean foods to American cuisine. Despite these ethnic markers of Koreanness, his outward appearances make it impossible for him to be Korean, and just based on his experiences as a racial outsider in the land of his birth, he identifies as a "foreigner."

It is not definitive to say that Amerasians like Michael and Minna inherit white privilege even though American fathers, U.S. citizenship, and English language skills

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ "Michael," Personal Interview by author, Seoul, July 09, 2011.

guard them. Still, they are Amerasian and therefore symbols of the neo-colonial relationship between Korea and the U.S. As illustrated in the experiences of Michael and Minna above, they too experience racism in their everyday lives because of their status as a visible “other.” However, unlike Han and Yookyung, they have the ability to retreat into protective American enclaves within Korea. In other words, they get to pick and chose when they interact with mainstream society, and they know that their choices to leave their protective communities may result in experiencing discrimination or being refused public services. For these Amerasians, their Korean sides clash with their American sides. This is why they are not on top of the Korean/American racial hierarchy, because unlike movie stars Daniel Henney and Dennis Oh, they are too intimately connected to the history of U.S. neo-colonialism in Korea to be considered symbols of fashionable globalization.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have investigated the contemporary status and identities of mixed race Amerasians through oral histories, cultural productions, and my own personal experiences during fieldwork. As South Korea continues to promote a self-image of itself as a nation that has successfully overcome its history of racial discrimination against multiracial people, Amerasians continue to live marginal lives even in a multicultural era. My analysis of multicultural policy reveals that the South Korean government continues to employ methods to keep Amerasians from gaining legitimacy or recognition as proper members of Korean society. Where the *Kosian* represents liaisons between Korean men and migrant brides, this relationship can be highlighted without damaging Korea’s self-image of itself as a sovereign nation. By protecting migrant brides under multicultural

policies, Korea is framing itself as a masculine protector of these foreign women that hail from underdeveloped third-world countries. However, Amerasians represent much different liaisons, and much different geo-political relationships by symbolizing U.S. imperialism in South Korea. Therefore the South Korean government and multicultural policy initiatives have still not facilitated the integration of Amerasians into South Korean society. In other words, it seems that in South Korea, all of the frustrations about being a colonized nation are taken out on the only people whom are different yet Korean enough to still be colonized themselves: mixed race Amerasians.

Additionally, the insight I have received from speaking with Amerasian individuals living in Seoul today reveal that there is a disconnect between Amerasian celebrities and the lives of ordinary Amerasians. Unlike these celebrities, Amerasians are not viewed as “foreign” enough to gain the white privilege that will shield them from racial discrimination and secure them white privilege. Racial and ethnic markers of hybridity seem to trigger a correlation between Amerasian individuals and the history of neo-colonialism that they represent. Additionally, my subjects reveal that just as the media emphasizes the “foreign” status of multiracial celebrities, everyday Amerasians resort to the strategy of identifying themselves as foreigners as well. This can be read as an attempt on part of Amerasians like Michael, Minna, Han, and Yookyung to distance themselves from the history that links them to U.S. neo-colonial rule, the camptown, and militarized prostitution just as South Koreans are attempting to distance themselves from the same history by emphasizing the complete “foreignness” of these multiracial celebrities.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have argued that the status of mixed race Amerasians has remained relatively constant since the Korean War. I have researched the ways in which mixed race individuals have historically been regarded by the South Korean government and also analyzed the lived experiences of ordinary Amerasians in contemporary society. The history of mixed race Amerasians is inextricably connected to the history of U.S. imperialism in South Korea, the forces of which have dictated these individuals' lives.

In Chapter 1, I focused my analysis on the twentieth century and the origins of U.S. neo-colonialism and Amerasians in South Korea. I began by discussing pureblooded constructions of national, racial, and ethnic identity in order to understand how the presence of GI babies complicated existing notions of Koreanness. I continued by highlighting the gendered nature of the U.S.-ROK relation by tracing the history of U.S. militarism in South Korea, the production of camptowns, and the institutionalization of militarized prostitution. The Amerasians produced from the liaisons between American soldiers and Korean women have historically served as a visible reminder to the Korean people of their subjugated status as an inferior and feminine state in need of the power and protection of the U.S. The Rhee government of post-war South Korea saw Amerasians as detrimental to their political goals of reunification and Korean nationalism, and sought out measures to eliminate the presence of mixed race GI babies in South Korea. The regime highlighted that mixed race Amerasians were not Korean, because they had American fathers. This notion underscored the foreignness of Amerasians, justifying the formation of intercountry adoption policies. GI babies were aggressively deported to the United States. For those Amerasians left behind in South Korea, the

Korean government continued to prevent them from having access to legitimate Koreanness through maintaining patriarchal constructions of citizenship and family. Because Amerasians had Korean mothers, they were legally barred from state representation and legitimacy. Consequently, the result of these twentieth century racial ideologies, politics, and legal policies in South Korea has racialized the Amerasian body with explicit geo-political and gendered dimensions. Despite the abolition of many of these legal policies their legacies continue to have ramifications in the everyday lives of Amerasians in the twenty-first century.

In Chapter Two, I focused my analysis on contemporary South Korean society and the formation of Korea's first multicultural laws. I discuss the prominence of a new mixed race *Kosian* demographic in light of an aging South Korean population and crisis of low birth rates. Multiculturalism seeks to assimilate these *Kosian* individuals, a demographic that is rapidly increasing in population, in order to ensure the continued production of proper Korean persons. With these efforts, the legal policies of multiculturalism in South Korea re-institutionalizes patriarchy—marginalizing foreign migrant brides; additionally these policies do not apply to Amerasian individuals. Thus, multiculturalism in South Korea successfully racializes Amerasians as foreigners unassimilable by the government. Despite this the Korean media continues to market multiculturalism as proof of South Korea's racial liberalism. An emergence of mixed race celebrities in South Korea has created the surface-image that it is a tolerant society for mixed race individuals, but my analysis shows the ways in which the “foreignness” of these Amerasian celebrities is marketed, only further racializing Amerasians as foreigners within the lands of their birth. Additionally, ordinary Amerasians identify as “American”

as well. This distances them from the history connecting mixed race persons to U.S. neo-colonialism in South Korea and allows them to gain some status and privilege, although it is clear that mixed race Amerasians are still not completely embraced within South Korean society.

My research suggests that the status of Amerasians has not improved since the Korean War. The same “foreignness” that was perpetuated to justify intercountry adoption reemerged in contemporary era to justify the exclusion of mixed race individuals from multicultural policies. Popular understandings of who Amerasians are, linking these individuals to camptowns and militarized prostitution have not changed. Their mixed-bloodness, lack of paternal Korean blood, and racial appearances clash with their ethnic and cultural identities and they have yet to be embraced and accepted within mainstream society. Because of this, Amerasians still remain barred from military service, equal work and educational opportunities, and live marginal lives. For those who have access to military bases, they retreat into these protective communities in order to avoid facing racial discrimination and interactions with South Korean society. Multicultural education has promoted awareness to *Kosian* and migrant bride issues, in addition to the incorporation of their histories within Korean public education. Amerasians issues continue to be ignored and they are still are not accepted as a part of the history of the Korean people

Emphasizing the foreignness of Amerasians allows for Koreans to distance themselves from the history of U.S. neo-colonialism, imperialism, and militarism. Embracing the *Kosian* also enables this. By constructing South Korea as a masculine nation juxtaposed against struggling third-world Asian neighbors, *Kosians* make it

possible for Koreans to ignore the profound ramifications that U.S. military presence has had on the Korean peninsula since the 1950s, highlighting South Korea's sovereignty, independence, and power as a leading world economy. If Koreans were to embrace mixed race Amerasians (as they are embracing *Kosians*) for who they truly were: citizens, members of the Korean national and the broader diasporic community, they would have to accept a history of subjugation and subordination. The reluctance to accept this history is analogous to the refusal to admit that mixed race persons are Korean. Therefore the reason why Amerasians remain excluded and marginalized members of South Korean society is primarily because of South Korea's persistent status as a neo-colony of the United States. But while South Koreans cannot change their status as a neo-colonial nation and additionally fear losing the protection and geo-political stability that the U.S. military offers, there are still possible solutions to the problem of mixed race in South Korea. If we are to see the status of Amerasians change in South Korea, their histories too, must be acknowledged and taught in public education, and the South Korean government must create laws to facilitate their inclusion and acceptance as members of the South Korean national community.

A fundamental reimagining of South Korea as a multicultural society could improve the status of Amerasians, *Kosians*, and other ethnic and racial South Korean minorities; this includes altering current multicultural policies to create a tolerant society. Thus far, South Korean multiculturalism has failed to significantly improve the status of mixed race individuals (Amerasians or *Kosians* alike) because it lacks multicultural values and aids Korean society in maintaining homogenous constructions of Koreanness. *Kosians* have been aggressively targeted for assimilation and subsequently "Koreanized."

Their inclusion in South Korean society is not marked by their acceptance as diverse multiracial individuals, but instead by their passable Koreanness. In other words, multicultural policy in South Korea has become a mechanism to further perpetuate the idea of a homogenous society, as *Kosians* are erased of their non-Korean identities and their sameness is emphasized. South Korean multiculturalism should embrace difference, rather than mask it; and a policy with proper multicultural values could initiate change.

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