

EXPANSIVE HYBRIDITY: MULTILINGUAL AND VISUAL POETICS
IN CONTEMPORARY EXPERIMENTAL ASIAN AMERICAN
AND PACIFIC ISLANDER POETRY

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ABSTRACT

Although the term *hybrid* has gained much traction in literary analyses of contemporary experimental poetry, there is a notable divide within scholarly discourse wherein its uses pertain to either form or content. The term has been used by literary critics and anthologists to categorize works of poetry that combine formal techniques and practices from opposing traditions of literary history, but within cultural, postcolonial, and Asian American studies, it has served as an important term that designates sites of resistance within cross-cultural contexts of uneven power dynamics. This discrepancy in uses of the term *hybrid* serves as the basis for my critical investigation of experimental poetry by Cathy Park Hong, Craig Santos Perez, Don Mee Choi, and Monica Ong. This dissertation presents an interdisciplinary reassessment of the concept of hybridity that applies it to both formal experimentation and cultural content by examining the innovative ways in which Asian American and Pacific Islander poets use hybrid forms to represent hybrid identities and the particular social, political, and colonial contexts within which they emerge. While the term in relation to ethnic American poetry has primarily pertained to multilingual features, my study widens the scope of hybridity to not only include verbal expression but also visual forms of representation (such as photographs, illustrations, and digital renderings of images). How do these poets grapple with both text and image as a means of communicating across and confronting different types of boundaries (such as linguistic, national, cultural, racial, and ideological)? How do they utilize the page as a textual-visual space to not only represent hybrid identity but also to critique their social and political milieu? I address these inquiries by exploring the ways

in which Hong, Perez, Choi, and Ong enact formal hybridity to challenge multilingualism as cosmopolitan commodity, the colonial erasure of indigenous language and culture, hegemonic narratives of history, and representations of the racial Other. This dissertation argues that their poetry demonstrates an expansive hybridity in which multilingual and mixed-media practices serve as the very means by which they negotiate the fraught conditions of migration, colonization, geopolitics, and marginalization.

For my mother

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The term *hybrid* is often applied to contemporary poetry to describe innovative crossovers in genre and experimentation with form and aesthetics. However, there is an apparent inconsistency within scholarly discourse wherein its uses vary across disciplinary fields. The term has broadly been used by literary critics and anthologists to categorize works of poetry that combine formal techniques and practices from opposing traditions of literary history, but within cultural, postcolonial, and Asian American studies, it has served as an important term that designates sites of resistance within cross-cultural contexts of uneven power dynamics. While these differing approaches have centered on either form or content, this dissertation presents an expansive reconceptualization of hybridity that bridges these foci by examining the experimental poetry of contemporary Asian American and Pacific Islander writers who incorporate multiple languages as well as visual media in their work to challenge the hegemonic structures of their hybrid contexts.

Literary criticism and anthologies on hybrid poetry have generally emphasized experimentation with form and genre. For example, in *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (2003), Elisabeth A. Frost uses the term *hybrid* to describe Harryette Mullen's revamping of the lyric (191) and the intertextuality of Susan Howe's *The Birthmark* (114). In *American Hybrid Poetics: Gender, Mass Culture, and Form* (2014), Amy M. Robbins offers a conceptualization of hybridity that involves the mixing of high and low aesthetics, which she sees as productive for interrogating "the role of the degraded

feminine” in the works of Laura Mullen, Alice Notley, Harryette Mullen, and Claudia Rankine (11). A 2018 *Lithub* article also names Jenny Boully, Dodie Bellamy, and Maggie Nelson as some notable authors who write hybrid blends of poetry and essay (Burton). Anthologies such as *American Women Poets in the 21st Century: Where Lyric Meets Language* (2002), *Lyric Postmodernisms: An Anthology of Contemporary Innovative Poetries* (2008), and *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry* (2009) evince an emphasis on experimental poetries that blur the line between traditional (or mainstream) and avant-garde aesthetics. Cole Swensen’s introduction to *American Hybrid* is a notable example of conceptualizing hybrid poetic practice as the blurring of distinctions between the tenets of different poetic traditions.¹ Swensen outlines the model of binary oppositions that has been used to categorize American poetry throughout the twentieth century that placed different strands of poetic “camps” at odds. She explains that while the rubrics for classifying camps have varied over the latter half of the century, binary oppositions have remained a steady pattern. In the 1960s, one side stemmed from the centrality of the individual of British Romanticism while the other found its roots in the emphasis on textual materiality and formal innovation of French poets. By the 80s, the dichotomy at play was one in which mainstream poetry (which adopted less elevated language to explore the self while still maintaining certain aspects of formalism) opposed Language poetry (which insisted upon the socially constructed and political nature of language). Thus, Swensen argues that the strict dichotomization of poetic schools no longer works as neatly as it once did:

¹ While *American Hybrid* is only one among the anthologies that thematically center on non-binary categorizations of contemporary poetry, I discuss it here as an example of an anthology that specifically uses the term hybrid as its central guiding premise.

Considering the traits associated with ‘conventional’ work, such as coherence, linearity, formal clarity, narrative, firm closure, symbolic resonance, and stable voice, and those generally assumed of ‘experimental’ work, such as non-linearity, juxtaposition, rupture, fragmentation, immanence, multiple perspective, open form, and resistance to closure, hybrid poets access a wealth of tools, each one of which can change dramatically depending on how it is combined with others and the particular role it plays in the composition. (xxi)

According to Swensen’s characterization, then, hybridity constitutes an engagement with both conventional and experimental modes of poetry that unsettles the ostensibly clear separation between them.

However, this emphasis on aesthetics and form ignores the important theorizations of hybridity centered on identity and difference that postcolonial and Asian American scholars have previously established. For this reason, Swensen’s framing of hybridity has not gone uncriticized. In one particularly scathing response, Craig Santos Perez offers a sarcastic polemic against the anthology’s exclusion of poets of color, invoking the scholars such as Lisa Lowe, Alfred Arteaga, and Gloria Anzaldúa (all of whom go unmentioned in Swensen’s introduction) as obvious touchstones to acknowledge for their influential contributions to theorizing hybridity.² Perez calls it “a white poetic legacy, a white reading of twentieth-century American poetry,” taking umbrage at defining *hybridity* as merely an aesthetic term since doing so disregards writers of mixed ethnic and racial backgrounds and their complex experiences of navigating identity and difference (“Whitewashing” 139). Such a critique underscores the

² See also essays by Mark Wallace, Michael Theune, Arielle Greenberg, and Megan Volpert (collected along with Perez’s in *The Monkey and the Wrench*), which challenge *American Hybrid*’s conceptualization of hybridity as well as recent theorizations of the concept. Robbins also argues directly against Swensen’s framework of opposing poetic camps to define hybridity, taking issue with its lack of engagement with politics. Robbins’ study of innovative aesthetic practices in the works of radical women poets presents an important contribution to critical discussions of hybridity by addressing the political implications of employing mixed forms, but its central focus is feminist poetics rather than race and ethnicity.

need to reclaim the concept of hybridity as one that pertains to *both* aesthetic factors as well as racial and ethnic subjectivities in order to attend to the various social and political struggles that the cross-cultural experience inescapably entails. Thus, this dissertation presents a critical intervention that unsettles this separation of poetics and politics.

My dissertation insists upon a more comprehensive notion of hybridity that does not ignore its basis in Asian American and postcolonial studies in favor of designating the intermixing of poetic traditions. Indeed, the notion of hybridity does not only pertain to formal and aesthetic aspects of poetry; the scholars who galvanized the concept in literary studies in the '90s largely framed it within the context of cultural difference rather than differences between poetic camps. Lisa Lowe's important essay "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Asian American Differences" in *Immigrant Acts* (1996) discusses hybridity in terms of its contrast to dominant, homogeneous representations of racial/ethnic history and experiences that essentialize Asian American narratives. She defines hybridity as "the formation of cultural objects and practices produced by histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations" (67), often within the context of colonialism, and frames it as "the process through which [Asians in the US] survive those violences by living, inventing, and reproducing different cultural alternatives" that defy hegemonic representations (82). In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha describes it as "a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality" (19). For Bhabha, *hybrid* is not an adjective that merely describes the combinatory features of language but a noun that encompasses the condition of colonial subjects as well as the means by which they challenge imperial authority in order to undermine it: a "strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal" (112). In *Chicano Poetics:*

Heterotexts and Hybridities (1997), Alfred Arteaga also theorizes hybridity in terms of cultural production concerned with racial difference but sees linguistic difference as directly tied to it. Addressing specifically the interlingual practices of Chicano poets, Arteaga asserts that “hybridity is the mode of both Chicano *poem* and Chicano *subject*” in that “the poems work out linguistically with thought what the border does culturally with the nation and what mestizaje does racially with the body” (10, my emphasis). These definitions point to the concept’s relevance to both literary strategies *and* racial identity rather than either one or the other.

Given that the notion of hybridity as it has historically been used by literary scholarship has pertained to negotiating racial, cultural, national, and linguistic boundaries, my dissertation expands the edges of what *hybridity* contains by approaching it as a term that encompasses *both* content and form rather than one or the other. Asian American scholars have already begun the important work of bridging this gap. For example, Steven G. Yao argues in *Foreign Accents: Chinese American Verse from Exclusion to Postethnicity* (2010) that even Bhabha and Lowe’s theories prove to be limited in their scope because they are more descriptive of cultural difference rather than serving an analytical function. Yao’s assertion of the limitations of their theories is based on his recognition that their conceptions of hybridity stem from M.M. Bakhtin’s theory of the novel, which they applied generally to sociocultural and political contexts rather than acknowledging the formal specificities by which hybridity exists within verse (19).³ In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1975) Bakhtin explains that “[w]hat we are calling a hybrid

³ It is useful to note here as well Bakhtin’s assertion that “[f]orm and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon” (259).

construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two ‘languages,’ two semantic and axiological belief systems” (304). To account for both formal and cultural specificities, Yao proposes a taxonomy of hybridity that—drawing from the biologicistic and technical implications of the term—offers “expressive or combinatory strategies that enable substantive distinctions to be made between the formal, as well as larger political, significance of differences among specific approaches to ethnic representation with the sphere of Asian American cultural, and especially poetic, production” (21). Additionally, in *“So There It Is”*: *An Exploration of Cultural Hybridity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry*, Brigitte Wallinger-Schorn examines cultural hybridity at the level of language, content, and form. She states:

In this poetry, Asian American identity is presented as a new, culturally hybrid subjectivity independent of—and at the same time interrelated with—Asian and majority American cultures as independent conceptual entities. This new “third space” (Bhabha’s term) of Asian American identity is expressed in the culturally hybrid content of the poems, in their poetic forms inspired by European as well as Asian models, and in their use of English as well as Asian languages. (29)

Dorothy J. Wang also offers another important contribution to addressing the tendency of scholarship on ethnic minority poetry to emphasize content over form. She argues in *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (2013) for the need to examine works of Asian American poets not only through a sociological lens of racial and cultural history—as it has overwhelmingly been the tendency for critics to do—but also through a literary lens by attending to the formal elements of their work. Recognizing the false opposition of content (identity politics) and

form (literary production) in scholarship, she makes a necessary claim for linking minority avant-garde work and racialized ethnic subjectivity (33).

My dissertation follows in the vein of these scholars' work but extends the scope of their focus on linguistic and formal hybridity, arguing that the focal poetics of my study exceed the boundaries of hybridity that literary critics have drawn thus far. While their analyses of poets' multilingualism primarily focus on the interweaving of another language into a primarily English text, I examine radical multilingual practices that intermix numerous languages beyond the ones tied to the poets' ethnic identity.⁴ For example, Cathy Park Hong's *Dance Dance Revolution* (2007) uses an invented creole that blends languages such as English, Spanish, Latin, French, and Korean (as well as various dialects of these languages); in *from unincorporated territory: [hacha]* (2008), Craig Santos Perez alternates between English, Chamorro, Spanish, and Japanese. As my chapters on Hong and Perez's work will demonstrate, the use of multiple languages is not so much a push for plurality or an assertion of linguistic identity but signals the ways in which hybrid language use is symptomatic of the power struggles involved in postcolonial and diasporic experience. Additionally, while previous studies' examinations of formal elements focus on literary devices and aesthetic features at the level of textual material, I expand the study of hybrid poetry to also include experimentation with

⁴ Recognizing that *multilingual* is often used as a quantitative term rather than an ideological one, Sarah Dowling favors the applied linguistics term *translingualism*, describing it as "a set of strategies by which writers engage with diverse linguistic codes in ways that are context-dependent... Unlike the term *multilingual*, which is often associated with dominant multiculturalisms, the term *translingual* typically describes critical, oppositional, and survival practices" (5). While *translingualism* usefully foregrounds the relationship between languages, I maintain use of the term *multilingualism* in order to also lend it a critical valence and avoid reifying it as a blanket term that merely celebrates the coexistence of different languages.

medium, namely through visual elements such as photographs, illustrations, and collage.⁵ My dissertation addresses a lack of critical discussion on the interplay of the verbal and the visual in poetry. I contend that rather than merely illustrative or supplementary to text, images in hybrid poetry can be read *as* text—as constitutive of the poetry’s formal construction. For example, Don Mee Choi includes photographs, illustrations, and sheet music within her poems in *Hardly War* (2016) while Monica Ong digitally combines diagrams, family photographs, and medical ephemera in her poetry in *Silent Anatomies* (2015). These visual elements work directly in connection with the textual material and thus, they cannot be read apart from each other.

Given the lack of attention to hybrid poetics that account for multilingual practices that go beyond the poets’ native languages and the integration of visual media, I position my dissertation as a critical intervention that addresses this gap by examining the experimental work of contemporary Asian American and Pacific Islander poets. I argue that the poetry selected for my study represents an expansive hybridity that enacts formal hybridity in order to address matters of cultural hybridity. Focusing on multilingual and mixed-media practices to expand the category of hybrid poetics is central to my analysis of works by the aforementioned poets because so many of the issues addressed in their poetic investigations of hybrid subjectivity—set against the historical backdrop of imperialism and racial oppression—deal with confronting non-native or colonial languages as well as misrepresentations of ethnic subjects. Their use of various languages

⁵ Although Wallinger-Schorn acknowledges the integration of different genres (such as film, music, and painting) in Asian American poetry, her study only focuses on contemporary formal verse (181-182). *American Hybrid* does include excerpts from Claudia Rankine’s *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely*, but it is the only work in the entire anthology that features photography.

and visual elements demonstrate that hybridity constitutes poetic practice *as well as* the negotiation of racial, ethnic, and cultural difference. As Nathaniel Mackey explains concerning the contrast between the word *other* as a noun and verb: “[a]rtistic othering has to do with innovation, invention, and change, upon which cultural health and diversity depend and thrive. Social othering has to do with power, exclusion, and privilege, the centralizing of a norm against which otherness is measured, meted out, marginalized. My focus is the *practice* of the former by *people* subjected to the latter” (51, my emphasis). Similarly, *hybrid* also functions as an adjective that describes both practices and people.

All of the poets included in my dissertation write from hybrid subject positions as ethnic American poets. However, though they could nominally be listed under the banner of “American poetry,” they each have vexed ties with the US, which complicate this national identification. Hong was born in the US to Korean immigrant parents and her first language was not English; Perez is a native Chamorro from Guam, which remains an unincorporated territory of the US; Choi was born in Seoul, South Korea and lived in Hong Kong before moving to Seattle; Ong is the daughter of Chinese parents who fled to the Philippines before eventually immigrating to the US. As such, none of these poets share a common American experience, nor can they easily (or even desire to) identify as American; their work falls under the category of American poetry insofar as it puts pressure on this nationally defined identification and questions the notion of Americanness itself. Therefore, their inclusion in this study challenges homogenous notions of “American” poetry and also accounts for the different histories and experiences that Asian and Pacific Islander poets trace within their negotiations of

American identity and culture. While Perez may appear to be an outlier among the selected poets of my study, being the only Pacific Islander, I include his work in order to consider the conditions of hybrid positioning within the context of US imperialism. My use of the conjunction *and* when naming the poetries of my study intends to emphasize Asian American and Pacific Islander poetry's differences rather than conflating these labels. As J. Kehaulani Kauanui argues, "we should understand the Pacific Islander difference as *a different kind of difference*" than Asian American difference (125, original emphasis). Examining Perez's work also clarifies the differences between immigrant and postcolonial experience. While Hong and Ong's works address diasporic experience and the specific linguistic and cultural tensions involved in migration, Perez and Choi's poetry is more concerned with the repercussions of US geopolitics and colonial conquest.

Therefore, I read these poets' hybrid uses of multiple languages and visual elements as techniques that demonstrate innovative means by which to represent Asian American and Pacific Islander hybridity as sites of resistance. These poetic techniques not only challenge the dominance of English as a global and colonial language, but also make palpable the ways in which the subjugation of ethnic subjects transpires at the level of the visual just as profoundly as the verbal. How do the poets grapple with both text and image as a means of communicating across and confronting different types of boundaries (such as linguistic, national, cultural, racial, and ideological)? How do they utilize the page as a textual-visual space to not only address questions of hybrid identity but also to reflect upon and critique their social and political milieu? What does the use of hybrid forms suggest about cultural hybridity in local and transnational contexts? Considering the use of different languages as well as the relationship between visual and textual

elements in these works reveals the unique ways in which contemporary Pacific Islander and Asian American poets grapple with personal, cultural, and political struggle.

The multilingual and visual poetics of Hong, Perez, Choi, and Ong not only reflect particular themes of hybrid conditions, such as migration, colonization, geopolitical warfare, and marginalization (respectively), but also demonstrate new hybrid forms by which to represent them, which extend beyond an established tradition such as lyric poetry or a school such as Language poetry. These poets employ the lyric mode to varying degrees, but rarely do so as a means of presenting transparent expressions of self; rather, their “I”s are refracted through the voice of fictional characters, quoted language, or parodic ventriloquisms of hegemonic ideologies. They also emphasize “language itself” and the reader’s role in creating meaning by drawing attention to rhetorical gestures and presenting verbal-visual poems that require the reader’s engagement with their intermedial construction; however, these formal innovations are not merely self-referential but serve as the vehicles through which the poets elucidate the power dynamics at stake in their hybrid positionings. These poets are not only interested in telling narratives *about* hybrid identity but showing *how* hybridity transpires within specific social, political, and transnational contexts of oppression to represent and critique the apparatuses of hegemony. While Yao, Wallinger-Schorn, and Wang’s monographs offer important investigations of formal innovations in Asian American poetry that move beyond what Yao describes as “lyric testimony” (56) and toward what Wang categorizes as “minority avant-garde” poetry (33),⁶ they tend to highlight poets

⁶ Timothy Yu’s *Race and the Avant-Garde: Experimental and Asian American Poetry Since 1965* also presents an important study of the intersection of ethnic and experimental poetry that identifies both Asian American and Language poetry as literary categories that engage with formal and social concerns.

such as Marilyn Chin, Li-Young Lee and John Yau, who have become representative figures of Asian American poetry as some of the most widely published and frequently studied poets in Asian American literary criticism. These critics helpfully elucidate how their poetry does not easily fit into either lyric or avant-garde categories; however, the multilingual and visual strategies used by the poets I examine in this dissertation evidently exceed the formal strategies that they have outlined.⁷

I locate the poetry of Hong, Perez, Choi, and Ong within the literary lineage of *Dictee* (1982), the groundbreaking hybrid work of avant-garde Korean American writer and artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Scholars have alternately referred to this work as novel, memoir, and poetry, evincing how it resists easy categorization by combining these genres. Cha's experimental work enacts formal hybridity through the inclusion of photographs, film stills, handwritten notes, scanned letters, and diagrams along with fragmentary text to explore cultural hybridity of diaspora and colonization. Literary criticisms on *Dictee* from the last decade attest to this: whether by enacting multilingual experimentation to resist imperialism; using mixed media to explore transpacific imaginary; using form to parallel the body and language; using cinematic techniques to display historical memory; emphasizing performativity to address transnational discourse; using media to confront the problems of remembering and forgetting; or using

⁷ Yao offers cross-fertilization, mimicry, grafting, transplantation, and mutation as specific forms of hybridity in Chinese American poetry. Wallinger-Schorn examines linguistic codes in translation as well as European and Asian verse forms, such as the sonnet, elegy, ballad, *zuihitsu*, and *ghazal*. Wang analyzes literary devices and grammatical elements such as metaphor, irony, parody, syntax, and subjunctive mood.

linguistic experimentation to explore nationality, history, and identity, scholarship has recognized that Cha activates many different valences of hybridity in *Dictee*.⁸

The newer poetries that I examine in my dissertation also activate these techniques but do so to an even more pronounced and, at times, exaggerated level. Just as Cha minimally uses her native language, Korean, choosing instead to primarily use English and French, which are the languages she learned as a result of immigration, Hong blends numerous languages and dialects to emphasize the process of language acquisition in the context of migration and globalization. As Perez's use of an excerpt from *Dictee* in the epigraph of his book indicates, his work directly engages with the theme of exile through fragmented syntax and experimentation with page space while also exploring historical representation through the integration of official documents and family narratives. Whereas Cha imitates dictation exercises to critique the act of translation, Choi presents blatant mistranslations of words and images in order to expose the faulty logic of translation embedded in representations of geopolitical warfare. While Cha interspersed visual elements within the pages of her text like a montage, Ong combines text and image through digital collage techniques. Although a substantial comparative analysis of each poet's work with *Dictee* is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I draw

⁸ See, respectively: Joo, Hee-Jung S. and Christina Lux. "Dismantling Bellicose Identities: Strategic Language Games in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *DICTEE*." *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-18; Liu, Yu-Yen. "Repositioning 'Asia'—The Problematics of Liminality and Transpacific Imaginary in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*." *EurAmerica*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2012, pp. 497-534; Kim Hyo K. "Embodying the in-between: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*." *Mosaic*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2013, pp. 127-143; Inoue, Mayumo. "Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's "Phantomnation": Cinematic Specters and Spectral Collectivity in *Dictée* and *Apparatus*." *Criticism*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2014, pp. 63–87; Alvergue, Jose F. "Poetic Seeing/Beyond Telling: the "Call" in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*." *College Literature*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2016, pp. 427-455; Bloomfield, Mandy. "'The word. The image': Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Fractured Forms." *Archaeopoetics: Word, Image, History*. U of Alabama P, 2016, pp. 74-111; Lim, Tae Y. "'Forgetting; and 'Re membering': The Language of Stuttering and the Notion of 'Home' in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Experimental Writings." *ariel*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2019, pp. 79-104.

these connections here to highlight the importance of its legacy, not only as a work of experimental poetry that used hybrid techniques, but also as one that, as Timothy Yu argues in his essay “Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and the Impact of Theory,” shifted the paradigm of Asian American studies “from a monolithic cultural nationalism grounded in the politics of the 1970s to a more hybrid, deconstructed sense of the Asian American informed by poststructuralist and postcolonial theory” (306).⁹

However, an overview of recent scholarship on *Dictee*'s mixed-media form evinces the tendency of Asian American scholars to varyingly emphasize either identity politics or deconstructive theories of difference in their analyses of this work—not both. Yu provides an overview of scholarship on *Dictee* since the 90s and the critical split that the differing approaches demonstrate. From the essays collected in *Writing Self, Writing Nation*, which emphasize historical context and were highly influential in garnering critical attention to *Dictee*, Lisa Lowe's chapter in *Immigrant Acts*, which analyzes it through the lenses of postcolonial and Marxist theory, to Sau-ling Wong's critique of theory as potentially depoliticizing, these varying readings evince for Yu a significant dilemma in the field of Asian American studies: its initial emphasis on investigating cultural nationalist concerns in contrast with its shift toward deconstructionist and poststructuralist readings. He attributes the diverging approaches to *Dictee* to Asian Americanists' focus on historical content as well as the nature of the book's construction, noting that the latter sections—which do not pertain to Korea's history of colonization but rather, “the ‘apparatus’ of ideological interpellation”—often get ignored (313).

⁹ For a discussion of the connections between Perez and Cha's work, see: He, Huan. “‘On the perpetual motion of search’: The transpacific networked poetics of Craig Santos Perez and Theresa H.K. Cha.” *College Literature*, vol. 47, no 1, 2020, pp. 185-212.

However, he explains that for Cha, theory does not necessarily preclude identity politics even though the book seems to put these at odds with each other. Yu reads the subtle presentation of a Korean myth in the final section of *Dictee* as evidence of framing theory with cultural context:

By circling back to Korea, Cha suggests that the movement from identity to theory is not a unidirectional one, in which identity and history are abandoned as we move toward theoretical abstraction. Instead, we find ourselves returning to the scene of identity—and of history, culture, and nation—but with a difference. Having moved through deconstructive critique, we can no longer look to historical narratives (or counternarratives) for an opposition to or escape from ideology. Art becomes the crucial context within which issues of theory and identity can be played out, where acts can be both referential and performative, both abstract and concrete... Cha's self-theorizing work shows how art and literature provide a terrain on which "Asian America" is continually unfolding, shaped by history and culture but always in a process of self-definition. (318)

Ultimately, Yu sees *Dictee* as the catalyst for a "newly theoretical Asian American studies" (320). This recasting of the field by aligning theory with identity politics allows for readings of Asian American literature that do not privilege one over the other. By positioning *Dictee* as the forerunner of the poetics examined in this dissertation, I read their hybrid formal innovations as engaging with and signifying the complexities of their hybrid contexts, much like Cha did before them. What Yu describes as the "self-theorizing" quality of Cha's work is certainly evident in the work of these later poets as well in that their hybrid forms reflect the historical conditions of linguistic, cultural, postcolonial, and transnational hybridity that inform those forms. Furthermore, this dissertation will demonstrate how Hong, Perez, Choi, and Ong not only utilize the hybrid poetics that Cha introduced but build and expand upon them.

My interdisciplinary methodologies for analyzing the ways in which Asian American and Pacific Islander poets implement multiple languages and visual elements in their work draw from postcolonial theory and visual studies. In *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Language as Postcolonial Experience*, Rey Chow addresses the issue of racialization in the process of identity formation as a linguistically-based one, theorizing language in terms of tones—both audial (speech) and visual (skin tone)—to challenge the figure of the native speaker. As opposed to other assessments of the postcolonial subject’s encounter with the colonizer’s language as a *loss* of indigenous language, Chow conceives of postcolonial languaging not as a linear process anchored in one’s native language but a prosthetic one in which languages continually accumulate. As such, she sees a possibility for regarding colonized subjects as fully possessing their plural, unique language—what she calls a “xenophone”: foreign-sounding speech that “bear[s] in its accents diverse found speeches” (59). Chapter 2 reads Cathy Park Hong’s use of an invented creole language in *Dance Dance Revolution* as a hyperbolic xenophone that critiques utopic visions of multilingualism within the context of globalization. My reading of this dystopian poetic narrative asserts the need to examine the diasporic protagonist’s creole language as such and challenges the notion of hybrid language as cosmopolitan commodity. Rather than championing the use of non-standard Englishes and intermixed languages as unproblematized expressions of transnational identity, which extant scholarship on this work has suggested, I argue that Hong’s speculative poetry calls attention to the colonial conditions that necessitate multilingual practices.

Similarly, Craig Santos Perez’s multilingualism does not simply celebrate plurality for plurality’s sake but traces the history of colonialism in Guam. In Chapter 3, I

examine Perez's activation of hybridity through the use of his native language, Chamorro, in conjunction with formal elements such as page space, quotation marks, and brackets in *from unincorporated territory: [hacha]*. Given this work's thematic focus on Guam's colonial past and present as well as the constant erasure of indigenous language and culture, I argue that Perez uses poetic excerpting as a subversive, decolonizing strategy to establish the emergence of self-determined sovereignty. Kamau Brathwaite's discussion of the emergence of "nation language" in the Caribbean offers a useful comparison to the linguistic history of Guam. In *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*, Brathwaite addresses the various kinds of linguistic pluralities existing in the Caribbean as a result of contact between imperial languages and imported languages. He identifies nation language as the kind of English spoken by the African slaves and laborers who were brought to the Caribbean (5), describing it as a revolutionary strategy by which enslaved people were able to preserve the "software"—the rhythm and syllables—of their own emergent language in the face of colonial languages (9). Since the official language cannot account for the particularities of colonial subjects' experience, Brathwaite asserts nation language as an important means by which create the linguistic authority to do so (14). Although, on the surface, Perez does not necessarily infiltrate the colonial languages included in *from unincorporated territory: [hacha]* in such a way that alters them with "software" of Chamorro, his multilingual and formal excerpting techniques use, recontextualize, and undermine colonial discourse to work against the suppression and erasure of Chamorro existence. My reading of Perez's resistance to the unincorporated legal status of Guam as

a territory of the US offers a critical contribution to Archipelagic American studies that further examines the performance of politics through innovative poetics.

Don Mee Choi's work also addresses US imperialism and militarism, but specifically in relation to South Korea. Chapter 4 analyzes the hybrid use of verbal and visual material in *Hardly War* as polemical dramatizations of South Korea's enlistment in the US empire's anti-communist campaign during the Cold War period. I read Choi's deliberate mistranslations of English and Korean as well as her nonlinear, seemingly non-referential juxtaposition of text (which shifts between poetic memoir, historical satire, and libretto) with photographs from the Korean and Vietnam Wars as enacting false equivalences that reveal the dissonant logic by which geopolitical warfare become justified. As such, this chapter provides an analytical lens by which to assess and critique the verbal and visual representations of empire's versions of history. I read Choi's combinatory use of text and image as what W.J.T. Mitchell calls "imagetext." He defines the term in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* as "composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text" (89n9), asserting that "all media are mixed media... there are no 'purely' visual or verbal arts" (5). For Mitchell, reading and understanding imagetexts involves examining the ways in which each already exists within the other's medium. Approaching Choi's hybrid poems as imagetexts—rather than texts containing visual elements that function only as supplementary material—opens up considerations of the ways in which linguistic expressions connote images and visual representations denote language within the overall structure of the work's meaning-making processes. This approach also reveals the translational process involved in reading texts and images and how mistranslation can

productively yield interpretations that contest hegemonic narratives of transnational history.

Whereas Choi primarily juxtaposes image and text to suggest their relationality and tension, Monica Ong foregrounds the visuality of her poems by combining pictorial and textual materials through graphic design. In Chapter 5, I examine Ong's object poems and digital collages—which integrate poetic text with family photographs and various medical ephemera—as visualizations of the ways in which imagetexts of patriarchal and racist ideologies interpellate Asian and Asian American women's bodies as the Other in *Silent Anatomies*. My analysis is informed by Mitchell's approach to pictures as living entities that show desire and Sara Ahmed's conceptualization of the figure of the stranger. In *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, Mitchell explores the notion that pictures have a life of their own and are therefore capable of possessing desires and calling out to their viewer. This provides a model for understanding how Ong's work presents imagetexts that are suffused with ideologies and that show how ideologies project desire onto the viewer. I consider the relationship between pictures and viewers in conjunction with Ahmed's theorization of the stranger as the dialectical Other to the embodied subject. In *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality*, Ahmed identifies the stranger not as that which is unknown, but that which is already recognized through its difference from a particular community. This conceptualization of the figure of the stranger lends an understanding of Asian women's perpetually marginal position within Western and Eastern cultures in that it does not assume that the stranger categorically exists beyond spatial borders, but rather, recognizes her alterity as produced through her proximity within them. This chapter

examines the ways in which Ong's imagetexts represent and challenge the ideological interpellation of the stranger to demonstrate the deeply interconnected relationship between iconology and ideology. I assert that picturing scenes of enforced and internalized silences both exposes and delegitimizes the reification of the ethnic female body by oppressive ideologies.

This dissertation offers conceptual frameworks for understanding the experimental formal practices of hybridity enacted by contemporary Asian American and Pacific Islander poets to represent their unique hybrid positionings. It provides interdisciplinary methods for analyzing hybridity as both a formal and ontological concept that not only describes experimental poetic strategies like multilingualism and intermixing visual media but also designates the social, cultural, political, and postcolonial positionings of ethnic American subjects as the sites of resistance they inescapably inhabit. This expansive approach offers an interpretive lens by which to examine innovative formal practices with closer attention to the contentious socio-historical contexts from which they have emerged since, far from being arbitrary, they constitute the strategic means by which the poets of my study challenge the systems of power that deny hybrid subjects agency.

CHAPTER 2

“CRAMMED WITH TONGUES”: COSMOPOLITAN CREOLE IN CATHY PARK HONG’S *DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION*

*I speak sum Han-guk y Finnish, good bit o Latin
y Spanish... sum toto Desert Creole en evachanging dipdong
'pendable on mine mood...*

—Cathy Park Hong, “Roles”

It seems no small coincidence that in the same year that W.W. Norton & Company published *Rotten English: A Literary Anthology* (2007)—which offers a sampling of fiction and poetry that uses non-standard English—they also released Korean American poet Cathy Park Hong’s second collection of poems, *Dance Dance Revolution* (henceforth referred to as *DDR*), a book that hybridizes English with other languages and dialects. These texts attest to the influx of literatures in the late-20th and early-21st centuries that destabilize standardized language and champion more diverse, heterogeneous linguistic forms. Of all the works examined within this dissertation, Hong’s poetry appears most like traditional, left-hand margin aligned stanzas of verse; however, her use of an invented hybrid language is the most experimental in its multilingual practice.

In *DDR*, Hong introduces a character named Chun Sujin, better known as the Guide, who interweaves numerous languages (English, Korean, Latin, Spanish, and Finnish, to name a few) and dialects in what she calls “Desert Creole,” to demonstrate the hybrid nature of language in an increasingly globalized milieu. The events of the text are

set in 2016 (conceived as the near future at the time of *DDR*'s publication), in a fictional cosmopolitan city called "The Desert" where the Guide leads another character, the Historian (the transcriber of the text), through various tourist spots while recounting her life: from her early years of education to her involvement in leading a rebellion against Chun Du-Hwan's¹⁰ military coup in the Kwangju Uprising in South Korea (an actual historical event)¹¹ and to her move to the Desert where she began working as a tour guide. While transcriptions of the Guide's speech comprise the majority of the text, excerpts from the Historian's memoir punctuate the end of each section, and some poems offer samplings of the diverse speech of other residents of the Desert as well. In the foreword, the Historian describes this language as "an amalgam of some three hundred languages and dialects imported into this city, a rapidly evolving lingua franca" (Hong, *DDR* 19). Altogether, the text presents a look into a fictional microcosm that, at its surface, seems to celebrate diverse populations and languages but, at its core, is a colonized city of tourism in which cosmopolitanism is promoted at the expense of the native population.

The Desert is a place where language continuously evolves. As the Historian explains, "[h]ere, new faces pour in and civilian accents morph so quickly that their

¹⁰ Major General Chun Du-Hwan (also spelled Chun Doo Hwan) was the President of South Korea from 1980-1988. After the assassination of President Park Chung Hee in 1979, Prime Minister Choi Kyu-Ha became the interim president while Chun, who was chief of Defense Security Command at the time, became the de facto leader (Cumings 380). In order to stage a coup d'état against Choi's government, on March 17, 1980 Chun "declared martial law, closed universities, dissolved the legislature, banned all political activity, and arrested thousands of political leaders and dissidents" (381).

¹¹ Also known as the Kwangju Revolution, the Kwangju Democratization Movement, or simply as "May 18," the Kwangju Uprising occurred from May 18th to 27th in 1980. Civilians, many of them students, led protests against their militarized government under Chun, only to be met with violent repression (Shin xii-xv). The ten-day skirmish resulted in nearly 500 dead and over 3,000 injured (xvii). This event marked an important chapter in historical narratives of South Korea's fight for democracy.

accents betray who they talked to that day rather than their cultural roots” (19). In this sense, the language is not indicative of nationality or ethnic identity, as is often presumed of multilingual speakers, because they use an unstable creole that constantly shifts with subsequent interactions. Primarily through the figure of the Guide, Hong introduces an explosive kind of multilingualism that splices different languages and dialects together. In light of this, it may be tempting to describe Desert Creole as an all-inclusive, ever-expanding lingua franca that is able to contain an infinite number of languages. However, part of what Hong seems to suggest through the Guide’s hybrid language is not so much a celebration of multilingualism simply for the sake of plurality or diversity but a wariness of such unquestioned optimism. Hong does not portray the Desert as a linguistic utopia but a *dystopia*—a “city of unrest”—in which trademark phrases are auctioned for profit, people have to hybridize their language out of commercial necessity rather than any genuine practice of cultural exchange, and Desert officials exile natives who subsequently orchestrate “canny acts of sabotage” against the tourism industry by misleading travelers to landmines leftover from war (21). As such, Hong’s Desert demonstrates that the presence of hybrid languages does not always serve as evidence of harmoniously coexisting groups of people.

By establishing this discordant cosmopolitan setting, Hong neither fully celebrates multilingualism nor argues for monolingualism (or the purity of a native language). Rather than calling for the preservation or validation of a native language (either that of the Desert natives or the Guide’s), by including languages that neither the Guide nor Hong herself would claim as their native languages *DDR* pushes the boundaries of what hybridity can mean for diasporic subjects beyond ethnic and national ties. This marks a

clear divergence from the strand of multilingual poetics primarily concerned with the affirmation of a “mother tongue” and challenging standard English as the norm of proper speech. Recent critical studies have worked to reclaim the use of nonstandard English in multilingual poetry. For example, in “English before English: Asian American Poetry’s Unruly Tongue,” Tara Fickle examines the deliberate misuse of English in Asian American avant-garde poetry as playful Wittgensteinian language games. She takes issue with derogatory assessments of nonstandard uses of English, asserting that “Asian uses—or misuses—of the English language are... instrumental sites for the contemporary articulation of a national sovereignty that is increasingly being defined as, and through, linguistic sovereignty” (84). Arguments such as Fickle’s offer important and necessary perspectives on poetry that challenges the English-only status quo by incorporating the authors’ native languages.¹² But what do we make of poetry that includes languages other than ones directly tied to the writer’s ethnic identity or national origin? How do we read the language(s) of literary works like Hong’s that do not present an autobiographical voice that seeks to reclaim a native tongue?

Through the figure of the Guide and her unique position as a multilingual tour guide in the Desert, Hong suggests that linguistic identity is not simply a product of birth

¹² While Fickle’s study focuses on Asian North American experimental poets, the aforementioned themes have also been addressed in scholarship on poets of other ethnic minorities as well. In her reading of Chicano literature, Holly E. Martin argues that “[f]or multilingual authors, switching between two or more languages is not an arbitrary act, nor is it simply an attempt to mimic the speech of their communities; code-switching results from a conscious decision to create a desired effect and to promote the validity of authors’ heritage languages” (403-404). Addressing the need to identify the rhetorical implications of Hawaiian poet Noelle Kahanu’s use of Pidgin as an indigenous linguistic resource (not evolving from Standard English), Georganne Nordstrom reads her poetry through the lens of Ellen Cushman’s notion of “cultural perseverance.” She insists on the connection between language and indigenous identity, claiming it as a “part of a cultural continuum predating Western contact and continuing through the present. It creates space to understand how Hawaiians have developed and adapted rhetorical strategies so as to both survive and resist colonization” (322).

or heritage, nor is it equivalent to ethnic identity. As Juliana Spahr has argued concerning multilingual literature at the end of the twentieth century, “[i]nstead of saying ‘I am my language,’ these writers are saying something about language itself” (“The ‘90s” 162).¹³ In the Desert, language is an endless process that is constantly evolving; the Guide’s speech is a composite of all the languages and dialects to which she has been exposed. But rather than presenting a Whitmanic portrayal of the Guide’s ability to contain the multitude of languages with which she has come into contact, Hong’s text demonstrates a relationship of precarity, ambivalence, and otherness to one’s spoken language—rather than possession of it—that epitomizes hybridized language use. As this chapter will argue, rather than her ethnic particularity determining her language use or her language reflecting her ethnicity, the Guide’s linguistic hybridity ultimately exposes the ways in which multilingualism can be used as a ploy to mask the colonial undercurrent of cosmopolitanism. As such, Hong’s construction of the Desert more accurately exemplifies Walter Dignolo’s notion of “critical cosmopolitanism,” which “reconceive[s] cosmopolitanism from the perspective of coloniality” as a global design “driven by the will to control and homogenize” (723).¹⁴ Given Hong’s sobering representation of hybrid language, I argue in this chapter that *DDR* hyperbolizes what Rey Chow calls the “xenophone,” the postcolonial subject’s foreign-sounding speech that “bear[s] in its accents diverse found speeches,” in order to demonstrate that the Guide’s language is not

¹³ Spahr is alluding here to Gloria Anzaldúa’s assertion that ethnic identity and language are inextricably tied, which is a point I will discuss later in this chapter.

¹⁴ Dignolo contextualizes contemporary cosmopolitanism in terms of globalization, capitalism, and modernity (721). He traces the trajectory of cosmopolitanism along four (Eurocentric) global designs: first, Spanish and Portuguese colonialism (Christian mission) of the 16th and 17th Century; second, French and English colonialism (civilizing mission) of the 18th and 19th Century; third, US colonialism (modernizing mission) of the second half of 20th Century; and fourth, the transnational ideology of the market with “neoliberalism as an emergent civilizational project” (725).

simply an inventive amalgamation that envisions limitless multilingual possibilities but an allegorical representation of the consequences of a globalized society that operates under the logic of colonialism (59). Desert Creole complicates visions of multilingualism that are perhaps too quick to deem it a fundamentally revolutionary apparatus without considering the colonial conditions that necessitate it.

This chapter begins with a wider discussion of multilingualism in ethnic American literature in general and scholarship on *DDR* more specifically in order to rethink Hong's approach to linguistic hybridity, not merely as a form of resistance against monolingualism but a critique of colonial cosmopolitanism. The remaining sections move toward narrower foci for close reading: from a contextualization of the Desert's cosmopolitan setting and resultant creole languages to a comparison of the Guide and Historian's linguistic backgrounds, and finally, to an examination of the Guide's unique xenophone. I ultimately read *DDR* as a cautionary tale that warns against multilingualism as cosmopolitan commodity. This reading demonstrates that Hong's notion of hybridity does not reinscribe the dominant narratives of Asian experience that focus on either nationalism or assimilation but, as Lowe asserts, "marks the history of survival within relationships of unequal power and domination" (67). Such a reading offers a necessary perspective on multilingualism that does not simplistically identify it as a revolutionary tool but recognizes the colonial conditions that create the need for linguistic hybridity.

Multilingualism and the Xenophone

This section presents a brief overview of literary scholarship on multilingualism and *DDR* in order to differentiate Hong's hybrid poetics from identity-centered

multilingualism and to align Desert Creole to Chow's concept of the xenophone. In order to foreground Hong's ambivalence toward multilingualism, I locate her invented creole language in *DDR* within the lineage of the kind of multilingual poetics that critics like Spahr have observed emerging from the '90s. Spahr asserts that "by the end of the century, while many writers continue to bring other languages into their English, they do this less to talk about their personal identity and more to talk about English and its histories" ("The '90s" 164).¹⁵ Tracing the trajectory of movements in Asian American poetry—from the politically charged writing of the 70s, to the lyrical and autobiographical work of the 80s, to the more experimental and language-centered poetry of the 90s—Timothy Yu also sees Hong's work emerging from this last strain; however, he argues that her emphasis on language does not preclude its ability to speak to issues of racial difference. Reading the Guide's "linguistic hybridization as a metaphor for Asian American experience" ("Asian American Poetry" 834), he argues that "[w]ithout engaging an Asian language directly, Hong creates a sense of linguistic foreignness that powerfully allegorizes the Asian American perspective on language, from the accented speech of the immigrant to the alienated relationship of American-born Asians to their parents' language" (835-836). As Yu observes, *DDR* demonstrates its ability to speak to collective experience, not just individual identity. However, I would argue that Desert Creole is even more detached from the Asian American linguistic experience than Yu

¹⁵ Spahr contextualizes this shift in poetry within the larger political debates about language such as "English Only" and "English Plus" ("The '90s" 175). She argues that "[t]he literature in English that turns away from standard English in the '90s is not merely a literary style or trend. It is also a moment when literature reflects and comments on a very intense public debate about language that was also a discussion about globalization and indigenous and immigrant rights, a debate that changed not only literature in English but also governing bodies and public school systems" (177).

suggests; the allegory extends beyond this multi-ethnic identity to reflect an increasingly globalized world.

In the Desert, one's language reflects conversational interactions rather than ethnicity. Having experienced attempts to suppress her use of Chicano Spanish, Gloria Anzaldúa insists that "[e]thnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language" (81). Yet for a diasporic multilingual speaking subject, this equivalence is not so easily applicable. As opposed to the code-switching that Anzaldúa enacts between English and various Spanish dialects in *Borderlands/La Frontera* to represent mestiza identity, the Guide's speech constitutes a borderless, fluctuating language for which the line between the various languages and dialects is impossible to draw in a simplistic manner. The Guide is a dissident from South Korea, or as she describes herself, "I'mma double migrant. Ceded from Koryo, ceded from/ 'Merikka, ceded y ceded" (Hong, *DDR* 26). This positions the Guide as a perpetual exile or emigrant who never arrives at a final place of settlement. As such, she is a character who cannot simply be labeled Korean, Korean American, or any other multi-ethnic identity category according to her spoken languages or the places in which she has resided. Whereas Hong's earlier work, *Translating Mo'um*, directly explored the Korean American immigrant experience by incorporating Korean words and phrases (transliterated into English) within a primarily English text, *DDR* complicates readers' assumptions about the connection between ethnicity and language. Hong has confirmed her departure from solely addressing identity politics in her later work: "I'm not saying that my ethnic identity plays a scant role, but it's now more temperament rather than a subject matter. Like most writers from bicultural backgrounds, I do share a 'stranger within one's own language' consciousness, but as I

continue to write, it has less to do with the actual naming of my ethnic identity” (“Interview”). Her allusion to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s essay, “What is a Minor Literature,” here evidently underscores its influence on the poetics of *DDR*.

Accordingly, most of the extant works of literary criticism on *DDR* read Hong’s use of multilingualism by invoking Deleuze and Guattari. For example, Tae Yun Lim identifies the Guide’s hybrid language as a “minor literature.” According to Lim’s reading of the theorists’ concept, a minor literature “uses the dominant language to catalyze transformations beyond the boundaries of nations, races, and cultural histories to create new, perpetually fluid meanings” (88). Although the Guide’s language is anchored in English, its inclusion of other languages and dialects suggests a liminal “in-between” state that never fully represents either her Korean or American identity. Therefore, Lim argues that this “becoming” affords her agency to create her identity apart from homogenous representations of Asian American subjects. In a similar vein, Ruth Williams examines Hong’s multilingualism through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “deterritorialization.” She reads the Guide’s language as an interrogation of the primacy of standard English as well as an assertion of legitimacy for non-standardized, hybrid language use (which, we can see, aligns with Fickle’s restorative reading “Engrish”). Williams argues that “‘Desert Creole’ subverts the hegemony of standardized English by unsettling systems of power that connect citizenship to fluency” (646).¹⁶ In this sense, the Guide’s speech embodies a productive power struggle in which minor languages surface to underscore the socially constructed dominance of major

¹⁶ A.K. Afferez also discusses *DDR* in terms of its challenge to the notion of fluency. She asserts that fluency is “property of the acquired language” rather than of a mother tongue and therefore, “it can be lost or taken away” (Afferez).

languages as such. Williams affirms that “despite the fragmentation wrought by globalization, revolution is still possible” (665). Seen through this lens, the Guide’s use of nonstandard English is strategically subversive and ultimately empowering.¹⁷

These arguments usefully identify the ways in which the Guide’s hybrid language confronts issues of homogeneity, whether it pertains to stereotypical representations of Asian American subjects or the dominance of official languages. Readings of the Guide as an agential figure in full possession and command of her language contribute to reclaiming the diverse linguistic practices of minority writers as productive and valid, which is at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical projects. However, focusing only on the revolutionary potential of the Guide’s language risks rendering Desert Creole into a utopic concept of hybridity despite the fact that the narrative of *DDR* more prominently highlights the troubled histories (that of the Guide as well as the Desert natives) that preceded its eminence. This also overlooks the colonial context from which her hybrid language emerged. On the one hand, the Guide, apropos to her title, is an expert navigator of the city and deft speaker of its variegated tongue who refers to herself as a “talky Virgil” (Hong, *DDR* 25). This brief allusion not only draws a parallel between Dante’s *Inferno* and the Desert as purgatorial in-between places of unrest but also characterizes the Guide as a poetic figure herself—a speaker with confidence in her aptitude for crafting language. In this sense, her position is indeed one of agency in that she is the storyteller as well as the navigator. But on the other hand, the Guide’s recollections of her involvement in an anti-military government demonstration in South

¹⁷ Additionally, Min Hyoung Song refers to Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* to read the Desert as a rhizomatic place and the Guide’s language as “weird English”—a term she borrows from Evelyn Ch’ien (205).

Korea before her eventual arrival to the Desert demonstrate that her speech did not always carry such revolutionary potential. Examining the fraught contexts of warfare, emigration, and colonialism that encompass the Desert's cosmopolitanism also reveals the ways in which language is too often stripped of agency, thereby necessitating revolution and reclamation. Therefore, the circumstances under which postcolonial and diasporic subjects like the Guide and the Desert natives are *forced* to hybridize their language must not be ignored. In *DDR*, the fracturing, intermixing, and diversifying of language does not occur in a vacuum or simply by matter of choice; rather, it is inertial: evolving in response to the subjugation and disenfranchisement wrought by colonialism under the guise of cosmopolitanism.

As such, the central tension of *DDR* cannot simply be schematized as a matter of native/minor versus colonial/major languages. The fictional context of the Desert invites readers to consider the ways in which multilingual subjects are inescapably thrust into a relationship of radical otherness with the very languages they speak due to the unsettling conditions through which they live. Therefore, in analyzing the innovative qualities of the Hong's invented language and its revolutionary potential, it is important to also recognize the cause that engendered the effect. Concerning her relationship to language, Hong has stated her appreciation for the linguistic experimentation of the Language poets, who de-centered the lyric "I" and foregrounded the materiality of the English language, while also articulating her greater interest in experimentation that reflects poets' complicated linguistic histories:

Ultimately, though, I was more drawn to poets who severed syntax out of a sense of cultural or political displacement rather than for the sake of experimentation. History and circumstance alienated these poets from

their own language, placed them in the margins of their cultures, where they were witness to language's limits in articulating a cohesive voice. Through deliberate inarticulation, they managed to strain out a charged music from syntactic chaff, a music borne out of negation. ("How Words Fail")¹⁸

The alienation that Hong describes is attributed to the poets' tortured relationship to their language.¹⁹ These poets' formal strategies emerge as the result of being confronted with the inadequacy of language to convey their traumatic experiences and the need to create other means by which to articulate them.

Therefore, I contend that the Guide's language and its specific classification as a creole warrants a closer examination of it as such because this linguistic phenomenon is firstly a product of her displacement—and the inevitable communicational strain it entails—before it becomes the revolutionary tool she reclaims and wields to exercise her linguistic agency. In "What is a Minor Literature?" Deleuze and Guattari use the example of Prague Jewish immigrants writing in German, noting their "irreducible distance from their primitive Czech territoriality" (16). Arguing for a minor literature deterritorialized from the major in order to establish the revolutionary capacity of the former, they pose a significant series of questions: "How many people today live in a language that is not *their own*? Or no longer, or not yet, even know their own and poorly the major language that they are forced to serve?... How to become a nomad and a gypsy in relation to *one's own* language?" (19, emphasis mine). In response to these questions, I pose another: what

¹⁸ Elsewhere, Hong has polemicized the racial divide in the avant-garde poetry scene and the dismissal of identity politics within it. See: "Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde." *Arcade: Literature, Humanities, and the World*, <https://arcade.stanford.edu/content/delusions-whiteness-avant-garde>. Originally published in Lana Turner, no. 7, 2014.

¹⁹ For example, Hong cites Paul Celan and his use of German, "the language of his parents' murderers," as an example ("How Words Fail").

might someone like the Guide designate as her “own” language? Deleuze and Guattari’s questions reveal an underlying assumption that such a thing as one’s “own language” exists by giving primacy to the language of immigrants’ native place of origin for the creation of a minor language.

In contrast, in *Not Like a Native Speaker* Rey Chow problematizes the figure of the native speaker and the assumption that language can be possessed, acquired, or used as an inherent identity marker. Chow’s reading of Jacques Derrida’s autobiographical work, *Monolingualism of the Other*, which recounts his experience of otherness from French (his only language), offers a useful comparison to the Guide’s relationship to her hybrid language. Addressing the issue of racialization in the process of identity formation as a linguistically-based one, she theorizes language in terms of tones—both audial (speech) and visual (skin tone)—to challenge the figure of the native speaker as the prototype of an original language speaker. Refuting Derrida’s notion that all languages are originarily colonial, she complicates this originary status by identifying it as a prosthetic feature rather than a permanent one. As opposed to other assessments of the postcolonial subject’s encounter with the colonizer’s language as a *loss* of indigenous language, Chow conceives of languaging—which she adapts from the linguist A.L. Becker—not as a linear (therefore quantifiable) process but one in which discourses are fragmented and dispersed, constantly shifting, cumulative in acquisition, and thus, never complete.²⁰ Thus, she sees language as “involuntary memory, self-estrangement, and lived experience” (11). As such, the figure of the native speaker loses its prime status

²⁰ Chow clarifies that for Becker, “the term *language* refers to a system of rules or structures, whereas the term *languaging* refers to an open-ended process that combines attunement to context, storing and retrieving memories, and communication” (125n19).

because this understanding of language negates the notion of the “mother tongue” as a unified, whole entity. Seen through this notion of languaging, the Guide’s speech demonstrates that language always comes *from without* rather than being an inherent ontological feature.

Therefore, rather than theorizing multilingualism as a loss of native language, Chow offers the concept of the xenophone as an “emergent languaging domain” that “draws its sustenance from mimicry and adaptation and bears in its accents the murmur, the passage, of diverse found speeches” (59).²¹ She argues for the need to rethink the “affects of loss in contemporary cultural politics, especially as native languages and cultures are in the translational process of being dismantled, abandoned, reorganized, and/or reclaimed” (12). Just as Hong places emphasis on experimental uses of language as a means of articulating near-impossible-to-articulate lived experiences, Chow recognizes that languaging is tied to the trajectory of discourses in postcolonial contexts. While Deleuze and Guattari envision a “new intensity” (19) granted to minor languages through the deterritorialization of major languages, the narrative of *DDR* suggests that the emergence of heterogeneity is not necessarily the more desirable counterbalance to homogeneity. Multilingualism can, and indeed does, challenge the dominance of English and monolingualism but, as Chow asserts, “[j]ust as diversity is not the opposite of

²¹ Chow’s term also echoes the poetic term *xenoglossia*, which *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines as “the intelligible use, through speech, aural comprehension, reading, or writing, of a natural lang[uage] one has not learned formally and/or does not know” (Scappetone). While early examples of xenoglossia referred to supernatural phenomena, such as speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost, “More recently, the term xenoglossia has been used to describe the plurilingual, creolistic, and translational strategies of postcolonial poetics and poetries of migration and exile. No longer restricted to the domain of the paranormal, irrational, or exotic, the term xenoglossia encompasses ling[ui]stic phenomena increasingly prevalent as texts reflect the incomplete weaving of unlearned or alien lang[uages] into national or ‘mother’ tongues, exemplifying an age of global networking, transit, and dislocation” (Scappetone).

oneness (because oneness is never one), so neither is multilingualism the opposite of monolingualism” (33). In this sense, the presence of multilingualism does not guarantee that the problematic implications of monolingualism (i.e., insistence on “proper” speech and the devaluing of non-conforming language use) are no longer in play. Indeed, as Kwame A. Appiah recognizes, “[n]o doubt, there can be an easy and spurious utopianism of ‘mixture,’ as there is over ‘purity’” within cosmopolitanism (113). Therefore, rather than focusing on the tension between native and non-native languages in the Guide’s creole, it is necessary to recognize the systems of power that sanction language use—whether mono- or multilingual. As the following section will demonstrate, examining the Guide’s language as a creole reveals the colonial undercurrent of the Desert’s cosmopolitanism that necessitates hybridized language use.

Desert Creole: Hybrid Language of Cosmopolitan Tourism

To establish an understanding of the Desert as a space of colonial hybridity, this section examines its colonial infrastructure and its adjacency to New Town, a neighboring city without trade, in order to identify Desert Creole as a language born of the market-driven values of global tourism. The name for the Guide’s spoken language, “Desert Creole,” is offered by the Guide herself. This specific nomenclature—as opposed to code-switching, pidgin, or idiolect—suggests its significance in the overall framing of multilingualism in *DDR* and the importance of examining it as a creole language.²² The

²² While a thorough outlining of the differences between these various types of multilingual forms are beyond the scope of this chapter, it is useful to distinguish the Guide’s Desert Creole from the concept of code-switching, which Penelope Gardner-Chloros describes as bilingual speakers *alternating* between different languages. She loosely defines code-switching as “the use of several languages or dialects in the

Oxford English Dictionary defines *creole* as “[a] language that has developed from the mixing of two or more parent languages and has come to be the first language of a community, typically arising as the result of contact between the language of a dominant group (historically often a European colonizer) and that (or those) of a subordinate group (often the colonized people, or a slave population)” (“creole, n2”). Sociolinguists have debated over precise definitions of languages that emerge as a result of contact but generally agree that pidgins are simple or reduced languages prompted into existence by the need for a means of communication between different groups who share no common language—often in the context of trade.²³ They are born of necessity and exist solely to fulfill the need for communicative exchange between speakers of different languages. While pidgins are used in addition (i.e., as a second language) to one’s already-spoken language, creoles on the other hand, are complex linguistic systems that constitute the native language of a group. According to Viveka Velupillai, a creole is “a natural language spoken as a mother tongue by an entire community that arose due to situations of intense contact. Creoles are fullfledged languages on par with any other natural language in the world, and are capable of fulfilling any linguistic need of the relevant

same conversation or sentence by bilingual people” acknowledging the complexity and fine-line between code-switching, pidginization, creolization, and “mixed languages” (4).

²³ John Holm defines pidgin as “a reduced language that results from extended contact between groups of people with no language in common; it evolves when they need some means of verbal communication, perhaps for trade” (5) and recognizes that they “evolv[e] as the result of non-intimate social contact between groups of unequal power” (68). Offering a similar definition, Viveka Velupillai describes pidgin as a “communicative bridge” that is used exclusively for trade: “If speakers of different languages repeatedly meet to negotiate, they will need to have some kind of tool for communication. This tool only needs to serve the immediate function of the situation, and is typically only used in that particular situation; for everything else the parties have their own respective languages. If this tool or communicative bridge is used systematically, a new linguistic variety, a pidgin, may emerge” (15). Salikoko S. Mufwene defines them as a “second-language variety” of “reduced linguistic systems which are used for specific communicative functions, typically in trade between speakers of different, mutually unintelligible languages. They are second-language varieties that developed in settings where the speakers of the lexifier had only sporadic contacts with the populations they traded with” (7).

speech community” (43). John Holm explains that a creole “has a jargon or a pidgin in its ancestry; it is spoken natively by an entire speech community, often one whose ancestors were displaced geographically so that their ties with their original language and sociocultural identity were partly broken” (6). However, Salikoko S. Mufwene, offering a socio-historical perspective, disputes the notion that creoles are nativized pidgins, arguing instead that they emerged from European settlement colonies “and grew more by importations of new labor than by birth” (11). Despite differences in their specific definitions, these explanations clarify that creoles result from extended contact between different groups of people and serve as the first or native language to a speech community.

Given that creoles are the result of a necessary hybridizing of languages due to extended contact between speakers of different languages for the purposes of trade, we can read Desert Creole as a product of colonial cosmopolitanism. As readers learn, language in the Desert “[f]irst began warping when the first ship docked and they hybridized a word for money so that group 1 would understand group 2” (Hong, *DDR* 80). This moment of contact was the initial seed that led to the eventual growth of the Desert as a cosmopolitan tourist site. Global tourism is at the center of the Desert’s design as a “planned city of renewed wonders” (20). The main settings and attractions of the Guide’s tours are hotels modeled after major cities, such as St. Petersburg, Belgrade, and Paris; the Desert also comes complete with a bazaar, auctioneer tent, and even a red-light district as well. Significantly, the Desert is described as an “elsewhere,” suggesting that it is a totally unfamiliar marginal space, yet simultaneously implies that, in view of its cosmopolitan qualities, the otherness of the city is not so different from the world

readers know today. As the Historian states, “[t]his city is the center of elsewhere but perhaps that is not accurate. As the world shrinks, elsewhere begins to disappear” (20). The Desert’s cluster of mock sites invite travelers from all over the world to sample a global experience within one centralized city-state. Hong has described the Desert as “an omnibus city, an allegorical space of a present condition, which could be present-day Korea or America as well as other places” (“Interview”). That the Desert could be analogous to both the US and South Korea suggests that it could potentially be compared to an ethnically heterogeneous nation like the former as well as (generally) an ethnically homogenous one like the latter since it is not as uncommon to see more diverse cultures and people populating countries all throughout the world today (indeed, travel and tourism have become much more accessible in the twenty-first century). The Desert constitutes a place of utter foreignness in terms of its linguistic alterity in that Desert Creole is an invented language that does not resemble any extant language in the world, so it cannot be read as directly analogous to an actual place in the world, but its situational backdrop presents a familiar context of global tourism. In constructing this imagined (yet not entirely unfamiliar) city, Hong allegorizes the way the enterprise of colonialism becomes actualized and bolstered in the name of cosmopolitanism qua global tourism to ultimately problematize the notion of multilingualism as cultural capital.

At its surface, the Desert appears to be a multilingual utopia in which a wide variety of languages and dialects can coexist. As the Historian mentions in the foreword, far from enforcing any kind of official or standardized language, in the Desert, “[f]luency is also a matter of opinion. There is no tuning fork to one’s twang” (*DDR* 19). Therefore, there is no such thing as “proper” or correct speech. The poem sequence, “Music of the

Streets Series,” presents snapshots of the various voices represented in the marketplace that attest to the Desert’s endorsement of diverse tongues. For example, “Hagglers in the Bazaar” presents the smooth-talking rhythm of shoppers trying to secure a bargain:

Hurdy-gurdy sounds: cricket shrieks
o mahikit, abraded music slum scent.

How-kapow pops, a lime streak starled
lika Gerty’s bloomas fire crack de dusky violet sky.

.....
o radish mon, one bushel o dim bitta root. (88).

In “Dance Hall Song for When You’re in the Mood” lines like “She a swift fire cat bristlin’ she fie,” “She a illywacka,” and “she sing orda o de Keys” offer colloquial lyrics in the style of hip hop and reggae music (91). The variation of these speakers’ languages within one location exemplifies the Desert as a linguistic cornucopia. Moreover, in addition to the intermixing of languages, the Desert celebrates miscegenation as well. The final poem of the sequence, “Toast in the Grove of Proposals,” repeats the refrain, “les’ toast to bountiful gene pool,/ to intramarried couple breedim beige population!” (92). Whether it be the union of a “brassy Brahmin” and “swoon bine faire Waspian” or a “husky Ontarian” and a “teacup size Tibetan,” the Desert extols the marriage of different peoples (92), unlike the “exiled rooks pearled with the self-same/ gene” who desire to preserve their homogenous population and tongue (78). In such a place that does not merely tolerate but enthusiastically promotes mixed languages and ethnicities, one might consider the Desert to be the allegorical epitome of utopic hybridity.

However, a closer look at the Desert’s innerworkings reveals an environment more hostile than initially let on in *DDR*. The section entitled “Intermission: Portrait of the Desert” takes a pause from interviewing the Guide to present a sampling of other

voices, but unlike in “Music of the Streets” the speakers here reveal the grim reality of the Desert’s history and the trajectory of its expansion. In the first poem that opens the section, “Elegy,” we are informed that “emigres land[ed] in dusty tureen,/ and ladled a job” (71). Through the suggestive title, Hong implies that the Desert’s beginning was also its demise in that the introduction of migrant labor led to the capitalistic cosmopolitan tourist city that it became. However, the proliferation of trade and migrant workers proves not to be the only issue. The subsequent series of poems titled “Almanac” explain that even before the desert became known as The Desert, filled with “hotels grease-shined/ with locals” (74), it was “a meteor-mottled terrain,/ spotted with buried mines” which left locals injured with missing limbs (72). This refers to the “Year of Dance Dance Revolution,” an uprising led by rebellious native residents who were eventually exiled to New Town by Desert officials. Despite these hostile conditions, the Desert became flooded with an influx of guides “crammed with tongues” who continued to run tours even while the remnants of the insurrection were visibly—and audibly—apparent (74). One such guide remarks:

I paddle down the bodies with an oar’s
thwack the storage of migrants kept
 under gouting stream

Is that gun fire? Rat-a-tat?
 What cadaverous blooms? Faces smear
 against my windshield crying (75)

Unlike the charming portrayals of all that the Desert’s hotels and marketplace have to offer, this passage paints a dark picture that certainly would not be promoted by the city’s tourism industry. This image also calls into question the ethical position of the guides as well. The flat tone with which the poem describes the grotesque scene suggests that they

have become desensitized to the violence and complicit in the Desert's disregard for human lives lost for the sake of maintaining its flow of business.

Even the Guide is guilty of trying to mask the visible remnants of the Desert's history of colonialism. Early in the text, she alludes to the state of the Desert in the aftermath of the revolution when she challenges the Historian to attempt "[t]o flower-arrange words so sand-piss/ ash sounds like *Melodious plot of/ beechen green, try, nary!*" (33, original emphasis). The Guide demonstrates her cognizance of language's effect on one's view of the experience but also articulates the difficulty of linguistically representing the unseemly terrain as something more palatable. Recognizing the limits of language's capacity to transform one's perception of seen reality, the Guide concedes that even a language as colorful as her own cannot erase the evidence of the appalling manner in which the Desert established and sustains its tourism industry. Furthermore, not even visitors—described as "misbegodder fool[s] who vacation/ en woebegone ruins"—are safe from the violence (33). The repercussions of the natives being exiled from the Desert are such that the tourists also pay the price. Hong presents more stark imagery in "Almanac," in which "rended travelers are tissues wrestling/ in flame, blasts in this guttering dawn,/ this spittle of unrest" while the subsequent stanza states, "lovely day, lovely day now/ says the rabid girl and nips/ at a sun-seared hand" (78-79). This disturbing juxtaposition makes obvious the dissonance between the Desert's vision of cosmopolitan tourism and the cost of such a vision.

Importantly, rather than conceiving of the Desert as an isolated city, Hong sets it in contrast to New Town, another city at its outskirts that is increasingly becoming populated by natives who have been exiled from the Desert. Unlike its cosmopolitan

neighbor, New Town has no trace of trade; therefore, the people can identify the roots of their linguistic lineage “back to the first tribe” (80). Hong’s figuring of these sites in tension suggests an apprehensive attitude towards the relationship between multilingualism and trade because the primary basis of the idiosyncratic language in the Desert is its function in commerce, namely global tourism. This adjacency of the Desert and New Town evokes Gloria Anzaldua’s “borderlands”²⁴ and Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zones.”²⁵ The fraught conjunction of disparate groups that Anzaldua and Pratt’s concepts address adds an important dimension to understanding hybridity as a non-neutral concept in that the convergence of racial, cultural, and class differences subsequently necessitates their confrontation and negotiation. In other words, such proximity entails conflict between different social groups rather than a reciprocal intermixing of their cultural practices.²⁶ However, these concepts cannot be transferred neatly to that of the dystopian city of the Desert because *DDR* presents a reversal of the typical dynamic wherein indigenous cultures and languages are at risk of being superseded by imperial powers. Like borderlands and contact zones, the Desert is a contentious meeting place of different people; however, a key difference is that in this world, multilingualism is the hegemonic institution that is perceived to be at threat. I draw this distinction

²⁴ Anzaldua explains in *Borderlands/La Frontera* that borderlands are “physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (18). However, this narrowing of the gap between these groups is not necessarily an affable development; rather, it more often than not involves infringement upon indigenous cultures by colonial forces.

²⁵ In *Imperial Eyes*, Pratt defines contact zones as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (4). Addressing European imperialism specifically, she critiques the process of transculturation wherein marginal groups begin to represent themselves through the ideological lens and language of the colonizer.

²⁶ Notably, both Anzaldua and Pratt’s concepts not only address the ways in which these conflicts work at the level of ideology but also underscore how they are played out in physical spaces. Borderlands and contact zones are sites of continued power struggle between the colonized and the colonizer rather than mutually shared territories, which parallels to the frictions of Desert and New Town.

between Anzaldua and Pratt's concepts and Hong's imaginative construction of the Desert in order to point out that while they all deal with the ways different people and languages rub shoulders with each other, ironically inverting the dynamics of the conflict between the colonizer and the colonized in which multilingualism is the *modus operandi* of the former prompts the question: what exactly does the hegemonic power structure protect when it defends multiculturalism and multilingualism? If cosmopolitanism is only upheld to advance the Desert's tourism industry rather than to celebrate difference among its residents, it is merely another form of coloniality. As Mignolo explains, "when capitalism crosses the colonial difference, it brings civilizations into conflicts of a different order" but it is a colonial order nonetheless—one of "managed cosmopolitanism" that functions "as a benevolent form of control" (741). That the Desert's tourism industry displaces and even kills natives who attempt to challenge its cosmopolitan vision proves its prioritization of capital over human rights.

Since New Town, the neighboring city of exiles separated from the Desert by a bridge, is a place without trade, one might assume that it is free of the problems seen in the city adjacent to it. Initially, New Town appears to be a peaceful, untainted space of "unfractured idiom[s]" in which "[n]o longer/ the tongue anahems with another/ man's slangy ahems" (76). However, the contingency of New Town's existence in relation to—or more accurately, as a result of—Desert officials weeding out uncooperative natives suggests that it cannot be a new place of solace after all. The prose poem "New Town" briefly outlines various aspects of the city such as population, religion, and landmarks, but unlike a typical travel guidebook or informational pamphlet, it itemizes each topic in ways that reveal the subjugation of the natives as postcolonial subjects. New Town is

essentially a place of forced relocation for Desert natives but even in this new location, they cannot permanently settle because they are continuously expelled from their land as the Desert expands its own perimeter. On the topic of “Borders” the poem explains that “[t]he border moves a quarter of an inch east everyday, and so imperceptibly, that natives do not notice until suddenly a clothesline is over so that they must retie the clothesline” (80). This procedure of incrementally driving out natives evinces the Desert officials’ shifty project of continued expansion and conquest. While their approach to banishing the natives out of the Desert is quite forward, the officials’ tactic for seizing New Town is subtle; it requires the natives to draw back their own territory as if done by choice. This exemplifies the stripping of agency by indirect means as powerless pawns unwittingly comply to pressure from the powerful. In addition to Desert officials’ more circuitous approach, they also take extreme measures to prevent future disruptions and to maintain their authority as keepers of their microcosm. Offering yet another disturbing image, the topic of “Jobs” presents an anecdote: “Desert officials raided one room, slit open a boy’s belly to see if he stored land mines in his body” (82). Here, we see officials pillaging New Town based on the suspicion that civilians are planting mines in the Desert. Readers are not told whether the boy’s body actually held any artillery or not—though this detail would not justify such blatant brutality.

The Desert officials’ hostility toward the natives is based on the former’s view of the latter’s passé desire to preserve their native language and land. The natives are portrayed as “hidebound jingo-purists” whose fight for preservation and survival run contrary to the authorities’ vision of tourism and expansion (98). The conflict centers on a power struggle in which Desert officials attempt to protect the diversely populated

place they have created from extreme nationalists “try[ing] to wrest desert back” (98). This depicts the exiled natives as uncooperative, backward-looking traditionalists “who crave for time to stand still” and therefore refuse to subscribe to the Desert’s progressive vision of radical multiculturalism and multilingualism (21). Although the Desert advertises itself as a cosmopolitan city of international attractions that both welcomes tourists and employs migrant workers from all over the world, it becomes obvious that such cosmopolitanism is only valuable insofar as it builds capital. In a reversal of Derrida’s notion of monolingualism of the other, which Chow reads as “imposed and coerced by the other,” in the dystopian world of *DDR*, Desert Creole is the *multilingualism* of the colonizer from the perspective of the exiled natives (Chow 23). In *DDR*, Desert Creole is yet another colonial (albeit diverse) language to the natives. While they long to return to a monolingual state, the Desert imposes a multilingualism that masks the violent subtext of their tourism industry. Under “Nomenclature” the description states that “[t]ravelers are not allowed to visit New Town” (Hong, *DDR* 82). To ensure this, guards stand watch at the bridge to ward them off. That this detail is used to illustrate New Town’s system of naming and terminology suggests that the reason for banning travelers has to do with preventing the hybridization of the natives’ language. As the Guide later remarks, the natives crave silence, “not dis babel,” which they consider “a sly unrest” (118). This statute against tourists is a means of preventing New Town from becoming another Desert because for the natives, multilingualism is just as much a part of the Desert’s project of colonialism as its tourism industry.

Evidently, language itself is a commodity in the Desert. The tourism industry not only thrives on marketing the replicated experience of visiting cities around the world

through its model hotels but also thrives on selling off linguistic expressions. In the poem “Music of the Streets,” in the section “The Auctioneer’s Woo,” readers learn that the Desert not only sells tangible products but verbal material as well. The grammar and syntax are noticeably in proper English to complement the phrase being sold: “May I have this dance” (90). The Historian’s footnote informs that “trademarks are auctioned off every week. In the Desert, so many words have become trademarked that it is impossible to even speak without stumbling upon someone’s trademark” (90). This clarifies the Desert’s conception of language as property—as a speaker’s territory. This commodification of language suggests that rather than celebrating the use of hybrid languages to appreciate their differences, language in the Desert is more about how to capitalize on them. The tourism industry’s conflation of cosmopolitanism and capitalism makes evident the reality that these systems are part and parcel of the same mechanism of colonialism. As Appiah argues, “[a] tenable cosmopolitanism tempers a respect for difference with a respect for actual human beings” (113). However, as this section has demonstrated, the Desert evidently does not operate on an ethos of respect for difference. Ultimately, *DDR* is a cautionary tale that warns against commodified cosmopolitanism rather than an optimistically visionary one that imagines a future of idyllic or revolutionary multilingualism. Therefore, readers must recognize that multilingualism is not categorically inclusive but can itself be exploited for yet another civilizing mission of colonialism. As Mignolo asserts, “[t]he problem, then, is not to accommodate cosmopolitanism to cultural relativism, but to dissolve cultural relativism and to focus on the *coloniality of power* and the colonial difference produced, reproduced, and maintained by global designs” (742, my emphasis). Given the fraught setting of the

Desert and its cosmopolitanism built on capitalistic principles, one must not ignore the fact that Desert Creole is a product of colonial conditions. This reading elucidates linguistic hybridization as a necessary means of survival within a globalized society.

Diasporic Migrants: The Guide and The Historian

This section provides a comparison of the Guide and the Historian's divergent linguistic backgrounds in order to highlight the trajectory of their multi- and monolingualism (respectively) as contingent upon their social engagements within colonial spaces. This comparison will illuminate the extreme conditions that propelled the Guide's language to develop into the hybrid form that it did. A comparison of the Guide and the Historian's languages ultimately reveals Hong's ambivalent attitude toward multilingualism as symptomatic of the cultural and linguistic constraints of one's social environment.

The Guide's creole is strikingly "foreign" in comparison to the standard English used by the Historian in their prose.²⁷ But the narrative establishes an unexpected reversal in that the Historian is the foreigner to the Desert while the Guide is the native. Whereas the polylingual Guide recalls vivid memories of her past, the monolingual Historian presents fragmented pieces of their past in English. Although the Historian's language is more familiar, their prose seems marginally relevant to the overall narrative of the text and perhaps even more opaque in content than the Guide's speech. Through this dynamic, the text implicitly poses the question: what qualifies as comprehensible or

²⁷ I refer to the Historian with the gender-neutral plural pronouns *they*, *them*, and *their* since their gender is never specified in the text.

comprehensive in articulating history, whether personal, familial, or national? Hong herself has more directly advocated for linguistic experimentation by proposing that “we could be more formally rigorous with sound while widening our palette on what makes a ‘word’” (“Fabula Poetics” 38). In this sense, language can create or *make* sense beyond traditional modes of meaning making. Through the Guide’s idiosyncratic mixed language, Hong demonstrates that the use of standard English does not necessarily equate to meaningful substance since despite the unconventional and “foreign” qualities of the Guide’s speech, it does not fail to produce semantic weight in the poetic narrative.

Notably, while the timeline at the beginning of the text informs the reader that the Guide is Korean born, her speech shows minimal evidence of her native language, save for the occasional phrase or idiom. As introduced in the epigraph of this chapter, she states, “I speak sum Han-guk y Finnish, a good bit o Latin/ y Spanish... sum toto Desert Creole en evachanging dipdong/ ‘pendable on mine mood...” (*DDR* 25). The Guide describes her language as a flexible and mutable faculty affected by temperament rather than an expression of her ethnic identity or heritage. This is not to suggest that *DDR* and other experimental poetics that include multilingual techniques categorically disavow any and all connection to ethnic identity. It is indeed no small detail that Hong establishes the Guide as the daughter of a pansori singer and characterizes her as a nationalist who participated in the Kwangju Uprising.²⁸ If ethnic history and particularity were not relevant to Hong’s poetic narrative, details about the Guide’s Korean origins would likely not be included in the text. But her minimal use of Korean in *DDR* suggests that the

²⁸ As Don Baker explains, “*P’ansori* is a traditional form of drama in which a single performer alternately speaks and sings an entertaining and morally uplifting story. That performer is accompanied by one musician, a drummer” (Baker 107n18).

Guide does not view her language as proxy to her ethnic identity. Chow's notion that the originary status of one's native language is merely an artificial label rather than a verifiable fact offers a way to read how languaging operates in the Desert without either conceding to the primacy of her native language or marking the ability to speak an official language like the Historian as the ultimate target. As Chow suggests, "the colonized is arguably more closely in touch with the reality of languaging as a type of prostheticization, whereupon even what feels like an inalienable interiority, such as the way one speaks is... impermanent, detachable, and (ex)changeable" (15). This prostheticization more accurately reflects the Guide's creole language as a product of the exilic position.

The Historian's language is also detached, not from their language but their socio-political environments. Despite the Historian's rather lofty title, the prose excerpts from their memoir reveal less of a commitment to documenting significant historical events and more of a self-absorbed preoccupation with their personal experience. This is initially evident in the Historian's foreword, which indicates that the primary reason for interviewing the Guide is to gain more information concerning their father—who was another activist involved in the Kwangju Uprising as well as, at one time, the Guide's lover (the timeline at the beginning of *DDR* identifies him as Kim Yoon-Sah). In one of the "Excerpts from the Historian's Memoir," they describe having to attend boarding schools across several different continents but acknowledges, "[s]chool granted me a kind of immunity from my foreign surroundings" (Hong, *DDR* 68). In fact, the first memoir excerpt that appears in *DDR* reveals that notwithstanding the outbreak of a civil war in

Freetown, Sierra Leone (also an actual historical event),²⁹ where they spent their childhood and where their father served as a doctor, the Historian lived in “quiet solitude” as a “peaceful, oblivious child with only one true anxiety: the burden of consciousness” (37). Whether this is merely naïve ignorance or blatant avoidance, their individualistic perception not only presents a clear contrast to the Guide’s regard for the collective, given her political involvement in the Kwangju Uprising, but the Historian’s ability to somehow remain cognitively removed from the reality of an armed conflict while maintaining a solipsistic fixation on the self also indicates a privileging of interiority over social consciousness. The Historian asks, “[d]id others possess the same kind of *command* and awareness over themselves? Were they just chattering machines without the gift of inner thought?” (37, original emphasis). Such an inflated estimation of the Historian’s sensibilities ironically betrays a *lack* of self-awareness. That the Historian was haunted by their own burden much more acutely than that of a brutal war also underscores the problematic separation of the private from the public. Hong herself has remarked that her linguistic experimentalism has less to do with delving into “the tricky interior self” and more to do with “the energy of collectivity” (“Fabula Poetics” 38). In this sense, placing the Guide and the Historian’s proclivities at such odds also allows Hong to establish a subtle critique of the lyric as a poetic genre that tends to assume that the “I” is a universal subject untethered to social or political concerns.

²⁹ The Sierra Leone Civil War, which took place from 1991 to 2002, began when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded south-eastern Sierra Leone in the attempt to overthrow the government under Major General Joseph Saidu Momoh. It is infamous for numerous atrocities that were committed against political leaders and civilians such as torture, rape, amputations, cannibalism, and the recruitment of child soldiers (Mitton 4).

Another crucial difference between the Guide and Historian is the factors that led to their arrival in the Desert. While both characters are migrants who have resided in several countries outside of their birthplaces, the Guide is a refugee who exiled herself from South Korea (then later again from the United States) after being released from prison for her involvement in the Kwangju Uprising. On the other hand, the Historian, unscathed by the turbulent state of their past surroundings, is a voluntary traveler who came to the Desert to seek information about their father. The Guide is a resident of the Desert, while the Historian is a visitor. As such, the latter has the option to leave at any time while the former decidedly does not. Commenting on her long hours of labor entertaining “Begum tourists” who “cannot be slaked” (DDR 94) because they caught “desertitis” (which she explains is “*The sensation of feeling deserted after facing too many choices*”), the Guide laments that, unlike the tourists she serves, she cannot return home (93, original emphasis). For the tourist who dreads his “hum-a-day life, to fes domicile’s wan light” (93), even though as he leaves the Desert he may feel “banished, he can come back to him life, begin afresh, aseed,/ tourist’s privilege be dat he can return, always return, though frum desert he g’won” (94). While the Guide boasts of her expertise and her enjoyment of her occupation, it becomes apparent that she is not as content to live in the Desert as she may have initially let on. She admits, “I’s covet dat choice./ When dim ideas seed in us, how do we’um return, when we can only g’won” (94). Without such a choice, she remains without a permanent home. The Guide and the Historian’s respective heterogeneous and homogenous languages reflect the stability (or lack thereof) of their environments. As a political exile from multiple countries, the Guide inevitably came to “siezem/ dis sizable Mouthpiece role” from her encounters with

various languages and dialects (26). While her language became variegated as a result of displacement and having to adjust to the diverse tongues of her new settings, the Historian was able to maintain consistent use of Standard English in boarding schools in London, Hong Kong, and Connecticut.

Interestingly, the Guide's introduction to multilingualism came long before she arrived at the Desert. The notion of speaking more than one language was impressed upon her at a young age by her father who somehow seemed to have foreseen what her language would eventually become. In the parodically titled poem "The Importance of Being English" she recounts the unsettling episode that prompted her father to learn to speak English. While facing imminent death at gunpoint by an American soldier who mistakes him for a communist spy, he witnesses an "old school chum," who was working as a translator for the American troops, save him simply by speaking to the officer in English. Consequently, the Guide's father implores her:

*You can be the best talker but no point if you can't
Speak the other man's tongue. You can't chisel, con, plead,
seduce, beg for your life, you can't do anything, because you
know not their language. So learn them all. (46, original emphasis)*

Evidently, language is a tool that has practical functions and effects in particular contexts. Here, multilingualism is figured as a survival tool—being able to speak English is a matter of life and death. The Guide's father recognizes that an encounter with military authorities necessitates having a linguistic arsenal at his disposal. The Guide states, "[m]e fadder sees dis y decide to learn English righteo dere./ Become a Jees cucking stool fo means o survival/ me lineage biggum on survival" (45). In this poem, Hong not only illuminates the advantageous function of this dominant language in the context of warfare

but also presents a situation in which the subaltern, to use Gayatri Spivak's term, resolves to speak the master's language in order to remain in his good graces, so to speak. But even as this is a determination at which the Guide's father arrives through his own assessment of the incident, it is ultimately still an imposition of English (albeit an indirect one) in that his will to learn the language is prompted by his vulnerability within an extreme life-threatening circumstance. The Guide's description of her father as a "cucking stool," an archaic form of public punishment and humiliation, also shows her awareness that he succumbed to learn English under a kind of duress rather than by his own volition. The lesson he imparts on his daughter evinces the internalization of the ideology that one must speak the languages of those in power in order to survive. This primer on multilingualism paints it not so optimistically as a badge of social merit but as another subtle form of imperialism.

While the Historian was afforded a stable and unproblematic relationship with the English language, the Guide's experience with English as an imperial language is more complex. She learned English even before she "ceded" to the US and eventually to the Desert. The timeline at the beginning of *DDR* informs readers that she studied political science and English at her university while she was still living in South Korea (17).³⁰ However, her attitude toward English is certainly not neutral. Despite her father's anecdotal appeal to learn the language, a negative attitude toward the English language

³⁰ Notwithstanding the Guide's major in college, students in South Korea are taught English formally starting in elementary school. As Samuel Gerald Collins notes, after South Korea signed the Shufeldt Treaty with the US in 1882, allowing teachers and Protestant missionaries into the country, English first began being taught in missionary schools for children of commoners, not just the privileged, then in the '60s was made part of the curriculum for secondary education (419-420, 422). By the late '90s English was taught in elementary and middle schools as well (424).

was instilled by her teacher, with whom the Guide went to live after leaving her father when she was a teenager. In “Early Influence” the Guide recalls an incident in which she was warned against the use of English. Catching the Guide replicating Hallmark Christmas cards to gift to her classmates, her teacher berates her, saying, “you got betta talent din to hand out de enemy’s words” (51). Additionally, the fact that the Kwangju Uprising—which stirred anti-American sentiment due to the US military’s backing of martial law under Chun Du-Hwan—occurred while she was attending university gives that much more reason to suspect the Guide’s complicated relationship to the language associated with the oppressor.³¹ These contrasting messages from her father and teacher about the role of English suggest that the Guide’s relationship to the language comes with an awareness of its utility and geopolitical implications. Unlike the Historian, whose use of English indicates an assumption of its transparency in representing their sense of self-consciousness, the Guide’s use of English, as I will discuss in the following section, demonstrates her recognition of its contextually contingent instrumentality.

Lastly, the Guide’s exposure to and active participation in political conflict as a dissident also presents a significant contrast to the Historian’s sheltered youth in boarding schools. Whereas the Guide’s “pirated radio station led thousands into the streets,” the Historian remained secluded from any conflict that would compromise their stable

³¹ As Gi-Wook Shin notes, while most Korean citizens previously considered the United States as an ally to their nation, after the US government redeployed troops in Kwangju rather than intervening against their authoritarian government, “Anti-Americanism became a new form of nationalism that fueled Korea’s march for democracy, and Kwangju was the turning point” (xxv). Collins explains that in South Korea’s history, the use of English held many shifting roles and implications: as a tool to advance independence before the Japanese occupation, as propaganda by the Japanese colonial government, as a way to communicate the plight of South Korea to other countries, and as a means of acquiring goods from American soldiers during the Korean War, then “[b]y the late 1970s and early 1980s, English had become part of middle-class pretension and cosmopolitanism” (420-423).

language (21). Williams offers a feminist reading of the Guide's recollection of the Kwangju Uprising as a direct contrast to the usual valorization of patriarchal involvement in historical movements. She reads Hong's characterization of the Guide as emblematic of female participation in the fight for democracy in South Korea (661).³² The Guide's active involvement in the Kwangju Uprising, read against the Historian's self-involved reflections, establishes her heroic status while the same could not be said of the latter. However, Hong does not establish such stark contrasts between the Guide and Historian to suggest that one should be regarded more favorably than the other. Despite her prior experience of opposing a corrupted government, the Guide reveals herself to also be a flawed character who is not impervious to capitalistic motives when she confesses to helping Desert officials arrest exiled insurrectionists who are posing as guides to lead tourists to landmines. She states frankly:

So I'se spy en spies fo a buck,
tip Desert officials whom raid jingo-purist hovels
y haulem off to camps...
Needs it samsy, fo me retirement fund...

D'wan stare at me, I usta be a jingo-purist mefelf!
A fist-a-cuff naysaya! Now I'm nut-ing but a yeller
cawin' castrati, wire-tappim for pennies... (99).

Here, her father's urging to use the "other man's tongue" to con and seduce proves its influence over her even in a place that seems to welcome the diverse intermixing of languages and does not treat foreigners with hostility. Although the Guide's

³² Representations of the Kwangju Uprising itself have shifted over time. As Baker notes, "Early narratives of May 18 generally focused on the victimization rather than the heroism of the people of Kwangju. The men and women of Kwangju were primarily remembered during the Chun Doo Hwan years as innocent victims who rose up in spontaneous outburst of righteous anger at the brutality of Chun's martial law forces. Back then, the events of May 1980 were usually referred to as *haksal* (massacre) or, in milder terms, a *sakon* (incident). Only near the end of the 1980s did the characterization of May 18 as a *minjuhwa undong* (democratization movement) began to gain favor" (91).

“[m]outhpiece role” was exercised in Kwangju to inspire civilians to revolt against an authoritarian regime, in the Desert it is employed in collusion with it (26). As such, Hong portrays the Guide as a complex hero and antihero whose verbal capacity is both admirable and suspect.³³ This characterization suggests that multilingualism should not be accepted as a purely constructive tool; therefore, a critical stance towards the revolutionary potential of the Guide’s hybrid language must be assumed.

Hyperbolizing the Xenophone

As the previous sections have demonstrated, the colonial city of the Desert and the cosmopolitan creole it has bred exemplify multilingualism as an apparatus of capitalism. It is within this context that I read the Guide’s creole as a xenophone rather than an affirmation of ethnic identity or nondominant languages. As a hybrid form of language, creoles, like xenophones, carry with them a negative reputation. Not accidentally, Chow’s concept of the xenophone echoes the term *xenophobe*, putting pressure on the derision with which dialects and accented speech are so commonly met. An important issue concerning pidgins and creoles that socio- and historical linguists frequently raise is the common perception of them as inferior forms of official languages, particularly in postcolonial contexts. Ishtla Singh explains that pidgins’ “‘minimalist’ structure is one of the reasons why many people think of pidgins as ‘broken’ versions of ‘full’ languages, and has led to their categorization as *simple* forms of communication”

³³ Hong states, “I was fascinated by Dante’s Virgil, and I was thinking what a guide means in contemporary times—a guide as crass tour guide, guide as poet and storyteller, guide as revolutionary, or guide in the spiritual sense. I also wanted to create a kind of flawed antihero, like Brecht’s Mother Courage” (“Interview”).

(6). He cites as an example missionaries' manuscripts from the 18th Century that described their encounter with African slaves by derogatorily labeling their use of English as "broken," which subsequently led to more widespread condemnation of creole as a mongrelized form of language (14). Velupillai also confirms:

The vast majority of languages that we know as creoles today have suffered a long history of condescension and stigmatization, a situation which is far from over today. The languages have been viewed as "broken", "lazy", "debased", or in other ways highly inadequate versions of their European lexifiers. Speakers of creole languages were made to understand that their mother tongues were in every way inferior to what was considered the "proper" European languages, which were usually spoken by a minority population of the society. (45)

In view of these negative attitudes concerning mixed languages, it is not difficult to see the need for recuperative readings of hybrid language use, such as the ones mentioned earlier in this chapter. Williams argues that the inclusion of minor languages exposes the supposed purity of the major language as suspect by explaining that polylingualism "reveals the repressed dialects which have been hidden by the projection of a solid 'state language, an official language' that represses difference on both a linguistic and ideological level" (651). This offers a useful reminder that dialects are often defined by and weighed against what they are *not*: a sanctioned language legitimized by the powers that be. However, as this section will demonstrate, *DDR* differs from multilingual poetics that primarily champion native tongues or frame the use of multilingualism as a challenge to official languages.

Hong offers a text that unapologetically highlights the xenophonic textures of the Guide's language by incorporating words from various languages as well as dialects—not only from her native language, Korean. From the outset, Hong establishes the Guide's

self-awareness of the presence of different vernaculars in her speech. In “Roles,” the very first poem of the collection, she describes the nature of her occupation:

Mine vocation your vacation!
... I train mine talk box to talk yep-puh, as you
‘Merikkens say “purdy,” no goods only phrases,
betta de phrase, “purdier” de experience (25)

The Guide’s articulation of the word *pretty* in its American vernacular form (an imitative drawl implied by the scare quotes around it) as the equivalent of the Korean word “yep-puh” suggests, firstly, the Guide’s awareness of the difference in sound between the standard and dialect forms of the English word and, secondly, her utterance of the Korean word as a conscious choice weighed against the English word. Despite knowledge of her American audience, she deliberately selects the Korean word first. While it may be tempting to read this moment as a “slip of the tongue,” so to speak—as if this emergence of the Guide’s first language were indicative of its default status whenever her other languages escape her—Hong deflects against efforts to simplify the Guide’s speech as dependent upon the Korean language, mainly through its conspicuously sparse inclusion in the text.³⁴ *DDR* challenges attempts to identify the speaker’s ethnicity through her language and resists essentializing modes of identity politics centered on language. The Guide’s diverse speech calls into question the primacy of a “mother tongue” in one’s language use because her language is not just a hybridized version of her native language in combination with other acquired languages but an entirely new, continuously evolving linguistic system. The gendered nomenclature of “mother tongue” carries with it the assumption that one’s first language is inherited through biological lineage. But what

³⁴ This is also characteristic of Korean American poet, Myung Mi Kim’s poetry as well. For a discussion of this, see Sarah Dowling’s chapter “Abstract Citizenship and Alien Racialization” in *Translingual Poetics*.

legacy does such a language hold for the postcolonial subject? As Derrida states, “[t]he language called maternal is never purely natural, nor proper, not inhabitable. *To inhabit*: this is a value that is quite *disconcerting* and equivocal; one never inhabits what one is in the habit of calling inhabiting. There is no possible habitat without the difference of this exile and this nostalgia” (58, original emphasis). By complicating the very notion of inhabiting, Derrida questions the possibility of ever truly possessing one’s language as one’s own. In this sense, if the Guide never actually or fully inhabits her mother tongue, its centrality to her identity politics is less significant.

The Guide displays other moments of linguistic slippage throughout the text, yet they do not appear in her native tongue. For example, in one of the poems of the “St. Petersburg Hotel Series,” she addresses the Historian, saying, “Tu, I mean, you tryim” (Hong, *DDR* 33). Given the Guide’s frequent use of “y” rather than “and” throughout the text, it is not necessarily surprising to see Spanish diction appear here.³⁵ What is significant about this particular utterance is that unlike in “Roles,” the Guide’s linguistic gesture here is not translation but self-correction. That she corrects herself in English further displays her awareness of audience. Hong emphasizes the relationship between languages as one of flux—of prosthesis—not to suggest that diction is unproblematically interchangeable through translation, but to demonstrate the contextual nature of languages. Rather than indicating a connection to the speaker’s ethnic identity, the use of other languages exemplifies situationally aware usage and a playful dispossession of such languages as identity markers. Just as Derrida claimed of French that “I have only one language and it is not mine,” the Guide might also claim that she has many languages but

³⁵ “Tu” could also be read as the French familiar form of “you” as well.

they are not hers (25). Desert Creole introduces the possibility of a new native tongue detached from the speaker's origin. Lim describes Hong's use of other languages in *DDR* as having an "estranging effect" that "confuses and transforms cultural origin" (94). While I find *estranging* to be an apt term, I would argue that in addition to the languages being distanced from their ethnic roots, the Guide's language constitutes an othering from itself. Similar to the way that Derrida deemed French, his only language, *not* his, the Guide suggests that she is not in full possession—or fully inhabited by—her language(s). In classifying the Guide's language as creole, Hong does not merely draw attention to the multiplicity of her language, but more so calls attention to its shifting, never-stabilizing nature. Following in the vein of Foucault's notion of discourse as an all-pervasive web of spoken utterances, Chow argues that history needs to be reconceptualized as an untotalizable field of disjointed discourse events (55). Commenting on Foucault's term "enonce," which treats language as a found object, she points to Deleuze's interpretation of the term: "the constitution of a substantive in which '*multiple*' ceases to be a predicate opposed to the One" (qtd. in Chow 54, original emphasis). Chow explains:

If language is no longer viewed as a linear, logical progression but rather as actual discourses that are dispersed and found in bits and pieces, language *use* would amount to a new type of act—an archiving in process, involving shifting series of transitions among different levels of deposits, remains, excavations, and adaptations. Above all, language would enable us to come in touch with the temporally cumulative yet often vague and seldom entirely verifiable experience left behind by others. It is in such use, at once particular and anonymous, at once individual and impersonal, that language mutates and renovates itself in the process I have been alluding to as "languaging." (57, original emphasis)

Hong's interest is not necessarily in taxonomizing all of the languages that constitute the Guide's speech to point out their differences but in demonstrating "[c]reole as a language

that is in transition” (Hong, “Interview”). Contrary to the notion of the originary status of one’s mother tongue, in the Desert, language use disregards origin as it gives way to new linguistic possibilities.

Yet, in other instances, the Guide makes it clear that her lived experience in South Korea indeed plays a key role in her languaging. In “Karaoke Lounge,” she recites the lyrics of a pansori song (which are transliterated into English in the poem) her mother used to sing: “sulp’un yaegge.../ Ssarang-han nam’pyun” (36).³⁶ However, in this case, she does not offer a translation of these phrases.³⁷ Making a claim against her language taking root in cultural origin, Lim argues that “Hong’s hybrid English not only defamiliarizes the culturally homogeneous meaning system of both English and Korean, but also creates a new representative system that fits more appropriately to these characters’ culturally more diverse living conditions” (92). In this sense, for Lim, the Guide’s hybrid language reflects her present locality in the Desert rather than her past. But interestingly, she focuses on the Guide’s use of Korean words, prioritizing the significance of her mother tongue in bearing upon her present process of meaning making. Adding that the inclusion of foreign languages “serves as pure intensity or energy rather than fixed conceptual or representational units” Lim proceeds to translate them into English (92). This process of translation prompted by Hong’s poems parallels the phenomenon of cultural zigzagging of the Dance Dance Revolution game, which

³⁶ While Lim translates these lines as “a sad story” and “a husband that I loved” (94), I would translate these phrases more literally as “sad talk” and “beloved husband” in order to preserve the fragmented quality of these descriptive noun clauses.

³⁷ The Guide’s use of Korean here is an example of one of the forms of hybridity that Yao identifies as transplantation, which is “the use of different languages in their original form without any concessions to potential incomprehensibility such as internal glosses or translations” (25).

Hong found fitting for the title of the work.³⁸ The Korean words are phonetically spelled out for English readers rather than appearing in Hangul, but they have no semantic referent for those very readers; therefore, it necessitates translation of the Korean words into English. By converting this energy into semantic substance (however varied or flexible), Lim demonstrates that beyond enacting “phonetic ambiguity” the Guide’s invocation of Korean also evinces the very real presence of the past (93).

While Lim sees the inclusion of Korean as denoting estrangement through sonic disruption, I read it as a critique of romanization as a means of representing other languages through the English alphabet.³⁹ Although transliterations provide phonetically similar versions of non-Roman languages, they remain approximations rather than exact representations. Remembering that the Historian is the transcriber of the text, it is necessary to also acknowledge here the mediated state of the Guide’s speech as seen on the page. Although the Historian transliterates with careful attention to the sound of the Korean words, this rendering of them with the English alphabet still fails to both represent the exact pronunciation of the Guide and facilitate an authentic pronunciation from the reader. For instance, the use of the consonant *r* in the word *ssarang* where a soft *l* sound would be more phonetically accurate undermines any effort at accurate representation of “authentic” Korean speech (additionally, if languaging constitutes the

³⁸ As Hong states, “I was fascinated by the origin of the game—by the fact that the Japanese appropriated Western dance moves to turn into a video game, a game which was then imported back to the West with explosive success. I loved the cultural zigzagging, which seemed appropriate since the book has much of that misplaced cultural bartering happening in the imagined city” (“Interview”).

³⁹ Several romanization systems were used in Korea in the last century. The McCune-Reischauer system was developed in 1939; the Ministry of Education system, which includes diacritical markers for specifying sounds, was implemented as the official romanization system in 1984; this was replaced in 2000 with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism system, which uses different spellings for most of the consonant and vowel sounds (H. Lee 97, 98).

accumulation of one's linguistic practices, the fact that the Guide grew up close to Kwangju also presents the likelihood that her Korean pronunciation would be inflected with the unique dialect of this southern city). As the foreword informs, the text constitutes transcriptions of recordings of the Guide's speech, but because the Historian haplessly left the recording device out in the rain, there are ellipses that indicate gaps in the interviews. Additionally, the Historian admits to translating certain words into "a proper English when I felt clarification was needed" (20). This deliberately contrived narrative framework establishes an immediate compromise to the purity of the transcribed text and foregrounds the fact that it does not claim to offer an exact representation of the nuances of the Guide's creole—that it is only an approximation.

While readers have no choice but to take the Historian's word on the integrity and realism of the given text that has been produced from the surviving tapes, this necessary suspension of disbelief subsequently calls attention to the fact that written texts in general present filtered versions of speech and thought rather than immediate or precise representations of their referent. The transcriptions deliberately enact an imperfect attempt at capturing with precision the nuances of the Guide's xenophone to demonstrate the impossibility of the task itself. Additionally, the Historian's transcriptions may also be read as what Chow calls "double disfigurement," which she defines as "a defective correction of something already deemed defective" (8). Given that creoles are an already disparaged linguistic form, the act of transcription renders the already foreign-sounding speech into further illegible written material. These layers of mediation demonstrate a disregard for accuracy and authenticity. As such, they evince Hong's interest in enacting distance or denying the reader access to the Guide's native language.

In contrast to moments of untranslated text in *DDR*, “Song that Breaks the World Record,” offers an example of code-switching that further complicates the terms of transcription. The poem closes with the lyrics of a pansori song that the Guide’s mother sang to her as a newborn before she passed away. However, in this case, rather than transliterated words, the lyrics are offered in English (the text is italicized to indicate that it is a translation): “*A martyr spun nettle out of a silk shorn dress,/ A lice-laced boot to my heart in/ Angyang I rest...*” (Hong, *DDR* 42). Strikingly, the lines end with a rhyme—which would likely not be the case if the text were translated literally. The poem does not indicate whether the translation was produced by the Guide or the Historian, but since it is unlikely that the song is of English origin, the reader can only guess that the translator took creative liberty in altering the content of the lyrics for the aural pleasure of an English-speaking audience. This not only transgresses the thin line between approximation and inaccuracy in translation (which is a transgression that, as I will discuss in chapter 3, Don Mee Choi deliberately exploits in order to enact critique) but also ambiguously conflates the voices of the characters. The conspicuous turn to standard English within a text saturated with creole also draws attention to the undeniable instrumentality of the language. As much as the text resists and critiques the usage and value of English, its recourse to it also demonstrates an acknowledgement of its advantageous power. This is not only evident in the characters’ lived experiences, as seen in the Guide and her father’s confrontations with English, but also at the narrative level through its use to communicate the plot.

Yet, it is clear that Hong neither establishes a hierarchy of English and non-English languages nor mono- and multilingualism in terms of their instrumentality since,

as the later sections of *DDR* show, the pinnacle of the Guide's revolutionary language was exemplified in her activism in the Kwangju Uprising, three years before she arrived at the Desert, where she acquired her creole language. In "The Voice," the Guide recalls her key role in mobilizing protesters:

... Hearim me voice en radio, ma che si,
pot-belly war veterans sling up
WWII carbine rifle gainst sifa tanks ... Coal miners
donated dim detonatas ... Housewives fed scabbard insurrectas
wit hot bowls o *ttok-guk*... (105, original omissions)

While readers encounter this narrative in the Guide's creole, we understand based on the context that the language she used then was Korean. Unlike her complicity in the Desert's tourism industry and its exploitation of multilingualism, in Kwangju, the Guide used her native language to ignite collective action against Chun Du-Hwan's authoritarian regime. This demonstrates that monolingualism can also be a galvanizing tool and that multilingualism is not always a revolutionary one.

However, Hong also complicates this recognition of the Guide's powerful use of her native language. Ironically, the Guide prefaces her descriptions of her leadership role by informing that it was not her physical presence that guided insurrectionists but her disembodied voice:

... Dim call me voice o Kwangju,
uprising's danseur principal ... but samsy, es funny,
I's voice of Kwangju since dim multitudes who
cryim fo acceptance shun mine presence ... (104, original omissions)

The crowd apparently rejected the Guide based on her appearance the moment they discovered that she was bald. This rejection of difference exemplifies a reversal of the Desert's inclusivity. When "Sah" (Kim Yoon-Sah) urges the Guide, "you'll fes n'won

b'gib dim/ ye voice," this demonstrates a denial of embodied subjectivity even as it affirms the utility of her speech (105). This moment demonstrates how the instrumentality of language is contingent upon the speaker who wields the language and how, even when used in revolutionary ways, it is easy to erase the person behind the voice. If voice and language are valued by listeners only when they are detached from the speaking subject, this shows no more respect for difference than the Desert's commodification of multilingualism and multiculturalism. As such, whether South Korea, the Desert, or anywhere else in the world, rather than privileging one mode of language use over the other, it is necessary to identify the purposes they serve as well as recognize who benefits from them. That is the dance of revolution and of hybridity in the twenty-first century. The diasporic subject does not settle on one signifying mode or another, but constantly moves in response to shifting conditions of cultural and linguistic hybridity.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that multilingualism can be and is used in productive and empowering ways, but when heralded as a commodity within colonial cosmopolitan contexts, as it is in Hong's Desert, it risks becoming subsumed within the machinery of imperialism. Examining Desert creole specifically as a creole language and the Desert as a colonial cosmopolitan space elucidated the emergence of linguistic hybridity as a necessity within the context of trade and framed the Guide's hybrid language not necessarily as a representation of her ethnic identity or only a revolutionary activist tool, but an inevitable product of a hyper-globalized, contentious site of cosmopolitanism. Comparing the Guide and Historian's linguistic backgrounds offered useful insight into

their differing approaches to language. While the Guide's formative years taught her that language must be utilized strategically as a means of survival, the Historian's sheltered education in boarding schools evinced less of an awareness of language's utility and more of an assumption of its ability to convey one's consciousness. Finally, analyzing the particularities of the Guide's creole as a xenophone demonstrated its deviation from the types of multilingualism anchored in her native language or positioned in opposition to official languages. Instead, its situational flexibility, inconsistencies, and dispossessive qualities showed how linguistic hybridity involves constant negotiation.

Ultimately, my analysis elucidates Hong's ambivalence concerning both mono- and multilingualism. As *DDR* illustrates, at the same time that linguistic hybridity might be celebrated within cosmopolitan spaces as an exemplar of progress and inclusivity, it can also perpetuate systems of control and power if multilingualism is enforced as *the* dominant mode of language use. Therefore, as Appiah argues, "cosmopolitanism shouldn't be seen as some exalted attainment: it begins with the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association" (xix). Indeed, any kind of coexistence and association must come with a respect for difference.

Since the turn of the century, there has been increased advocacy for multilingualism. For example, the publication of Werner Sollors' acclaimed *Multilingual Anthology of American Literature* exemplified an important and overdue representation of American literature that was more inclusive of non-white writers using languages other than English. More recently, more aggressive anti-monolingualism campaigns have emerged. For example, Greg Roberts has asserted the notion that "monolingualism is the

illiteracy of the twenty-first century” (Roberts et al. 116). This has become an increasingly popular refrain that has gained much traction within educational circles. For example, in Utah, legislation for funding Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs in Spanish and Portuguese were passed to push for proficiency and competency in multiple languages in order to build a “future global workforce” and establish “future economic competitiveness” (116). Based on their market-driven rationale, these programs do not seem so different from Hong’s cosmopolitan Desert. Furthermore, despite claiming to be “committed to being responsive to the priorities of the native-speaking and heritage populations” the ultimate goal of the DLI programs is to “eradicat[e] monolingualism” (116). As the tensions between Desert officials and New Town’s exiled natives have shown, the implementation of multilingualism as the dominant linguistic mode necessarily comes at an expense.

The enforcement of one form of language over another, whether multi- or monolingual, inevitably involves a struggle for power and agency. Hong foregrounds the adverse conditions and constraints within both mono- and multilingual contexts in *DDR* in order to suggest that neither should stand as the only prevailing mode of languaging. Earlier in this chapter, I asked: what exactly does the hegemonic power structure protect when it defends multiculturalism and multilingualism? I might ask this question another way: *who* exactly does either monolingualism or multilingualism serve? What matters is not so much that we advocate one kind of language over the other but that we recognize that language use and the linguistic possibilities available to postcolonial subjects are contingent upon systems of power. As the following chapter will discuss, linguistic hybridity carries with it traces of colonial history.

CHAPTER 3

“TIDAL PALIMPSESTS”: EXCERPTING AS “NATION PERFORMANCE”

IN CRAIG SANTOS PEREZ’S *FROM UNINCORPORATED*

TERRITORY: [HACHA]

the contours of a drowned

anguage

—Craig Santos Perez, “*from* Lisiensan Ga’lago”

While Hong presents an allegory of the ways in which diversity and multilingualism can be exploited by colonial power through the commodification of cosmopolitanism in the twenty-first century, Craig Santos Perez addresses hybrid identity and language in the context of settler colonialism in Guam, which spans as far back as the seventeenth century. Like Hong’s invented creole, which underscores hybridized language as an inevitable requisite of colonialism, Perez’s formal, linguistic, and narrative strategies demonstrate that the poetics employed to represent Pacific Islander experience is also a necessary response to colonial suppression. But whereas Hong addresses the increasing distance between ethnicity and language in postcolonial spaces from the perspective of the migrant, Perez illuminates this experience as it applies to the indigenous subject. Importantly, while Hong’s Guide accepts hybridity as her reality, like many Pacific writers—whose “multilingual gestures,” as Spahr calls them, demonstrate their use as an “unavoidable result of colonialism and economic globalism, while working to avoid hybridity and subsumption” (“Connected Disconnection” 78-79)—Perez’s multilingualism reflects an effort to resist the involuntary hybridity of the

colonized native Chamorro people of Guam who are legally unincorporated citizens of the United States. In addition to Perez's multilingual gestures, this chapter will also explore his visually and typographically attuned poetics as demonstrative of an expansive hybridity that uses formal experimentation to envision the emergence of Guam's independence from the US empire.

As a Chamorro poet from Guam, Perez's relationship to the US is neither a simple nor amicable one. Although he has only ever technically lived in the US—he grew up in Guam, moved to California for his graduate studies, and currently lives in Hawaii, where he teaches creative writing and Pacific literature—to place his work within the category of American or even ethnic American poetry would be problematic since Perez decidedly does not identify himself as an American. For example, he recounts when he had to show his passport during his travels to Europe: “I explained over and over: *I am not American*, even though I speak English like an American, even though I am a U.S. citizen” (“I Lina‘la‘ Tataotao Ta‘lo” 183).⁴⁰ Perez dissociates himself from this identification because although Guam is an organized territory of the US, it is an unincorporated one; therefore, its citizens do not have the same rights as American citizens.⁴¹ The United States Office of Insular Affairs defines an unincorporated territory as “[a] United States insular area in which the United States Congress has determined that only selected parts of the United States Constitution apply” (U.S. Dept. of the Interior). This arbitrary status

⁴⁰ On the uncritical celebration of hybridity, Perez establishes a clear distinction between citizenship and unincorporation by questioning, “But what if you are not American? What if you are a colonial subject of America? What if you continue to live and write *from* an unincorporated territory of the US empire?” (“From Unincorporated Territories” 255, original emphasis).

⁴¹ For example, citizens of Guam do not have the right to vote in general elections for the President of the United States and their representatives in Congress cannot vote, disqualifying them from participation in the democratic process.

was decided by the Organic Act of Guam, a federal law signed by President Harry S. Truman in 1950 that established a civil government on the island, which was previously under the jurisdiction of the US Navy.⁴² As such, Perez's hybrid identity as a native Chamorro and US citizen is the default condition of the colonial history he has inherited.

Perez's first book of poetry, *from unincorporated territory: [hacha]*,⁴³ confronts his liminal position as a US citizen who is only marginally protected by the nation's Constitution and who must navigate the long history of colonialism in Guam as it still remains evident in the present. Aware that Guam is nearly absent from American consciousness, Perez makes it a vital component of his work to address its colonial history in order to fight against the erasure of Chamorro culture and language as well as to bring awareness to Guam's subjugation by several imperial nations. From Spanish colonization in the 17th Century to US acquisition of Guam after the Spanish-American War in 1898, to Japanese military occupation in 1941 after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, to US reacquisition in 1944, to the present state of unincorporation, *[hacha]* traces this long history of imperialism along with the indigenous narratives that would otherwise go unheard and unknown in order to ultimately envision a path toward the sovereignty of Guahan, which means "we have" in Chamorro and is thought to be the indigenous name of the island ("Mapping Diaspora").⁴⁴

⁴² Historian Robert F. Rogers explains that "The Organic Act functions as a constitution for Guam, but it does not derive its powers from the people of the island. They never voted on it. The U.S. Congress retains full authority to amend the act or to enact any legislation it wishes for Guam without the consent of the people of the island, a power that the Congress does not possess when dealing with the citizens of a U.S. State. In other words, the Organic Act did not apply to Guam the normal statutory and judicial presumptions that favor full local democratic government in the American system" (209).

⁴³ Henceforth, the title of Perez's books will be referred to by their subtitles.

⁴⁴ I will alternate between names to distinguish between colonial Guam and self-determined Guahan.

[*hacha*]*—*which means “one” in Chamorro*—*is the first book of the *from unincorporated territory* series, which Perez conceives of as a multi- or trans-book project that parallels the separate yet connected formation of the islands of an archipelago.⁴⁵ It is an ongoing work that comprises excerpts from a larger, never-to-be-completed whole. Thus far, the series includes three additional installments: [*saina*] (2010), [*guma*] (2014), and [*lukao*] (2017)*—*which mean “outrigger canoe,” “home,” and “procession” in Chamorro, respectively. Perez extends many of the themes explored in the first book*—*indigenous culture, identity, and ecology, as well as the colonial and military presence that has threatened these*—*in the subsequent ones and also adds new narrative threads to them as well. Many of the poems in [*hacha*] focus on his grandfather’s life during World War II while [*saina*] shifts the focus to his grandmother’s experience. The latter books are more directly autobiographical; [*guma*] explores the theme of diaspora in relation to Perez’s return to Guam after fifteen years and [*lukao*] deals with parenthood as well as environmental issues in Hawaii. Collectively, these books bear witness to the effects of imperialism and militarization in the Pacific in an anachronistic and piecemeal fashion while also incorporating personal, familial, and cultural memory into historical narratives.

At a glance, the serial design of the project could be likened to other canonical long poems like *The Cantos* by Ezra Pound or *The Maximus Poems* by Charles Olson. In fact, Perez himself identifies these texts as influential to his work (“New Oceania”). But

⁴⁵ In a poetics statement, Perez states, “[b]ecause Guahan is part of an archipelago, the geography inspired the form of my *from unincorporated territory* series. Additionally, the unfolding nature of memory, learning, listening, sharing, and storytelling informed the serial nature of the work. To me, the complexity of the story of Guahan and the Chamorro people*—*entangled in the complications of ongoing colonialism and militarism*—*inspired the ongoing serial form” (“Poetics Statement” 331).

Perez's work diverges from these archetypes in that it is neither burdened, like Pound, by the desire for the coherence of its many quotations, allusions, and fragments, nor does its form subscribe to Olson's poetics of "field composition," which privileges the poet's breath and perception (which I will discuss further in a later section).⁴⁶ Furthermore, rather than applying an appropriative approach to linguistic innovation as Pound did with the Chinese language, Perez's work honors his own indigenous heritage, culture, and language.⁴⁷ The *from unincorporated territory* series also rejects the lyric subjectivity of Olson's titular epic hero in that it does not assume a position of authority from individual expression or refract the voice of the author through a persona. Needless to say, Perez's politics sharply opposes Pound's fascist views on authoritarianism and Olson's visions of an ideal America. Perez's inclusion of excerpts from competing sources and histories highlights their irreconcilability, exemplifying a unique postcolonial hybridity that negotiates unincorporation and activates critique through formal hybridity in order to insist on Chamorro sovereignty from an imperial nation.

As the first book in the series, [*hacha*] establishes the breadth of Perez's formal experimentation. It comprises six sections that include poems with reoccurring titles, which appear all throughout the book and series; however, their pages reject any semblance of uniformity. They largely do not contain left-hand aligned stanzas; rather, fragmented words and lines float freeform across the white space. As a book object,

⁴⁶ See Rowe's discussion of the parallels and differences between Perez and modernists like Pound, Eliot, and Olson ("Shades of Paradise" 218, 226, and 227).

⁴⁷ For a discussion of Pound's Orientalism, see Yunte Huang's chapter "Ezra Pound: An Ideographer or Ethnographer?" in *Transpacific Displacement: Ethnography, Translation, and Intertextual Travel in Twentieth-Century American Literature*. U of California P, 2002. See also Josephine Park's chapter "Cathay to Confucius: Ezra Pound and China" in *Apparitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Poetics*. Oxford UP, 2008.

[*hacha*] sets itself apart from typical books of poetry—and the other books in the series—through its shape: square, as opposed to the familiar rectangular dimensions of books.⁴⁸ This allows for longer lines to span the length of the pages and for the white space to assume more of an active role in the poems. The book also sporadically includes illustrations as well as reimagined maps that highlight the exploitation of Guam’s position in the Pacific for military, trade, and travel purposes. Additionally, Perez implements typographical experimentation by using symbols to frame the textual material, such as tildes, brackets, and quotation marks. These aspects of formal and visual experimentation function as crucial contextualizing apparatuses of the excerpted content, which includes fragments of heard speech from family members, historical narratives concerning the colonization of Guam, quoted passages of poetry, information about plants and wildlife (both native and invasive ones), personal anecdotes, and Chamorro words in the midst of other colonial languages. Perez demonstrates that the poetic act of excerption can recontextualize oral, literary, and official history to challenge the erasure of indigenous culture and language, and to envision a decolonized reality in the present.

As such, [*hacha*] is not only a poetic representation of Guam’s colonial history, but also an imaginative assertion—or incorporation—of Guahan’s sovereignty. Since such sovereignty does not yet exist in reality, Perez constructs poetic spaces in which achieving it is made possible. In her introduction to the anthology *A Transpacific Poetics*, Lisa Samuels describes the poetry collected in the work (of which Perez’s is one) as “poetics that witness Pacific consequences” (3) and argues that “[i]magining a

⁴⁸ The original 2008 edition of the book is now out of print. In 2017, Omnidawn released a reprinted version of [*hacha*] with a new cover design, dimensions that are consistent with the other books in the series, as well as an afterword by Perez. This chapter refers to the earlier edition.

transpacific poetics includes imagining a right to participate in its articulation” (4). For a poet like Perez, imagination is an imperative faculty for articulating the sovereignty of Guahan. Formulating the status of unincorporation as a constructed origin via the word *from* allows Perez to create his own excerpted space in which the sovereignty of Chamorro people can be granted from within. This defines *unincorporation* apart from the exclusionary purpose of the legal term by recasting it as a means of decolonization and self-determination. By examining the ways in which [*hacha*] activates hybrid form through spatial and typographical experimentation in combination with the use of Chamorro, I argue in this chapter that Perez enacts a poetics of excerption that demonstrates what Kamau Brathwaite calls “nation performance” to envision the emergence of Guahan’s sovereignty. In order to draw a parallel between Brathwaite’s conceptualization of language use by Caribbean poets and Perez’s specific struggle to preserve his native language and culture in the context of the Pacific, the following section provides a discussion of Perez’s poetics of excerption as a subversive mode that recontextualizes language to allow new meanings to emerge. The remaining sections examine three specific formal features in [*hacha*] that enact excerpting as nation performance: page space, quotation marks, and brackets. Reading Perez’s excerpting techniques will demonstrate a unique formal hybridity that enacts politics through poetics in order to claim indigenous authority and resist postcolonial hybridity.

Excerpting Unincorporation Through “Nation Performance”

Perez conceives of the *from unincorporated territory* series itself as a collection of excerpts. However, beyond utilizing excerpts as textual material, he approaches

excerpting as an act of incorporation. Perez offers the following definition of *excerpt* in the preface of *[hacha]*: “*excerpt* (v): 1432, from *L. excerptus*: ‘pluck out, excerpt,’ from *ex-* ‘out’ + *carpere* ‘pluck, gather, harvest’” (12). As opposed to its familiar use as a noun, this etymology centers on the word as a verb that indicates actively removing something from a larger source for the purpose of collection. Where Nathaniel Mackey asserts concerning black poets’ that “[t]he privileging of the verb [‘other’], the movement from noun to verb, linguistically accentuates action among a people whose ability to act is curtailed by racist constraints,” we can also see how this kind of grammatical reworking is applicable within the colonial constraints placed on the Chamorro people as well, namely their legal unincorporation by an imperial nation (53).

One of the most prominent excerpting gestures in the *from unincorporated territory* series is Perez’s use of the word *from*. Its appearance, not only in the title of the work as a whole, but also at the beginning of every poem title signals the significance of this seemingly simple but weighty preposition that contains multiple valences. Perez delineates the connotations of *from*:

“I” am “*from unincorporated territory*.” *From* indicates a particular time or place as a starting point; *from* refers to a specific location as the first of two limits; *from* imagines a source, a cause, an agent, or an instrument; *from* marks separation, removal, or exclusion; *from* differentiates borders... [These poems] have been incorporated from their origins (those ‘far flung territories’) to establish an ‘excerpted space’ via the transient, processional, and migratory allowances of the page. Each poem carries the ‘from’ and bears its weight and resultant incompleteness.⁴⁹ (12, original emphasis)

⁴⁹ In his essay entitled “from A Poetics of Continuous Presence and Erasure,” these same lines are repeated, but in lines of verse, and Perez replaces some of the “from”s with the Chamorro word “ginen.”

As each *from* indicates a point of origin, basis of reasoning, or marker of distance, Perez's poems not only confront the history of Guam's colonization and present unincorporation but also create an alternate route that reaches toward decolonization, demilitarization, and ultimately, sovereignty.⁵⁰ Each poem serves as an "excerpted space" that synthesizes Guam's history, makes colonial injustices evident, and reincorporates Chamorro language and culture. As J. Michael Martinez states, *from* "indicates the spatial, temporal, or logical relationship of the subject to the rest of the sentence" and "dictates the underlying structure of those spaces, times, and logics" (336). In this sense, using the multifunctional preposition *from* as the guiding trope of his poems allows Perez to forge a trajectory that shifts away from unincorporation. Importantly, at the beginning of the passage quoted above, Perez figures the word *I* as an excerpted, linguistic representation of himself and claims that the text is analogous to that identity as well by using scare quotes around the personal pronoun and subsequently equating himself to the title of the series. This not only presents a subtle critique of the unquestioned agency and personhood that are not afforded to him as they are to the lyric "I" of traditional verse, but also emphasizes the excerpted nature of the figure of the "I" and the larger poetic project itself. Perez's agential position is just as much in the process of emergence as is the continuous development of the *from unincorporated territory* series. While his status

⁵⁰ As Perez explains elsewhere concerning the nature of writing "from": "Writing *from* a colonized space means writing towards indigenous, national, and international audiences. The plurality and unpredictability of these audiences means that there is no single trajectory of accessibility... I try to write poems that have multiple points of access and, in turn, walls of inaccessibility... Society, family, culture, self, history, and memory are complex human experiences; thus, writing these experiences is a complex process that articulates variable lines of access and inaccessibility. Access is power. Poetry is a site of sharing, struggling, and recognizing the coloniality and aesthetics of power" ("From Unincorporated Territories" 257).

as an unincorporated citizen has been determined by the law, Perez does not resign to be a mere product of this sanctioned designation. He defines the “I” that represents his subjectivity through his own excerpted poetic space.

For Perez, *from* is an excerpting device that animates and builds upon what has been excerpted. Presenting the word in italics and in lowercase indicates that every poem, and indeed the work as a whole, begins mid-speech, mid-narrative, mid-experience—each poem always begins *en medias res*. In addition to being a derivative term that, as John Carlos Rowe claims, “criticize[s] and repurpose[s] his sources in ways that connect his anticolonial intentions with his sense of historical responsibility,” *from* is also a generative one in that starting from one point inevitably leads *to* another (“Shades of Paradise” 218). The act of excerpting takes language from outside sources and places it within the writer’s text—within a new context. This not only creates the potential for including voices that would otherwise go unheard but also for exhibiting and recontextualizing the excerpted text in order to assert alternate meanings that re-think and challenge the original source. Importantly, the ultimate goal of Perez’s poetic gesture is not to achieve incorporation in the legal sense of the term as defined by the Insular Cases since such a shift in status would not liberate the island from US imperialism.⁵¹ Perez does not conceive of Guam’s position in relation to the US as trapped within the false binary of either unincorporation or incorporation. The final goal in activating *from* is not

⁵¹ In *Downes v. Bidwell*, the first and arguably most instrumental of the Insular Cases of 1901, the Supreme Court ruled that the US Constitution does not apply to insular, unincorporated territories. While Justice Edward D. White defined incorporated and unincorporated territories according to whether or not they could become a US state, Justice Henry B. Brown gave the following rationale: “If these possessions are inhabited by alien races, differing from us in religion, customs, laws, methods of taxation and modes of thoughts, the administration of government and justice, according to Anglo-Saxon principles, may for a time be impossible” (qtd. in Rogers 118).

inclusion into the American empire as a state but Guahan's sovereignty in its own right. Titling the work "*from unincorporated territory*" formulates the status of unincorporation as the origin of Guam's belonging to the US and as the point from which to imagine a decolonized Guahan. As such, excerpting is not merely a matter of presenting past and present reality but creating a new self-determining reality—a reality that exists apart from the nation's definition of unincorporation.

In order to redefine unincorporation, Perez excerpts the language of Guam's colonial history and displays it on a new spatially imagined page. This expansive use of form and his response to legal proceedings bear resemblance to M. Nourbese Philip's *Zong!*, which explores the 1781 *Gregson v. Gilbert* case that transpired after the captain of a British ship transporting 470 African slaves to Jamaica ordered 150 of them to be thrown overboard into the Atlantic ocean in order to collect insurance money for supposedly damaged cargo.⁵² Confronting the utter illogicality of the deliberate massacre of African lives, Philip presents a highly fragmented text that reproduces and reformulates excerpts from the case in order to "not tell the story that must be told" (Philip 189). *Zong!* resists linearity and narrative coherency by "mutilat[ing]" the language of the court hearing into decontextualized words and sounds splayed out on the page to not only parallel the manner in which the slaves were killed but to also allow the newly formed text to break out of the grammar and voice of the original source (195). Philip enacts a poetics of excerption by plucking out language found in the case proceedings—phrases, words, or even just syllables—and reorganizing them on the page.

⁵² While it was decided that the insurers were ultimately not held liable to compensate the ship's owner for their loss, neither Captain Collingsworth nor the ship's crewmen were convicted of a crime. In other words, the ruling did not find that the deliberate murder of slaves was illegal.

By doing so, a wholly new text emerges. At the same time that Philip is interested in challenging the precise language of the legal documents, she is also interested in silence—who and what fails to be articulated in them. Through the construction of a “recombinant antinarrative,” Philip gives voice to the bodies that were deprived of speech while also reorienting the reader’s approach to sense-making (204). This demonstrates the way that excerpting can initiate a critical re-seeing of a text.

Comparing the project of *Zong!* to that of *[hacha]* illuminates the transformative potential of excerpting as a poetic strategy. Both Philip and Perez challenge—literally and figuratively—the letter of the law in that they use and misuse legal documents in order to reveal the experiences of the victims who were not regarded, protected, or preserved by them. Whereas Philip samples the language of the *Gregson v. Gilbert* case to reveal the submerged speech of the African slaves, Perez quotes excerpts from the *Downes v. Bidwell* case in the preface of *[hacha]* while *[saina]* excerpts (and sometimes even alters) passages from the Organic Act of Guam in order to expose the questionable logic of their rulings. Additionally, similar to the way that Philip uses page space to represent the way “language happened” (205) aboard the ship and to imaginatively visualize the memory of the drowned slaves, Perez treats the “blank page as an excerpted ocean” in which various sources are placed in conversation with each other in order to see what those combinations and tensions reveal (“Page Transformed”). In so doing, both poets refuse silence; they insist upon revealing the history and memory of the subaltern voices that have been suppressed by official narratives. As Perez states, “I value poems that speak against the colonial forces that create indigenous absence and silence. I value poems that assert indigenous survival and presence in all our complexity. I value poetic

forms that creatively weave moments, languages, voices, and geographies to create multiple layers of meaning” (“From Unincorporated Territories” 256). Neither Philip nor Perez attempt to present whole or transparent narratives in their works but approach histories of injustice often through paratactic language that offer only pieces of information at a time. While Zong’s excerpting practice is highly fragmentary and breaks apart the original text, Perez’s is more collage-like; both create combinations that allow the fragments to accumulate meanings. Their uses of secondary sources establish new contexts—antinarratives that allow alternate voices and meanings to emerge from the very textual spaces from which they were initially excluded or disregarded. These parallels illuminate excerpting as a means of resistance that utilizes and transforms source texts to ultimately establish an alternate reading that critiques official narratives.

Given Perez’s subversive use of excerpting to enact the emergence of Chamorro sovereignty, Kamau Brathwaite’s concept of “nation language” offers a useful lens by which to read the poetic strategies used by postcolonial writers to preserve their native culture and language. In his lecture, *History of the Voice*, Brathwaite addresses the various kinds of linguistic pluralities existing in the Caribbean as a result of contact between imperial languages and imported languages. He identifies nation language as the kind of English spoken by the African slaves and laborers who were brought to the Caribbean (5), explaining that “it is an English which is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now increasingly coming to the surface” (13). As opposed to dialects and creole languages, which tend to carry derogatory connotations as lesser forms of official languages, he describes nation language as a revolutionary

strategy by which enslaved people were able to preserve the rhythm and syllables of their own emergent language in the face of colonial languages (9). Although English was the dominant language that was taught and enforced in the Caribbean, Brathwaite argues, “that English was still being influenced by the underground language, the submerged language” (7). He cites the work of Claude McKay as a representative example of nation language because although he later wrote sonnets in standard English rather than in dialect like his earlier books, his oral reading of those sonnets demonstrated a notable difference in the pronunciation of certain words as well as a subtle syllabic departure from iambic pentameter (20). As Brathwaite puts it, “[t]he hurricane does not roar in pentameters. And that’s the problem: how do you get a rhythm which approximates the *natural* experience, the *environmental* experience?” (10, original emphasis). The reflection of one’s natural and environmental experience in poetry is central to nation language because it resists cultural imperialism and more accurately reflects the poet’s lived reality. Since the official language cannot account for the particularities of colonial subjects’ experience, Brathwaite asserts that “[o]ne of our urgent tasks now is to try to create our own Authorities” (14). Nation language is an important means by which to defy English as the hegemonic language and establish the agency of submerged voices.

Although the colonial history of Guam undoubtedly differs from that of the Caribbean, I draw this connection between the use of nation language by the diasporic poets that Brathwaite highlights and the multilingual and excerpting strategies that Perez uses because they all emerged in response to the imposition of colonial authorities that threatened the survival of native languages and cultures. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey recognizes in *Routes and Roots*, a comparative study of postcolonial Caribbean and

Pacific literatures, a nonlinear geographical framework provides a means by which to bridge Atlantic and Pacific postcolonial struggle by focusing on language's role in islander experience.⁵³ To further illuminate these transoceanic connections, I apply Brathwaite's concept of "nation performance" to Perez's multilingual and formal strategies. Although nation language is the central concept of Brathwaite's lecture on anglophone Caribbean poetry, he also briefly mentions nation performance in his discussion of the oral tradition, stating that "[n]oise is that decorative energy that invests the nation performance" (46n). In this sense, the poetic emergence of a submerged culture is not limited to linguistic elements; it can also be enacted through other nonverbal aspects as well. Therefore, while Brathwaite uses the term "nation language" to encompass the many different ways that poets submerge their language in English, I use his broader (though lesser used) term "nation performance" to account for the non-linguistic techniques that Perez employs in *[hacha]*, namely forms of excerpation that employ page space and typographical symbols, in combination with linguistic experimentation.⁵⁴

Perez's nation performance through the use of Chamorro and his insistent practice of excerpation not only work toward the preservation of indigenous identity, culture, and language but also toward subversively challenging colonial power. In the preface to *[hacha]*, Perez states that "[i]n the ocean of English words, the Chamorro words in this

⁵³ DeLoughrey's study examines novels of transoceanic contexts, applying Brathwaite's notion of "tidalectics" to "explor[e] the complex and shifting engagement between sea and land, diaspora and indigeneity, and routes and roots" (2). Referencing DeLoughrey's study, Perez also affirms that "[a]rchipelagic thinking has roots in Caribbean and Pacific studies" ("Guam and Archipelagic American Studies" 97).

⁵⁴ For examples of the poetic strategies by which poets subversively use English, see Brathwaite's discussion of meter (17), voice (21), mimesis (31), conversational modes (32), and the employment of sounds (33).

collection remain insular, *struggling to emerge* within their own ‘excerpted space’” (12, my emphasis). The incorporation of Chamorro insists on its survival and counteracts the presence of Spanish, Japanese, and, most predominantly, English in the text, challenging the typical postcolonial trajectory wherein native languages become subsumed by the colonial. As Brathwaite explains of the languages imported in the Caribbean, “what these languages had to do, however, was to *submerge* themselves, because officially the conquering peoples—the Spaniards, the English, the French, and the Dutch—insisted that the language of public discourse and conversation, of obedience, command and conception should be English, French, Spanish or Dutch” (7, my emphasis). Nation language allowed poets to feign compliance to imperial languages while simultaneously resisting complete assimilation into the hegemonic order. In other words, nation language uses the dominant language’s framework and defies it from the inside in order to assert its own authority by inserting into the language aspects of the poets’ unique experience. As Spahr recognizes, “[t]he negotiating yet politicized gesture of multilingual works in the Pacific has an activist intent. They work to pre-serve, as well as recover and reinstitute, particular cultures, languages, and concerns that are being overwritten as English expands through a critique of globalism’s disrespect for the local and localized sovereignty” (“Connected Disconnection” 85). Although, on the surface, Perez’s poetry does not necessarily infiltrate the colonial languages included in [*hacha*] in such a way that alters them with the qualities of Chamorro, his excerpting techniques use and undermine colonial discourse in ways that reflect Guam’s geographical context and assert indigenous experience. As he states in the preface, “my hope is that these poems provide a strategic position for ‘Guam’ to emerge from imperial ‘reduccion(s)’ into further

uprisings of meaning” (Perez, *[hacha]* 11).⁵⁵ By presenting an amalgamation of excerpts (which include legal documents, heard speech, historical narratives, and Chamorro words), Perez creates a new poetic space that contests the suppression of Chamorro heritage. As Robert J. Briggs argues, *erasure* is an inadequate term for encapsulating the loss experienced by Guam because it “overshadow[s] and ignore[s] the varying degrees that Guam has changed in the presence of military rule. Other forms of transformation include, but are not limited to, silencing, damaging, displacement, oppression, repurposing, appropriation, hybridisation, recruitment, and assimilation” (55). Given the multiple processes that erode indigenous presence, it is all the more necessary to offer a counteraction to these acts of transformation. Therefore, I read Perez’s excerpting strategies as demonstrations of nation performance aimed toward the emergence of decolonized spaces from which to establish Chamorro authority.

Archipelagic Word Formations and Oceanic Page Space

The most palpable visualization of excerpting as nation performance in *[hacha]* is exemplified by Perez’s use of page space. Far from the typical left-hand margin aligned lines of verse, the poems scatter words on the page to parallel the way islands are interconnected in an archipelago. As such, they constitute hybrid poem-maps. As Perez states, “[e]ach word is an island. The visible part of the word is its textual body; the invisible part of the word is the *submerged* mountain of meaning. Words *emerging* from the silence are islands forming. No word is just an island, every word is part of a

⁵⁵ Perez describes “reduccion” as “the term the Spanish used to name their efforts of subduing, converting, and gathering natives through the establishment of missions and the stationing of soldiers to protect these missions” (*[hacha]* 11).

sentence, an archipelago. The space between is defined by referential waves and currents” (“On Writing,” my emphasis). This description parallels Guam’s topography; as he explains in the preface, the island was created by the “union of two underwater volcanoes” which “created the submerged mountain of which Guahan is the peak” (*[hacha]* 8). Perez’s geographical conceptualization of his poetry also clarifies that although the words that appear on the page do not always form a complete, grammatical sentence on their own, they still allude to the words that could potentially surface to fill the empty spaces. As Paul Lai observes, Perez’s poetry “functions at a visual level in the orthography of words and negative spaces of the page” (10). These very gaps are where the reader must “read between the lines,” as the truism goes, to access what is not yet fully evident in the visible text alone. In this sense, words are not the only agents of meaning; both the textual and spatial elements generate interpretive potential.

The “*from Lisiensan Ga’lago*” poems most characteristically take on the archipelagic formation of words on the ocean of the white page. Perez scatters words and phrases, arranging them in a diagonal flow across the pages. Echoing Robert Creeley’s claim that “form is never more than an extension of content,” Perez has stated that “[f]orm is never more than a *navigation* of content” (“*from Organic Acts*” 228, my emphasis). This suggests that form does not merely function as the visual manifestation of content, but that form also directs the content’s semantic routes. The page itself is a map of meanings. Although each word-island functions as a discrete unit of meaning, the space between them—particularly when the lines shift from one language to another—bears the silent weight of colonial suppression. For example, the poem that I have excerpted for the epigraph of this chapter linguistically maps the struggle of retaining the

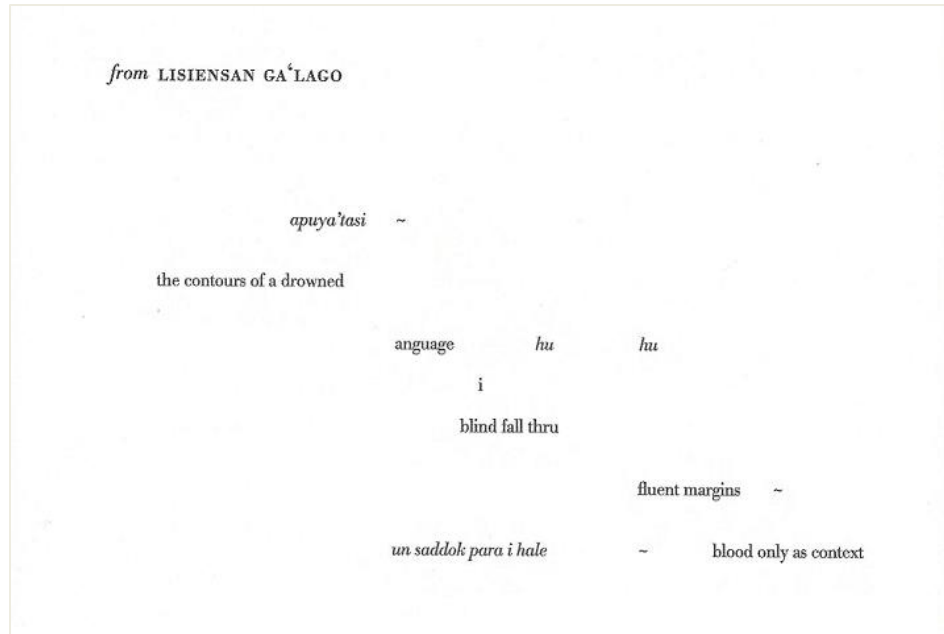


Figure 1. “from Lisiensan Ga’lago” (“apuya’tasi”). From *from unincorporated territory: [hacha]*, p. 78.

indigenous language in the face of colonial annexation. It primarily includes English words that describe the precarious remnants of a quelled language while the Chamorro words refer to natural elements, namely bodies of water (Figure 1). The poem begins with “*apuya’tasi*,” which translates literally to “navel of the ocean” (the deepest part of it), implying the depth of Chamorro linguistic heritage, but the following lines clarify that it is a “drowned// *anguage*” (78, original emphasis). Fracturing the word *language* suggests that the word itself is submerged within the page. Doing so also sonically evokes the word *anguish* to suggest the emotional impact of losing one’s indigenous language. This also alludes to Philip’s poem, “Discourse on the Logic of Language” from *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, in which she uses similar wordplay; the first stanza reads:

English

is my mother tongue.
A mother tongue is not
not a foreign lan lan lang
language
l/anguish
anguish
—a foreign anguish. (30)

Here, severing and repeating the first syllable of *language* emphasizes the necessity of using one's tongue to articulate the word and the physicality of speech. Following it immediately with the conflation "l/anguish" draws attention to the similarity, not only in the pronunciation of the words but also the difficult experience of grappling with mother and foreign tongues.

Such a struggle with competing languages is reflected in Perez's poem as well. The repetition of "*hu*," which is Chamorro for the pronoun "I," can be read in two ways: not only does it suggest Perez's existential assertion of personhood, but it also sonically enacts his (and perhaps even the language's) desperate attempts to catch a breath at the surface of the page—to resist drowning. As such it holds agency and powerlessness in tension. On the one hand, the poem-map enacts physical distance between words in order to demonstrate the ways in which text-less space carries meaning. For example, the gap between "blind fall thru" and "fluent margins" implies the submergence of the "i" (Perez, [*hacha*] 78). On the other hand, the closing in of distance between words demonstrates way in which language maps relation and conflict. Whereas most of the word-islands maintain the separation of Chamorro and English, the phrase "*un saddok para i hale*," which translates literally to "a river for with root," splices together Spanish and Chamorro words with no space between them (78, original emphasis). The Spanish article and preposition bleed into the Chamorro words, paralleling the violent history of

Spanish conquest in Guam, as alluded to by the final line, “blood only as context” (78). As Rowe argues, Perez’s multilingualism does not “endors[e] postcolonial hybridity as so many postcolonial theorists, like Gloria Anzaldua and Homi Bhabha, did” but instead, “understands hybridity as an inevitable effect of colonial production” (“Decolonial Performer” 27). However, rather than conceding to the trajectory of colonial production, Perez’s arrangement of multiple languages on the page serves as a testimony that exposes its violence in order to allow the “hu”—the Chamorro speaking subject—to re-emerge.

One important way that Perez enacts the emergence of the Chamorro language is by presenting translations. In some poems, he includes a rectangular box that offers English translations for some of the Chamorro words that appear in them. Although they are cordoned off from the main body of the poem, they have a critical role in its meaning-making in that they serve as a key or legend (much like the ones that typically appear on maps) that instructs readers unfamiliar with Chamorro on what it is they see on the poem-map. They function to “unlock” the meaning of the words, which would otherwise remain symbols or merely representations of sound. However, rather than presenting any continuity between the English and Chamorro words, these poems often reveal the disparity between their content. In one particular “from Lisiensan Ga’lago” poem, the translated words in the box emphasize speech while the rest of the poem seems to describe violence incurred upon the island (Figure 2). Setting the Chamorro words on the same visual plane as the English words while simultaneously creating thematic dissonance between them demonstrates the existence of diverging narratives within the same space. Read alone, the English words suggest war-like conditions; in conjunction with the Chamorro words, the poem implies the erasure of native language as analogous

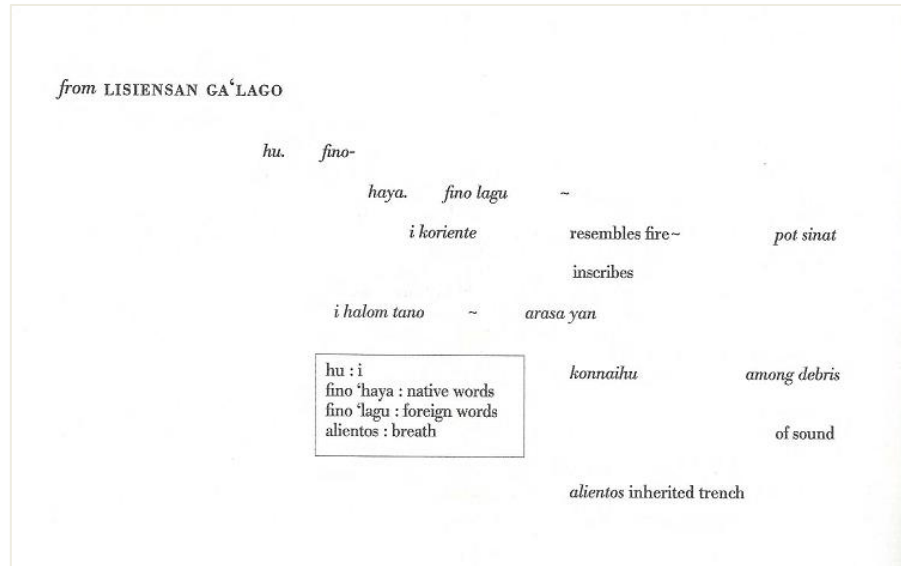


Figure 2. “from Lisiensan Ga’lago” (“hu.”) with Chamorro to English translation key. From *from unincorporated territory: [hacha]*, p. 34.

to the destruction of land. Evidently, not all of the non-English words are translated in the box. Neither are the translations offered elsewhere in the book as Perez does in other poems (which I will discuss later). Therefore, the reader must do the work of translating unfamiliar phrases in order to navigate the layers of the poem. The phrase “pot sinat,” which translates to “sign of the cross,” places the poem in the context of the Spanish missionaries who, led by the Jesuit priest Father Diego Luis de San Vitores in the mid-17th Century, established the first Catholic church in Guam ([hacha] 34). Despite this reference to the religious gesture, the rest of the Chamorro words allude to the warfare that ensued not long after the missionaries arrived on the island. The phrase “halom tano” translates to “inside earth” while “arasa” translates to “raze” or “destroy” (34). This draws a parallel between the pillaging of land and the suppression of indigenous culture, religion, and language. Lai comments on maps’ function as identifying one’s legibility in relation to others—what he calls “cartographic knowledge”—observing that “the

placement of words create a map-like meaning” (16). Noticeably, the poem begins solely in Chamorro but gets increasingly interrupted by English. This progression confirms that it decidedly locates English as foreign words, rejecting the common conception of all non-English languages as foreign. However, it simultaneously also maps out a trajectory in which the native language becomes subsumed by the foreign one. On the one hand, the description of “i koriente” (which means “the current”) “resembl[ing] fire” alludes to Guam’s geographical context as a volcanic island; on the other hand, this also implies that the shift from Chamorro to English was not a harmless one (*[hacha]* 34).

In contrast to the Chamorro to English translations in the previous poem, in one of the later “*from Lisiensan Ga’lago*” poems, Perez switches the translations in the boxes from English to Chamorro (Figure 3). While in the previous poem, the translation box served to aid the (Anglophone) reader’s understanding of the Chamorro words, in this one, it invites the reader to replace the English words with Chamorro ones. In this sense, it envisions an alternate trajectory by providing the reader an opportunity to reclaim the space on the page with the native language. Strikingly, while the translation for “broken glass” is offered, this phrase does not appear within the body of the poem (*[hacha]* 77). This suggests that those words are submerged beneath the surface of the page. If this page represents a map of the intrusion of Catholic missionaries as well as English as a colonial language, the translation box undermines the authority of the map by introducing elements that it fails to display. As a key, the translations direct the reader’s attention to the submerged language that can imaginatively be incorporated into the space. This exemplifies nation performance in that although the main portion of the poem-map remains in English, Perez makes it possible for Chamorro words to emerge from it by

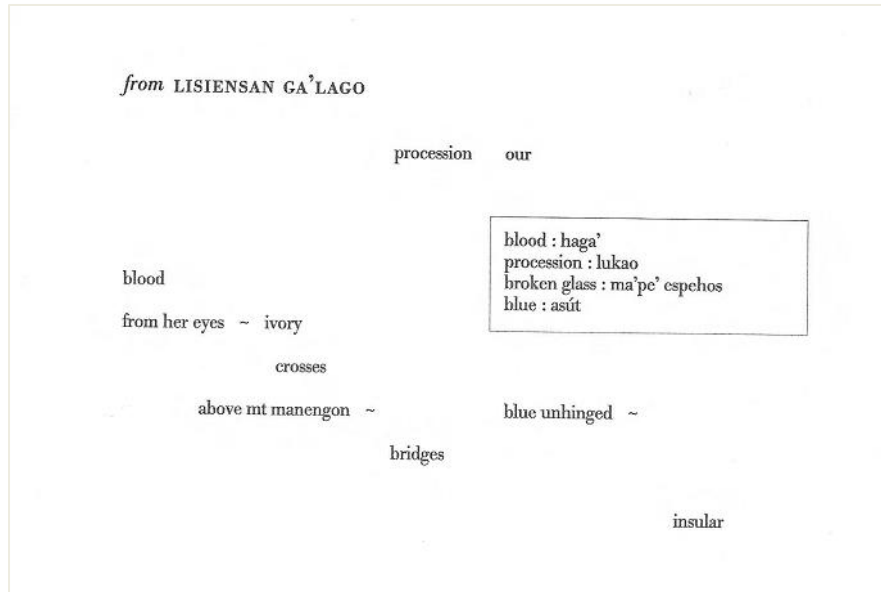


Figure 3. “from Lisiensan Ga’lago” (“procession”) with English to Chamorro translation key. From *from unincorporated territory: [hacha]*, p. 77.

providing translations within the key. While the English words remain visually unaltered, the key allows an alternate reading of the text that would require re-seeing and replacing the word-islands with Chamorro.

The only poem sequence in which Perez does not expansively use page space is “*from Stations of Crossing*.” The use of primarily left-hand aligned stanzas with sporadic indentation resembles the formal qualities of Olson’s poetry and an excerpt from *The Maximus Poems*—“Let them not make you as the nation is”—as the epigraph of the poem not only confirms Perez’s engagement with field composition but also the postwar poet’s notion of citizenship (qtd. in *[hacha]* 54). The excerpt comes from “Letter 3” where, in the stanza that follows this line, the speaker poses two significant questions: “the island of this city/ is a mainland now of who? who can say who are/ citizens?” (*Maximus Poems* 14). However, Perez’s island is neither merely a metaphor for an

isolated community like Gloucester nor an ideal model for the nation; rather than incorporation into the mainland of the US empire, he envisions Guahan's independence from it. Additionally, Olson insists on an immediacy in which objects "must be treated exactly as they do occur therein and not by any ideas or preconceptions from outside the poem" so that a series of tensions hold "the content and the context of the poem which has forced itself, through the poet and them, into being" ("Projective Verse" 20). We can see this in the way that Perez interweaves excerpts from several different source texts into the poem sequence, such as the gospel of Matthew, Chief Hurao's speech before the Spanish-Chamoru Wars, and Claude McKay's sonnets to meditate upon the "dialectic of violent and non-violent resistance" seen in Jesus and Hurao (*[hacha]* 70). By excerpting these texts and placing them in tension, Perez initiates a reflection on Guam's colonization and the conflicting ways by which to achieve decolonization.

But beyond Perez's imitation of Olson's form in "*from Stations of Crossing*," *[hacha]* largely demonstrates a departure from his poetics. As the poems discussed in this section have shown, Perez's approach to form in these poems presents a stark contrast to Olson's field composition techniques. Unlike Olson's construction of lines by "register[ing] both the acquisitions of [the poet's] ear *and* the pressures of his breath" in order to move from one perception to another as he delineates in "Projective Verse" (17, original emphasis), Perez "re-territorializ[es] the Chamorro language in relation to [his] own body, by way of the page" (*[hacha]* 12). In this sense, Perez's use of the line is a matter of reclaiming occupied space, as exemplified by the inclusion of translation keys for his poem-maps. He directly opposes Olson's notion of field composition in *[saina]*, stating, "while [I] try to be aware of the several forces that surface when writing in the

open, the concept of the ‘field’ doesn’t entirely translate into my own cultural experience” and instead embraces Epeli Hau’ofa’s conceptualization of oceanic preterrain, which offers a geographic perspective that does not only remain fixated on land (Perez, [*saina*] 63). More than reliance on the poet’s breath, the form of Perez’s poetry reflects the ebb and flow of the ocean, which illustrates Brathwaite’s notion of nation performance as a reflection of one’s natural and environmental experience. Rather than representing the kinetic progression of the poet’s perceptions, the words and phrases push and pull each other in tension, allowing new perceptions to emerge as a result.

Weaving Quotations

While the previous section’s discussion of Perez’s creation of excerpted page space illuminated a unique nation performance that reflects Guam’s oceanic environment, this section examines his use of quotation marks as another excerpting strategy that compiles a fragmented history of colonialism in Guam. These typographical symbols demarcate the various speaking contexts of the word-islands, revealing their instrumentality as well as, in some cases, their problematic rhetoric. Perez uses quotation marks to indicate that the words contained within them—whether the names of places, text from other sources, or quoted speech—constitute language that comes from outside of the text. In other words, quotation marks establish the existence of multiple discourses—a hybridity of voices. In many instances, they enact distance between Perez’s own language and the material he excerpts. For example, in the preface, Perez recounts his experiences of having to identify his place of origin according to different maps’ designation (or lack thereof) of Guam. He alters his responses accordingly: “[o]n

some maps Guam is named ‘Guam, U.S.A.’ I say, ‘I’m from a territory of the United States.’ On some maps, Guam is named simply, ‘Guam’; I say, ‘I am from “Guam”’” ([*hacha*] 7). Here, Perez not only distances himself from the colonial name of the island by encapsulating it within scare quotes but also specifies Guam’s status in the US as a territory rather than a state. Throughout the preface, he consciously differentiates between Guahan, the name bestowed upon the island by native Chamorros, and “Guam” in order to set the proper name of the island apart from the label that reflects the linguistic pronunciation of its colonizers. Using quotation marks emphasizes the irony of the name, which was conferred upon it by an outside authority. This demonstrates that even referring to the island’s name exemplifies postcolonial hybridity in that to do so is a negotiation of its designation according to the US in contrast to its indigenous name.

Unfortunately, “Guam” is only one colonial name out of several. Perez traces the historical trajectory of Guam’s changing names in the first poem of the book, “*from Lisiensan Ga’lago*.” The title means “dog tag,” which refers to a mandatory identification system instated during the time of Japanese occupation in 1941. The poem places nearly every word and phrase in quotation marks, listing the various so-called epithets for Guam in accordance to the languages of its colonizers: “‘*islas de las velas latinas*’/ (of lateen sails” and “‘*isles de los ladrones*’/ (of the thieves” are two names dubbed by Ferdinand Magellan when he led the Spanish expedition to Guam in 1521; “‘*islas marianas*’” was the name given by San Vitores in 1668 in honor of the Spanish queen who funded the Catholic mission to the island; the island was renamed “*omiya jima*”—which a later poem translates as “great shrine island” (76)—by the Japanese during their occupation after World War II; and lastly, “‘the first province of the great ocean’” in English reflects

current US colonization (Perez, [*hacha*] 15; Rogers 8). Here, the usurping of prior names demonstrates naming as an act of claiming land as a nation's possession—of territorializing. However, the quotation marks emphasize the constructed and transient nature of these labels as one name shifts to another. That these titles begin with lowercase letters also denies them their status as proper nouns; as such, Perez figures them as misnomers rather than legitimate names. The other words in quotation marks seem to present variations of “Guam” through a series of sound associations. The poem starts with “‘goaam’,” which eventually shifts to “‘guan’” and “‘guajan’,” to the slightly different “‘bahan’,” “‘guaon’,” and finally, “‘guam’” (*[hacha]* 15). The end of the poem on the following page reveals that these words are an “archipelago of/ ‘chamoru last names drawn// from the lexicon of everyday language’” and adds, “‘it is possible they changed/ their last names throughout their lives’~ remade : sovereign” (16).⁵⁶ The shifting names of the island parallel those of the indigenous population. In an essay in which Perez contextualizes and elaborates on his *from unincorporated territory* series, he explains that “Chamorros changed their names throughout their lives, often to reflect a life change,” adding that “[o]ur names map trauma. And we have many names” (“Mapping Diaspora”).⁵⁷ Perez’s use of the Chamorro word for dog tags, which are normally worn by soldiers, as the title of the poem underscores Guam’s imperialism under Spanish, Japanese, and American rule as principally military endeavors.

⁵⁶ Perez quotes the names from Brenna Lorenz’s essay, “Baby Names of the Pacific and Asia,” which examines Spanish census records of Chamorros from the 1700s (Perez, “Mapping Diaspora”).

⁵⁷ Rogers explains: “Civil government under the Japanese was quickly placed under a civilian affairs section, called the Minseisho, of the Imperial Japanese Army. The Minseisho instituted an identification system; every resident had to obtain and wear a strip of cloth with Japanese characters identifying the bearer. This pass was issued only once. Called *lisiensan ga’lago* (dog tag) by the Chamorros, the pass was required until late 1942, when life became more routine” (170).

Interestingly, although “Guahan” is the only word capitalized in the poem, Perez does not exclude it from quotation marks (*[hacha]* 15). In doing so, he confronts the reality that Guam is still a colonial territory that is not yet free from its primary use as a strategic military base for the US. Even the indigenous name of the island remains in quotation marks because while it may be spoken by the Chamorro people, it has neither traction nor legitimacy so long as it is called “Guam” by and under the US government. However, the poem does not accept this situation as final; Perez concludes the poem with the notion that remaking is a means of achieving sovereignty, envisioning a possibility for decolonization in the future as the names continue to change. Excerpting these names enacts nation performance in that it undermines the colonial act of naming—which is fundamental to territorializing—as transient and mutable.

Perez also uses quotation marks to indicate orally relayed speech as well as to illustrate the instrumentality of spoken languages in the colonial context.⁵⁸ In the “*from Ta(la)ya*” poems—the title conflates the words for throw net, “talaya,” and nothing, “taya”—much of the quoted text records his grandfather’s instructions on how to make the nets and effectively use them to fish. In the first poem of this series, his directions are deictic rather than specifically descriptive, illustrating the physicality of passing on the cultural tradition of fishing to the younger generation: “‘you hold the nicho like this’ he says ‘and the nasa around your fingers like this’” (31).⁵⁹ The following page presents

⁵⁸ Curiously, in recorded readings of his poems, Perez generally does not indicate through direct articulation that quotation marks exist in the work or use any intonations of his voice that differentiate quoted text from his original writing. One of the only moments he does so is when he says “quote” and “unquote” as he reads a line from “*from Achiote*”: “‘motives for not delaying further the conquest and instruction of the island of the thieves’” (*[hacha]* 23). Perez reads the poem with Brandy Nalani McDougall, who reads the italicized portions of the poem. For the recording, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSF20vMVFrI&list=WL&index=19&t=0s>.

⁵⁹ The poem later reveals that “nicho” is “spool” and “nasa” is “thread” in Chamorro.

quoted speech that also implies deictic gestures but the insertion of Spanish indicates a clear shift in subject matter from familial bonding to Magellan's expedition and arrival to Guam in 1521. Perez never names the explorer directly, only alluding to him through the line "the strait of His name northeast trade winds and equatorial ocean currents" followed by the exclamation "'tierra!'" which evokes the image of crewmen announcing the discovery of land (32). Although Perez subsequently inserts (without quotation marks) the Chamorro phrase "tano'ta," which means "our land," in the next line, it is followed again by "'tierra! tierra! land-/ fallen" (32). The deliberate inclusion and subsequent omission of scare quotes in these lines exemplify speech as a powerful means by which to seize and retain already inhabited land. Of the three instances in which the Spanish word is repeated, the final one appears without quotation marks. This progression in which the Spanish word eventually discards the quotation marks, as was characteristic of the possessive Chamorro phrase that came before it, demonstrates the way in which Magellan's crew secured their colonial conquest of Guam by first verbally claiming it in their language until it became reality—a fact that no longer needs to be stated. The punctuation serves to further illuminate this history without narrating it.

Later poems make Perez's use of quotation marks to signal a critique of the problematic rhetoric of the excerpted language more apparent. For example, the next "*from Ta(la)ya*" piece a few pages later quotes Perez's grandfather but increasingly includes more historical information concerning the Spanish missionaries' conversion efforts and the American military's suppression of the Chamorro language. Below the italicized word "*reduccion*," he offers the quote "'duties necessary to the formation of a

christian and political republic” (37).⁶⁰ Here, the quotation marks expose the text as dangerous rhetoric used to justify a violent means to an end. Given the earlier lines of the poem, which describe retaliation against islanders (through the pillaging of homes, land, and people) for the killing of Father Sanvitores, the reader can hardly reconcile this behavior with so-called Christian values since the missionaries’ plundering does not appropriately reflect the words they project.⁶¹ Similarly, Perez mentions that the US military participated in another kind of violence in that “[*u.s. naval authorities gathered and burned chamorro-english dictionaries forbidding the use of Chamorro except for official interpreting—1922*]” (37, original emphasis). Then later in the poem, after seemingly unrelated lines detailing his grandfather’s school uniform, the change in names of Guam’s capital city, and various buildings there, he quotes his grandfather: “the monitors tried to trick you and ask you something in chamoru’ he says/ ‘and you got punished if you didn’t answer them in english” (37). Rather than offering this spoken text directly after the contextual information about the burning of dictionaries, Perez delays its appearance in the poem, allowing the narrative layers of his grandfather’s personal experience and Guam’s colonial history to alternate and accumulate like a montage. Intermixing these nonchronological narratives demonstrates the inextricability of modern life and centuries of subjugation. Just as Perez’s grandfather instructed him to “weave and pull cross” the threads of the throw net, he does so with history and memory in the poem by gathering excerpts of speech (31).

⁶⁰ These words were spoken by Francisco de Irisarri y Vivar, an army captain who became the military governor (or “sargento mayor”) of Guam in 1676. The complete quotation concludes with the rationale “banishing barbarism little by little” (qtd. in Rogers 57).

⁶¹ Sanvitores was killed by Mata’pang, the chief of a Chamorro village, after the former baptized the latter’s daughter without his permission. Perez briefly describes this in “*from Achioté.*”

The act of constructing a throw net becomes an analogy for Perez's poetic process of weaving together excerpts. In a "*from Ta(la)ya*" poem that appears later in [*hacha*], Perez quotes the words of Japanese authorities speaking to Chamorro women after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. They insist that the Americans will not win the war against Japan and attempt to appeal to them by stating, "*your families are being protected by the Japanese at/ manengon you girls have/ been chosen to serve the Taicho and afterwards you will be rewarded*" (73, original emphasis).⁶² Here, the tone of the speaker's agenda is unmistakable. The passage clearly displays the coercive tactics used by the Japanese to justify their exploitation of the Chamorros. But rather than polemicizing the language of the oppressors by recapitulating it in his own words, Perez displays it as-is in order to give the reader the opportunity to question and critique the manipulative rhetoric of the quoted material. Indeed, when weighed against subsequent lines that describe civilians being "forced into caves" at Tinta by armed soldiers and having to "hide beneath other dead bodies" in order to avoid getting killed themselves, their assurances prove empty (73).⁶³ Perez's utilization of quotation marks demonstrates nation performance in that the interweaving of quotations not only parallels the act of weaving traditional throw nets but also presents a more accurate account of the subjugation of the Chamorro people. Such use of quoted speech functions as a poetic counterbalance to the Insular cases in that Perez presents testimonies and excerpts of spoken evidence without any accusations or exposition in order to allow the reader to adjudicate the case as a self-evident one of colonial oppression.

⁶² *Taicho* is the Japanese word for "captain," "commander," or "leader."

⁶³ Perez alludes to this event in "*from Stations of Crossing*." In the endnote Perez informs that "On July 15, 1944, many residents of Merizo were taken to a cave at Tinta and massacred by Japanese soldiers" (71).

Emerging from Brackets

The final form of punctuation by which Perez enacts a poetics of excerption that I will discuss in this chapter is brackets. While the formal strategies examined thus far, address excerpting in terms of Perez's use of space and speech, an analysis of his use of brackets reveals a reformulation of the act of incorporation. The first instance of brackets appears in the preface, where Perez quotes from the *Downs v. Bidwell* case. Contained within them are ellipses that indicate that portions of the rulings before and after the paragraphs were omitted. This further emphasizes the quoted material as samplings rather than representative of the whole text. The incomplete representation of the ruling highlights its constructedness; just as the omissions seem arbitrary, Perez implies that so too are the decisions of the rulings that lawfully granted the US government authority to "take possession of and hold in the exercise of its sovereign power a particular territory, without incorporating it into the United States [...]" (*[hacha]* 9, original omission). Such an omission signals a lack of grounds for this self-appointed power, which is under scrutiny since it is the very thing denied of Guam. As Rowe asserts on Perez's excerpts from the Organic Act, such legal language reveals the "fantastic aspect of imperial imaginary" ("Decolonial Performer" 24). As this section will demonstrate, Perez contests colonial submergence through the agential use of brackets to incorporate Chamorro presence in terms of both language and body.

For the most part, the bracketed text has an explanatory function in *[hacha]*. It often appears toward the bottom of the page and provides contextual information (as in "from Achiote," where the text informs readers of the different uses of the achiote plant)

or provides translations of Chamorro words (as in the “*from Tidelands*” poems, where the brackets include the Chamorro word used earlier in the poem, followed by its English translation). One may wonder why Perez chose brackets instead of parentheses, a somewhat similar form of punctuation; however, there is a clear difference in their functions. Whereas parenthetical text might be read as an afterthought or added clause within a sentence (that could otherwise exist on its own without any significant effect on overall meaning of the sentence if the parenthetical were to be excluded), brackets constitute an insertion of changed content. In their typical typographical use, brackets are used within quoted language to indicate that the contents included in them do not represent the original text exactly; they inform the reader that the writer has altered the content to some extent to better suit the needs of the new text. One definition of brackets clarifies that they have a figurative use: “for ‘the position of being bracketed equal, equality’” (“Bracket”). In this sense, brackets are an agential form of punctuation that gives equal footing to the inserted text rather than absolute, unchangeable authority to the source material. Therefore, whether it be to modify, clarify, or correct, bracketed text ultimately serves the purposes of the writer. Given this function, it is all the more peculiar that in nearly all of the poem sequences, the bracketed text—particularly that which includes historical information—never appears within quotations. Rather than interrupting the syntactical flow of quoted material, bracketed lines often stand alone as their own discrete unit of text on the page.

This kind of bracketing features most prominently at the beginning of section two, where Perez uses them to label the names of land regions within unique maps of the Pacific. These maps are atypical in that many of them look more like diagrams that

illustrate the military, political, and commercial implications, not only of maps in general, but specifically of Guam's central position in the project of Western advancement.⁶⁴ An immediately visible aspect of the maps is that they do not demarcate the borders of national lines; instead, the lines indicate travel routes of the Spanish galleons, the expanse of Japanese military control in the Pacific, and the connection between Guam and other airports. Perez brackets the names of nations, islands, airport abbreviations, military bases, and the labels of the maps themselves—though conspicuously, not the names of bodies of water. This highlights the mutability of the designations and borders of land in contrast to the permanence of oceanic areas. That the brackets only contain the names of landmasses in “[*War: in the Pacific Ocean*]” but that those very landmasses are not given physical shape on the map brings into question national boundaries and exposes the arbitrary practice of drawing territorial lines (Figure 4). The bracketed labels float vaguely in the white space of the page, placing emphasis on approximate locations rather than specifically outlined regions. This asserts not only a vision of borderless spaces but also underscores territorialized lands as constructs. In his reading of Perez's maps, Lai offers the term “discontiguous” as a way to “think of these territories that are considered to be part of the nation, but are not seen to be spaces that define the national land, culture, or identity” and put pressure on the “rubric of nation-states” (3). Additionally, adding brackets around names of landmasses implies that, similar to the use of quotation marks for the changing names of Guam, those very names are subject to change and even re-naming—that they are disposable. This unique construction of the maps with bracketed

⁶⁴ The maps, which the copyright page of the book calls “illustrations,” were made for Perez by Sumet (Ben) Viwatmanitsakul (3).

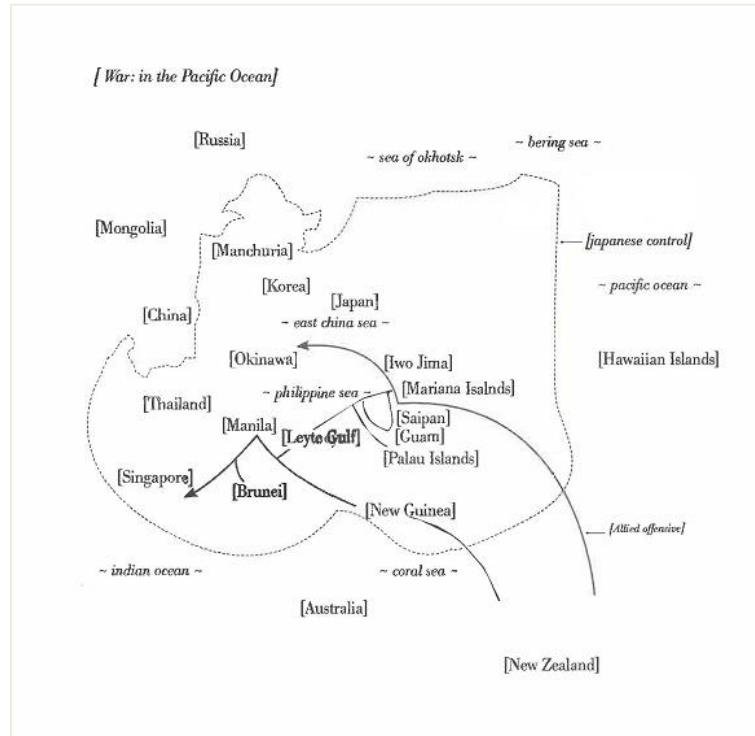


Figure 4. “[War: in the Pacific Ocean].” From *from unincorporated territory: [hacha]*, p. 29.

labels emphasize the subjectivity of cartography; maps show what their makers want them to show. Perez’s map brings into focus the nations imbricated in warfare as well as Guam’s central position among them. The map can also be read for what it does not show: the narratives that often do not get told in representations of military conflict.⁶⁵ The lines indicate the movement of troops and the trajectory of military advancement from one country to another but do not account for the civilians of those nations who fell victim to the consequences of colonization and war in the Pacific. This underscores the

⁶⁵ As Perez explains, “In my imagination, [the maps] function in two ways: first, they center “Guam,” a locating signifier often omitted from many maps. Secondly, the maps are meant to provide a counterpoint to the actual stories that are told throughout the book. While maps can locate, chart, and represent (and through this representation tell an abstracted story), they never show us the human voices of a place” (“Page Transformed”).

privileging of place over people, not only in the construction of maps but the mission of imperial conquest. By bracketing the names of land areas, Perez presents an opportunity to re-see the Pacific as a textual space vulnerable to revision due to geopolitical conflicts between nations.

In addition to reframing landmasses, one of the most important functions of brackets for Perez is providing a means by which to incorporate Chamorro words into otherwise English text. In each of the “*from Tidelands*” poems, a Chamorro word appears inside a pair of brackets within the body of the poem, then at the bottom of the page—sandwiched between tildes above and below the line—the word is offered again, followed by an English translation (the entire final line is always bracketed and italicized). For example, the first of these poems in section one appears as follows:

“edge
closer to the illegible
borders—“let this cast open [hale’]
into razed “temporal fields and

harness

“these tidal” palimpsests

~
[hale’ : root]
~ (24, original emphasis)

It is difficult to deduce from context clues within the poem alone what the Chamorro word might mean. Valerie Solar Woodward identifies “delayed translation” (83) as one of Perez’s poetic techniques, arguing that “[t]he use of English with the Chamorro words in brackets prompts us to realize that within the body of English lies a fracture of

meanings, just as there is a multiple and fractured meaning carried within each person that is inherited from the lives and deaths of Spanish priests, soldiers, native Chamorros, and others living on Guam” (84). The italicized portion serves as a kind of footnote (though, of course, it could also be read as being part of the main body of the poem rather than merely an auxiliary feature) or key by which to decipher the earlier use of the word, similar to the translation boxes in the “*from Lisiensan Ga’lago*” poems. In this sense, the bracketed text functions as a dictionary or teaching tool for readers who are unfamiliar with Chamorro. The “illegible/ borders” seem to refer to the aforementioned map poem of war in the Pacific while the notion of “harness[ing]// ‘these tidal’ palimpsests” clarifies Perez’s motive for using this specific form of punctuation: to trace Chamorro over the existing English ([*hacha*] 24). “Tidal” is an apt description for the palimpsests because these bracketed translations do not appear as isolated moments but return multiple times throughout [*hacha*]. Like ocean tides, the words enter and re-enter the pages, exemplifying nation performance by imbuing the text with a feature that reflects Guam’s natural environment. In fact, this poem is not the first instance in which readers encounter the word *hale’*. Just a few pages earlier, in “*from Achiole*,” Perez first introduces the phrase “hale’ta” (20) without offering a translation, then later presents a slightly different, inverted version of the above translation: “[*our roots : hale’ta*]” (22). The repetition of the word and its meaning not only allows the word to take root in the reader’s memory but also reinforces the importance of cultural and linguistic roots in the midst of the “ocean of English words” (12). Lai reads the brackets as representing the “volatile relationship between colonial and indigenous languages” and argues that they “isolate or imprison Chamorro words” (9). This is indeed how the words appear at face value on the

page; however, when read as an example of nation performance, the bracketed translations demonstrate the emergence of Chamorro where it may not have been before. While the tension and uneven use of the languages are indeed apparent throughout the text, the inclusion of the bracketed Chamorro word within the main body of the poem provides an opportunity to imagine the incorporation of the language within English speech/text where it may not otherwise appear. In addition to representing the colonization of speech, the brackets productively afford the Chamorro language the means by which to insert itself in place of the colonial language.

Perez also breaks from the conventional usage of brackets by omitting closing brackets. In the oxymoronically titled poems “*from Aerial Roots*,” which refer to the banyan trees that are indigenous to Guam, Perez intentionally mis-uses brackets by offsetting their typical symmetry. In these poems, only opening brackets accompany each Chamorro word without any closing brackets or English translations after the colons. He also emphasizes these moments by bolding them. For example, in one of the later poems of this series, “[**attadok** :” appears but neither the line that follows, “arrivals—threadbare light, dissolving arcs of fluent margins—originating,” nor the surrounding text even so much as hint at the word’s meaning: “eye” (49). Perez does sporadically offer the English equivalent of one of the Chamorro words on each page—though, oddly, in parentheses before the colon: “[**pacho (mouth)** :” (49). This suggests that translation is not the end goal of including these words; rather, the incompleteness leaves potential for meaning making. In many instances, the words are simply followed by white space, as if the reader should fill in the blanks after the colons. The absence of closure through the omission of closing brackets demonstrates Perez’s resistance against the extinction of the

Chamorro language. It is a gesture of nation performance that works toward releasing the Chamorro words (which, in these poems, represent the Chamorro body) into the body of the poems—re-incorporating them—rather than relegating them as “other” by keeping them contained within the brackets. As alluded to in the title, just as banyan trees’ roots grow and weave above ground, Perez creates a poetic environment within which the language can thrive despite the process of “reduccion” that uprooted the indigenous language—or as he describes it in another poem within the series, the aerial roots of the Chamorro words incorporate “native syllables within” the English text (47). As he explains in [*saina*], the roots “fuse together to form accessory trunks/ —in time/ these trunks become indistinguishable from the main trunk” (41). In this sense, the open-bracketed Chamorro words enact the re-building of linguistic roots to resist colonial erasure as they are released into the body of the page.

Perhaps just as quizzical as their formatting is that the inclusion of the Chamorro words read as tangents rather than having any detectable relevance to the “*from Aerial Roots*” poems’ title or subject matter: the introduction of horses to Guam. The poems present a highly fragmented and paratactic account of this history. Perez repeats the phrase “they say” (sometimes in quotation marks, sometimes not) multiple times to highlight the mythic nature of the details and to bring attention to the way in which the information gets passed on orally rather than through official documentation of events.⁶⁶

The first horse was brought to Guam by Spanish missionaries in 1673; before then, the

⁶⁶ Perez has commented on colonialism’s impact on the indigenous oral tradition: “There was a time when the audience for Chamoru oral poetry was composed entirely of other Chamorus who drew from sources of inherited knowledge. Colonialism severed our inheritance, introduced foreign populations, and pressured Chamorus into diasporic migrant streams” (“From Unincorporated Territories” 256).

Chamorros had never seen such creatures on their island (Rogers 59). By the time of Japanese occupation in the 1940s, hundreds of horses were used by the military to carry artillery (170). In an earlier “*from Ta(la)ya*” poem, Perez also informs readers that “The First Horse arrived mounted by damian de esplana [1673],” a Spanish captain who “burned tomhom and rode/ to the southern villages hunting ‘rebels’ in retribution for/ sanvitores” ([*hacha*] 37). The association between the horse and the destructive pillaging of the village for the sake of maintaining military control and converting natives to Catholicism implies their metonymic relationship to colonialism, though Perez is not entirely unsympathetic to them when he mentions the flaying of a horse’s skin (45), the shooting of runaways, as well as being mistreated in the galleons by which they were transported to Guam (47). Rather than ultimately implicating horses in the project of colonialism, he reveals that they were also victim to it.

This empathetic portrayal of horses draws a connection between human and animal bodies. Each poem includes clusters of Chamorro words referring to various regions of the body such as the torso, limbs, and face. In one of the poems in section three, Perez scatters the words “sintura,” “apuya’,” “pecho,” and “aga’ga”—which mean “waist,” “navel,” “chest,” and “neck” respectively—almost randomly throughout the poem (43). In a blog post in which Perez discusses his process of writing these poems, he distills their themes as “‘horses and colonialism’, or ‘colonialism and the body’” and explains:

The horse gains a kind of mythic quality on guam (similar to the “introduction” of horses to south america) – and the poems play with that idea and with the deconstructive framing of Muybridge’s photographs of a horse in motion. each poem is made of four “frames” – first there is the name of a body part in Chamoru (the native language of guam) : then what

follows is a Steinian “creating [sic] it without naming it” flow of sentence/fragment sequences. (“finish line”)

This reference to Eadweard Muybridge becomes more obvious in the second poem of the series when Perez states “‘they say’ the horse/ doesn’t touch the ground when it runs— signs of the cross” (45).⁶⁷ This mystical description of the horse conflates Muybridge’s project with that of the Spanish missionaries. If the inclusion of the Chamorro words for various body parts functions similarly to the photographs that captured the succession of a horse’s movements, Perez’s isolation of each body part allows more precise scrutiny of them. While Muybridge’s famous photographs do not appear in *[hacha]* as they do at the beginning of Perez’s blog post, one of the epigraphs with which section three opens is Gertrude Stein’s “A Carafe, That is a Blind Glass.” Read as a parallel to Perez’s invocation of body parts within his reflection on the role of horses in colonial endeavors in Guam, the notion that the Chamorro words are “not unordered in not resembling” suggests that juxtaposing these seemingly unrelated threads offers an opportunity to notice their “arrangement in a system” (Stein qtd. in *[hacha]* 40). Similar to the structure of *[hacha]* as a book that comprises various series of poems that interconnect with the *from unincorporated territory* series as a whole, the individual poems comprise non-linear excerpts that are interwoven together to be, as Hsuan L. Hsu describes them, “unpredictably recombinant” (301). In “Poetry and Grammar,” Stein insisted on using nouns as “a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them” (236). Rather than explaining nouns by describing them, she asserted that

⁶⁷ Eadweard Muybridge was an English American photographer who was hired by the governor of California, Leland Stanford, in 1872 to confirm whether or not all four of a horse’s hooves left the ground when galloping. He used a system of multiple cameras to capture a horse’s motion as it passed them to prove that they indeed did and became known as the inventor of the motion-picture technique (“Eadweard Muybridge”).

“the noun must be replaced... by the thing in itself” (246). Perez also enacts this by creating a space for the words to mean their names. Perez brings attention to the suffering of both human and animal bodies through the inclusion of these words. The poem concludes: “in mounting light, the horse is/ captured frame by frame to our least common muscle” (*[hacha]* 51). This establishes bodily affiliation that draws a parallel between the captured image of the horse to the figuratively trapped Chamoru body within the frame of unincorporation. However, whereas the images of the horse remain enclosed within the frames, the Chamorro words are left open without closing brackets, creating the possibility for release.

The last “*from Tidelands*” poem in section three also provides neither an English translation nor a closing bracket, which is uncharacteristic of all other poems in this particular series. The poem appears as follows:

night
displaces our “retrievable
 history”—the “sky impaired” by smoke—
“skin”—“grain”—“psalms”—“what saved us?”—one
storm bent

[*tinaitai*] in the sand—

~
[tinaitai:
~ (52)

“*Tinaitai*” translates to “prayer” or “tree,” one that is specifically “bent by wind and still attached to the land.” The poem’s imagery implies both the body of a supplicant in the act of prayer as well as the bending of a tree by strong winds, underscoring the

connection between nature and spirituality in Chamorro culture.⁶⁸ The description of “‘sky impaired’ by smoke” alludes to the burning of ifet trees by US Air Corps because, as the notes to “*from Stations of Crossing*” inform, “they posed a hazard to aircraft landings and takeoffs” (71). This demonstrates a contrast between the spiritual resonance of *tinaitai* and the US military’s irreverence for indigenous land. By omitting the closing bracket and a definitive translation of the Chamorro word, Perez not only shifts the responsibility to find and learn the meaning of the word on the reader but also refuses to conclude with a translation into English. This noticeable omission of the English translation also allows the word to retain its multiplicity rather than remain confined to a single definition. As Perez states, “[p]oetry, to me, is a space in which indeterminacy, ambiguity, uncertainty, and fragmentation can be productively engaged. In a sense, poetry is a space to gather unincorporated threads of identity in dynamic collision” (“Poetics Statement” 330). This ambiguity deters a final knowability, which creates a kind of uncolonizable space on the page.

Conclusion

As the first installment of the *from unincorporated territory* series, [*hacha*] establishes the purpose of the ongoing project as an effort toward the realization of Guam’s self-determination and sovereignty from within the hybrid context of unincorporation. An examination of the formal strategies that Perez employs demonstrates the subversive nature of excerpting in that its construction of a hybrid

⁶⁸ Perez has discussed elsewhere that “Chamorros view the land itself as an ancestor; thus land, genealogy, and spirituality are interconnected. Chamorros refer to themselves as *i taotao tano*, or ‘the people of the land’” (“Chamorro Creation Story” 10).

textual space invites readers to re-see and question the implications of the incorporated materials and sources. Read through the lens of Kamau Brathwaite's concept of "nation performance," Perez's expansive use of page space, frequent use of quotation marks, and unconventional use of brackets in combination with the inclusion of the Chamorro language recapitulate Guam's history while also enacting the emergence of indigenous culture and language. As such, excerption is a matter of preservation as well as decolonization. By spatially evoking the geographic context of Guam, intermixing historical narrative with quoted speech from Perez's grandfather, and inserting Chamorro words into the predominantly English text, *[hacha]* not only represents the struggle to retain native heritage but also challenges the trajectory of colonialism by imagining a decolonized space in which Chamorro agency can be exercised through form. The act of excerpting serves as a means by which to incorporate a recontextualized history that exposes the mechanisms of imperialist ideology and rhetoric that perpetuate the exploitation of Guam.

However, for Perez, his poetry is not only an effort to go backwards by excerpting from Guam's history (though, as this history often goes unknown or forgotten, making it more visible is certainly a central part of his poetic project) but to go forward—to use the word *from* as an opportunity to move *towards* the demilitarization and self-determined sovereignty of Guam.⁶⁹ As he clarifies in an interview:

Poetry cannot bring back the dead, nor can it bring back dying languages or cultures. However, I think poetry, and literature in general, is an important site of memory, recovery, resistance, revitalization, resilience, and resurgence—especially in response to historical, cultural, ecological,

⁶⁹ In "*from* Descending Plumeria," Perez states that "8,000 Marines and their dependents will be transferred to Guam from Okinawa by 2014 through a joint effort of the United States and Japan" (*[hacha]* 91). Today, the population of military personnel has risen to 12,000 ("Joint Region Marianas").

and personal trauma. Because the literary is a symbolic space, poetry can inspire and empower us towards real change. There is no guarantee or direct correlation to action, but instead poetry opens up a space of possibility and promise. In this way, poetry is like a prayer that believes in resurrection. (“Interview”)

In this sense, Perez does not naively anticipate a utopic return to indigenous experience prior to Guahan’s colonization. Rather than trying to excerpt imperialism from Chamorro history—as if such reversal or eradication were possible—Perez is interested in creating a *new* space that directly contests the hegemonic narratives that legitimize colonialism while glossing over or erasing evidence of trauma inflicted upon indigenous people, culture, and land. In Perez’s excerpted spaces, unincorporation is no longer a means of exclusion or political disenfranchisement; through formal hybridity, the *from unincorporated territory* series reappropriates the term *unincorporation* as a path toward sovereignty.

As this dissertation has demonstrated thus far, formal experimentation is a vital component of postcolonial poetry because it not only exposes the effects of imperialism but also offers the critical tools by which to challenge its enduring logic. While this chapter has discussed Guam as a colonized territory under the US, it is important to also recognize that colonialism does not only manifest in the direct possession of land; neocolonial power can also be exercised through geopolitical ties and military intervention. As Chapter 3 will demonstrate, hybridity is also an inherited colonial condition not only in the context of settler colonialism but also geopolitical warfare.

CHAPTER 4

“UGLY=NATION”: (MIS)TRANSLATIONS OF GEOPOLITICAL “IMAGETEXTS” IN DON MEE CHOI’S *HARDLY WAR*

*I see Ugly=Translators
Yes, Ma'am
Me=Gook*

—Don Mee Choi, “Hydrangea Agenda”

As the previous chapters have shown, hybrid poetic practices emerge as necessary strategies of resistance and survival within various sites of conflict. Hong’s poetry underscored how linguistic hybridity is an inevitable result of colonial cosmopolitanism. Perez’s work elucidated an inherited postcolonial hybridity resulting from centuries of colonization. This chapter will address a form of transnational hybridity resulting from geopolitical intervention by examining the US military’s presence and territorial reach in the Pacific further beyond Guam, in South Korea. Whereas Guam is a colonized territory of the US, Don Mee Choi’s *Hardly War* contends that South Korea is a neocolony of the US that has become embroiled in its anti-communist geopolitics. While the Korean War—also referred to as “The Forgotten War” in the US—was a civil war in that it involved fratricidal combat between North and South Korea, it was also a proxy war between the US and Soviet Union. The war began on June 25, 1950 when skirmishes along the border eventually led to the North Korean army invading South Korea. While historians debate over its precise origins, many point to the division of North and South

Korea as its major catalyst.⁷⁰ The 38th parallel was an arbitrary division of the country established by the US after the Korean peninsula was liberated from Japanese colonization.⁷¹ Combat came to halt on July 27, 1953 with the signing of an armistice; however, in the absence of a peace treaty, the war has technically never ended and a Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) still divides the Koreas to this day. Today, 28,500 US military personnel are still stationed in the country over half a century after the war.⁷² Even the period of redevelopment and industrialization that followed the Korean War was largely powered by American funding in exchange for military aid in the Vietnam War. By 1973, the US had paid South Korea approximately \$1 billion for the 300,000 combat troops sent to Vietnam (Cumings 321). As these factors evince, South Korea has been crucial to the US empire's geopolitics and concomitant wars.

Hardly War is a hybrid work that critiques US intervention in the Korean and Vietnam Wars by dramatizing verbal and visual representations of the experience of living through and beyond these conflicts. It illustrates through formal hybridity a transnational hybridity in which Korea's modern history cannot be told apart from US geopolitics. At the level of verbal representation Choi plays with language by using translation (and mistranslation) as a strategy of resistance against empire. Using puns, songs, exclamatory and repetitive statements, as well as untranslated words and phrases

⁷⁰ As historian William Stueck argues, “[t]he war originated in 1945 with the division of the peninsula into occupation zones by the Soviet Union and the United States, and the perpetuation of that division as a result of the two nation’s subsequent failure to agree on terms for unification” (3).

⁷¹ According to Bruce Cumings’ historical account, Colonels Dean Rush and Charles H. Bonesteel “chose the thirty-eighth parallel because it ‘would place the capital city in the American zone’” and “American officials consulted no Koreans in coming to this decision, nor did they ask the opinions of the British or Chinese, both of whom were to take part in a planned ‘trusteeship’ for Korea. Instead, the decision was unilateral and hasty” (187).

⁷² South Korea pays the US \$900 million annually for this security commitment (Choudhury).

in *Hangul*, Choi's language is simultaneously playful and sobering in its representation of American involvement in the Korean War, the deployment of South Korean soldiers in the Vietnam War, chemical warfare, war atrocities, as well as the key political and military figures involved in these conflicts. At the level of visual representation, Choi integrates various media such as photographs—many of which were taken by her father, a photojournalist—of the Korean and Vietnam Wars, posters, and illustrations Choi created during her childhood. The work is also highly referential, weaving in allusions to war films, Korean songs, literary and theoretical texts, as well as historical archives.

Each of the three sections of *Hardly War* present a variety of different forms, all of which exemplify a formal hybridity that engages with visuality by mixing media. The first section, which shares the book's title, intersperses photographs between poems in verse (often center-aligned on the page) and prose that combine Choi's memories about her father's work as a photographer with information about the Korean War. The speakers of the text—who shift between Choi's younger self, soldiers, Choi's father, and news sources—assume a childlike, almost sing-song tone, repeating words and phrases as if reciting nursery rhymes. A quotation from Gertrude Stein's *Wars I Have Seen* in the epigraph of the book alludes to Choi's channeling of the memoir's discursive recollections of wars and Stein's characteristic elliptical repetitions. The second section, "Purely Illustrative," which deals more with events related to the Vietnam War, includes similar elements as the first but also presents prose pieces that take on the form of newspaper columns as well as poems that play with typography and numbers. In addition to photographs, other types of visual media appear, such as photocopies of a postcard and a still frame from a television ad. The last section of the work, "Hardly Opera," presents a

kind of a libretto in seven acts that personifies objects like the Camera Elmar (Choi's father's camera of choice) as well as various flowers—such as hydrangeas, the rose of Sharon (South Korea's national flower), azaleas, and forsythias—as speaking characters to theatricalize Choi's interviews with her father. Opera is an apt genre categorization for this section since *Hardly War*, as Choi informs in the notes section at the end of the book, was inspired by Heiner Goebbel's *Songs of Wars I Have Seen*, which features lines from Stein's memoir sporadically throughout its musical orchestration.

Based on some of the aforementioned features of this work, it is not difficult to see *Hardly War* as expanding upon Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's experimental approach to documenting history and memory in her genre-bending, influential magnum opus, *Dictee*. The most apparent parallel between the ways in which Cha and Choi engage with Korean history is their inclusion of images (while both include photographs and illustrations, Cha also includes film stills, diagrams, handwritten text, and scanned documents). Although both *Dictee* and *Hardly War* use photographs as visual evidence of history, they emphasize the medium's opacity and inability to adequately represent the past. A similar attitude of suspicion toward the transparency of language is evident in their approaches to translation as well. Both enact subversive modes of translation; while Cha recreates dictation exercises in order to highlight the imprecision of translation, Choi deliberately implements mistranslations in order to reveal alternate meanings. Their hybrid uses of textual and visual material exemplify engagements with historical representation that complicate these media. While much of the recent scholarship on *Dictee* (which I discuss in the following section) tends to read Cha's textual experimentation as paralleling cinematic forms and treat the visual elements as ancillary for illuminating the text, I

argue that as a work of hybrid poetry, the visual material functions in combination with the verbal and must be analyzed as such. Given Choi's engagement with—and expansion of—Cha's formal strategies, this chapter examines *Hardly War* as a work of hybrid poetry that does not merely supplement its text with visual elements but that presents composite textual-visual constructions that enact Choi's translations of historical representations of the Korean and Vietnam Wars. In order to analyze hybrid poetry like *Dictee* and *Hardly War* as composite media that do not privilege text over image, I invoke W.J.T. Mitchell's concept of the "imagetext" as a useful lens through which to consider the interconnected relationship between the verbal and visual elements. This chapter contends that the inclusion of photography in *Hardly War* is not an auxiliary feature but constitutive of Choi's engagement with image-text relations; this hybrid form is fundamental to her staging of the problematic logic by which geopolitical warfare during the Cold War became justified by the US as a necessary means of containment.⁷³

The primary means by which Choi undermines hegemonic logic is through activating shifting registers of translation, both verbally and visually. Rather than presenting literal translations that decipher the meaning of one language into another, Choi takes a figurative approach by using translation to flout expected meanings and allow mistranslations to unveil new, recontextualized connotations. She uses what I will refer to as "word equations" (such as the ones featured in the title and epigraph of this

⁷³ Josephine Nock-Hee Park aptly describes this as a "new logic of substitution." She explains: "In the Cold War, 'proxy' became inseparable from 'war,' and while proxy states were inflamed, the superpowers unleashed a proliferation of geopolitical calculations. Indeed, once proximity gave way to proxy, material conditions gave way to figuration. Every war is fought with figures of speech, but proxy war launched a new logic of substitution. Recasting internal conflicts within states as miniature versions of the war between superpowers required a series of matching figurations—perhaps best exemplified in Eisenhower's metaphor of falling dominoes, which justified both overt and covert intervention on an unprecedented scale" (9).

chapter) as a trope of translation that enacts the supposed linkage of discrete entities through faulty causal logic. These false equivalences are knowing acts of mistranslation that counteract the temptation to accept translations as perfect equations. In contrast to the way that captions typically function to explain images or how images tend to supplement the text in literary works, Choi complicates the relationship between these media by presenting imagetexts that, like word equations, stage false equivalences between words and images to ultimately unveil and critique the logic of Cold War geopolitics that tethered South Korea to the US empire in a neocolonial relationship. Mitchell provides a useful understanding of the relationship between image and text as a dialectic that is not only concerned with aesthetics and semiotics but also with ideology: “issues of knowledge (true representation), ethics (responsible representations), and power (effective representations)” (*Picture Theory* 6). In conjunction with mistranslations of English and Korean, Choi intermixes verbal and visual material to enact the illogical logic of translating the Korean and Vietnam wars as “the hardliest of wars” (6). Choi’s word equations expose the fallacy of such an account of these conflicts by staging ironic scenes of historical representation through imagetexts. Just as the word equations reveal false equivalences, the imagetexts expose the aporias of geopolitical warfare.

By examining the conjunctions of images and texts in *Hardly War* and the ways in which these elements mutually participate in meaning-making, I read Choi’s poetics of (mis)translation as a hybrid strategy that challenges hegemonic narratives of history that elide how South Korea is inextricably tied to US imperialism. The following section begins with an in-depth discussion of the parallels and differences between *Hardly War* and *Dictee* as well as literary scholarship on the latter in order to argue that the textual

elements in these works cannot be read apart from the visual elements because their meanings are contingent upon each other. I then provide an explication of Mitchell's concept of the imagetext in order to establish the importance of reading both textual and visual material as combinatory signifying media rather than separate elements in hybrid poetry. The subsequent section unpacks Choi's idiosyncratic practice of (mis)translation as a decolonizing act in order to clarify its function as a mode of resistance against hegemonic versions of history and explain its applicability to reading her imagetexts. The remaining sections of this chapter provide close readings of the various types of imagetexts Choi presents in *Hardly War* and the ways in which they enact a poetics of (mis)translation to undermine official narratives of history. In doing so, this chapter demonstrates how Choi's (mis)translational history of the Korean and Vietnam Wars makes US geopolitical intervention and the logic of empire more visible.

***Dictee's* Legacy and the Translational Potential of Imagetexts**

In many respects, *Hardly War's* parallels to *Dictee* are more acutely evident than any of the other works of poetry I examine in this dissertation. Not only are they both authored by Korean American poets who immigrated to the US and whose parents lived through the Korean War, but they both also use other languages in addition to English as well as visual materials to explore the intersections of multiple threads of history.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that both Cha and Choi also share an interest in performance. Cha's background in film led her to produce many performance pieces; *Dictee* happens to be one of the few works in her oeuvre that takes book form; see: *The Dream of an Audience: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982)*, ed. Constance M. Lewallen, U of California P, 2001. Choi has performed pieces from *Hardly War* in costume, accompanied by music and visual projections; see her website's page on her performances and installations: <http://www.donmeechoi.com/performance-installation#/performance-hardlywar/>.

Rather than providing cohesive, chronological narratives, their multilingual and multimedia techniques explore history as fragmented and incomplete. While both works are partly memoir, they also present speaking subjects beyond a single, autobiographical “I” and incorporate outside source material to augment their poetic investigations of personal, familial, national, and transnational histories.

Articulating and visualizing history while drawing attention to the very media that make such documentary processes possible is central to both Cha and Choi’s poetics.⁷⁵ Both *Dictee* and *Hardly War* underscore the importance and limits of utilizing verbal and visual forms in representing Korean history. In *Dictee*, which integrates photographs, film stills, letters, and handwritten text, the visual elements do not necessarily serve revelatory functions; rather, they complicate the audience’s desire to access memory or gain knowledge from historical artifacts. Similarly, *Hardly War* thwarts the audience’s desire for linear continuity or an epistemological whole by presenting snapshots—both visual and linguistic—of war experiences from multiple, shifting perspectives.⁷⁶ Additionally, whereas the visual materials incorporated in *Dictee* are placed on separate pages from the ones that include text, creating the effect of a montage, images and texts are more integrated in *Hardly War* like collages. Importantly, both poets also use translation as a recurring trope in their work but maintain skepticism toward the

⁷⁵ For example, in the “Thalia Comedy” section, Cha includes scanned images of letters—one typed, one handwritten—addressed to Laura Claxton that provide information about the change of a Mr. Reardon’s address and the addressee’s sister’s mental state. Additionally, *Dictee* includes photographs of landscapes, such as the one of what appears to be ruins on the front endpaper and the first image in the “Polymnia Sacred Poetry” section, which depicts two tree trunks cut similarly in an otherwise barren land. Neither the letters nor photographs are explained within the book.

⁷⁶ While I have referred to the audience of Hong and Perez’s poetry as readers in the previous chapters, given their primarily textual content, I use the term *audience* in this chapter to account for the verbal and visual viewership of Choi’s poetry.

transparency of translation and its ability to adequately convey the precise meaning of one language through another. Cha's translations of French are at times unreliable and her use of dictation exercises subversively suggests the impossibility of equivalent translations.⁷⁷ Choi further illustrates the false promise of translation by presenting deliberate mistranslations that do not pretend to aim for accuracy. These parallels not only attest to the relevance and enduring influence of Cha's formal experimentation nearly four decades after the publication of *Dictee*, but also highlight the ways in which Choi has expanded upon Cha's innovations in order to offer another form of engagement with historical representation.

Delineating commonalities between their formal techniques does not suggest that both works share the same objectives. Noticeably, the books' allusions indicate their thematic differences. The invocation of the Greek muses, revolutionary figures like Yu Guan Soon, Joan of Arc, Saint Therese, and Cha's mother demonstrate *Dictee's* interest in representing female subjectivity beyond the paradigms of official history. *Hardly War's* references to news sources, Yi Sang (an experimental poet during the Japanese occupation), war films, photographs, as well as samplings of interviews with her father demonstrate its interest in examining the ways in which the consequences of geopolitical warfare have come to be minimized and (mis)represented. In a sense, *Hardly War* takes on as its poetic project *Dictee's* challenge "[t]o extract each fragment by each fragment from the word from the image another word another image the reply that will not repeat history in oblivion" (Cha 33). But whereas Cha is preoccupied with being caught up in

⁷⁷ For a discussion of Cha's unreliable translations, see Lisa Lowe's chapter "Unfaithful to the Original: The Subject of *Dictée*" in *Immigrant Acts*.

the repetitions of history, Choi is invested in “disobeying history, severing its ties to power” through (mis)translation (*Hardly War* 4). While Cha confronts history as an “old wound” (33) that is always at risk of repeating itself, Choi hyperbolizes Roland Barthes’ notion that “history is hysterical” by enacting scenes that derisively imitate the rhetoric of Cold War geopolitics (qtd. in Choi, *Hardly War* 47).⁷⁸ Choi’s allusion to Barthes is itself an act of (mis)translation. As she has stated in an interview, “[w]hen I use another text in my writing I am also displacing it to see how wrong it could be and to see if any new connections can be made in its new geography” (Choi, “Conversation”). Extrapolating upon Barthes’ notion of history, Choi offers snapshots of what a mad history might look like when staged in her hybrid work.

While Cha offsets expectations about representational apparatuses by emphasizing the limits of using words and images to convey history, Choi operates under the assumption that such expectations were based on false notions of “true” representation to begin with. Choi in turn exploits the farce through ventriloquy, irony, and wry humor to satirically stage historical accounts that purport the valiance and necessity of geopolitical warfare in order to ultimately reveal the futility of geopolitical conflicts that cost the lives of more civilians than soldiers.⁷⁹ Choi’s exaggerated disobedience of history cannot be fully appreciated without looking first to Cha’s more somber reflections on history. Examining *Dictée* alongside *Hardly War* not only shows

⁷⁸ As Choi explains her poetic project: “[p]erhaps in many ways the entire book is about the experience of the Photograph not as the Spectator or the Operator, to use Barthes’s terms, but as the daughter of the Operator living inside the Camera with Spectrum, with History. Everything and everyone inside the Camera are mad” (*Hardly War* 49)

⁷⁹ According to Stueck, “Korea’s losses in the number of people killed, wounded, and missing approached three million, a tenth of the entire population. Another ten million Koreans saw their families divided; five million became refugees” (361).

how both use hybrid form as a means of resistance against hegemonic versions of history but also shows how Choi offers another means by which to enact critique that does not only reflect on the limits of historical representation but makes those limits even more visible by presenting a hysterical translation of official history.

Within the last decade, much of the scholarship on *Dictee* has focused on the cinematic performances of its speaking subjects. Alvergue discusses Cha's performative "call" to the audience and the images' inclusion of the reader while Inoue identifies the speaker(s) of *Dictee* as "disease(s)" and analyzes cinematic images' capacity to reincarnate and reinvent history.⁸⁰ Kim and Liu comment on Cha's use of mixed media as challenging the legitimacy of the body/language binary and conveying transpacific imagination.⁸¹ Bloomfield examines *Dictee*'s archaeological mode of knowing and argues that the material particulars of the work demonstrate the capacities and failings of its visual elements.⁸² These critical examinations of *Dictee* have duly noted its interdisciplinary practice of aesthetics and politics, yet they tend to discuss the images in the book as merely auxiliary to the textual material. However, by privileging language over image, this comparative approach risks overlooking the way in which both language and image play a mutual role in the meaning-making process of composite media.

Therefore, I propose examining hybrid works like *Dictee* and *Hardly War* through the

⁸⁰ See: Alvergue, José Felipe. "Poetic Seeing/Beyond Telling: The 'Call' in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictée*." *College Literature*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2016, p. 427-456; Inoue, Mayumo. "Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's "Phantomnation": Cinematic Specters and Spectral Collectivity in *Dictée* and *Apparatus*." *Criticism*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2014, pp. 63-87.

⁸¹ See: Kim, Hyo K. "Embodying the In-Between: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*." *Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2013, p. 127-143; Liu, Yu-yen. "Repositioning 'Asia'—the problematics of liminality and transpacific imaginary in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*." *EurAmerica*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2012, p. 497-534.

⁸² See: Bloomfield, Mandy. "'The word. The image': Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Fractured Forms." *Archaeopoetics: Word, Image, History*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2016.

lens of what W.J.T. Mitchell calls the “imagetext.” Viewing *Dictée* not as a work that merely borrows collage or cinematic techniques, as most scholars have described, but as a work of imagetexts in its own right illustrates how its hybridity is one that insists upon the irreducibility of medium and form in the representation of history. In other words, the inextricable combination of verbal and visual elements constitutes its own multimedia form and therefore warrants examination as such.

In *Picture Theory*, Mitchell defines imagetexts simply as “composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text,” (89n). However, he characterizes this term as a complex “problem” in that it constitutes “an unstable dialectic that constantly shifts its location in representational practices, breaking both pictorial and discursive frames and undermining the assumptions that underwrite the separation of the verbal and visual disciplines” (83). Offering the insight that “all media are mixed media, combining different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory and cognitive modes,” he argues that there is no such thing as a purely visual or verbal form of media (95). This is because the text of an image already exists inside the image (98) and the images of a text already exist within the text (99). Engaging with imagetexts not only entails identifying the referential correspondence between visual and verbal elements but also reading image as text and text as image. This framing of the relationship between words and images, then, warrants engagement with the visuality of language and the linguistic quality of pictorial representation—the ways in which images speak and words illustrate. Therefore, it is necessary to attend to the *relationship* between images and texts in composite works in order to arrive at a more comprehensive interpretation of their meaning-making process.

For Mitchell, reading and understanding imagetexts is not so much a matter of using comparative methods to determine the similarities and differences between literary and visual art but examining the ways in which each already exists within the other's medium. Therefore, he warns against analytical methods that compare words and images because they inevitably subordinate one medium in favor of the other. Rather, Mitchell insists on attending to the literalness and materiality of imagetexts:

The most important thing one learns from composite works... is that *comparison itself is not a necessary procedure in the study of image-text relations*. The necessary subject matter is, rather, the whole ensemble of *relations* between media, and relations can be many other things besides similarity, resemblance, and analogy. Difference is just as important as similarity, antagonism as crucial as collaboration, dissonance and division of labor as interesting as harmony and blending of function.⁸³ (89-90, original emphasis)

In examining imagetexts, the objective should not only be to identify the ways in which the pictorial and linguistic elements correspond to each other but to consider the ways in which they challenge and put pressure on each other in their meaning-making processes as well. Such an analytical lens requires the audience's attention to incongruity just as much as referentiality. While a referential connection involves an image and its accompanying text operating within a one-to-one relationship—as in, the text serves as the linguistic referent of the image (and vice versa)—an incongruous connection invites scrutiny into the nature of image-text relations themselves. Ultimately for Mitchell, imagetexts “reveal the relation of the visible and readable as one of negation/interdiction,

⁸³ Mitchell mentions William Blake's composite art, which includes poetry and illustrations, as a notable example of imagetexts. For further discussion, see his chapter “Visible Language: Blake's Art of Writing” in *Picture Theory*.

where power, desire, and knowledge converge” (82). In this sense, composite media make the tensions between visual and verbal material apparent.

It is within and through these very frictions that Choi enacts a poetics of (mis)translation. The construction of imagetexts in *Hardly War* reveals the ideologies embedded in the language and images that represent geopolitics and the translational process necessary to contest them. Analyzing the seemingly discordant convergences of text and images elucidates how, just as imagetexts draw attention to the relationality of images and texts, Choi uses word equations to expose the illogical basis of the imperialist ideologies that fuel geopolitical warfare. In *Hardly War*, imagetexts serve as vehicles for multiple registers of linguistic and visual translation that draw attention to what is being translated. Choi’s imagetexts critique the way in which words and pictures get translated into—and also translate *for*—geopolitically convenient narratives of war. This not only highlights the apparatuses of historical representation, as Cha does in *Dictee*, but also to the ideological purposes for which they can be employed by empire.⁸⁴ Choi’s geopolitical poetics demonstrates that the relationship between translations of English and Korean as well as pictures and narratives of proxy warfare are shifty and tenuous, therefore demanding greater scrutiny concerning what actually holds them together.

Equation=Translation

To provide a foundational understanding of Choi’s poetics of (mis)translation in *Hardly War*, this section examines the trope of word equations as a key poetic device by

⁸⁴ See Kim, Sue J. “Apparatus: Theresa Hak Kyung and the Politics of Form.” *Journal of Asian American Studies*, vol. 8 no. 2, 2005, p. 143-169.

which she conceptualizes the purpose of translation. Choi's word equations offer formulations that are self-aware of their rhetorical use of the equals symbol to present oversimplified translations. They ultimately demonstrate the way in which abstract logic can fuel and fortify empire's concrete power in that they signify explicitly the implicit false comparisons embedded in the formation of geopolitical ideologies. She explains her objective in the opening prose piece, "Race=Nation": "I'm trying to imagine race=nation, its language, its wars. I am trying to fold race into geopolitics and geopolitics into poetry. Hence, geopolitical poetics" (*Hardly War* 4). Rather than representing a genuine picture of the complex, dialectical relationship between racial and national identity, the equation serves as the object of critique. Choi conceives of language and war as mechanisms of the motif, "race=nation"; they are the very tools that justify this framing. Furthermore, she not only illustrates the geopolitics of "race=nation" through inhabiting and enacting it through her poetry, but also does the work of dismantling its rationale by revealing the violence it engenders. Choi's defiance of official history works at the level of satire. She highlights the fact that the equals symbol does not merely indicate a link between the words offered on either side but rather, their conflation; in other words, it functions as a metaphor for translation. Choi reveals the deception of this translational process by presenting equations that make obvious their fallacies. At face value, the equation "race=nation" upholds the belief that racial identity actually equates to national identity, but Choi's recontextualization of it demonstrates the folly of such reasoning, which resulted in the generalized racialization of Koreans as either communists or "gooks." Offering (mis)translations of the faulty logic that fuels the machinations of empire and

proxy warfare through word equations, thereby exposing the false equations as such, is at the heart of Choi's geopolitical poetics.

In order to further unpack the complexities of the word equation trope as analogous to Choi's poetics of (mis)translation, it is important to trace its appearance and development in her earlier work since *Hardly War* is not the first instance in which she uses them. Choi previously employed this device in a 2014 essay in collaboration with Eunsong Kim, "Refusal=Intervention," which was a polemic response to the Poetry Foundation's publication of a poem sampler on their website, "Asian American Voices in Poetry: A collection of poets and articles exploring Asian American culture," in which they labeled poets according to their "country of heritage."⁸⁵ In the essay, Choi and Kim address the racist implications of determining the poets' genealogy and the categorization of ethnicity against the pervasive non-categorization of whiteness. Recognizing the dangerous repercussions of the uncritical use of an already-mired term—which results in affirming and reifying it further—and the ways it will inevitably be used against them, Choi and Kim deny participation in the construction of "Asian American" as an easily-definable or list-able category: "We refuse their weaponization of this identity category" (Choi and Kim). They insist, "Refusal=Intervention is a political act. We aspire for a decolonizing act." Their essay makes unmistakably clear that "Asian American," rather than a legitimate ethnic category with a locatable referent, is a site of political critique of race and racialization. Refusal=Intervention as a word equation serves as a productive vehicle for such critique. While its use in this essay is literal, Choi's employment of word

⁸⁵ The sampler has since been removed from the Poetry Foundation's website.

equations in *Hardly War* is much more sardonic as it mimics the rhetoric and logic of imperialism.

The word equation trope, in fact, originally comes from Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* in which he argues against the imperialist notion that colonization advances civilization. Césaire recognizes the process by which constructed, false equations, such as "*Christianity = civilization, paganism = savagery*" (33), become the narrative and logic by which colonization gains justification, stating that "the commonest curse is to be the dupe in good faith of a collective hypocrisy that cleverly misrepresents problems, the better to legitimize the hateful solutions provided for them" (32). Unless such faulty logic is exposed and dismantled as such, colonialism maintains its oppressive power over those deemed as savages. Césaire affirms that civilizations benefit from coming into contact with one another and sees colonization as antithetical to civilization because in order for civilization to thrive, there cannot be the objectification of the powerless by those in power. He asserts that in colonization there is "[n]o [room for] human contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production" (42). Therefore, offering an equation that more genuinely represents the reality of colonialism and its effects, Césaire asserts, "My turn to state an equation: colonization = 'thingification'" (42).

Not coincidentally, this statement appears as the epigraph of another essay by Choi entitled "Womb 8691945," which presents a historical overview of the effects of

Japanese imperialism and US nuclear warfare on Korea.⁸⁶ In addition to her delineation of the many atrocities faced by the Korean people (millions of civilian deaths from war and bombings in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, starvation, and exploitative labor of soldiers and sex slaves), embedded in the essay is also a kind of pseudo-manifesto on translation—the forms it can take and the need to use it against empire. For Choi, translation is not simply a neutral linguistic practice of interpreting the meaning of words from one language to another but a political act that is carried out *for* specific purposes and that has real consequences. For example, the essay begins by describing the nuclear physicist Robert J. Oppenheimer as a translator of the Bhagavad Gita when he stated after successfully developing the atomic bomb, “I am become death, destroyer of worlds”; moreover, she labels him “a translator for the US Empire” because he turned the US military’s war efforts into an actual form of annihilation (Choi, “Womb”). Additionally, likening former South Korean presidents Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan to codenames Little Boy and Fat Man (respectively), which were the names of the bombs designed by Oppenheimer for The Manhattan Project, Choi offers her own “equation for rapid neocolonization = Generals→ Dictators→ Presidents” (“Womb”). In so doing, Choi performs a kind of translation of Park’s signing of a normalization treaty with Japan in 1965 and Chun’s suppression of the democratic uprising in Kwangju in 1980 as no different from instating colonial power—no different from nuclear attack against civilians. Though Choi does not elaborate on Césaire’s equation directly, this essay elucidates her conceptualization of the word equation as a form of translation and

⁸⁶ The numbers in the title refer to August 6 and 9, 1945, the dates on which Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed.

recognizes that “empire’s memory making machine” often obfuscates the correlation between the political and military actions of a government and imperialism; therefore, she implores, “[w]e all need to be translators against empire” (“Womb”).⁸⁷

Choi is well aware of the ways in which empire’s memory constructs and legitimates official narratives of warfare. For example, the Korean War gets translated as “The Forgotten War” or as a civil war between North and South Korea rather than as a conflict galvanized by the US as a result of dividing the two Koreas as a means of defense against a potential communist takeover at the end of World War II as well as a means of economic advancement.⁸⁸ US intervention, or as President Truman euphemistically called it, “police action,” was justified by the narrative of containment (qtd. in Cumings 265).⁸⁹ As Josephine Nock-Hee Park describes, “[p]ackaged as a symbol [of triumph over communism and fascism], Truman presented the Korean War as a preventive measure against World War III” (27).⁹⁰ In other words, fear of a potentially larger conflict justified engaging in a “smaller” one. Furthermore, the US not only

⁸⁷ For instance, in the US Department of State’s official statement on relations with South Korea, it paints a picture of political progress after the war but does not address the fact that the very authoritarian leaders that were appointed as presidents were backed by the US: “In the decades after the war, the ROK experienced political turmoil under autocratic leadership, but developed a vocal civil society that led to strong protests against authoritarian rule. Pro-democracy activities intensified in the 1980s, beginning with the Gwangju Democratization Movement in May 1980, eventually leading to the ROK’s transition to what is now a vibrant democracy” (United States, Dept of State).

⁸⁸ As historian Bruce Cumings argues, “more important [than Korea’s internal political conflicts] was Korea’s growing importance to American global policy, as part of a new, dual strategy of containing communism and reviving the Japanese industrial economy as a motor of the world economy, but one now shorn of its previous political and military clout” (209-210).

⁸⁹ As historian Allan R. Millet summarizes, “the American leaders saw [North Korea’s] invasion as a direct challenge to the American policy of ‘containing’ Communism and Russian imperialism and the U.S. strategic corollary of forward, collective defense and nuclear deterrence” (20-21).

⁹⁰ Park alludes to Truman’s 1951 State of the Union address in which he stated, “[t]he principles for which we are fighting in Korea are right and just. They are the foundations of collective security and of the future of free nations. Korea is not only a country undergoing the torment of aggression; it is also a symbol. It stands for right and justice in the world against oppression and slavery. The free world must always stand for these principles--and we will stand with the free world” (Truman).

designated the peninsula as a strategic geopolitical site but also, as *Hardly War* addresses, paid the South Korean government thereafter to enlist its soldiers in another Cold War conflict: the Vietnam War. To overlook these geopolitically motivated conflicts as acts of translation (i.e., the equation of warfare as a necessary measure against communism) is to perpetuate empire's version of history⁹¹ and underplay the contingency of US neocolonial control over South Korea and the latter's dependence on the former for military security and economic support.⁹² To translate against empire, however, would mean to draw the necessary connections between these moments in history and identify the agents of their inception.

But the poetic strategy that Choi adopts to translate against empire goes beyond re-historicization. Choi has commented regularly on her philosophy of translation in interviews, notably describing failure as her primary technique. Such a technique stems from having learned multiple languages during her adolescence and “butchering” English in school while attempting to recite texts she did not understand (“Conversation”). Accepting this failure as a fundamental feature of her speech allowed Choi to reclaim rather than censor her “strange” English to use it as a productive mode of critique. While greater scrutiny is often placed on the translation of a language or text and its degree of accuracy in relation to the original one, Choi asserts, “translation is in a perpetual state of

⁹¹ Another example of empire's version of history according to the US Department of State, which portrays the relationship between the US and South Korea as a reciprocal one, reads: “The United States and the ROK share a long history of cooperation based on mutual trust, shared values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, common strategic interests, and an enduring friendship. The two countries work together to combat regional and global threats and to strengthen their economies” (United States, Dept. of State).

⁹² As Scott A. Synder explains, in return for sending ROK troops to Vietnam, Park secured US military commitments to guard against an attack from the north and “earned political support and acquiescence to both his authoritarian rule and his efforts to promote Korean economic growth” (32).

being wrong because it isn't the original. But as you can see, not all originals are considered perfect. Some originals are plain wrong to begin with" ("Conversation"). This brings to light the underlying hierarchy of translation wherein the original text stands as the paradigm of meaning while the translation serves as the subsidiary vehicle for accessing it. Choi places pressure on the untouchable quality of the original text or language for which translations are done and introduces an alternate function of translation: to confront and question that which is being translated. Elsewhere, Choi concedes, "[i]n my world of translation, fluency doesn't exist. My history is a misfit" ("Expelled Tongue"). Here, she suggests that her method of translation disregards coherence not only linguistically but historically as well; Choi is not interested in telling conveniently packaged narratives of the past but addressing their elisions, complications, and troubling realities. Choi also identifies her refusal to translate as an act of resistance and decolonization (Choi and Hawkey). The use of word equations allows Choi to perform translations that seem to initially promise accuracy but ultimately perform acts of defiance against representations of history that gloss over their imperialist agendas.

While Choi's use of the word equation trope in her earlier essays is more straightforward, its usage in her poetry is more complex—shifty and double-edged as it takes on different registers of irony and seriousness while performing atypical translations. In *Hardly War*, Choi makes her poetic stance on denying the reader typical translations of language unequivocally palpable early in the book by declaring outright, "I refuse to translate" on a page that includes lines in Hangul (10). Yet paradoxically, she also enacts translations against empire throughout the work by dramatizing speech and imagery that epitomize its faulty logic. Choi's notion of translation is less interested in

accuracy—which is arguably an impossible and even false aim—and more interested in what performances of failed translations make evident. What is at stake is how and, more importantly, to what ends such translations are conducted. This is because even language that is initially intended to decolonize can be recast and utilized for empire. To return to the example of “race=nation,” as Choi recounts, “[m]y early education in South Korea trained me to think of race as nation and of nation as race, hence race=nation. A Korean term, *uri minjok*—our race, our national identity—was imagined, a crucial construction and a mobilizing force in the anti-colonial, independence movement during the Japanese occupation, 1910-45” (3). Translating “*uri minjok*” as “race=nation” elides the patriotic resonance of the term’s original purpose, which was to unify the Korean people, and instead equates race to nationality.⁹³ This also underscores the way in which Koreans were eventually “racialized and geopoliticized in the global class war” when the US intervened, which led to another equation: “gook=nation” (3-4). Many of the word equations in *Hardly War* are double entendres like this one in that they contain both a literal translation and transliteration of a Korean word into English as well as a figurative connotation of this conflation. On the one hand, “gook” is the English transliteration of the Korean word for “nation,” so the equation appears to present a seemingly straightforward translation; but, on the other hand, when read at face value the word equation implies that Korea is perceived as a country of “gooks,” a racist slur used against Asian (particularly Korean and Vietnamese) people to label them as foreigners.

⁹³ Cumings discusses the term *minjok*, which he translates as “ethnic people,” in relation to its galvanization by a rightist political leader and former guerrilla soldier during the 1940s, Yi Pom-sok, who was known for championing the slogan “nation first, state first” to unify the Korean people (207). Cumings attributes his conflation of nation and race to his work as an adviser to Chinese nationalists, who likely adopted the slogan from Germany.

Similarly, “me=gook” is a play on the Korean word for America, *Miguk*, which literally means “beautiful nation.” Phonetically, this is simply a transliteration; however, when placed within the equation format, it evidently highlights how one’s identity can be racialized as Other from without and how one might inevitably come to accept this othering from within. But far from suggesting that she has internalized such racialization, Choi sets up these false equivalences in order to foreground their inaccuracy and thereby dismantle them.

Given Choi’s forthright critique of empire—namely, the US—the designation of America as “Beauty=Nation” in *Hardly War* is certainly a literal but less than genuine translation. As opposed to the transliterated “me=gook,” she refers to the US as “Beauty=Nation” in “The Hydrangean Candidate,” where the speaker describes it as “the kindest, bravest, warmest, most wonderful nation I’ve ever known” (15).⁹⁴ The conspicuous use of superlatives calls attention to the flattery embedded in a translation that betrays an incongruity between Korea’s veneration of America and America’s neocolonial exploitation of Korea. The name “Beauty=Nation” ironically epitomizes the ideological tenor of Korea’s questionable esteem for an imperialist nation that was instrumental in two devastating wars that led to millions of civilian deaths. In contrast, later poems refer to South Korea, *Hanguk*, as “Ugly=Nation” and states that “its ugliness is so utterly unbearable that it might as well be scorched” (25). Choi mistranslates the name in order to reflect the US military’s rationale for the destruction wrought on the

⁹⁴ This quotation parodies a repeated line from John Frankenheimer’s 1962 film, *The Manchurian Candidate*, in which the plot centers around a platoon that has been brainwashed by communists during the Korean War. The soldiers have been conditioned to praise Sergeant Raymond Shaw as “the kindest, bravest, warmest, most wonderful human being I’ve ever known in my life” while Shaw has been programmed to be a sleeper agent.

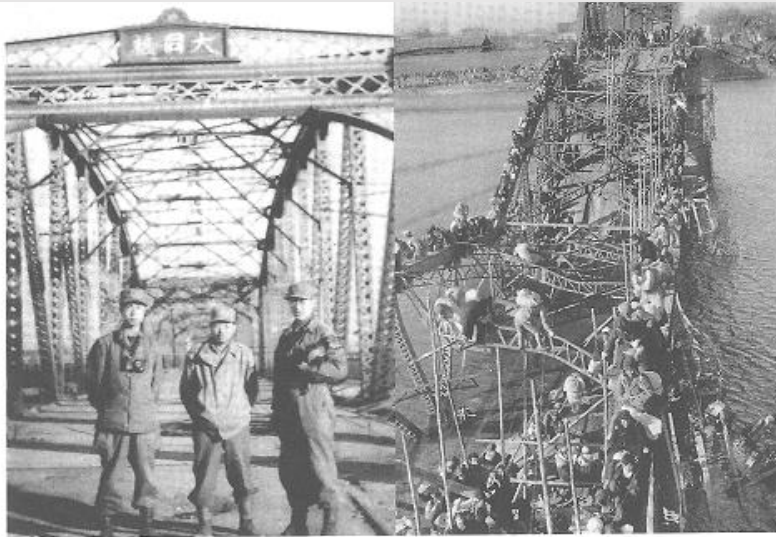
country through warfare. Through these exaggerated word equations, Choi demonstrates the way in which translations bear ideological biases that play out in geopolitical warfare. In so doing, she establishes the need for contesting the faulty logic by which empire operates through decolonizing acts of (mis)translation. By extrapolating upon false equations—transgressing against the transgressions—Choi undermines and de-weaponizes official narratives of geopolitical warfare (i.e., translations for empire).

Just as the word equations elucidate the tensions between translated words and the inherent logic that those translations represent, Choi's hybrid construction of text and photography also enacts false equations that reveal the problematic logic of US geopolitical intervention in South Korea. Reading Choi's imagetexts as such will clarify how imperialism does not merely manifest in the overt domination of a nation but in geopolitical relations as well. The remaining sections of this chapter will examine how Choi enacts (mis)translations with words *and* images in order to contextualize the history of geopolitics between the US and South Korea as a site of transnational hybridity. In using the term "imagetext" as the interpretive lens by which to examine image-text relations in *Hardly War*, I will distinguish between the different types of imagetexts included within the work: those that juxtapose text and image, those in which text is superimposed on image, as well as those that are text-dominant and image-dominant.⁹⁵ I examine the conjunction of words and images in *Hardly War* in these particular forms in order to demonstrate the various ways in which Choi's poetics of (mis)translation reveal how South Korea's history cannot be recalled apart from US imperialism.

⁹⁵ While Mitchell differentiates imagetexts as "pictorial texts" and "textual pictures," I offer these somewhat wordy categorizations in order to further specify the distinct types of image-text relations in *Hardly War*.

Juxtaposition of Text and Image

I begin with a discussion of poems in *Hardly War* that juxtapose text and image in order to demonstrate how, even when these media appear to be separate elements, reading them in conjunction reveals how Choi's associative (mis)translations recontextualize historical events in order to accentuate their contingencies. Early poems in the book establish Choi's conceptualization of word equations and (mis)translation as strategies by which to bridge words, languages, and images in unconventional ways. For example, in "A Little Glossary," two photographs are positioned at the top of the page, side by side (Figure 5). In the photograph on the left, three men pose in front of a bridge over which there is a sign written in Hanja (Chinese characters incorporated into Korean); on the right is an aerial view photograph of a collapsing bridge covered with people who have climbed its crumbling scaffolding. The text below offers a string of word-equations; the first line is in Korean while the second line presents English translations. Only one word is transliterated rather than translated: *gook*. The photographs and words seem completely unrelated. Furthermore, the text reads more like a rebus puzzle than lines of poetry. On the one hand, the poem presents a literal translation of each word in the first line, but on the other hand, their arrangement offers multivalent readings, depending on where the reader perceives each word to begin and end. A literal translation of the line that reads the equals signs as dividers between the words, thereby treating the adjacent characters of Hangul as individual words, would yield the following: beauty, noodles, prime, chrysanthemum, national love, nation. Interestingly, in Choi's performance of this piece at the Lannan Center in 2016, she does not say "equals" to indicate the symbols between the words; rather, she slowly reads the lines as if each word



A LITTLE GLOSSARY

미=국 수=국 무=국 화=국 애=국
 Beauty=Gook Hydrangea=Gook Radish=Gook Flower=Gook Love=Gook
 무궁화=5 petals



Figure 5. “A Little Glossary.” From *Hardly War*, p. 5.

equation were a metrical foot of inverted iambic pentameter, stressing the first syllable instead of the second (“Don Mee Choi and Craig Santos Perez” 00:05:32-00:06:06).⁹⁶ She pauses briefly after each equation unit, indicating that each constitutes a single word. Treating each word equation as constituting a two-syllable Korean word, then, another translation might read: America, hydrangea, stateless, flower country, patriotism. In addition to highlighting the many words in the Korean lexicon that include the same root word for nation, *gook*, these alternate possibilities reveal the translations offered by Choi on this page to be disingenuous.

Evidently, Choi’s glossary is not one that offers translations of words so that they may serve as a “key” to unlock the book’s “codes” (as some of Perez’s translations functioned in [*hacha*]), but a kind of anti-glossary that sets the tone of the book by dispelling the expectation that translation will be employed with any concern for accuracy or the facilitation of comprehension from one language to another. The repetition of the transliteration of “gook” also underscores the way that—in contrast to the other words in the line—Choi deliberately refrains from translating this one word into English. The apparent failure to translate it feigns its untranslatability. Rather than objects and ideals that represent the nation of Korea, things like “Radish” and “Love” are equated to the denigrated label, “Gook” (5). Moreover, the equation of the Korean word for rose of Sharon, *mugunghwa* (which means “eternal flower”), to “5 petals” in the following line enacts the translation of the flower’s *name* to a description of its *appearance* (5). In other words, it likens what the flower is called in *speech* to how it is identified by *sight*. This evinces a conflation of word and image—a deliberate

⁹⁶ Choi also sings the final line of the musical score when she performs the piece.

mistranslation that calls attention to its linguistic inaccuracy. The poem concludes, not with another stanza, but the musical score of a single measure of a Korean song with the lyrics—one word, “rose of Sharon”—below it. The score also illustrates the role of translation in turning symbols into music. Sheet music provides the notations that visually represent their correlating sounds, similar to the way Choi represents the repeated Korean word as “gook.”

The images above do not seem at first to have any correlation or relevance to the text below them, but Choi’s placement of these elements on a single page demonstrates her poetics of (mis)translation by performing a comparison of physical and linguistic bridges. In a sense, the inclusion of the photographs parallels the bridging and distancing of language enacted in the word equations. As the equals signs link the words to indicate their connection to each other, bridges architecturally make possible the crossing of bodies and vehicles between otherwise unconnected places. This draws attention to the function of bridges, which is not merely to link two separate entities—whether they be land or language—but to provide passage from one to another. In other words, they facilitate movement; bridges bind and make transit possible. Yet, ironically, Choi’s (mis)translations of the words and the juxtaposition of the photographs suggests that smooth passage is hardly granted in literal or figurative cases.

At the same time that Choi presents bridges, she reveals the ways in which they fail to carry out their functions. On the one hand, the suturing of images with no white space between them suggests that they are a single image that is representative of a single historical moment. This demonstrates a (mis)translation that elides both the physical and temporal “gap” between the two photographs. On the other hand, the way the two

photographs are adjacent to each other makes more obvious the differences between them: the angle at which the photographs were taken, the number of people portrayed, and the circumstances that may have led to their positioning in front of or on top of the bridges. These two “views” represent the way in which the function of such a structure is contingent upon the context. Choi’s notes inform the audience that both photographs are of the same bridge, the Taedong River Bridge in Pyongyang, North Korea, but that they were taken one month apart: the photograph on the left sometime in November of 1950 and the one on the right by Max Dresfor on December 4, 1950 (*Hardly War* 91).⁹⁷ The people on the bridge in the photograph on the right are North Korean refugees fleeing south despite the bridge having been significantly damaged by air raids. In contrast, the text below does not even hint at any reference to war and its effect on civilians. But through the dissonant juxtaposition of the photographs and word equations, Choi suggests that just as easy as it is to racialize a nation as “gooks,” so it is to destroy the bridges that connect them.

In another imagetext, “With Her Brother on Her Back/I Refuse to Translate,” Choi demonstrates that while the juxtaposed photograph and text do not necessarily serve as referents for each other, they *perform* the same function: thwart translations that aim for equivalence.⁹⁸ Similar to “A Little Glossary,” this poem features a photograph at the top of the page, followed by text below. Captured in the photograph is a young girl wearing a *hanbok* (traditional Korean clothing), carrying a baby on her back—an image that is echoed two pages later in another photograph of Choi and her brother (which I will

⁹⁷ The photograph by Max Desfor (Associated Press) is entitled *Flight of Refugees Across Wrecked Bridge in Korea*. It won a Pulitzer Prize in 1951.

⁹⁸ The page itself does not offer a title for the piece; Choi’s notes refer to it as such.

discuss in the next section)—while looking directly into the lens of the camera. Both children wear stoic expressions. Behind them is a military tank with large wheels, top entrance open, and missile pointing to the right (Figure 6). It is a stark, almost surreal image; the juxtaposition of the young siblings standing seemingly unphased in front of the tank is jarring to say the least. The photograph unequivocally depicts the collision of two discrete elements: domesticity and warfare. It epitomizes how even young civilians cannot escape war.⁹⁹ Susan Sontag has observed concerning typical photographic representations of war that “[t]he ultra-familiar, ultra-celebrated image—of agony, of ruin—is an unavoidable feature of our camera-mediated knowledge of war” (*Regarding* 24). However, rather than depicting a scene of bloodshed or the children fallen victim to an attack like so many of the war photographs we have come to encounter (consider, for example, the now iconic Vietnam War photograph of children fleeing down a road in South Vietnam after a napalm bombing), this photograph is oddly tranquil.¹⁰⁰

Below the photograph is a stanza that includes a series of repeating lines that extend the surrealism of the imagetext. The first five lines repeat in untranslated Hangul the words of a Korean children’s game comparable to Red Light Green Light. In the game, there is an “it” person who has her back turned to the rest of the players standing at some distance away from her. While she chants, “the rose of Sharon has bloomed,” the

⁹⁹ In consideration of Choi’s allusion to Stein’s *Wars I Have Seen* in the epigraph of *Hardly War*, the inclusion of photographs of children rather than scenes of battle is apt. In her memoir, Stein recalls her childhood and recounts seemingly minute and mundane details about it: being born in America, moving to Vienna, Paris, London, and back to America. She repeatedly describes “babyhood and fourteen” as the only periods of time when she was not witness to war. She states, “And children do not take war seriously as war. War is soldiers and soldiers have not to be war but they have to be soldiers. Which is a nice thing. I remember that the only war that was not soldiers to me but war was the civil war” (7). Of course, Choi’s photograph presents a direct contrast to Stein’s recollection of periods of warless adolescence.

¹⁰⁰ The Vietnam War photo, entitled *The Terror of War*, was taken by Nick Ut (Associated Press). It won a Pulitzer Prize in 1973.



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1 2 3 4 5=무

1 2 3 4 5=궁

1 2 3 4 5=화

1 2 3 4 5=수

1 2 3 4 5=국

I refuse to translate

I refuse to translate

I refuse to translate

I refuse to translate

I refuse to translate

5=Over

Figure 6. "I Refuse to Translate." From *Hardly War*, p. 5.

other players make their way toward her but must stand still once she completes the phrase and turns around to face them. If any of the other players are caught moving, they are “out.” The objective of the game is to eventually reach and tag the “it” person, then run back to the initial starting line without getting tagged by her in return. The placement of this text immediately below the photograph makes it appear as if it were a caption of the young girl’s chants and the siblings are engaged in this game with the tank. In this sense, the audience can imagine the tank moving behind them, approaching them until it makes contact. Of course, the presence of a military tank ultimately undermines the possibility of any playfulness; the childlike content of the repeated lines in Hangul discounts any potential correlation between the text and the image, at least for the moment at which the photograph was taken. While the photograph and its claim to realism captures the unimaginable coexistence of children and a war vehicle, the inclusion of the repeating lines below it adds to the absurdity of the scene. The imagetext exceeds reality by presenting what can only be an impossible scenario. The lines in Hangul misdirect the audience by presenting words that *could* be spoken by the young girl but in an entirely different set of circumstances. Rather than functioning as a real caption, the repeated lines imagine a context that is only plausible outside of war; yet their presence on the page in combination with the photograph creates a juncture that forces the audience to acknowledge that there is no “outside” of war for the children orphaned by it. Though, for an audience unfamiliar with Hangul, this dissonance between the image and text would be illegible because Choi withholds a translation of the Korean words.

In addition to thwarting translations of equivalence, Choi conceives of the refusal to translate as an act of resistance against hegemonic narratives of war. The next five lines repeat “12345=” with each line ending in one of the syllables of the words “rose of Sharon” and “hydrangea” in Hangul (again, left untranslated). The counting builds upon the situational context of children’s games but these equations technically constitute false translations because the same set of numbers results in a different Hangul character. In other words, the same input yields varying outputs. Yet, as if to confirm that the equations above are not mistaken, the third set of repeated lines states, “I refuse to translate.” Indeed, Choi does not provide translations of Hangul words in the poem (not even in the end notes). Choi has stated concerning her use of this particular line: “I refuse to perpetuate the official narratives of the Korean War, which thingifies. I think of refusal as one of the most highly effective modes of resistance. I refuse to be faithful” (Choi and Hawkey). Translation, in this context, is a form of narrative representation and the refusal to translate is a practice of offsetting commonly accepted interpretations of the war. Choi’s allusion to Césaire’s notion of thingification here draws a connection between the false equations used to justify colonization and those used to justify geopolitical warfare. Just as the supposed savagery of natives served as rationale for their colonization, the US anti-communist agenda served as rationale for the division of the two Koreas, and subsequently, military intervention in the Korean War.¹⁰¹ A translation that subscribes to the official narrative risks overlooking the US empire’s thingification of the Korean peninsula as merely a necessary means to their geopolitical ends.

¹⁰¹ Drawing a connection between the civilizing mission of colonization and anti-communism during the Cold War, Mignolo states, “[d]uring the Cold War, human rights as a strategy to control communism was similar to the control of pagans, infidels, and barbarians... or of foreigners” (737-738).

Moreover, Choi's refusal to translate not only applies to the lines of Hangul on the page but to the photograph as well. Evidently, the young girl's narrative is unavailable from the photograph alone. It is difficult to deny that images, more often than not, rely on words for their interpretation. As Sontag argues, "[w]hether the photograph is understood as naïve object or the work of an experienced artificer, its meaning—and the viewer's response—depends on how the picture is identified or misidentified; that is, on words" (*Regarding* 29). The actual caption (i.e. the official narrative) for the photograph comes from the US National Archives, which state, "[w]ith her brother on her back, a war weary Korean girl tiredly trudges by a stalled M-26 tank at Haengju, Korea, 06/09/1951" (qtd. in Choi, *Hardly War* 92). By withholding this caption—which constitutes an American translation of the photograph—within the imagetext, Choi rejects the themes of heroism and resilience implied in the caption, dismissing them as projections that do not necessarily voice the young girl's own narrative. By refusing to translate the photograph, Choi refuses the thingification of civilian survival.

In other poems, Choi's juxtaposition of image and text allows her to (mis)translate the connection between different historical moments. In "Suicide Parade," Choi utilizes the span of two pages facing opposite each other, one with left-hand aligned text that resembles more typical poetic form and the other with a series of cropped photographs. The stanza delineates the specific ingredients and process of creating napalm, a chemical weapon used heavily during the Korean War, as well as the destruction it wreaked. On the one hand, the title is appropriate, given the description of "South Korean laborers funnel[ing] napalm powder into gasoline/ tanks" (20). In this sense, the use of napalm in Korea was fratricidal—hence suicidal—since the laborers

essentially produced the very weapon that would be used against fellow Korean people. But on the other hand, the title's designation of the type of death as suicide rather than genocide is suspect, especially considering the speaker's descriptions of the victims of napalm attacks:

Wooden warehouses and thatched-hut villages, common in Korea, were
made
to order for firebombs, as were Japan's wooden cities
(hence napalm) and (hence gasstir) and the respectable distance of the
planes
maintains a gusto of ring spots
maintains Bombenbrandschrumpfleichen
which is to say incendiary-bomb-shrunken bodies
so the story of napalm is still being written in Korea
(hence napalm) + (hence gasstir)
double hence (20)

The use of parenthetical "hence" phrases here differs from their first appearances in the poem in which Choi simply indicates that *napalm* is a portmanteau of the words *naphthalene* and *palmitate* while *gasstir* is a (made-up) portmanteau of the words *gasoline* and *stirring*, which are necessary for the production of napalm. The use of parentheses implies that the "hence" phrases merely state what may already be obvious in the statements that come before them. But by offering the "hence" phrases after—rather than to introduce—the statements that both Korea and Japan suffered attacks and that Korea continues to face the repercussions of napalm attacks, Choi knowingly misuses the word's function. Even though napalm and gasstir are what *caused* destruction in these countries, she ironically names them as *consequences*, implying that the materials from which the buildings were constructed elicited their demise. The way that the "hence" phrases are presented one after the other without any explanation concerning their relation also draws attention to their tenuous linkage as well. Calling out this flawed

causal logic, Choi subsequently identifies this rhetorical move as “double hence,” acknowledging the problematic structure of the phrases.

This seemingly backwards sequence of the stanza parallels the historical correlations made within it. In fact, many of the lines in the poem, including those that precede the parenthetical phrases, were taken from an article from May 1951 in *Naval Aviation News*, which celebrates napalm’s “terrific success” during World War II and the ways in which it “reached its peak of popularity” during the Korean War (“Fire Bombs” 7). The appropriated lines become the template on which Choi establishes her own (mis)translation of official history. Although the article justifies the use of napalm as a highly effective death weapon by categorizing “Japs,” “Reds,” and “Communists” as rightful targets—in other words, placing “respectable distance” between them (the enemies) and the US (the heroes)—when paired with the “hence” phrases in the poem, the article’s patriotic overtones become questionable.¹⁰² The poem’s reference to Japan and Germany also draws a connection between the bombings that took place during the Korean War and nuclear bombings during WWII. This enacts another kind of false equivalence: a willful anachronism that overlaps the contexts of two different wars. Choi has offered commentary elsewhere concerning this particular poem:

I used the German term *Bombenbrandschrumpfleichen* in order to trace the use of the bomb from one war to another, then another... We need to remember that the main casualties are always civilians, especially women and children. I wanted to narrate in my poem the history of deaths resulting from one particular bomb amongst many. Deaths of civilians are constantly erased in the official narration of war. I like to believe that

¹⁰² Where the parenthetical “hence” phrases appear in “Suicide Parade,” the following sentences appear in the article, respectively: “Orders often went out to burn down a town known to be full of Red troops hiding in huts” (9); “It is a cheap, effective weapon of multiple uses, popular with the Navy, Marines and Air Force alike. Our troops are glad the Communists are not using it against them” (11).

poetry can serve as a counter-narrative that can resist erasure and oblivion.
("Suicide Parade")

In this sense, Choi's disobedience of history in the poem demonstrates her awareness that, rather than enemy troops, civilians are the true victims of the napalm bombings—which the article conveniently neglects to mention.¹⁰³ Her counter-narrative, which highlights the direct ties between bombings and civilian victims, extends from the poem to the images juxtaposed to it.

Choi's anachronistic juxtaposition of different historical events makes possible another kind of (mis)translation that equates the atrocities of war to the leaders responsible for them. On the page opposite of the text, Choi presents a montage-like collage of cropped photographs that appear throughout *Hardly War*. The fragments run across the page in a straight line—much like a parade. Each clipping includes a fragmented view of some of the human subjects in the photographs but none of them offer a view of a full body or face. They show only portions of Choi's father, General Hodge, General MacArthur, Syngman Rhee, the aforementioned children carrying their siblings on their backs, as well as a North Vietnamese girl carrying a boy. Notably, the fragments from the photograph of Rhee's inauguration as South Korea's first president (taken by Choi's father on August 15, 1948, when the Republic of Korea was established, three years after Korea gained independence from Japanese colonization) only show the torsos, shoulders, and ears of the figures. The facelessness of the military and political leaders noticeably contrasts the partially visible profiles of the photographs of the

¹⁰³ According to reports by US army officers from just a few months into the Korean War, bombs were ordered to be dropped on villages where enemies troops were thought to be taking shelter. One stated concerning the effects of napalm bombings, "[f]rom the house burning we already have estimated 8000 refugees and expect more. These are mostly the old, crippled, and children" (qtd. in Cumings 294-295).

children. Although the photographs' timeframes vary from before, during, and after the war, the line-up of images suggests a linear connection between them. The succession of images also plays with the idea of "respectable distance" in that it narrows the physical and temporal gaps between them. As Choi describes elsewhere, "[t]ranslation weaves, it weaves atrocities. And translation mirrors enable us to 'experience all the obliterations at once'" ("Darkness").¹⁰⁴ Similar to the way that Choi translated the names of former South Korean presidents (who succeeded Rhee) to those of nuclear bombs in her essay, "Womb 8691945," by placing these images beside the poem, Choi translates the actions of Hodge, MacArthur, and Rhee as direct causes of the suffering of civilians. In this sense, the title, "Suicide Parade" is more sarcastic than it is literal; it is a (mis)translation of the genocide that was the war, which Choi translates as a consequence of US geopolitical intervention in South Korea. As Cumings concedes, "[h]ad the Americans and Russians quit Korea, a leftist regime would have taken over quickly, and it would have been a revolutionary nationalist government that, over time, would have moderated and rejoined the world community" and perhaps far fewer lives would have been lost to war (199). As such, the history of the Korean War must be remembered as a transnational history, not only as a fratricidal conflict.

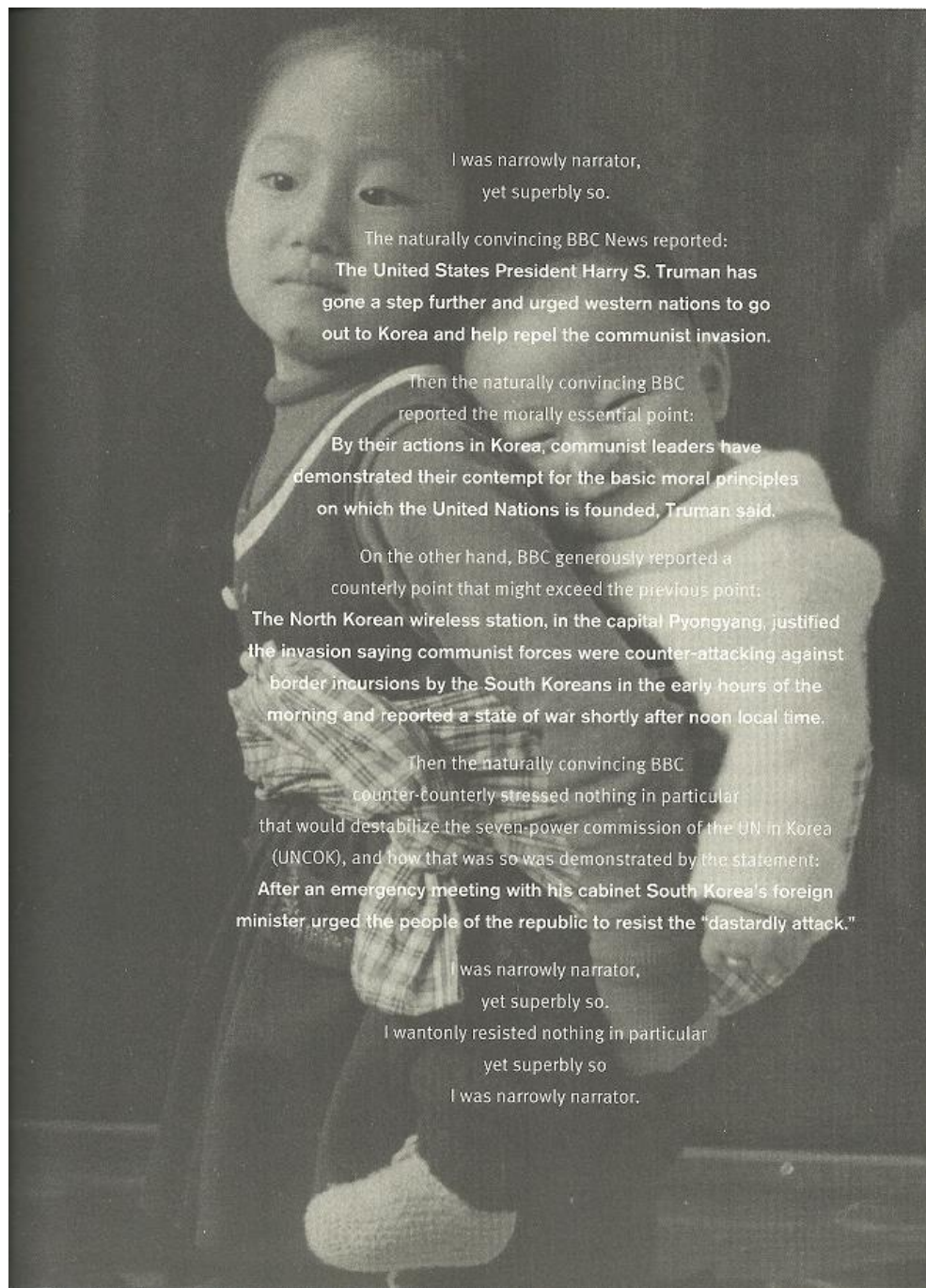
Text Superimposed on Image

Similar to the juxtaposition of text and photographs, which demonstrated the correlations between seemingly separate events in history, the imagetexts in which text is

¹⁰⁴ Choi is referring to Daniel Borzutzky's introduction to *The Country of Planks* (a translation of Raul Zurita's poetry), where he states "The history of atrocity is not a series of separate events here. Rather, to be alive is to experience all the obliterations at once" (qtd. in "Darkness").

overlaid onto an image do so as well; however, by integrating their media, Choi further exaggerates dissonant rhetorical contexts to enact (mis)translations of official history. In these imagetexts, the image becomes the material object on which the text appears; the image serves as a kind of vehicle for the text. As opposed to the associative connections connoted by the juxtaposition of images and text, these amalgamated imagetexts denote a more direct connection between its visual and verbal components. “Narrowly Narrator/Brother on my back” presents a photograph, taken by Choi’s father, of Choi as a child carrying her younger brother on her back (Figure 7).¹⁰⁵ The image spans across the entire page, leaving no white space in the margins. The text in white font presents the meta-commentary of a precariously self-designated “narrator” on BBC News reports (these excerpts appear in bolded font) from June 25, 1950, the day on which the Korean War began. The image clearly mirrors the previous one of the siblings standing in front of the tank; however, rather than withholding narratives of official history, in this imagetext, the speaker places them under direct scrutiny. The speaker is “narrowly” a narrator because she merely repeats the language of the BBC report, offering only brief descriptions of its rhetorical gestures. However, her meta-report is not to be underestimated because it serves as the very means by which Choi offers her critique of official history. The narrator describes BBC’s reportage as “naturally convincing” first, then states that they “reported the morally essential point” made by Truman concerning communist leaders’ disregard for the UN’s “moral principles” (13). Subsequently, the narrator concedes that BBC “generously reported a counterly point” about North Korea

¹⁰⁵ The page itself does not offer a title for the piece; Choi’s endnote refers to it as such.



I was narrowly narrator,
yet superbly so.

The naturally convincing BBC News reported:

The United States President Harry S. Truman has gone a step further and urged western nations to go out to Korea and help repel the communist invasion.

Then the naturally convincing BBC reported the morally essential point:

By their actions in Korea, communist leaders have demonstrated their contempt for the basic moral principles on which the United Nations is founded, Truman said.

On the other hand, BBC generously reported a counterly point that might exceed the previous point:

The North Korean wireless station, in the capital Pyongyang, justified the invasion saying communist forces were counter-attacking against border incursions by the South Koreans in the early hours of the morning and reported a state of war shortly after noon local time.

Then the naturally convincing BBC counter-counterly stressed nothing in particular

that would destabilize the seven-power commission of the UN in Korea (UNCOK), and how that was so was demonstrated by the statement:

After an emergency meeting with his cabinet South Korea's foreign minister urged the people of the republic to resist the "dastardly attack."

I was narrowly narrator,
yet superbly so.

I wantonly resisted nothing in particular
yet superbly so

I was narrowly narrator.

Figure 7. "Narrowly Narrator." From *Hardly War*, p. 13.

merely defending against attacks from South Korea; however, the next stanza states that they “counter-counterly stressed nothing in particular” (13). In a sense, this is also a kind of rhetorical translation in that Choi directly articulates what is indirectly evident in BBC’s discourse. Her use of adverbs implies a clear tone of mockery, establishing the narrator’s non-neutral position. This push and pull between backhandedly praising BBC News and sarcastically criticizing them also confirms the speaker’s point of view as a kind of omniscient narrator who recognizes BBC’s narrative of the Korean War as one that over-simplistically thematizes it as a conflict between North and South Korea—between anti-communist and communist forces. The oxymoronic description in the final, chiasmic stanza that she “wantonly resisted nothing in particular/ yet superbly so/ [she] was narrowly narrator” suggests that without translational resistance official narratives of history become accepted as fact. As Choi has asserted regarding Austrian writer and Holocaust survivor Ilse Aichinger’s notion of “bad words” (a term of resistance set in contrast to the precision of supposedly “better” words) that “[a]nti-hegemonic, anticolonial translation is not faithful to power, the best, the brutal, but insists on those weaker possibilities, ‘the inadequate.’ Translation needs to be unfaithful in order to expose what ‘the best hides.’ Translation can allow itself to be ‘shrewd,’ too. *It can mimic the best*. It can undress the best through a radical writer or poet” (Choi and Hawkey, my emphasis). In this imagetext, Choi’s unfaithful translation of the news report mimics and amplifies its anti-communist narrative, thereby exposing the way it fails to

acknowledge that the war was one stoked by Cold War tensions between the US and Soviet Union's conflicting agendas.¹⁰⁶

The decision to superimpose this text onto this particular photograph is perplexing because there does not seem to be any narrative correlation between them—especially considering the fact that Choi was not alive during the Korean War. Although this piece does not include any word equations, Choi enacts the false equivalence of time by overlapping a photograph of herself when she was a child with a report from the first outbreak of the war. Conflating these non-contemporaneous moments allows Choi to suggest that her life and family were, and likely are, still affected by the war. Additionally, the text resembles credits rolling up the screen at the end of a film. Just as film credits name those who contributed to the production of the work, this imagetext seems to implicate this history in the conditions under which Choi and her brother lived. Unlike “With Her Brother on Her Back/I Refuse to Translate,” in which the text sustains a surreal, dissonant relationship to the photograph of the siblings, “Narrowly Narrator/Brother on my back” insists upon the direct historical linkage between the Korean War to Choi's youth by enacting (mis)translation as a form of recontextualization. In this imagetext, history is literally written across the children's bodies even though they did not live through the years of battle. The historical contingency is such that their own memories cannot be recalled apart from the war.

¹⁰⁶ Notably, the final paragraph of the report, which Choi does not include in her poem, presents a brief summary of historical background that underplays such geopolitics through the use of passive voice: “Korea has been divided since the Japanese withdrawal at the end of World War II left the USSR occupying the area north of the 38th parallel and the US to the south” (“1950”).

Choi also enacts another kind of visual false equivalence through an imagetext that combines different elements like a collage. While in “Suicide Parade,” Choi altered the photograph of the inauguration of the Republic of Korea by cropping out military and political leaders’ faces, in “Hardly Opera,” Choi modifies a photo of the May 16 military coup d’état of 1961—when generals Chang Do Yong and Park Chung Hee overthrew then-president of South Korea, Yun Po Sun—by superimposing an image of a rose of Sharon over each of the generals’ faces (Figure 8). Additionally, the same lines of Hangul from earlier in the book that repeated “the rose of Sharon has bloomed” reappear here, superimposed onto the photograph in white font. Although the same lines are repeated, Choi creates a different speaking context by placing these lines on the photograph itself—another instance of (mis)translation as recontextualization. With Chang and Park facing the crowd (comprising photojournalists holding up their cameras), they are figured as the “it” players of the “rose of Sharon has bloomed” game while those in the audience are the other players who have frozen in place. Rather than evoking a sense of collective perseverance and resiliency that the national flower symbolizes, the imagetext constitutes a (mis)translation that equates the blooming of the rose of Sharon to the initiation of military dictatorship under Park. The stanzas below the photograph present multiple exclamations that begin with “O-” such as “O-Daddy!” (repeated five times) and “O-Pomp-Pomp-Sir!” (which appears in larger, bolded font), suggesting the audience’s reverence for him (Choi, *Hardly War* 78). Choi also incorporates within the imagetext the national emblem of South Korea, which features the five petals of the rose of Sharon and a yin-yang symbol, *taegeuk* (which also appears on the South Korean flag), at its center. According to B.R. Myers, the national emblem—which was instated in 1963, during

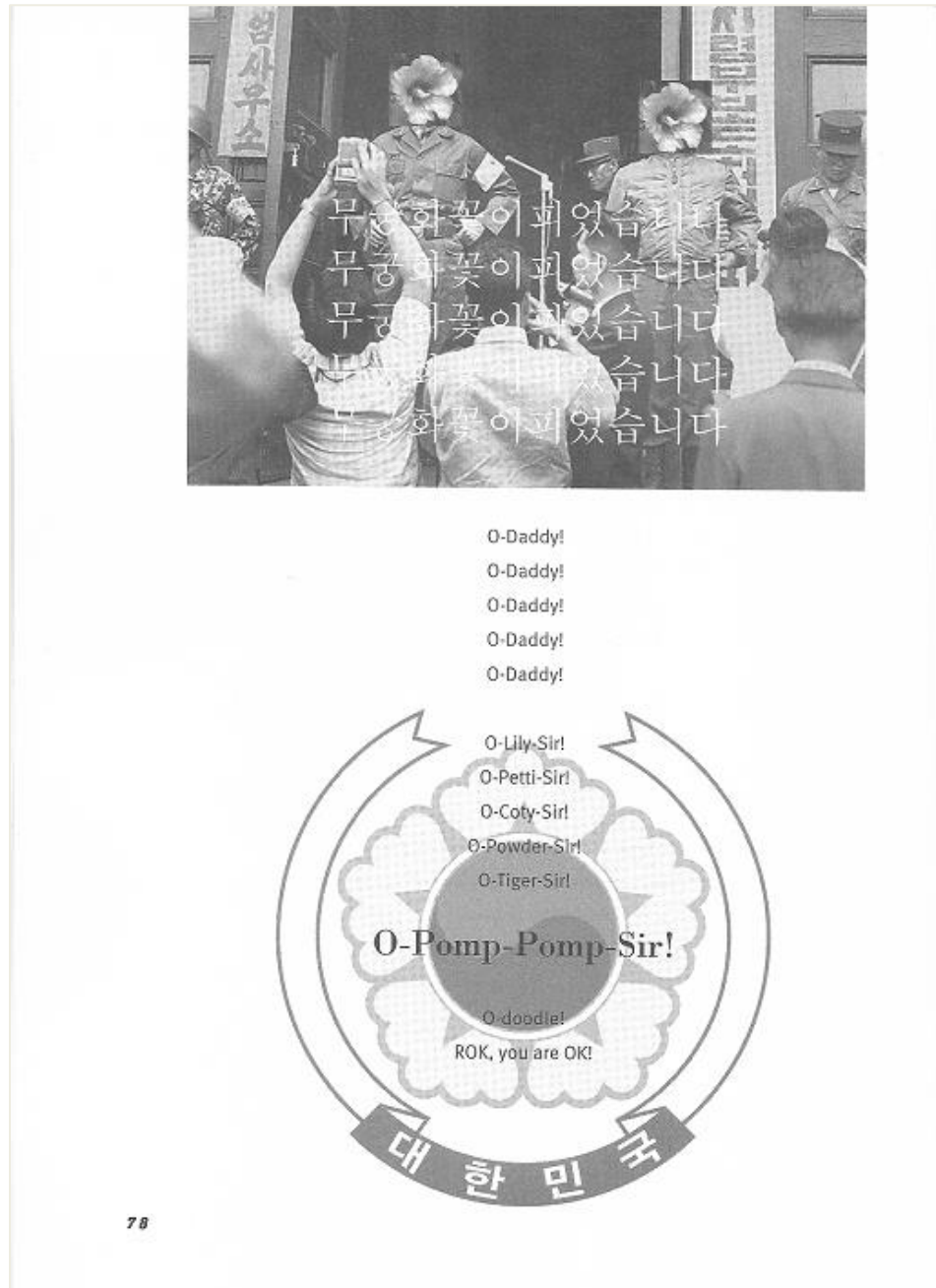


Figure 8. Coup D'état with Flowers. From *Hardly War*, p. 78.

Park's presidency—conveys a sense of loyalty to the Korean people as a race rather than allegiance to the ROK as a nation-state (120). Similar to the way Choi (mis)translates *uriminjok* as “race=nation” to highlight the risk of politically radicalizing the term, combining images of the rose of Sharon with the photograph of the coup d'état reveals the ironic contrast between the ethos of the emblem and Park's authoritarian regime.

Several elements of this imagetext have connections to other moments within *Hardly War*. For example, the final line, “You are OK, ROK!” (Choi, *Hardly War* 78) harkens back to an earlier poem, “Are you OK, ROK?,” which includes allusions to South Korean divisions sent to Vietnam, the Christmas carol “White Christmas” (which was the official signal for evacuating US personnel and vulnerable civilians from Saigon), as well as a stanza that laments the mutilation of pregnant women's bodies in civilian massacres during the Vietnam War. After a series of lines that, similar to the coup d'état piece in “Hardly Opera,” parrot the voice of obedient soldiers, a “Chorus of O” bemoans:

O dream—no face just a wide-open belly
O fetus in the split womb
O cut off the baby cord
O war—breasts cut out and woman shot by ROK marines
O US marines transport her to the hospital but she died soon
O war—executed young women's bodies (45)

The progression of these disturbing descriptions is all the more unsettling when read alongside the emphatic subservience of the troops who inflicted such violence. The final line of the coup d'état piece inverts the title from a question to a statement, asserting South Korea's wellbeing despite the unimaginable devastation it has caused and witnessed—as if such atrocities never happened or were insignificant. Another earlier

poem, “Shitty Kitty,” which refers to the USS Kitty Hawk, a navy supercarrier used during the Vietnam War, mentions “South Korea export[ing] military labor left over from the war” and presents a list of word equations that delineates numerous massacres committed by ROK troops—the victims of which were primarily women, children, and the elderly—and places a monetary value on each, such as “\$7.5 million=per division/ or Binh Tai massacre=\$7.5 million/ or Binh Hoa massacre=\$7.5 million” (41). Rather than reflecting the estimated cost of damages to the villages, these are false equations that indicate the payments that South Korea received from the US to assist in their war efforts in Vietnam. As such, these mistranslations are also truthful translations that expose the reality of the correlation between the Vietnam War and South Korea’s economic development, which was essentially sponsored by the US.¹⁰⁷ That the list of massacres is preceded by a chorus stating “Dictator Park Chung Hee and his soldiers in Ray-Bans” presents another equation: that of culpability (41). In Choi’s version of the coup d’état photo, Park’s American-brand sunglasses are covered by a rose of Sharon, but this verbal description supplies the link to the iconic image. In a sense, effacing the generals in the photograph with the rose of Sharon implies that the promise of Park’s regime for a “self-supporting economy” and “return [of] power to civilians” was superficial at best (Cumings 353). Underneath this veil is another symbol of its allyship to the US, a geopolitical dependency that secured economic advancement at the expense of millions of civilian lives offshore. As scholar Jin-Kyung Lee observes, “South Korea’s

¹⁰⁷ The capital gained from exporting troops accounted for approximately 8% of Korea’s GDP at the time (Cumings 321). Nearly all of South Korea’s steel exports (94%) went toward war efforts in Vietnam as well, which as Cumings puts it, “underlines the way in which warfare in East Asia was handmaiden to economic growth [in South Korea] in the period of 1935-1975” (322).

involvement in the Vietnam War through its military proletarianization served the goal of nation-building, on one level, and that of supplying transnational labor force for the U.S. empire, on another” (661).

These interwoven references enact false equivalences between asynchronous events of the two wars as well as the political upheavals that ensued during and after them. Tracking these connections demonstrates the ways in which Choi’s disobedient history denies easy translations of events that maintain a single, stable, or even chronological narrative. For Choi, Park’s military dictatorship, the horrific violence done to civilians, the outsourcing of ROK troops, and South Korea’s economic advancement are not isolated moments in history. What seems at first like false equivalence yields new threads of historical knowledge that reveals the multiple layers of a geopolitical alliance with the US that ultimately prioritized modernization efforts over civilian lives.¹⁰⁸ Choi’s re-combinatory imagetexts expose empire’s version of history, which tends to translate the real consequences of warfare as justifiable in the interest of larger causes: economic growth and the containment of communist forces. The repetitions and re-combinatory elements of *Hardly War* requires the audience to reckon with Choi’s constructed network of contingencies between images and text in order to translate against this history.

Text-dominant and Image-dominant Imagetexts

Even on pages where only text or photographs appear, we see that Choi engages with the referentiality of imagetexts in that textual material refers to visual material and

¹⁰⁸ As Snyder notes, “On the economic front, the war in Vietnam created growth opportunities for nascent South Korean firms that produced goods to support the war effort” (29).

vice versa. These imagetexts demonstrate how texts and images are often (mis)translations of the other medium as well as the fact that such translations are always ideologically charged. For example, in the poem sequence on the subject of the Tarzon bomb, a guided missile developed by the US military in the 40s, the text on each page is formatted into two full-justified columns to resemble the formatting of a newspaper. They are similar to the “Narrowly Narrator” piece in that they use language taken directly from official news outlets. However, rather than samplings of printed news stories, Choi’s note indicates that the text comes from voiceovers from a British Pathé newsreel from 1952.¹⁰⁹ This introduces another level of translation: from the verbal to the textual. The representation of audible speech in such a visibly recognizable textual template blurs the line between these forms of news and allows the audience to observe the language more closely. Of course, the written version excludes the sonic elements that contribute to the presentation of the narrative, such as the accents and intonations of the speakers as well as the music playing in the background. The background music in the British version is lilting and fanfare-like, evoking a sense of excitement and wonder, while in the American version, the orchestration is menacing, instilling fear. Furthermore, as opposed to radio broadcasts that strictly rely on sound, the newsreels from which the text was transcribed include video footage of the Tarzon bombs in use. Both the British and American versions present the same black and white footage offering aerial views of the Tarzon bomb dropping first onto a testing site and subsequently on a dam in North Korea.

The transcribed text constitutes referential language that depends upon the visual context. Choi’s omission of such visual context in the series invites an examination of the

¹⁰⁹ For archived recordings of each, see: <https://www.britishpathe.com/search/query/tarzon>.

language for its self-referentiality. Though, at a glance, the three pieces look similar in form, the differing rhetoric in each demonstrates the varying lenses by which a single event can be viewed. Moreover, though English is the only language used in this series, each piece offers a different kind of translation of the rhetoric used to describe the bomb. The first piece, “New Tarzon Guided Bomb Hits Bull’s-Eye!,” which is transcribed from the American voiceover, emphasizes the ingenuity of the bomb: “[w]atch this performance carefully, for you are witnessing a new concept of modern warfare” (30). Without the video footage, the reader might identify the language of the text itself as the performance (i.e., rhetoric as a weapon that activates response). It almost enjoys withholding details from the audience—and the fear this induces—through its posing of unanswered questions such as “[i]s the Tarzon in mass production? Is it used regularly in Korea?” (30). In contrast, the next piece, entitled “Bomb with a Brain AKA ‘The Tarzon’ Guides Itself to Targets,” from the British voiceover, omits the fearmongering, self-aggrandizing bravado of the previous one. It uses words like “uncanny” instead of “eerie,” phrases like “[a]nother bull’s-eye” rather than “[a]gain a perfect bull’s-eye,” and replaces “could be the world’s most terrifying weapon” with the more subdued “might well be one of the world’s most powerful weapons” (31). These varying versions hint at their agendas and leanings. They also demonstrate the subjectivity inherent in the acts of viewing and describing, even while referring to the same visual object.

In contrast, “The Tarzon’s Guide to History” presents Choi’s hysterical translation of the newsreel. The speaker channels a kind of Dickinsonian aesthetic through the profuse use of dashes as it seems to take on the voice of the Tarzon bomb itself: “Absolute=History—loaded with terrifying meaning—The Air Force doesn’t say,

hence Ugly=Narration—That’s a good sight for my old eyes, he said—utterly so—looked down on the bodies of four young Korean soldiers—Purely=Utterly—so and so—to and to—hush hush—it’s not proper to be against human understanding” (32). It enacts the fractured and fragmented (as opposed to the cohesive) nature of history. The first and last lines describe what neither of the previous two versions acknowledged: the destruction of victims who looked “[l]ike fried potato chips” as a result of the bomb and the assessment that they were “Hardly=Humans” (32). By personifying the tarzon bomb through ventriloquism and presenting its voice in a sing-song tone, Choi’s (mis)translation not only emphasizes its menacing nature but also offers a version of history that reminds readers that the real targets of bombs are people.

In contrast to the pages that precede it, the final piece in the series presents a cropped photograph rather than text, offering a reversal of the previous iterations. The photograph includes two people on a motorcycle; the driver is wearing a conical hat and traditional Vietnamese tunic while the passenger is holding the seat with her right hand and what appears to be a thin parcel in front of her face with her left hand, as if blocking the sun or wind. The background is blurry, suggesting they are riding at a fast rate. It initially seems to suggest that the two figures are the targets of the Tarzon bomb, confirming what was described in the previous piece. However, Choi’s use of this photograph within this series demonstrates another anachronism in that while the Tarzon bomb was used early during the Korean War, it was discontinued in 1951, long before the Vietnam War. Another look at the title, “Again a Perfect Bull’s-Eye,” confirms that this piece does not specifically reference the Tarzon bomb after all, despite alluding to an earlier description of it. Choi’s use of the term “bull’s-eye” in the title implies that both

the weapon and the target have shifted but that the pattern of bombs being used against civilians remains the same. The means have changed but the ends have not.

“Operation Punctum” makes a gesture similar to that of the Tarzon bomb series in that its prose offers commentary on video footage while emphasizing the various layers of mediation that Choi activates through her representation of it. The footage, which appears in Michael Cimino’s 1978 film based on the Vietnam War, *The Deer Hunter*, features moments from Operation Frequent Wind, the final evacuation of US personnel and Vietnamese civilians that took place before the Fall of Saigon. As Choi’s endnote reveals, the footage was taken by her father.¹¹⁰ Much of the prose describes what the camera captures—soldiers aboard an aircraft carrier, the USS Hancock, a helicopter being carted away, another being pushed off of the carrier into the South China Sea, passengers from another helicopter quickly abandoning it, as well as a news anchor reporting from the scene—but also includes elements that push beyond simple description.

As an imagetext, the piece enacts multiple levels of (mis)translation through ekphrasis. Firstly, Choi presents a verbal representation of the visual referent by describing what she observes from the footage. As Mitchell explains, “[e]kphrasis is stationed between two ‘othernesses,’ and two forms of (apparently) *impossible translation* and exchange: (1) the conversion of the visual representation into a verbal representation, either by description or ventriloquism; (2) the reconversion of the verbal representation back into the visual object in the reception of the reader” (*Picture Theory*

¹¹⁰ In her performance of this piece at the Lannan Center, Choi has the footage play on a loop while she reads the text (“Don Mee Choi and Craig Santos Perez” 00:21:30-00:25:10).

164, my emphasis). On the one hand, Choi's frame-by-frame descriptions convert footage into verbal snapshots; on the other hand, those descriptions do not necessarily conjure the precise imagery of the footage despite their specificity. The visual cannot translate exactly into the verbal. Secondly, it is evident that Choi does not even aim for a translation that would yield the verbal equivalent of the footage, given that she does not present a strictly literal description of it but also interjects figurative perceptions of its content (for example, she compares the sound of the whirring helicopter to "Godzilla crying") as well as personal, somewhat tangential thoughts beyond what she sees while watching it (47). Before even describing the footage, she comments, "I sing in English while my father is in Vietnam. American wives are in immeasurable pain and so is my mother" (47). While this draws connections between Choi's childhood and her father's absence as well as between the experiences of the American women seeing the frantic footage and Choi's own mother worrying for her husband who was on site, this statement evidently omits the Vietnamese civilians who were desperately attempting to flee Saigon at the time. This is indeed a false equivalence of suffering in that whether the pain stems from empathy or horror, it cannot equate to that of the victims. But just as Choi's father is "nowhere to be seen because he's behind the camera," so are the Vietnamese evacuees absent from her prose (47). These ekphrastic (mis)translations reveal through omission the real impossible translation: articulating the ravages wrought by the war and the civilians who inevitably inherit the repercussions. Rather than reiterate imagery of the frenzied evacuation—which was so pervasive in the news coverage of the operation and which *The Deer Hunter* replicates in an earlier chaotic scene of Vietnamese civilians storming the walls of the US embassy—the poem focuses instead on this thirty-second

scene in which the news footage appears on a television screen. By verbally zooming in on the camerawork that captures the moments at which helicopters are abandoned into the ocean (to make more room for other helicopters and evacuees), Choi demonstrates that she refuses to translate the footage as a depiction of the evacuation operation's success but evidence of the futility of the war.

Given this verbal omission as well as the visual omission of photography in the poem, Choi's allusions to Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* in the conspicuously titled "Operation Punctum" is ironic.¹¹¹ Barthes explains that the photograph is "a bizarre *medium*, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, *shared* hallucination (on the one hand 'it is not there,' on the other 'but it has indeed been'): a mad image chafed by reality" (115, original emphasis).¹¹² While viewing taped footage is already a mediated means of looking at history, Choi adds additional layers of mediation by not only including tangential thoughts beyond the content of the footage but by also emphasizing that the footage is viewed on a screen within a screen. Her descriptions, which specify where the helicopters and their blades are positioned on the screen, demonstrate her acute awareness of the fact that she is viewing the footage through the television within a scene of a film.¹¹³ As such, it is a kind of hallucination in that Choi views it from several

¹¹¹ Of course, Choi's discussion of *The Deer Hunter* demonstrates the peripheral existence of film, which constitutes moving pictures; however, my observation points to the fact that no literal photographs are included within this particular prose poem.

¹¹² This passage appears as one of the quotations listed in the epigraph of *Hardly War*.

¹¹³ Notably, the cadence of the short, often fragmented sentences as well as Choi's descriptions of minute details from the footage in "Operation Punctum" conjures moments in *Dictée*'s "Erato Love Poetry" section where the speaker describes the movements of a camera as it films a woman attending a theatre (Cha 94 and 96). This parallel brings into focus the meta-spectatorship of both works; they draw attention to the fact that the audience is not viewing the footage itself but observing someone's verbal mediation of

degrees of separation that mediates reality through fiction—the event is paradoxically there and not there. Choi’s reference to Barthes’ notion that “[h]istory is hysterical” here is apt (qtd. in *Hardly War* 47). Immediately following this statement in *Camera Lucida*, Barthes explains that “it is constituted only if we consider it, only if we look at it—and in order to look at it, we must be excluded from it” (65). Choi would have been around the age at which the aforementioned photograph of her carrying her brother was taken at the time that her father shot the evacuation footage; although she lived through this moment in history, she is excluded from it because she did not witness the event herself. Yet, by viewing the footage—captured by the eyes of her father’s camera—Choi also accesses this “modest, shared hallucination” and redoubles the hallucination by translating it into words (Barthes qtd. in Choi, *Hardly War* 47). Rather than equating actual scenes of the fleeing South Vietnamese civilians as a hysterical moment in history, the poem suggests that what is truly hysterical is the notion that the evacuation marks, in the words of ABC News reporter Hilary Brown, “THE LAST CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM” and that this proverbial book could simply be closed thereafter (Choi, *Hardly War* 47).

Invoking Barthes also perhaps inevitably invites the audience to observe Choi’s photographs for the “studium,” the term he offers to designate that which might cause general interest in a photograph, such as its cultural or historical details, or to search for the “punctum,” the poignant detail within a photograph that attracts and affects the viewer in a visceral, personal way (Barthes 26). Choi has identified her father’s footage

the footage—we are encountering the speaker’s articulation of her viewing experience of the footage. In this sense, these pieces are meta-commentaries, not only on cinematic representation but on *viewership*.

as, for her, the punctum of *The Deer Hunter* but clarifies that “this particular wound is not only personal, but national and global in scale” (“Don Mee Choi” 16). The evacuation of Saigon constitutes a point in American and world history that put the US empire’s hubris to shame and patently proved the debacle of proxy warfare. Through verbally conjuring the iconic imagery of helicopters being abandoned, Choi collapses the studium and punctum in this ekphrastic imagetext. In a sense, *Hardly War* destabilizes the audience’s ability to view its photographs for either the punctum or the studium. Viewing the photos only at the level of the studium poses a problematic relationship between the viewer and the image because it positions the latter as an object that remains at the level of “unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste” (Barthes 27) or “nothing but an indifferent picture” (73). Choi’s imagetexts are not to be studied merely for their empirical content. To read the scene of evacuation as purely informational would only confirm the suggestion that the history of the American war in Vietnam ended at Saigon. Neither do the imagetexts function to enact a “prick” of the punctum that remains at the level of the personal or to merely prompt an emotional response. Rather, they demand critical engagements that refuse to subscribe to versions of history that elide the ongoing repercussions of geopolitical warfare on the nations in which those conflicts took place. As Sontag states concerning the relationship between an event and a photograph:

Though an event has come to mean, precisely, something worth photographing, it is still ideology (in the broadest sense) that determines what constitutes an event. There can be no evidence, photographic or otherwise, of an event until the event itself has been named and characterized. And it is never photographic evidence which can construct—more properly, identify—events; the contribution of photography always follows the naming of the event. What determines the possibility of being affected morally by photographs is the existence of a relevant political consciousness. Without a politics, photographs of the

slaughter-beach of history will most likely be experienced as, simply, unreal or as a demoralizing emotional blow. (*On Photography* 16-17)

Choi's (mis)translations of historical representations of the Korean and Vietnam Wars emphasize their ideological implications in order to prompt recognition of the role of US geopolitical intervention in these conflicts.

Repurposed within Choi's imagetexts, photographs prompt a re-seeing of history's official narratives. "Operation Punctum" arguably functions as the fulcrum of *Hardly War* in that although it is entirely composed of prose, it prompts the audience to reexamine many of the photographs within the book. Choi concludes the poem curiously by stating, "[n]ow I see buttons on History's blouse" (*Hardly War* 48). This, in part, refers to Brown, whose reportage Choi quotes in all capitalized letters and who is wearing a dark blouse with white buttons in the news footage. The button image also, as Choi has remarked in an interview, harkens back to the August 15, 1948 photograph of the inauguration of the Republic of Korea (Figure 9) from the first section of the book ("Don Mee Choi" 16). Between Rhee and Hodge in the foreground is an unidentified woman wearing a white hat with a black polka-dotted veil in the row behind them. Two pages later, a cropped close-up image of the woman appears next to the title of "Hydrangea Agenda." This doubling of the photograph is clearly a nod to a similar gesture that Cha made in *Dictee* with her use of a photograph of the young Korean revolutionary Yu Guan Soon. Cha first presents the image at the beginning of the "Clio History" section, which addresses the period of Japanese occupation in Korea. The image resurfaces again at the very end of the book, on the back endpaper—but there, we find that what appeared at first to be portrait is actually a cropped portion of a larger



Figure 9. South Korea's First Republic, August 15, 1948. From *Hardly War*, p. 16.

photograph in which Yu is posing with several other women. In contrast, *Hardly War* reverses the order in which the audience encounters the images. Choi first presents the full photo facing opposite of “A Little Menu” (which lists various foods that were brought to South Korea by American GIs), then presents the cropped portion on the next page.

The delayed shift in *Dictée* from the isolated image of Yu to the group photo implies a contrast between the individual and the collective, not only in terms of representations of revolutionary figures but also in terms of history.¹¹⁴ Yu is one of the most well-known female figures in Korean history as an important activist who led the March 1st Movement in 1919, which were demonstrations against Japanese imperialism;

¹¹⁴ Cha also mentions the French heroine Jeanne d’Arc and Korean activist Ahn Joong Kun. Both died by execution.

however, as the group photo suggests, she certainly was not alone in her efforts. Just as the photo of Yu was only a fragment of the larger image, her role within the history of Korean independence and democratization was only one of many movements—such as the April Revolution in 1960 and Kwangju Uprising in 1980, which Cha addresses in the “Melpomene Tragedy” section—that involved many other activists beyond her time. In *Hardly War*, the immediate shift from complete photo to the partial image zooms in to a detail that may have otherwise been overlooked—such as the fact that she is the only woman in photograph within a crowd of uniformed men. In a sense, it identifies the woman’s spotted veil as the punctum of the photograph. By linking the buttons on Brown’s blouse to the “ring spots” of the woman’s veil, Choi connects the evacuation of Saigon in 1975, which signaled the end of the Vietnam War, to the inauguration of the Republic of Korea in 1948, which signaled South Korea’s US-selected first president. In so doing, she casts these events as different chapters within the same book of American history. As Choi explains, “I wanted each part of the book to refer or link back to every other part. War is very linked. That’s how it operates” (“Don Mee Choi” 16). In this sense, none of these moments are isolated moments in history; they are all interlocking cogs within the machine that is American geopolitics. The wars in Korea and Vietnam do not merely belong in the history books of these “foreign” nations. As Timothy Yu states, “‘Vietnam’ and ‘Korea’ signify not only nations in Southeast and East Asia but sites in American history and culture” (*Race* 109). Through hybrid imagetexts, Choi’s (mis)translations, repetitions, and recontextualizations bring into focus the hallucinatory there/not-there histories of the Korean and Vietnam Wars as sites of transnational hybridity.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined Choi's hybrid construction of photography and text in *Hardly War* as imagetexts that present translations against empire's versions of history. Offering a comparison of *Hardly War* to *Dictée* established Choi's expansion of Cha's formal hybridity as well as the need for reading the visual elements in combination with the textual as mutually contributing to the works' signifying modes. Tracing the various uses of word equations as a trope in Choi's prose elucidated her conceptualization of translation as a defiant means of setting up false equivalences in order to highlight the problematic logic by which they operate. Applying Mitchell's concept of the imagetext as a model for analyzing composite media to *Hardly War* showed the various ways in which Choi enacts false equivalences between text and images to present (mis)translations of historical representations of the Korean and Vietnam Wars. These (mis)translations revealed the historical contingencies of South Korea's neocolonial position within US geopolitics by emphasizing the seemingly disjunctive relationships between the verbal and visual elements. Choi's sardonic, ahistorical, and piecemeal representations of these Cold War conflicts demonstrated that despite liberation from Japanese occupation, neocolonialism was and still is the condition of South Korea's postcoloniality, given the US military's geopolitical intervention after World War II and South Korea's continued dependence on it thereafter.

One can only speculate how Korea would have progressed without interventions from the US and Soviet Union—without the division of the Koreas, three devastating

years of war on the peninsula, US-backed military dictatorships, or several more years of war in Vietnam. As Sontag has commented:

One would like to imagine that the American public would not have been so unanimous in its acquiescence to the Korean War if it had been confronted with photographic evidence of the devastation of Korea, an ecocide and genocide in some respects even more thorough than those inflicted on Vietnam a decade later... The Korean War was understood differently—as part of the just struggle of the Free World against the Soviet Union and China—and, given that characterization, photographs of the cruelty of unlimited American firepower would have been irrelevant. (*On Photography* 16)

In keeping with the title of the book, Choi does not include any graphic images of combat from the wars. None of the photographs included in *Hardly War* actually depict scenes of battle or massacres of civilians. As such, the adverb *hardly* is appropriate; it diminishes the degree of, while minimally acknowledging the existence of, the war. Evidently, a war can only be deemed “hardly” by translating it as one emptied of humanity—by eliding the fact that civilians, as Choi’s father recognized, are “the real victims of war” (Choi, *Hardly War* 95). These are “hardly” wars because they are inconceivable, unimaginable, perhaps even unrepresentable through either verbal or visual media. It exceeds one’s ability to process as real. Yet, in drawing attention to this minimizing gesture through hybrid forms, Choi also refuses to treat the war as spectacle, even as she assumes a hysterical voice of history; instead, she guides the audience’s view to the geopolitical machinations at work in the morally bankrupt logic of warfare.

At a performance of pieces from *Hardly War* in Seattle shortly after its release, in response to an audience member’s question about whether other genres of writing and activist work would serve as more effective acts of antiwar and anticolonialism rather than poetry, Choi answered: “Just to survive is to make something happen... If the

language we create, reformulate, and recode can survive under the forces of language that occupies, militarizes, tortures, kills—then we made something happen” (qtd. in Smith). *Hardly War* demonstrates that words and images can be weaponized and used for various geopolitical purposes; however, those very words and images are not bound to hegemonic narratives of history. Choi not only retells history but critiques the way official history is told. (Mis)translation serves as a productive mode by which to hold a mirror up to “empire’s memory making machine” in order to reveal its flawed logic and innerworkings. As this chapter has demonstrated, (mis)translations of history through imagetexts can yield versions of history that reveal what empire has obscured or framed as justifiable. As Mitchell asserts, “[t]he image/text is neither a method nor a guarantee of historical discovery; it is more like an aperture or cleavage in representation, a place where history might slip through the cracks” (*Picture Theory* 104). Choi utilizes those slippages, takes advantage of the gaps in translation between text and image as well as geopolitics and warfare, and draws attention to logical fallacies in order to render a hysterical history of South Korea that evinces its position in relation to the US as one of transnational hybridity. As the following chapter will discuss, re-representing dominant ideologies through imitative imagetexts is another practice of formal hybridity that visualizes transnational hybridity in terms of immigrant experience.

CHAPTER 5

“HER BODY, WRITTEN IN SILENCE”: OBJECT POEMS, DIGITAL COLLAGE, AND THE ETHNIC FEMALE BODY IN MONICA ONG’S *SILENT ANATOMIES*

But what about her tongue?

*Absent, unable to make real
her body, written in silence*

—Monica Ong, “Etymology of an Untranslated Cervix”

Like *Hardly War*, *Silent Anatomies* by poet and graphic designer Monica Ong also comprises imagetexts that include photographs, but Ong’s work further accentuates visuality by digitally combining textual and pictorial material in her poems so that text functions even less like captions and more as integrated parts of the imagetext as a whole. While the transnational hybridity that Choi’s visual poetry illustrates is the US empire’s neocolonial relationship to South Korea, *Silent Anatomies* visualizes transnational hybridity in terms of the ethnic female subject’s alterity in both pre- and post-immigration contexts. As the daughter of Chinese immigrant parents who were born and raised in the Philippines (where her grandparents fled during World War II), Ong’s poetry is informed by a complex family history, multiple languages (such as English, Mandarin, Tagalog, as well as Hokkien, which is a dialect spoken by Chinese migrants in the Philippines), and the concomitant traumas, tensions, shame, and secrets that this diasporic experience carries. Her poems represent various manifestations of cultural silence and erasure: her mother being dressed as a boy for a family portrait, her paternal

grandfather immigrating to the US on falsified papers, her maternal grandparents' adoption of her uncle when he was a child in the hopes of bearing more male children, her aunt's untreated mental illness, the burden of meeting physical and linguistic standards of whiteness, and generational tensions within the family. Through imaginative visual poems, which she describes in her endnotes as "digital collage," Ong addresses the double bind placed on Asian and Asian American women wherein they are pressured to assimilate into Western culture at the same time that they are treated as inferiors by Asian standards simply due to the fact that they are women. Ong's visual poems portray ethnic women's struggle to establish subjectivity as they are forced to confront racist and patriarchal demands across multiple cultures, whether Chinese, Filipino, or American.

Ong illuminates the themes of immigration, race, gender, and health through medical iconography. First conceived as part of an art installation, many of the pages of *Silent Anatomies* constitute two-dimensional representations of the physical materials on which Ong initially created her visual poems. These include letterpress broadsides, an accordion book, as well as various medical ephemera such as a CT scan, vintage medicine bottles, and pages from prescription pads (that her father was a physician undoubtedly influenced the aesthetic and material choices of her work).¹¹⁵ Ong combines these materials with illustrations from different editions of John B. Deaver's *Surgical Anatomy*, found family photographs, and her own poetic text. The material specificity of Ong's visual poems underscores the importance of medium in the presentation of content as each piece uniquely establishes its own visual context. Diagrams of body parts serve as

¹¹⁵ To view images of these works as they were displayed in the installation as well as details pertaining to specific materials used to construct them, see the Gallery page on Ong's website: <https://www.monicaong.com/gallery>.

specimens of medical study, labels on medicine bottles place the audience in the position of the pathologized patient, while x-rays and ultrasounds reveal otherwise unseen and unspoken narratives. These elements frame Ong's family history as material for clinical examination to be dissected and diagnosed. Importantly, these intermedial strategies are directly tied to the representation of hybrid identity. As Ong states in an interview: "*Silent Anatomies* is a literary hybrid, not only in its use of text and images, but also because it addresses the hybridity of cultural identity, the way our bloodlines and family narratives are deeply interwoven, extending in these poems from China to the Philippines and the U.S.A." ("Cultural Silences"). In other words, hybrid medium functions as a representational embodiment of hybrid ontology. As Mitchell asserts in *What Do Pictures Want?*, "the medium itself is the embodied messenger, not the message" (216).¹¹⁶ Given the repressive conditions under which Asian women¹¹⁷ are forced to be silent, invisible, and obedient, *Silent Anatomies* provides visual-textual evidence in order to not only diagnose silence as a symptom of racist and patriarchal ideologies that impose themselves upon ethnic female bodies but also to envision new and nuanced ways by which to challenge those ideologies. Ong's imagetexts ultimately critique the ideological structures that legitimate and perpetuate the cultural pressures that enforce silence upon the ethnic female body.

¹¹⁶ Mitchell is responding here to Marshall McLuhan's now famous maxim that "the medium is the message."

¹¹⁷ While *Silent Anatomies* addresses the silencing of both Asian and Asian American women (though, admittedly, these terms of identification are themselves fraught), I use the generalization "Asian women" when referring to these categories to reflect the way in which racist ideologies tend to neither distinguish between them nor include Asian women in the national identity category "American."

The theme of silence is not an unfamiliar one to Asian American literature. Whether it be self-imposed silences motivated by societal shame or oppressive silencing of the non-native English speaker, Asian American writers have frequently addressed various experiences of dealing with silence.¹¹⁸ Both King-Kok Cheung and Patti Duncan provide important studies on Asian American women writers whose work enact silence in ways that undermine reductive Western philosophical perceptions of silence as the opposite of speech.¹¹⁹ However, while their studies productively reclaim silence as a means of resistance, creativity, and agency, they only address verbal representations of silence. Writing and speech are important modes by which to challenge silence; however, as Ong's poetry demonstrates, another effective means of critique is the visual medium. This chapter expands scholarship on the representation of silence in Asian American literature by examining Ong's visualizations of silence and silencing. *Silent Anatomies* engages directly with orientalist attitudes that patronize the reticent, submissive Asian woman but not necessarily by verbally speaking out against them or asserting a voice that "breaks" the silence. As Timothy Yu describes his own poetic project for *100 Chinese Silences*, it could also be said of Ong's work that its coherence "is not that of poetic voice but of critical posture; it is defined by its conceptual project of inhabiting and critiquing

¹¹⁸ For example, *The Woman Warrior* by Maxine Hong Kingston is an often-cited text that deals with the issue of silence surrounding a shameful past. Additionally, one of the prominent concerns of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* is the failures of speech and the difficulty of articulating personal and national history.

¹¹⁹ Cheung rejects the hierarchy that privileges the verbal above the nonverbal and asserts that silence has multiple modalities that function differently depending on context. She argues that "silence—textual ellipses, nonverbal gestures, authorial hesitations, (as against moral, historical, religious, or political authority)—can be articulate" (4). Duncan echoes her arguments, explaining that silence "is not simply the absence of speech" (14) and that the relationship between them must be interrogated because it "represents a site of power wherein subjectivities may be created, destroyed, or otherwise transformed" (15). Both critics recognize that the gestures of silence represented by Asian American women writers confront the repressive conditions that prompted them.

orientalist discourse” (“Chinese Silence” 617).¹²⁰ Through visual poems that represent the racist and sexist othering of the ethnic female body, *Silent Anatomies* exposes the ideological apparatuses that relegate Asian women to silence and also imagines another means by which to convey their experience beyond orality or establishing a voice. In other words, rather than merely *telling* narratives about repression, Ong *shows* impositions of silence upon Asian women in order to make those very impositions the object of critique. Edward R. Tufte—whose work on information design Ong has cited as influential to her own poetics—conceives of what he calls “evidence displays” as demonstrating “*how seeing turns into showing*, how empirical observations turn into explanations and evidence” (9, original emphasis).¹²¹ By making visible the various ways in which Asian women are othered, Ong’s poems critique the ideological apparatuses of racism and patriarchy and envision alternate modes of viewing the ethnic female body.

The visual poetry of *Silent Anatomies* comprises multiple layers of mediation that enact encounters between the ethnic female body and oppressive ideologies. These encounters are staged through two particular types of imagetexts: object poems¹²² and digital collage poems.¹²³ These visual poems exemplify the interpellation, to use Louis

¹²⁰ Yu’s *100 Chinese Silences* parodically responds to the ways in which white poets (from contemporary poets such as Billy Collins to modernist poets such as Ezra Pound) have contributed to orientalist stereotypes of silence.

¹²¹ Ong states of this influence: “Tufte’s compendium of information design highlights the importance of context when considering the relationship between text and image, and how data design shares kinship with poetry by way of distilling ideas with elegant compression while creating pleasure in the process. As a practicing designer, the cognitive principles of design thinking are another important toolbox that I use when creating visual poetry” (“tpq5”).

¹²² While Ong does not identify the object poems as such within in *Silent Anatomies*, she does so on her website to categorize “Poetry off the Page” such as pieces that use medicine bottles and a CT scan as their medium (“Gallery”). At a reading at Temple University, Ong noted that she was inspired by Canadian artists George Bures Miller and Janet Cardiff to create poems “off the page” (Ong, *Poets & Writers Series*).

¹²³ Many of the poems, including the object poems, technically use digital collage techniques to combine discrete textual and pictorial material; however, I follow Ong’s endnotes in *Silent Anatomies*, which identify the medium of specific non-object poems as “digital collage.”

Althusser's term, of the ethnic female as the Other by patriarchal and racist ideologies. Both types of poems visualize the pictorial and rhetorical gestures of interpellation as representations of ideologies that desire to recruit Asian women as their subjects in order to further perpetuate their othering. For example, some of the object poems use vintage medicine bottles as the literal and figurative vessel by which to disseminate ideological messages that disparage bearing female offspring or entice Asian women to whiten their skin and speech. Many of Ong's digital collage poems, on the other hand, combine anatomy diagrams, found family photographs, and poetic text that reflects Ong's speaking position as an Asian American woman grappling with competing values and discourses. Importantly, both represent staged scenes of encounter that offer mediated views of the interpellation process at critical distance. Just as my discussion of Choi's visual poems in Chapter 3 emphasized the combinatory quality of the verbal and visual elements in *Hardly War* in order to read them as imagetexts, this chapter continues this approach to examine *Silent Anatomies*. However, in order to analyze Ong's visual poetry as imagetexts that represent ideological desire, this chapter shifts the focus from "what pictures *do* to what they *want*" as Mitchell proposes in *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (33, original emphasis).¹²⁴ I take up the question of what Ong's imagetexts want in connection with postcolonial feminist theorist Sara Ahmed's conceptualization of the figure of the stranger in *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the self and

¹²⁴ Mitchell conceptualizes images as immaterial visual representations and pictures as concrete, material representations (84-85). Since *picture* is the general term that Mitchell uses to refer to pictorial media, I will substitute it when appropriate for the specific media with which Ong constructs her imagetexts, such as medicine bottles, photographs, and diagrams. I will use the term *image* when referring to representations of pictorial elements included *within* those media.

other dichotomy in the context of ideological encounters. As Ahmed argues, “recognition operates as a *visual economy*: it involves ways of *seeing the difference* between familiar and strange others as they are (re)presented to the subject” (24, original emphasis). This accounts for varying degrees of relational distance and proximity—rather than a simplistic opposition—between the self and other, which lends insight into the othering of the ethnic female body not only as it is contingent upon racial and gendered difference, but also as it involves stratifications within those very categories of difference.

The following section of this chapter will present my synthesis of Mitchell’s conceptualization of the desires of pictures and Ahmed’s conceptualization of the figure of the stranger as a critical shift from Althusser’s notion of interpellation in order to establish the underlying assumptions of my analysis of interpellation in terms of both ideology and iconography. This will establish my approach to Ong’s verbal-visual representations of imagetexts that hail the ethnic female subject as active rejections of interpellation. The remaining sections will analyze Ong’s object poems through the lens of Homi Bhabha’s concept of mimicry and her digital collages through the lens of M.M. Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia in order to demonstrate the ways in which Ong’s visual poems perform rejections of interpellation. I argue that Ong’s object poems enact Bhabha’s concept of mimicry by visualizing patriarchal and racist ideologies as a means of undermining their power and ultimately denying the validity of their hegemonic representations of Asian women as strangers. I also argue that her digital collages enact Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia to visualize the tension between the language of Asian women and the discourses that compete with it in order to challenge the oppressive ideologies that attempt to silence them. These readings of Ong’s hybrid poetry

complicate the constraints and power dynamics of ideological interpellation that Althusser theorized. Altogether, these theoretical lenses aid an understanding of Ong's visual staging of encounters between the ethnic female body and patriarchal and racist ideologies as scenes of what I will call "disrecognition": a refusal to recognize ideology's hail or a critical turning away from (rather than toward) it. Ultimately, *Silent Anatomies* makes hyper-visible the imposition of whiteness and patriarchy upon the ethnic female body in order to expose and ultimately dismantle the reification of the hegemonic images and scripts of Asian women that other them as silent strangers. Through Ong's use of hybrid forms, she illustrates verbal-visual encounters in which the interpellation of Asian and Asian American women is not final; strangers have the ability to disrecognize racist and patriarchal ideologies—to challenge the ideological apparatuses that deny the presence of hybrid identities.

Interpellation and the Ethnic Female as Stranger

In order to read Ong's imagetexts as rejections of the interpellation of the ethnic female body as stranger, I first address the process of ideological interpellation as Althusser theorized in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." According to Althusser, ideological interpellation not only involves the verbal act of hailing but the visual element of recognition by those who are hailed. Ideology successfully "'recruits' subjects among individuals" when individuals turn and recognize that the greeting was indeed meant for them, thus accepting their subjection to ideology (Althusser 79). Applying this to *Silent Anatomies*, we might, for example, read the imagetexts of medicine bottles with labels that list entries from a Chinese-English dictionary as

representations of immigrants' recognition of themselves as subjects of the ideology that to belong in America one must speak English. However, to read Ong's poems as a genuine depiction of this discriminatory ideology, rather than a critical imitation of it, would be to overlook the ways in which she constructs imagetexts as oppositional hybrid forms. Ong's poems enact scenes of encounter between othered subjects and hegemonic ideologies to ultimately demonstrate those subjects' refusal to recognize themselves according to oppressive ideologies. Though, as Althusser argues, individuals are "*always already* subjects," Ong's imagetexts suggest that even from within ideology, subjects can use hybrid strategies to deny recognition by undermining its power (78, original emphasis). While Althusser identifies two functions of ideology, recognition and misrecognition, I argue that Ong's imagetexts envision the possibility of a third function of ideology: *dis*recognition. Thus, I draw upon Mitchell's approach to pictures as living entities and Ahmed's conceptualization of the figure of the stranger, both of which offer useful ways to re-think ideological interpellation beyond Althusser's notion of recognition.

In *Picture Theory*, Mitchell staged his own scene of recognition between Erwin Panofsky's scene of iconology (being greeted by an acquaintance removing a hat) and Althusser's scene of ideology (being hailed on the street) in order to not only "make iconology 'ideologically aware' or self-critical, but to make the ideological critique iconologically aware" (30).¹²⁵ This conceptualization of the reciprocal relationship

¹²⁵ Mitchell explains that "[t]he main importance of *recognition* as the link between ideology and iconology is that it shifts both 'sciences' from an epistemological 'cognitive' ground (the knowledge of objects by subjects) to an ethical, political, and hermeneutic ground (the knowledge of subjects by subjects, perhaps even Subjects by Subjects). The categories of judgment shift from terms of cognition to terms of re-cognition, from epistemological categories of knowledge to social categories like 'acknowledgment'" (33).

between these fields of study puts into concrete terms Althusser's thesis concerning ideology's "material existence" (75) in that Mitchell locates ideology in pictorial representation (and vice versa). In today's hyper-visual culture, perhaps it comes as no surprise that images represent ideologies (that iconology is a visual manifestation of ideology) but Mitchell elucidates ideology as also produced and disseminated *through* iconology—that images, too, can potentially recruit individuals as subjects. Responding to visual culture's emphasis on images as having a life of their own, in *What Do Pictures Want?*, he explores the notion that pictures are "not merely signs *for* living things but signs *as* living things," and are therefore capable of being "driven by desire and appetites" (6, original emphasis). However, he does not grant that media's desire to hail addressees warrants its unquestioned influence over them; rather he argues that pictures actually lack power. For Mitchell, desire signals lack because pictures only want what they do not have: "The power they want is manifested as *lack*, not as possession" (36).

As Mitchell recognizes, power is not necessarily a given capacity of images. Extending as well as complicating his investigations in *Picture Theory* of the composite and interrelated nature of images and texts in pictorial representations, in *What Do Pictures Want?* Mitchell presents a "poetics of pictures" that considers the ways in which images, objects, and media have and represent desire (xv).¹²⁶ While *Picture Theory* emphasized the spectator's desire to extract meaning from pictures, *What Do Pictures Want?* focuses on the effect of pictures' desires on the spectator. For Mitchell, examining

¹²⁶ Mitchell defines image as "any likeness, figure, motif, or form that appears in some medium or other," object as "the material support in or on which an image appears, or the material thing that an image refers to or brings into view," and the medium as "the set of material practices that brings an image together with an object to produce a picture" (xiii). He also defines the picture as "the appearance of the immaterial image in a material medium" (85).

pictures in order to interpret the meanings that their image-text relations signify—in other words, interpreting what they *do*—assumes that they possess power and agency but analyzing them in order to identify what they *want* suggests that they lack it. Therefore, he insists that we shift our theoretical framework of images “from the model of the dominant power to be opposed, to the model of the subaltern to be interrogated or (better) to be invited to speak” (*WDPW* 33). The act of extending an invitation to pictures to express their desires also entails the viewer’s participation in the process because this approach does not intend to “install a personification of the work of art as the master term,” but rather, “to make the *relationality* of image and beholder the field of investigation” (49, original emphasis). Mitchell’s focus, not only on pictures as containers of meaning to be interpreted but also on the nature of encounters between the viewer and the viewed object, offers a productive way to consider the power of images’ desires as contingent upon their audience’s willingness to recognize or fulfill them. In other words, recognition is not the only possible outcome of interpellation. This provides insight for understanding how imagetexts of racist and patriarchal ideologies’ desire to recruit Asian women as silent and submissive subjects can and ultimately do fail in their attempts. As Ong’s mimetic and heteroglossic representations of those ideologies demonstrate, ethnic female subjects have the ability to recognize the imagetexts not as accurate depictions of their bodies but of the racist and patriarchal ideologies themselves.

Mitchell’s attention to the relationship between pictures and their beholder shares common ground with Ahmed’s theorization of the relationship between subjects and strangers. Ahmed complicates the self/other binary by considering instead the relationships of social antagonism that construct the figure of the stranger against familiar

bodies. She argues that “the dialectic between the self and other is insufficient: it is the very acts and gestures whereby subjects differentiate *between* others (for example, between familiar and strange others) that constitute the permeability of both social and bodily space” (15, original emphasis). Thus, she identifies the stranger not as that which is unknown, but that which is already recognized through its difference from a particular community. While strangers are often thought to be those who do not occupy the space of the familiar, Ahmed argues that “the ‘stranger’ only becomes a figure through proximity: the stranger’s body cannot be reified as the distant body” (13). In other words, it is precisely because the stranger’s body comes close that a subject is able to recognize and reject it as an Other. As such, encounters with strangers do not involve the failure to recognize a body but the very identification of the stranger as different from familiar bodies: “The recognition of dangerous strangers allows the enforcement of the boundaries of such communities: a definition of the purity of the ‘we’ against the monstrous ‘it’” (35-36). As *Silent Anatomies* shows, recognition of Asian women’s otherness to white male bodies becomes the basis for the legitimation of the former’s exclusion from the latter’s space of the familiar—such as the domestic space (both home and nation).

However, exclusionary practices do not only apply to spatial contexts and the lines between us/them or inside/outside of the community are not so clearly demarcated. Ahmed names globalization, migration, and multiculturalism as particular modes of proximity in which the figure of the stranger is commonly produced (for example, through encounters between citizens and aliens) but she acknowledges that encounters with strangers are not exclusive to transnational contexts. Likening the nation to the

home, Ahmed explains that “there are always encounters with others already recognised as strangers *within*, rather than just *between*, nations” (88, my emphasis). As my discussions of Hong, Perez, and Choi’s works in the previous chapters have shown, whether it is an encounter between native and migrant, colonizer and colonized, or empire and civilian, what establishes these dialectical conflicts are moments of hostility between these figures that test and display the uneven power dynamics of these relationships. The transnational experience of migration is an important undercurrent of *Silent Anatomies*, but Ong also emphasizes the proximal relationships between subjects and strangers that exist within spaces that are even closer than those across national borders: within immediate families and their cultures. As such, the home can function not merely as an analogy but the literal space within which Asian and Asian American women experience estrangement. When subjectivity hinges on white patriarchy, the ethnic female stranger inevitably faces marginalization, whether in the hybrid contexts of cross-cultural encounter or diasporic family dynamics. As Ahmed explains:

Strange bodies do not exist as such, as they can only be assimilated as the unassimilable within the home of the white masculine subject: his being is here *and* there, secured as a dwelling that allows him to occupy and move within space. And yet, strange bodies are also over-represented and perpetually encountered as the impossible border that both establishes and threatens his identity and home. (53, original emphasis)

Although no white male subjects are visually represented in *Silent Anatomies*, Ong’s work depicts the ways in which white patriarchy as an ideology also influences Asian cultural and familial values, resulting in both the enforced and accepted suppression of female presence, speech, and agency. Even within the domain of the family, Asian women’s bodies are recognized as those that either do not belong within the privileged

space of the home or as those that are less welcomed in it than male bodies. While such strangers cohabitate the domestic spaces of the home, exclusion still manifests itself through various acts of othering, such as the overstated preferences for male offspring or light skin, as Ong's object poems portray.

Ahmed's theorization of the figure of the stranger lends more nuance to understanding Asian women's perpetually marginal position. She does not assume that the stranger categorically exists beyond spatial borders, but rather, recognizes her alterity as produced through recognition of proximity *within* them. As Ahmed asserts, "we need to consider how the stranger is an effect of the processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities, including communities of living (dwelling and travel), as well as epistemic communities" (6). The figure of the stranger holds in tension underlying notions of difference that rely on these binaries even while it also complicates their distinctions. The term *stranger* (as opposed to alien or Other) is particularly useful for characterizing Ong's portrayal of Asian and Asian American women given its semantic resonances as both a noun that names the figure and an adjective that denotes comparison. Its root, "strange," captures the perception of one's presence as an aberration while its suffix aptly describes a degree of separation that differentiates between bodies that are not familiar and other bodies that are even less so. In other words, the hybrid conditions of the ethnic female body are such that strangers are not strictly othered to the extent that they reside outside of a particular community; they are deemed *stranger* than those who comprise the familiar majority at the center of it.

Like Mitchell, Ahmed is privy to the role of iconology in the process of ideological interpellation. Drawing attention to the agent of hailing as opposed to its addressee, she explains that “[t]he recognition of the other as ‘you there’ is a *misrecognition* which produces the ‘you’ as a subject, and as subject to the very law implicated in recognition” (23, my emphasis). As such, the identification of the “you” is inaccurate since the hailed “you” does not match the other “you”s who are already subjects of ideology unless the former recognizes herself as the latter. Ahmed argues that within encounters with strangers, “[i]n the gesture of recognising the one that we do not know, the one that is different from ‘us,’ we flesh out the beyond, and give it a face and form” (3). In other words, ideology *creates* the iconology of the stranger. Arguably, all ideological apparatuses desire subjects; they must become internalized beliefs rather than distant ideas in order to exist. In *Silent Anatomies*, imagetexts of the stranger desire self-recognition from Asian women. However, this is not to say that they become subjected to the racist and patriarchal ideologies that the imagetexts represent. As Mitchell asserts, “[w]e need to reckon with not just the meaning of images but their silence, their reticence, their wildness and nonsensical obduracy. We need to account for not just the power of images but their powerlessness, their impotence, their abjection” (*WDPW* 10). By visually and verbally mimicking the iconology and discourses of oppressive ideologies in her visual poems, Ong enacts *disrecognition*—an active means of rejecting interpellation—that figures those images and languages themselves as abject rather than the ethnic female bodies that they construct. If pictures are viewed as *powerless* media that merely signify the desire to interpellate their beholders, rather than ones that inherently (always already) wield the power to recruit subjects, we can conceive of the

limits of racist and patriarchal images' interpellation of Asian women into their ideologies that figure her as stranger.

The Visual Interpellation of Strangers: Object Poems

In this section, I examine how strangeness is constructed through prescriptive imagetexts that overvalue male and white bodies, which consequently devalue ethnic female bodies; however, rather than a picture of successful interpellation into this ideology that desires the silence and erasure of Asian women, my analysis will demonstrate how Ong's object poems mimic this ideology, making the *process* of interpellation visible in order to critique it. The object poems that feature vintage medicine bottles—what Ong categorizes as “apothecary poems” within her “Remedies” series—combine several forms of media: photographs, text, and the physical objects on which the first two appear.¹²⁷ Ong's use of glass medicine bottles as vessels to display the family photos and their accompanying texts establishes the intended purpose of the objects: to treat various maladies. The contents of the bottles—most of them filled with small white pills, with the exception of a few that contain liquids—appear to be various kinds of medication intended for bodily consumption or application. The label on each bottle features a found family photograph, the name of the item, as well as information relevant for usage, such as instructions, ingredients, warnings, and effects. The photos portray ostensibly satisfied users as visual proof of the effectiveness of the products while the text takes on the rhetoric of infomercials to advertise the potential results. However,

¹²⁷ While Ong does not identify these poems or the series as such in *Silent Anatomies*, she uses these categorizations on the Gallery page of her website.

rather than prescriptions for legitimate ailments, the bottles—each label punctuated with the alluring phrase “Ancient Chinese Secret” at the bottom—claim to offer treatments that would allow users to conform to specific cultural preferences, namely: bearing male offspring, having light skin complexion, achieving accent-less speech, and maintaining psychosocial normativity. In so doing, they also repudiate the obverse bodily conditions, faculties, and features that are considered *undesirable* in Chinese culture (the fact that the text on the labels for a Chinese product is entirely in English conspicuously betrays their orientalism).¹²⁸ As Ahmed explains, “[t]he relationship between the processes of incorporation and expulsion which produce the abject and the marking of, and withdrawal from, particular bodily others as strange bodies, is hence *contingent* rather than necessary: there is a metonymic sliding across different borders, objects and bodies within such strange encounters” (54, original emphasis). The medicine bottles figure female, non-white, non-standard English speaking, and mentally ill bodies as those in need of curing—as strange bodies. They literally and figuratively label these bodies as defective or deficient by claiming to offer convenient remedies for their supposed illnesses. This, in turn, preserves the terms of inclusion in the category of subjects as male, white, English-speaking and psychosocially “normal” bodies. These objects demarcate strangeness against more desirable bodies.

However, as imagetexts that constitute object poems, the apothecary poems are satirical representations of patriarchal and racist ideologies that figure ethnic women as

¹²⁸ These object poems maintain a degree of ambiguity about the “origin” of these products—whether they are positioned as either Chinese or Western products catered to English-speaking Asian consumers. Therefore, my readings refrain from pinning the intended audience of these products as either East Asian *or* Asian American and instead acknowledges the potential for both of these possibilities.

strangers. One apparent difference between these poems' appearance in the pages within *Silent Anatomies*, as opposed to the physical objects displayed in Ong's art installation, is the inclusion of the text from the label on the opposite page of the medicine bottle that features it. This draws attention to the difference in the delivery of the message when removed from the medium. While the picture of the medicine bottle represents the visual and verbal material as constitutive of a *product*, the reiteration of the textual material alone recontextualizes it and further emphasizes its status as a *poem*. As visual poems designed by Ong, they critique the very ideological structures that figure the ethnic female body as undesirable or warranting correction, treatment, and silence.

The bottles demonstrate a palpable tension between realism and surrealism through the use of actual medicine bottles in combination with labels that mock the ways they promise easy solutions for biological and physical conditions that are not necessarily curable or treatable. As such, I read these poems as staging multivalent encounters: at one level, they show patriarchal and racist ideologies attempting to hail Asian women as strangers, which essentially constitutes misrecognition, while at another level, the poems enact disrecognition through mimicking their misrecognitions. This double staging, which establishes patriarchal and racist ideologies as the very object of Ong's critique, exemplifies Bhabha's conceptualization of mimicry. According to Bhabha, "mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it *visualizes power*" (122, my emphasis). It is through the "excess or slippage produced by the ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*)" that the mocker disrupts and makes questionable the

discourse of the colonial subject (123, original emphasis). While Ong's object poems do not necessarily pertain to the context of colonialism directly, we can see how Bhabha's theory illuminates the process of interpellation as a kind of ideological imperialism. On the one hand, the bottles' appeals to the desire to bear male offspring, attain white skin, achieve accent-less speech, and conceal mental illnesses represent the ideological processes by which Asian women may potentially be interpellated as strangers. On the other hand, observing these imagetexts as object poems constructed by Ong to ventriloquize such desires reveals the multiple layers of mediation that comprise her critique of the objects' power. As such, the beholder is not inescapably beholden to the objects' desires. These poems are multivalent imagetexts that balance opposing functions in that they are representations of both ideological desire and denials of it; they show what oppressive ideologies want as well as what they will not get. The object poems that figure strange bodies specifically in terms of gender and race demonstrate how Ong ultimately empties the objects of their power by constructing them in such a way that problematizes the desires they project.

In several of the object poems, the construction of the ethnic female body as an undesirable stranger becomes clear through its contrast to descriptions of male bodies as desirable. For example, in "Fortune Babies" (Figure 10) the directions advise, "[i]f you have difficulty conceiving, adopt a little boy so that spirits fill your home with blessings for many sons," later offering the more pointed warning that the product "[d]oes not guarantee protection from bearing daughters" (6). The label is forthright in equating male progeny to prosperity while also amplifying the fear of female progeny as an unwanted outcome. As such, it not only bears within it an assumption of the beholder's desire for

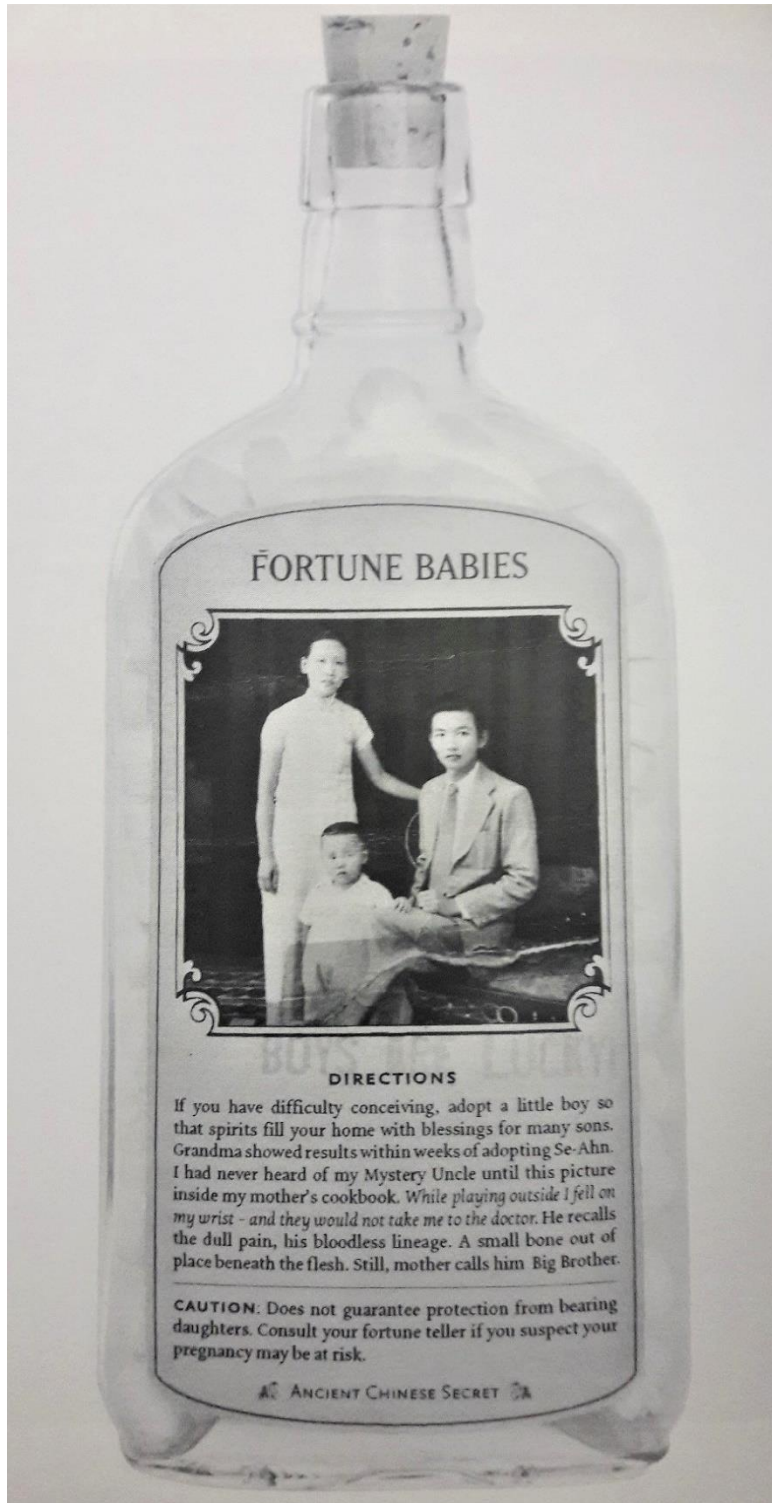


Figure 10. "Fortune Babies." From *Silent Anatomies*, p. 6.

sons but also reinforces those desires by suggesting that one must guard against the possibility of bearing daughters. The photograph portrays a family of three: mother, father, and son. The mother's hand rests somewhere behind her husband's back while the child's small hand rests on his father's knee. However, there is no gesture of physical touch shared between mother and son, as if to signal the lack of biological connection between them. Ong's endnotes confirm the nature of the figures' relationship; the photograph is a portrait (circa 1940) of her maternal grandparents with her Uncle Se-Ahn, who they had adopted based on the belief that doing so would increase their chances of conceiving a son of their own (82). The photograph functions as the "before" image while the text offers proof of the successful "after" since it states that Ong's grandmother indeed "showed results within weeks of adopting Se-Ahn" (6). Altogether, these elements encompass the visual and verbal forms by which patriarchal ideologies attempt to preserve their legitimacy based on an already existing cultural preference for male children over female children.

However, neither the Fortune Babies medicine nor the instructions on the label are, of course, real.¹²⁹ The object poem is a mimetic representation of the ideological belief in the supremacy of sons—the potency of which is captured by the suggestion that medicinal intervention would be used to ensure its actualization. The text on the label enacts mimicry by imitating the rhetoric of patriarchy through the voice of commercial advertising. As Bhabha explains, "the visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction. It is a form of colonial discourse that is uttered *inter dicta*: a discourse at

¹²⁹ I refer to the objects *without* quotation marks when naming them as products and *with* quotation marks when referring to them as Ong's poems.

the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them” (128). In “Fortune Babies,” the mimicry is less subtle. Ong knowingly parrots patriarchal ideology, exaggerating the bottle’s advertisement of sons by overstating its enthusiasm. For example, when the faintly stamped phrase “BOYS ARE LUCKY!”¹³⁰ (which resembles a flash of subliminal messaging, as if the directions were not already explicit enough) appears between the photograph and directions, it reads like a gimmicky marketing tactic that betrays the product’s hypocrisy and false marketing (*Silent Anatomies* 6). Considering that the action the directions suggest is entirely irrelevant to the consumption of the bottle’s contents, the pills are merely placebos that accompany the supposedly “real” remedy for the absence of male offspring: adoption.

The inclusion of first-person accounts from both Ong and her uncle also makes obvious that the phallogentric rhetoric of the label is another discourse apart from their own. The italicized text that presents Se-Ahn’s memory of not being taken to the hospital when he broke his arm demonstrates that although he served as a means by which to gain sons, he was not treated like one in the family. Furthermore, Ong’s first-person account of having little knowledge of her “Mystery Uncle” until much later in her life when she visited China also indicates his estranged position as well (despite the family’s residence in the Philippines and later, the US, he returned to China) (6, 82n6). These features

¹³⁰ The enthusiasm of this statement presents a stark contrast to a later one in “The Onset,” which Ong recognizes as her mother “translating her mother”: “*There are no fireworks when girls are born*” (51, original emphasis). That this statement is presented within a footnote on an otherwise blank page—one devoid of a textual body—further emphasizes the silencing and erasure of the ethnic female body. In a sense, Ong visualizes the only options for recognition afforded to ethnic female subjects: either the strange body or no body at all.

emphasize the disingenuous and problematic nature of the remedy, which establishes a hierarchy in which biological sons are regarded above adopted sons, who are still valued above daughters. As such, the poem invites recognition, not so much of the beholder's need for the product it represents, but of the dubious motivation behind the product's promise. As the first poem of its kind in *Silent Anatomies*, "Fortune Babies" makes it apparent that ideological apparatuses desire subjects but do not necessarily succeed in securing them. Despite the medicine bottle's realism, Ong's construction of the object poem as a mimetic representation of patriarchal desire reveals the failures of its visual and rhetorical attempts at interpellation. The poem not only represents a concrete manifestation of the desire to silence and expel the strange female body, but ultimately constitutes Ong's disrecognition of such desire.

The cultural pressure to bear sons undoubtedly weighs upon families prior to conception as well, but societal values continue to pose a burden to them even after the fact of pregnancy. In "Perfect Baby Formula," the bottle for which appears to be filled with an opaque, white liquid, the label states that it is intended for "pregnant women to curb the onset of physiological and psychosocial deficiencies in early fetal development" and that its "[g]ender correction treatment promotes production of the anti-Mullerian hormone (AMH), testosterone and dihydrotestosterone, which promote fetal masculinization" (15). Though they never directly specify the type of child who would meet the product's standard of perfection, these promotional phrases palpably suggest through omission that a female or socially abnormal child would certainly not fit the bill. As Ahmed asserts, "[d]ifference is not simply found in the body, but is established as a relation between bodies" (44). The photograph on the label includes a baby who is naked

from the waist-down, making it unmistakably apparent that the qualifier “perfect” in the title refers specifically to male children.¹³¹ Collectively, these elements highlight, quite visibly, the phallogocentric ideologies that shape family values and discourage the desire for daughters. *Fortune Babies* not only demonstrates the desire for sons but also the desire to deny the presence of daughters within the space of the family by decreasing the likelihood of their conception.

Taken at face value, this product presents a picture of a patriarchal desire that valorizes male life while de-valuing female life. As feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti asserts concerning the othering of female bodies, “[d]evalued and pejorative otherness organizes differences in a hierarchical scale that allows for the management and governability of all gradations of social differences. Thus, by extension, the pejorative use of difference is no accident, but rather structurally necessary to the phallogocentric system of meaning and the social order and power that sustain it” (97). By demarcating strangeness against that which is culturally desired, the label on the bottle attempts to further engender the desire for male offspring. Although parents do not have control over determining the sex of their child, the medicine bottles’ promise of increasing the likelihood of bearing male offspring relies upon the influence of this desire for their marketability. As apparatuses of patriarchal ideologies, these medicine bottles want their beholders (potential consumers who might recognize the products’ hail) to self-prescribe the medications to themselves—to determine their own need for the remedies they offer.

¹³¹ Ong’s endnote mentions that the practice of taking pictures of boys without pants “may have been a social response to the way girls were being disguised as boys in family portraits, as my grandfather did” (84). This is addressed in an earlier poem, “Bo Suerte,” for which the accompanying photograph portrays Ong’s mother dressed as a boy among her four sisters and two brothers due to the “terror of asymmetry” that is the “shortage of sons” (3).

They desire recognition of the female as a stranger to the nuclear family or, said more pointedly, the medicines want mothers to perform self-administered eugenics that will perpetuate the cultural preference for male offspring by eliminating the alternative.¹³²

Ong highlights these grim implications of the product through the mimetic staging of patriarchal ideology. Unlike “Fortune Babies,” which includes narrative elements that comment on the context of the photograph on the label, the text in “Perfect Baby Formula” fully embodies the voice of a pharmaceutical advertisement. The rhetorical question “WHY SETTLE?”—which succinctly captures the product’s attitude toward the inferiority of female offspring—signals its obvious attempt to recruit female subjects into the ideology that only male bodies are acceptable (15). Additionally, the claim that the product has “[a]lso proven efficacy for superior academic performance leading to professional overachievement” underscores the absurdity of such a guarantee by attributing these socially valued qualities to males as a self-fulfilling prophecy in which boys succeed far more than girls simply because they are socially expected and encouraged to do so (15). While Fortune Babies amplifies boys as blessings to the family, Perfect Baby Formula suggests taking preventative measures against bearing girls, which are ultimately two sides of the same ideological coin, so to speak, of patriarchy. The verbal and visual accentuation of sons suggest the desire to invalidate the possibility of

¹³² In light of this, it seems no coincidence that these two object poems are positioned as bookends for the poem sequence “Catching a Wave,” which features ultrasound images and includes text that alludes to the rampant abortion of female babies in China (Ong, *Silent Anatomies* 8-13). The first image overlays the outline of a map of China over a sonogram, evoking the trope of one’s native country as motherland as well as the womb as a child’s first home. This palimpsestic construction also suggests the disturbing irony of the technology that made it possible to “see” babies before birth but that also caused the disappearance of more than 100 million female babies, resulting in the banning of ultrasound machines in certain areas (82n). These poems collectively demonstrate the ways in which male life proliferates at the expense of female life. They reveal the cost of granting males the status of embodied subjects while figuring females as strangers unworthy of existence.

female valuation. In other words, cultural standards measure biological value. As Mitchell points out, the life of images depends upon human participation because their values are determined within social contexts (*WDPW* 92). In this sense, just as the devaluation of female bodies is established by cultural preferences, so too can value be restored unto those bodies through reevaluations of the basis of those devaluations. The production of ideological iconology has a central role in this process. Mitchell explains:

Images are active players in the game of establishing and changing values. They are capable of introducing new values into the world and thus of threatening old ones. For better and for worse, human beings establish their collective, historical identity by creating around them a second nature composed of images which do not merely reflect the values consciously intended by their makers, but radiate new forms of value formed in the collective, political unconscious of their beholders. (105)

Ong's visualization of the medicine bottles are mediated imagetexts that constitute the critical reevaluation and disrecognition (not simply a congenial representation) of patriarchal desire. As Bhabha asserts, "[t]he *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority" (126, original emphasis). Ong's object poems not only represent the construction of the ethnic female as stranger in contrast to male bodies but also the problematic pictorial and rhetorical strategies by which such constructions attempt to visually interpellate the stranger into their ideologies.

While the object poems discussed thus far represent ideological desire based on gender preferences by visualizing the ways in which patriarchal desire values male bodies over female ones, the following two object poems that I will examine visualize racial preferences, namely the desire to achieve whiteness in terms of both skin tone and speech. The products depicted in these latter poems feed off of (and into) the cultural

anxieties that heighten racist desire. “Yeong Mae’s Whitening Solution” bottle contains a white liquid, which the label instructs the user to apply topically to both the face and body (Figure 11). Its list of ingredients names a number of chemicals that are used for lightening skin pigment, “neutraliz[ing] facial hair and other ethnic features,” and “even[ing] out blemishes” (Ong, *Silent Anatomies* 18). This underscores the way race is read on the body and directly establishes any physical characteristics of non-whiteness as undesirable ones that need correction. The label also acknowledges the connection between racial appearance and social privilege, relying upon the advantages of white privilege for the product’s marketability. The text boasts that using the product has proven to yield positive results: “Studies have shown efficacy in elevating social standing, while lowering incidents of racial profiling by 27%” (18). This affirms that the lighter one’s skin, the greater the likelihood of appearing raceless, which also affords a greater chance at social mobility. In other words, to be racially visible is to be recognized as a stranger. As Richard Dyer explains, “[w]hites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen. To be seen as white is to have one’s corporeality registered, yet true whiteness resides in the non-corporeal” (45). In this sense, in order to avoid racial estrangement, the ethnic female subject must physically whitewash or erase her skin.

The effects that Yeong Mae’s Whitening Solution claims to have are all the more ironic in light of the photograph on the label. Strikingly, the smiling woman has no eyes (they appear to have been digitally removed from the image), which are one of the defining facial features commonly used to characterize (and often ridicule) Asians as racial strangers. The image suggests that in the process of changing the physical attributes



Figure 11. "Yeong Mae's Whitening Solution." From *Silent Anatomies*, p. 18.

that might mark the woman as non-white, she forfeited the very organs that would allow her to witness the results herself, causing an even stranger appearance. In a sense, the marred image not only presents a picture of an Asian woman with no eyes but no “I” by which to claim her own subjecthood because she is both unidentifiable and without visual agency. The products are only ever meant for the “you,” the stranger, not the speaking “I” implied in the text. Furthermore, as Ahmed argues, “[t]he over-representation of strange bodies as grotesque already positions the bodies of those that are not yet subjects, as out of place precisely in their refusal to be contained by place. The threat of contamination posed by strange bodies is precisely that those bodies already exceed the place in which they come to be encountered as such” (53). In the photograph on Yeong Mae’s Whitening Solution, the Asian body can be seen as out of place in its very attempt to assume whiteness. Importantly, Ong does not construct a simplistic opposition between Western and Eastern ideologies. The label indicates its representation of Chinese values through the inclusion of a Chinese Proverb below the photograph, which reads, “[i]f you have white skin you can cover 1,000 uglinesses” (Ong, *Silent Anatomies* 18). Evidently, Eastern standards of beauty also favor lighter skin tones. Ong’s endnote for this poem informs that this saying was quoted by a Chinese immigrant living in California in an article from the *Los Angeles Times*, which discusses the range of attitudes Asian and Asian American women hold about white skin.¹³³ The article, entitled “Beauty and the

¹³³ Interestingly, the article notes that immigrant women identified the desire for white skin as an Asian tradition, but younger, American-born Asians attributed it to white American culture and its racism against darker skin tones (Chong). While Anna Park, an associate editor at an Asian American women’s magazine, locates attitudes about white skin as stemming from East Asian culture (she mentions depictions of pale faces in Japanese and Korean paintings), Glen Mimura, a professor of Asian American studies, connects them to colonial history: “Dark skin gets associated with manual labor, agrarian communities, being less cosmopolitan” (qtd. in Chong).

Bleach,” addresses the growing popularity of skin lightening products—a lucrative industry in the US that makes \$10 million in sales yearly—despite their known harmful effects; for example, some women in Hong Kong were hospitalized due to mercury poisoning (Chong). Notably, people’s opinions about lighter skin are not merely a matter of aesthetics but more so have to do with how skin tone is culturally perceived as an indicator of social stature. Especially for women, white skin signifies high class, polite disposition, and femininity in that it “show[s] that [women] don’t have to toil outdoors” (Chong). However, as Ong’s object poem demonstrates, the correlation between elevated social standing and the appearance of whiteness is an ideological construct rather than a guaranteed “solution,” as the title claims.

Ong’s manipulation of the photograph on the label of the product mimics the way in which Asian women are inevitably deemed strange whether their ethnic markers are visible or not. In this sense, the product simultaneously appeals to beauty standards that elevate whiteness while mocking users’ desire to racially assimilate through the visual objectification of the stranger who attempts to erase her strangeness. The image almost serves as an intimidation tactic that warns future users that no amount of application of the product can conceal their strangeness—that it is impossible for the ethnic body to assume a position of racelessness, which is strictly reserved for white bodies. As such, the photograph is both an image of the strangeness that Asian women desire to relinquish as well as an image of how racist ideology will always view them as strangers. Yet, at the same time, the object poem also mimics this ideology by presenting a concrete example of the projection of the perpetual foreigner stereotype on the ethnic female body. Unlike in the previous object poems, the photograph on the label does not portray the consumer

for whom the product has been effective but rather the consumer for whom the product will never grant embodiment—whether physical or ontological—as a subject. As such, “Yeong Mae’s Whitening Solution” ultimately warns against the danger of subscribing to physical and ideological whitewashing by exposing the hypocrisy of a racist product that verbally purports to erase strangeness at the same time that it visually demonstrates that such strangeness is impossible to erase. In his reading of racial objects in *Dictee*, Joseph Jonghyun Jeon argues that Cha binds the “foreignness of avant-garde object to the trope of the Asian as perpetual foreigner while also interrogating the fictions of whiteness (blankness, immateriality) against which race becomes understood as objecthood” (4). Doing so makes ideology visible, ultimately disrupting what he describes as “fictions of blankness” to “allow us to understand social interactions as undetermined individual encounters (rather than as part of an unseen ideological machinery), and to present in physical form the abstract terms through which bodies have been historically understood in racial terms” (19). This is indeed evident in Ong’s construction of “Yeong Mae’s Whitening Solution” as well. By mimicking the objectification of the ethnic female body, Ong establishes a distinction between images *of* stereotypes as seen through the white gaze and *observations* of those stereotypical images as seen through what Bhabha describes as “the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double” (123).¹³⁴ In so doing, the “ideological machinery” of whiteness becomes visible, deplorable, and *dis*recognizable.

Ong is also acutely aware that whiteness does not only apply to skin tone but to speech as well. Her mimicry of racist ideology is especially exaggerated in “Yeong Mae’s Oral Whitening Rinse” (Figure 12). Unlike the representation of a cosmetic

¹³⁴ In the context of Bhabha’s discussion, “it” refers to the “civilizing mission” of colonialism (123)..



Figure 12. "Yeong Mae's Oral Whitening Rinse." From *Silent Anatomies*, p. 20.

product, which maintains a certain degree of realism, this object poem introduces an item that even more blatantly transgresses the audience's suspension of disbelief in that the product boasts its content's ability to rid the user of accented speech quickly and easily. If there was any doubt about the hyperbole of these products, the label states in bold "LOSE YOUR ACCENT IN 30 DAYS—GUARANTEED" to declare the bottle's hailing gesture of interpellation (20). It claims that the "[a]ntiseptic rinse kills 99% of all loose terms and fights slang build-up" while the "gentle Lingo-ease formula relaxes the mother tongue, naturalizing muscles with significant syllable stress" (20). This racist rhetoric functions under the assumption that non-English languages and nonstandard, accented forms of English are obviously strange and undesirable, placing them in opposition to white speech. Equating accented speech to the gendered term "mother tongue" implies that, by contrast, white speech is the "father tongue" that must override one's native language. Like the whitening solution product, Yeong Mae's Oral Whitening Rinse simultaneously promotes and mocks the audience's desire for it.

The photograph above the text also adds to the derision. The image features a woman with a sticker that reads "100% ENGLISH FREE" placed deliberately over her mouth. The invocation of this condescending stereotype in combination with the guarantee to eliminate the user's supposedly unrefined pronunciation demonstrates the product's recognition of its consumer as a stranger.¹³⁵ Mitchell argues that stereotypes "occup[y] precisely this middle ground between fantasy and technical reality, a more

¹³⁵ Although a thorough reading of "The Onset" is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that this sequence also includes object poems that use medicine bottles; however, the labels on these pieces feature entries from a Chinese-English dictionary. These object poems alternate with pages that only include footnotes, one of which mentions, "Father taught that to succeed in a new place, one must memorize the dictionary. Unable to locate him in the A's, I would go outside to taste the snow" (55). While

complexly intimate zone in which the image is, as it were, painted or laminated directly onto the body of a living being, and inscribed into the perceptual apparatus of a beholder” (*WDPW* 295).¹³⁶ Ong’s use of the guarantee sticker visually exemplifies the way in which a stereotype of non-native English speakers can be projected onto an actual body. Her use of a found family photo here also shows how easily real bodies can be misappropriated for stereotypical images. Like the photograph in Yeong Mae’s *Whitening Solution*, this image is also an extension of the trope of Asians as perpetual foreigners. The picture simultaneously erases the organ that most directly relates to the function that the product purports to correct and stamps it with the very insult that would trigger the stranger’s desire for such a product in the first place. Furthermore, the label performs a physical silencing by covering the mouth of the ethnic female, withholding from her the opportunity to disprove the efficacy of the product or the legitimacy of the stereotype on which it relies. Such suppression is especially ironic considering the tag’s resemblance to the “scream bubble” motif used in comics. The woman in the photograph does not speak; instead, the advertisement speaks to and for her as well as other strangers like her. The label’s text projects what it knows linguistic strangers want; such desire is contingent upon speakers of non-standard English recognizing themselves as the target audience anticipated by the product. Its backhanded disparagement of speech that diverges from “proper” English insists on the stranger’s need for the product as well.

Ong never reveals which A-word she searched for, the reader might imagine *American* as a possibility, which would imply that Ong’s father is a perpetual foreigner in the US despite learning the English language.

¹³⁶ Mitchell differentiates between pictures and images, explaining that a picture is “a concretely embodied object or assemblage” but an image is “a disembodied motif, a phantom that circulates from one picture to another across media” (*What Do Pictures* 72).

Falling prey to the desire for the product would confirm the ethnic female's interpellation as stranger. However, as an object poem that rejects interpellation, we can see the racist rhetoric and stereotypes on full display.

Ultimately, the perspective that Ong offers through "Yeong Mae's Oral Whitening Rinse" is twofold: while the object depicts a stereotypical image of Asians as linguistic strangers, the poem that comprises the product enacts a disrecognition of the racist and orientalist gaze upon them through mimicry of the stereotype. This demonstrates what Bhabha describes as the "*splitting* of colonial discourse so that two attitudes towards external reality persist; one takes reality into consideration while the other disavows it and replaces it by a product of desire that repeats, rearticulates 'reality' as mimicry" (130, original emphasis). Ong reproduces the racist and orientalist stereotype of Asians as categorically poor speakers of English in order to reveal that the stereotype is baseless—that it has no actual referent in reality. The so-called reality of "English" speakers is merely a representation of racist and orientalist imagination. As Mitchell argues:

The life of the stereotype resides in the death of its model, and the perceptual deadening of those who carry it in their heads as a schematic "search template" for identifying other people. What the stereotype wants, then, is precisely what it lacks—life, animation, vitality. And it obtains that life by deadening its object of representation *and* the subject who uses it as a medium for the classification of other subjects. Both the racist and the object of racism are reduced to static, inert figures by the stereotype. (298, original emphasis)

One way to "kill" the model of the stereotype is to destabilize its power. By creating the object poem as a verbal-visual proxy that epitomizes racial discrimination against nonstandard English speech, Ong exposes the false promise of assimilation and the

danger of interpellation into an ideology that perpetuates it. As the product's label evinces, using the remedy is a lose-lose situation because even with use, Asian women would still be considered strangers. Ong's poem makes visible the ways in which these ideologies construct the ethnic female body as a perpetual stranger in order to undermine the verbal and visual logics by which they do so.

Ong's object poems visualize ideological apparatuses through mimicry to enact critical disavowals of their legitimacy and rejections of interpellation. Taken at face value, the medicines want to be consumed—both physically and ideologically. They promise remedies for the strange skin and speech that the products and their consumers desire to correct and change. However, these object poems not only *present* pictures of ideological desires but also constitute mimetic *representations* of those desires as they play out in scenes of encounter between oppressive ideologies and ethnic female subjects. As such, they provide opportunities to view the process of ideological interpellation from *outside of* those scenes. They simultaneously embody and reject patriarchal and racist desires that seek to silence and erase ethnic female bodies. As Ong describes the purpose of her project, “raising these questions about cultural silences of the body shifts the conversation from ‘fixing’ something perceived as ‘flawed’ into considering *how these perceptions of the body are defined and by whom*” (“Cultural Silence,” my emphasis). The speaker who addresses the beholder in the implied imperative voice in the object poems is the ethnic female subject who parrots the rhetoric of white patriarchy, which hails her as the “you” who needs a cure or treatment for her strange conditions. The medicine bottles encapsulate the cultural preferences for male children and whiteness, attempting to inculcate the stranger with these desires. However, as Ong's object poems,

they ventriloquize the iconography and rhetoric of white patriarchy as it hails Asian women in concrete representations of medicines that deem their sex and ethnicity strange, and therefore needing correction, in order to renounce such ideologies as flawed. As Bhabha asserts, “[m]imicry does not merely destroy narcissistic authority through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire” but also “raises the question of the authorization of colonial representations” (129). Rather than a direct negation or condemnation of misogynistic and racist ideologies, the poems display their concrete apparatuses, offering a critical view of both white patriarchy’s construction of the stranger and its gaze upon the stranger. Therefore, they ultimately represent disrecognitions of patriarchal and racist ideologies that pathologize what they deem to be strange bodies, which allows Ong to destabilize the false iconography that fuel those ideologies.

The Strange Body, In Parts: Digital Collage Poems

In contrast to her object poems, which stage mimetic scenes of the attempted interpellation of ethnic female bodies as strangers through imagetexts that ventriloquize patriarchal and racist ideologies, Ong’s digital collage poems are imagetexts that visualize how Asian and Asian American women confront those ideologies from their own vantage points. As the title of the book suggests, Ong presents a visual study of silence as it can be read and seen on the structural components of the body. However, the digital collage poems demonstrate that they are not silent at all; these imagetexts show and tell the hybrid experiences of Asian American women through hybrid form. As Ong states, these poems “offer a reminder that a body is not just a body—not object, not

specimen—but a walking anthology of stories that are simultaneously inherited, translated, edited, erased, and created moment by moment” (“An Interview”). Many of the digital collages address Asian and Asian American women’s navigation of immigration, multilingualism, filial bonds, and motherhood. For instance, in “Elegy,” Ong arranges text as labels for a diagram of the forearm’s arteries and nerves to illustrate her tribute to a friend, a musician and mother, who passed away from cancer; the “Profunda Linguae” sequence features scanned images of prescription pad notes with recipes for Chinese-Filipino dishes typed onto them and various anatomical images of the tongue;¹³⁷ in “The Attic,” Ong juxtaposes a collage, which combines a photograph of her grandfather’s home in the Philippines with an illustration of the external and middle ear, with a serial poem that addresses her not-yet-born child and the various meanings of the Hokkien word *tiah*.¹³⁸ For Ong, using the digital collage form is a matter of hybridity in terms of both medium *and* identity. She states:

How do we live into our identities beyond binaries, i.e., male/female, white/colored, insider/outsider? What does it take to create a culture of genuine equality and respect?... *We are all essentially hybrids, complicated collages* of the people and places that have played a role in the maturation of our own voices as human beings—media sound bites don’t have time for that complexity. So it is really up to us to keep things complex—to make space for new possibilities in empathy. (“Cultural Silences”, my emphasis)

In this sense, enacting hybrid forms is a means of representing the complex intersections of hybrid identities in order to create opportunities for more nuanced understandings of them. These digital collage poems—in which Ong uses the lyric “I” to tell these

¹³⁷ In the endnote, Ong mentions that the recipes were typed onto the prescription pads by her mother as “an act of homesickness after her arrival to the United States during the mid-1970’s” (85n69).

¹³⁸ Ong translates the phrase “*lai tiah*” as “it is me,” the word “*tiah*” as “to listen” and “ache” (81), as well as the phrase “*Gua tzin tiah di*” as “I truly love you” (83n81).

narratives—portray the ethnic female body’s subjectivity apart from the racist and patriarchal gaze. As such, they provide important visualizations of the ways in which Asian and Asian American women can and do speak by claiming subjectivity beyond hegemonic iconography. In order to demonstrate the contrast between viewing the ethnic female body as an othered object and recognizing Asian and Asian American women as subjects, this section examines digital collages that depict the visual and verbal processes by which the ethnic female body disrecognizes oppressive ideologies through heteroglossia.

Just as anatomy is concerned with the internal structure of the body, Ong’s digital collages enact scenes of disrecognition to map out the ways in which Asian and Asian American women internalize and respond to impositions of silence. The integration of anatomy illustrations, family photographs, and poetic text through digital collage provides a means by which to examine the ways that silence bears upon Asian and Asian American women’s bodies. Like the object poems, Ong’s digital collage poems stage scenes of misrecognition of the ethnic female body as stranger in order to ultimately reveal their disrecognition of interpellation. However, while the object poems personify the voice of patriarchal and racist ideologies by projecting them from medicine bottles, her digital collages enact heteroglossia by visualizing the intermixing of multiple voices in order illustrate the tension between Asian women’s voices and the various discourses that compete with them. This, what Bakhtin calls “double-voiced discourse” (324), further demonstrates the ways in which the ethnic female body is deemed as a stranger even within her own culture and family.

Heteroglossia is a literary strategy that holds multiple languages and meanings in tension. Those languages represent “the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions” within the text (291). According to Bakhtin, heteroglossia in the comic novel has two primary features: “a multiplicity of ‘language’ and verbal-ideological belief systems” as well as their use by the author to expose them “as something false, hypocritical, greedy, limited, narrowly rationalistic, inadequate to reality” (311-312). The representation of multiple ideologies through multiple discourses ultimately reveals the dissonance between them. Bakhtin’s claim that the novel genre in particular accommodates such diversity of languages and voices while discounting poetic discourse as incapable of the same stems from his assumption that the language of the poet is unitary and unmediated.¹³⁹ However, his description of the novel as “a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice” (261) and his definition of the genre “as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized” (262) is certainly applicable to contemporary hybrid poetry as well. As demonstrated in my analyses of Hong, Perez, and Choi’s works in earlier chapters, multiple voices weave through their poetry in order to critique colonial hegemony. Ong’s poetry also verbally and visually integrates multiple voices to critique dominant ideologies. Not unlike mimicry, heteroglossia is “parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time” (Bakhtin 273).

¹³⁹ Bakhtin argues that “[t]he poet must assume a complete single-personed hegemony over his own language, he must assume equal responsibility for each one of its aspects and subordinate them to his own, and only his own, intentions. Each word must express the poet’s meaning directly and without mediation; there must be no distance between the poet and his word. The meaning must emerge from language as a single intentional whole: none of its stratification, its speech diversity, to say nothing of its language diversity, may be reflected in any fundamental way in his poetic work” (297). This evidently does not account for poetries like Ong’s that also include discourses that do not reflect those of the poet herself.

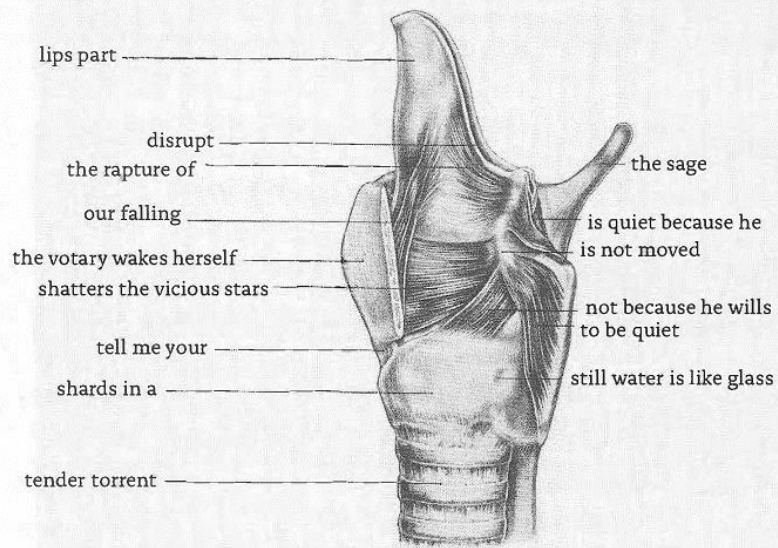
The way in which heteroglossia enacts critique is through an “artistic system” (299) by which the degrees of distance and proximity between the author and the various languages in the text are established. As Bakhtin explains:

[T]he stratification of language—generic, professional, social in the narrow sense, that of particular worlds views, particular tendencies, particular individuals, the social speech diversity and language-diversity (dialects) of language—upon entering the novel establishes its own special order within it, and becomes a unique artistic system, which orchestrates the intentional theme of the author. (299)

In order to demonstrate the stratification of languages in Ong’s digital collages, which ultimately enacts disrecognitions of the ethnic female body as stranger, I will first examine a poem that visualizes the tension between gendered notions of silence.

In “The Glass Larynx,” Ong visualizes the titular organ grappling with two different discourses on silence. The layout of the page, which appears to be a typical anatomy diagram, formats lines of poetry as labels for the various parts of the larynx (Figure 13). The third-person text describes the speech of a female figure, a votary, and the reticence of a male figure, a sage. However, despite presenting textual imagery that depicts the votary’s speech, the poem does not actually mention the words she speaks. Although the first line of text states that the votary’s “lips part,” the remaining lines give no indication that any words were spoken (Ong, *Silent Anatomies* 1). As such, the poem essentially portrays both figures’ silence, offering an ironic comparison between the bodily apparatus by which speech is made possible and its negated function. In this sense, the digital collage visualizes what Braidotti describes as the biomedical gaze of “organs without bodies” wherein “the living body becomes, in the process of clinical anatomy, a

THE GLASS LARYNX.



Right side is from "Action and Non-Action" by Chuang Tzu

MEDICA V. CHUANG TZU

Figure 13. "The Glass Larynx." From *Silent Anatomies*, p. 1.

living text, that is to say, material to be read and interpreted by a medical gaze that can decode its diseases and its functions. Anatomy results in a representation of the body as being clear and distinct—*visible* and therefore intelligible” (194, original emphasis). Ong’s poem portrays the larynx as an observational specimen—not a voice to be heard but a thing to be examined.

In light of the visual and thematic content in “The Glass Larynx,” its allusion to Cha’s juxtaposition of diagrams of the larynx and fragmented lines of verse in *Dictee* is unmistakable. Ong herself has stated that Cha’s book was the catalyst for her work as a visual poet (“tpq5”).¹⁴⁰ At the end of the “Urania Astronomy” section, which contains dictation exercises that feature mirrored pages of French on the left-hand page and English translations on the right, Cha includes a full page that includes four different diagrams, each showing another angle of the larynx and lungs. The lines of poetry on the opposite facing page describe a speaker’s stifled attempts at speech:

Swallows. Inhales. Stutter. Starts. Stops before
starts.
About to. Then stops. Exhale
swallowed to a sudden arrest. (Cha 75)

The speaker’s staccato descriptions denote repeated actions that are necessary for speaking, yet they are all devoid of speech itself. However, rather than suggesting that these instances of silence are failed attempts at speech, Cha demonstrates that these descriptions of the silent actions taken by the body are themselves evidence of written

¹⁴⁰ Ong states in an essay that delineates the various works that influenced her own, “*Dictee* was the book that started me on my path as a visual poet, though at the time I didn’t know that’s what I was trying to do other than feeling like a scattered and frustrated visual artist. The freedom with which she moves between languages and across media, weaving fractured narratives in and out of multiple voices and times, enraptured me in a way that I wanted to be able to do for others” (“tpq5”).

enunciation despite her “[c]racked tongue. Broken tongue” that can only offer “[s]emblance of speech” (75).¹⁴¹ Furthermore, on the page before the diagrams, the text ominously states, “No organ. Anymore” then concludes, “void to the left to the right./ Void the word./ Void the silence” (73). This exemplifies a shift from using the word *void* as a noun that describes absence to a verb that indicates active negation. In this sense, the written words on the page that describe the speaker’s lack of speech negate her perceived silence to show that “[w]here proper pauses were expected./ But no more” (75). This reorients the reader’s perception of vocalized speech as the opposite of silence in that Cha asserts textual utterance as a means of visualizing language where it was previously thought to be absent. In Lisa Lowe’s reading of the dictation exercises in *Dictée* through the lens of interpellation, she argues that, for Cha, “what we call the ‘subject’ takes place in those articulated spaces of continuing contradiction between the ideological imperative to imagine equivalence [between translations] and the material disruption of that equivalence, *always in the process of both speaking and speaking against ideologies of imagined identification*” (150, my emphasis).¹⁴² As I will demonstrate, Ong’s digital collage also holds this twofold function of speaking and speaking against patriarchal ideology by visualizing it as heteroglossia.

Ong emphasizes the role of written words in subverting silence in “The Glass Larynx,” which presents a visualization of the gendered meanings of silence. Whereas the

¹⁴¹ For other readings of Cha’s use of the larynx diagrams, see also: Joo, Hee-Jung S. and Christina Lux. “Dismantling Bellicose Identities: Strategic Language Games in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *DICTÉE*.” *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2012, p. 8; Cho, Jennifer. “Mel-han-cholia as Political Practice in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictée*.” *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2011, p. 54; Park, Josephine N.H. “Modern Warfare: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Myung Mi Kim.” *Apparitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Politics*. Oxford UP, 2008, p. 141.

¹⁴² Lowe is referring to the fact that the page of diagrams replaces what would have been the French version of the English text opposite to them within the pattern established in the section.

apothecary poems drew upon strict binaries (of the differences between male and female as well as white and non-white bodies) to figure the ethnic female as stranger, this collage poem demonstrates that even a common biological organ shared by both sexes and races can also be used to differentiate and other her. That the lines to the left of the larynx depict a female votary while the lines on the right side depict a male sage establishes a hierarchical relationship between teacher and devotee. There is a palpable difference in their diction as well. The text on the left uses verbs with violent connotations such as “disrupt/ the rapture// of our falling” and “shatters the vicious stars” to describe the consequences of her “lips part[ing]” (Ong, *Silent Anatomies* 1). It also presents oxymoronic imagery such as “shards in a// tender torrent” (1). In one sense, these descriptions imply that the votary’s speech is destructive and dangerous; in another sense, they suggest that the absence of an utterance does not equate to silence. Although the poem does not provide evidence of the words spoken by the votary, its synesthetic descriptions demonstrate her attempt to be heard by other means—through what Cha describes as “[s]emblance of noise” (75). In contrast, the text on the right uses calm and peaceful diction to describe the sage’s physical and metaphysical posture. It describes the sage as “quiet” and “not moved,” but clarifies that such states of being are not willed by him, implying that he achieves them through non-action (Ong, *Silent Anatomies* 1). But rather than conceiving of the sage’s silence as a flaw or an indication of weakness, the poem portrays it as a demonstration of his unwavering spirit. Linking the imagery of the simile, “still water is like glass,” to the sage implies that he embodies such wisdom that no one dare shake his tranquility (1). When read against the turbulent descriptions of the votary, his poise seems admirable. The repeated use of the “to be” verb *is* also

underscores the givenness of the sage's presence and subjecthood; he does not even need to act in order to be recognized as an embodied subject. Through these contrasting representations of silence, Ong visualizes the disparate ways in which silence registers for male and female bodies.

The poem's construction also invites different approaches to reading the textual matter. On the one hand, the horizontal lines that indicate the corresponding location of each line of text on the image of the larynx suggests the interwovenness of the words and invites the reader to follow them chronologically from top to bottom. By this approach, the larynx reads as a conflicted orator juggling two different discourses that construct meanings of female and male silence. That they both exist within the organ suggests that it has internalized them in such a way that they can no longer be distinguished from each other; in this sense, the body to which it belongs is one that has already been interpellated by the patriarchal ideology that deems women's silence and noise as violent or dangerous and men's silence as wisdom. In contrast, if we read the spatial placement of text on either side of the image of the larynx as staging an encounter between the two opposing discourses, they function as separate ideological monologues being recited within a single voice box—an anatomical visualization of heteroglossia. Importantly, while a heteroglossia includes multiple languages, they are not necessarily differentiated as such from the author's speech within a text; rather, they inconspicuously appear within it as if they were part of the author's own language. As Bakhtin describes this integrated speech of another:

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is *another's speech in another's language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes

a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author. In such a discourse there are two voices, two meanings, and two expressions. All the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they—as it were—know about each other (just as two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other); it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other. (Bakhtin 324, original emphasis)

In this sense, the text merely appears to be absent of the author's own language when in fact the author is aware of the presence of another voice and uses it to advance her own intent. "The Glass Larynx" exemplifies a hybrid use of opposing discourses that reveals an ideological double standard by which women's silence and speech are figured as erratic and strange while men's silence is read as composed and wise. Presenting descriptions of both the votary and sage through a third person speaker in her digital collage poem allows Ong to visualize the friction between these implications in order to reveal and critique the double standard. Furthermore, the designation of the larynx as one composed of glass draws a connection to the glass ceiling metaphor as well as the glass-like still water that depicts men's wisdom; as such, the poem implies that the invisible barriers faced by the ethnic female body must be shattered.

The mediated representation of this process further reveals the disparity of the gender stratification that figures male silence as wisdom while figuring both female speech and silence as strange. Notably, the poem features several frames: the white space of the page, a light shade of gray within its perimeter, and slightly darker shade in the innermost area within which the diagram appears.¹⁴³ These indicate that the poem

¹⁴³ All of the imagetexts in *Silent Anatomies* are in black and white, but in an earlier publication of this piece in *Hyperallergic*, "The Glass Larynx" features a color version in which the surface of the collage is tan and beige. See: <https://hyperallergic.com/213179/two-poems-by-monica-ong/>.

comprises palimpsestic layers of different documents that combine several visual and verbal contexts, one of which is ancient Chinese philosophy. The caption just below the diagram informs the viewer that the text on the right comes from another poem, “Action and Non-Action” by Chuang Tzu, a Chinese philosopher from 300 B.C. The poem begins by firmly establishing that “[t]he non-action of the wise man is not inaction” (Chuang, line 1). The lines that follow the ones that Ong has sampled in her digital collage use glass imagery as a metaphor for the transparency of man’s spirit—its “[e]mptiness, stillness, tranquillity[sic], tastelessness/ Silence, non-action” (lines 14-15). However, in Chuang’s poem, these qualities are not characterized as lack, but serve as evidence of the sage’s wisdom. The speaker states, “[f]rom [wise men’s] stillness comes their non-action, which is also action/ And is, therefore, their attainment” (lines 23-24). According to this logic, silence and stillness do not signify passivity; rather, they reflect the sage’s active achievement of “perfect Tao” (line 16). Ong’s use of this poem within her own digital collage allows her to recontextualize the words for her own ends. Juxtaposing descriptions of the sage and votary’s silence evinces the gendered double standard that delegitimizes Asian women’s silence and noise.

Ong also demonstrates the refracted presentation of discourse by visualizing the layers of mediated documentation in the digital collage. The final caption at the bottom of the page (which appears within the lighter gray edge) states, “MEDICA V. CHUANG TZU,” likening the conflict between the two figures to that of a court case.¹⁴⁴ This not

¹⁴⁴ The name Medica also appears in the title of a later poem, “Medica Visits the Witch Doctor,” in which the titular figure seeks out an unconventional physician to heal various bodily afflictions. This serial poem is paired with an image of a Chinese acupuncture chart in which the numbers that appear on various areas of the diagram of the body correspond to the lines of prose in the poem. This also bears parallels to Cha’s inclusion of a similar image at the beginning of the “Urania Astronomy” section in *Dictee*.

only suggests a connection between the objective language of medicine and law, but also positions the votary as the plaintiff and the sage as the defendant. This initiation of the dispute exemplifies the agential position from which Medica (which is the Spanish word for female doctor) presents her grievance against the sage.¹⁴⁵ As readers learn in a subsequent poem, “Paper Son: On the Origin of Ong,” Chuang is also the Mandarin version of Ong’s family name, which was changed when her paternal grandfather fled to the Philippines with “purchase[d] papers bearing the name of [a deceased person]” (4). When considered in relation to “The Glass Larynx,” this suggests that Medica and Chuang Tzu are proxy figures for the female and male members of her family. Staging a conflict between them with the larynx as the centerpiece allows Ong to illustrate a scene in which ethnic women’s speech and silence can visually challenge patriarchal ideology. Rather than Medica’s recognition as a subject to its law, the poem ultimately performs a *dis*recognition of its stifling double standard. Bakhtin explains that in a heteroglossic text, the intentions of the writer “are refracted, and refracted at different angles, depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien, already embodied and already objectivized” (300). Ong’s invocation of Chuang and her layered framing of her digital collage as documentation for a litigation establishes its function as concrete evidence of the ethnic female subject’s rejection of interpellation into a sexist ideology that discounts ethnic female presence, whether in terms of vocality or reticence. As Tufte explains concerning analytical design, it is “a content-driven craft, to be evaluated by its success in assisting thinking about the

¹⁴⁵ Spanish had been the official language of the Philippines (where Ong’s parents were raised) under Spanish colonization for over three centuries until 1987, when it was replaced with English and Tagalog (Rappa 64).

substance” (136). Beyond merely juxtaposing image and text on the page, Ong integrates them in such a way that makes them appear cohesive in order to signify the establishment of Asian and Asian American women’s subjectivity from within the very site of interpellation through disrecognition of their subjection. This digital collage is referential of another pictorial-discursive reality that affirms and envisions the legitimacy of ethnic female presence beyond what can be audibly spoken. As such, while an earlier poem inquires, “[b]ut what about *her* tongue?” the response, “[a]bsent, unable to make real/ her body, written in silence” is no longer evidence of lack but the assertion of another means of embodiment (40).

The poems discussed thus far in this chapter pertain to the ideological othering of strangers on the basis of gendered and racialized difference, namely the oppositions between male and female bodies as well as white and non-white bodies. I will now conclude my analysis of *Silent Anatomies* by examining a digital collage that represents an experience of otherness beyond these binary axes in order to address how even among ethnic women within the family, there are different degrees of strangeness between each other. I read “Innervation” as an imagetext that illustrates a complex process of affiliation with and disaffiliation from the ideologies imparted from mother to daughter. In this digital collage, Ong visualizes an encounter between herself and her mother’s values to demonstrate the generational rifts that exist between an immigrant mother who carries particular cultural beliefs and a daughter who finds herself in tension with them. The title refers to the process by which an organ is supplied with nerves. In medical terms, the nerves “aid in the contraction of muscles as well as provide sensory information from the skin” (Niklas et al.). Ong extrapolates upon these bodily functions to suggest her visceral

response to her mother's advice concerning matters of dating, marriage, and family. The page presents a stunning assemblage of family photographs, a diagram of the lower intercostal nerve with images of birds flying across and above the straggly nerve veins (which also look like tree branches), as well as a serialized stanza of poetry with each line correlating to a particular numbered part of the diagram (Figure 14).¹⁴⁶ The text at the bottom of the page labels the collage "DIARY OF AN INTERCOASTAL NERVE"—the wordplay indicating the transnational history of Ong's family, who emigrated from China to the Philippines "[a]nterior to the outbreak of war" (35, my emphasis). Within the stanza of text, Ong weaves in italicized phrases that quote her mother's advice.

Unlike the heteroglossia visualized in "The Glass Larynx," the discourses in "Innervation" are not as blatantly polarized, though they are typographically differentiated. The way Ong maps how her "[m]other's words nest" and "weigh on these muscular branches" of her nerves is less resolute and more equivocal (35). That she begins the stanza by locating her mother's words "[d]eep in the interior division" implies that although Ong has internalized them, they are not necessarily unified with her own (35). For example, the stanza includes statements by her mother concerning romantic relationships, such as "[o]ne eye open, one eye closed" (35, original emphasis), which the endnote informs is her secret to a long marriage (83n35). This motto not only implies that wives must be vigilant but that they must also know when to overlook certain problems in order to maintain their marriages. That Ong follows these words with "(Because I am raw,/ All red inside.) Shame as communicans" implies that rather than communicating

¹⁴⁶ Ong uses a color version of the digital collage (excluding the text) as the cover image of *Silent Anatomies*.

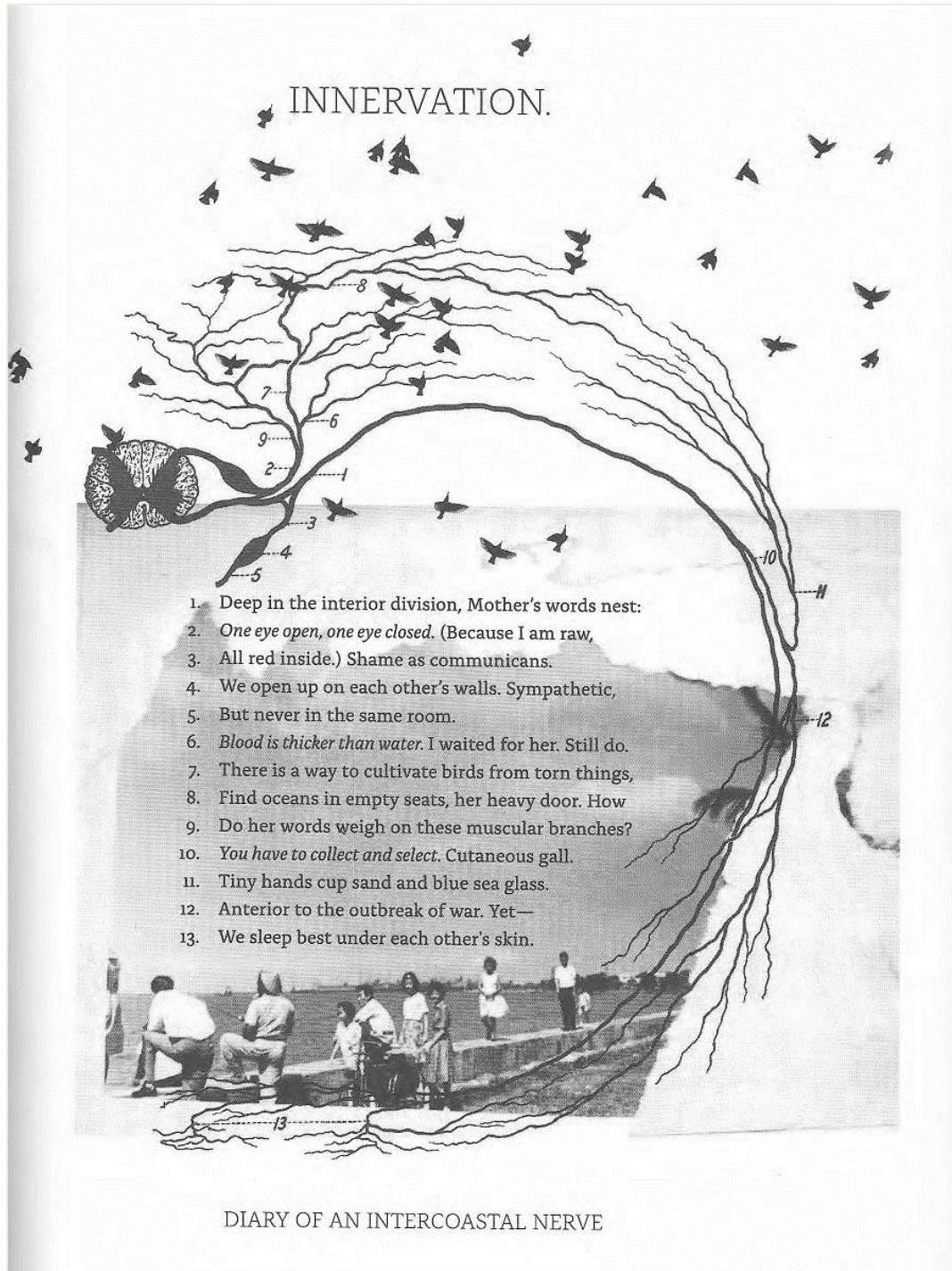


Figure 14. "Innervation." From *Silent Anatomies*, p. 35.

their difficulties with each other, she and her mother merely share a common sense of shame about them (35). Additionally, Ong states that she and her mother “open up on each other’s walls. Sympathetic,/ But never in the same room” to suggest that while they may share a certain degree of intimacy, it is not from within the same physical space, which indicates the figurative and literal walls between them. These lines demonstrate the way in which othering encounters do not only occur between diametrically opposed bodies but also among those who, as Ong’s object poems make palpable, are already considered strangers in the family as well. As Ahmed states, “there is always an encounter with strangeness at stake, *even within the home*: the home does not secure identity by expelling strangers, but requires those strangers to establish relations of proximity and distance within the home” (88, my emphasis). This poem shows how Ong must negotiate her otherness even in relation to her mother.

Yet, while Ong implies disapproval of her mother’s maxim in the early lines of “Innervation,” in later moments, she seems to be somewhat in agreement with them as well. For example, she echoes the aphorism “[b]lood is thicker than water” (*Silent Anatomies* 35), which is her mother’s warning to “stay close to family” (83n35). Notably, this statement appears again elsewhere, in “The Onset,” when Ong describes her mother preparing to visit Ama (Ong’s grandmother) in the Philippines.¹⁴⁷ As such, the saying bears a sense of filial duty and care. That Ong follows the statement in “Innervation” with “I waited for her. Still do” suggests that her mother’s words have indeed influenced her decision-making (35). Given Ong’s ambivalence concerning her mother’s words, the

¹⁴⁷ The phrase appears within the first footnote in “The Onset”: “Every year Mother predicts that Ama is going to die./ *Blood is thicker than water*, she says, clicking her suitcase shut” (46).

heteroglossia in this poem signals a more complex tension between Ong and her mother's discourses rather than total opposition. Rather than a scene of mis- or disrecognition that definitively establishes Ong's positioning in response to ideological interpellation, as seen in the other poems discussed in this chapter, this digital collage enacts what might more appropriately be called a scene of "inter-recognition":¹⁴⁸ neither a total rejection nor acceptance of interpellation but a constant grappling with the ideology of another—in this case, another stranger. In this sense, Ong's discourse is not reconciled with her mother's; in this poem, both are held in tension. This illustrates the hybridity of Asian American women's experience as one of profound ambivalence in that it does not only entail categorical alignment with either Western or Eastern ideologies but also navigating otherness even among other Asian American women. Indeed, while both Ong and her mother might fit into the general ethnic category as "Asian American," this classification does not adequately account for the heterogeneity of their hybrid identities and the discourses that inform them.

Ong's construction of this digital collage further illuminates the process of reckoning with her mother's ideological world and her own. In addition to the ambiguous use of heteroglossia, another feature that sets "Innervation" apart from nearly all other imagetexts in *Silent Anatomies* is that it emphasizes the patchwork quality of the poem. The pictorial elements are not integrated to appear like a cohesive, unified product (like

¹⁴⁸ Joana Sousa Ribiero, in her study of legal categories for migrants defines inter-recognition as "a process of inter-subjective intra-acting that addresses a mutual understanding of the alterity of the human being, developed along time, that is, considering the past and current experiences as long as future aspirations" (54). Though her use of the term is not in direct connection with Althusser's theory of interpellation, it does deal with the concept of recognition as it relates to ideology and unequal power relations, which are central concerns of this chapter.

the labels of the object poems or “The Glass Larynx”). For instance, the diagram exceeds the borders of the photograph and surrounding the photograph are scraps of torn paper, their ripped edges making the collage effort detectable. These material textures of the page highlight the fact that discrete elements have been amassed for the poem. In a sense, Ong’s mother’s advice that “[y]ou have to collect and select” (35, original emphasis), which refers to choosing a partner in the context of dating (83n35), parallels the poetics of the digital collage itself and *Silent Anatomies* as a whole. This also demonstrates how Ong lends another valence to her mother’s words in order recontextualize it for her own purposes. Bakhtin explains that the function of plot in the novel is to “coordinat[e] and expos[e] languages to each other”:

the novelist plot serves to represent speaking persons and their ideological worlds. What is realized in the novel is *the process of coming to know one’s own language as it is perceived in someone else’s language, coming to know one’s own belief system in someone else’s system*. There takes place within the novel an ideological translation of another’s language, and an overcoming of its otherness—an otherness that is only contingent, external, illusory. (365, my emphasis)

While Ong’s poem does not include a plot per se, we might read the visual construction of the digital collage as a kind of plot device that indicates the structural organization of the text in the piece. On the diagram, which provides a top-down view of the lower intercostal nerve within the body, the set of numbers that correlate to the first nine lines of the stanza are centrally located near the spine while numbers ten through twelve are on the side. Only the last number, thirteen—which correlates to the line “[w]e sleep best under each other’s skin” (35)—appears at the bottom of the diagram where the sternum would be located. Such an arrangement illustrates a paradoxical sense of strain and comfort in Ong and her mother’s relationship; despite ideological conflicts, they hold

each other close to their hearts. As Tufte states, “[m]appings help tell why the image matters” (45). Beyond staggering aesthetics, Ong’s designation of the lines in the stanza according to particular numbered placements on the nerve diagram, which draws an analogous connection between literal parts of the body and their figurative connotations, maps the complexity of her relationship with her mother. Reading the text in conjunction with the visual material illuminates the corporeal and emotional bond between them despite their positions as strangers within the family and their ideological disagreements. This evinces Ong’s coming to know her mother’s belief system without necessarily diminishing it within an ideological hierarchy. In this sense, “Innervation” visualizes what Bhabha describes as “the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5). As postcolonial feminist theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha articulates in *Woman, Native, Other*, “[b]etween knowledge and power, there is room for knowledge-without power” (40). Ong visualizes a scene of inter-recognition—one that does not further stratify differences between Asian American women but envisions a possibility for empathy.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that Ong’s hybrid poetry enacts scenes of encounter that visualize the ethnic female body’s various responses to ideological interpellation in order to provide a complex picture of Asian and Asian American women’s experiences as hybrid subjects. Asking Mitchell’s question about what pictures want of the prescriptive medicine bottles in Ong’s object poems made evident their desire to perpetuate the cycle of othering ethnic female bodies as, what Ahmed calls, strangers. However, analyzing the

object poems through the lens of mimicry revealed the very recognition of ethnic female bodies as strangers to be misrecognitions in that the labels of the medicine bottles relied upon the logic of misogynistic and discriminatory stereotypes. As mimetic representations of patriarchal and racist ideologies, Ong's object poems ultimately demonstrated critical disrecognitions of them, thereby undermining their power to interpellate Asian and Asian American women. Additionally, asking Mitchell's question of Ong's digital collages revealed their desire to present new signifying modes that do not subscribe to conventional gendered notions of silence and speech. Analyzing these visual poems through the lens of heteroglossia revealed Ong's inclusion of competing ideological discourses as a means of critiquing the double standards used to disqualify ethnic female presence as well as a means of navigating ideological difference among Asian American women. While the layered mediation of "The Glass Larynx" demonstrated a refracted disrecognition of patriarchal ideology, the piecemeal construction of the digital collage in "Innervation" demonstrated an analogous visualization of inter-recognition wherein Ong empathetically acknowledges difference without reinscribing a hierarchy of power.

A reading of Ong's visual poems through the lenses of mimicry and heteroglossia not only illustrate the imaginative ways in which hybrid identity can be represented through hybrid strategies that include visual experimentation, but also demonstrates their applicability to the context of immigration and the poetic genre. While Bhabha's concept of mimicry addresses specifically the power and discourse of English colonialism, applying it to Ong's apothecary poems clarifies how the mechanisms of imperialism are also evident in the patriarchal and racist ideologies that figure the female and non-white

body as Other. Additionally, while Bakhtin claims the comic novel as the primary literary genre that enacts heteroglossia through hybrid constructions of multiple languages, *Silent Anatomies* evinces that the language and images of poetry are not limited to unitary or unmediated forms. As such, Ong's intermedial poetry exemplifies an expansive hybridity that utilizes mimicry and heteroglossia in ways that open up the possibilities of these literary strategies' initial conceptions.

As the imagetexts in *Silent Anatomies* show, ideological apparatuses of interpellation can take many different verbal and visual forms. Therefore, as Ahmed argues, "we need to pay attention to the *shifting conditions* in which encounters between others, and between other others, take place" (13, original emphasis). Ong's visual poetry shows that whether through the images presented by concrete objects like medicines and cosmetic products or the values epitomized in discourse, Asian women are continually hailed by racialized and gendered representations that other ethnic female bodies as strangers. Each imagetext is a new site of ideological and iconographical encounter at which the hailed body must navigate mis-, dis-, and inter-recognition. These othering encounters exemplify the shifting conditions that Asian American women as hybrid subjects constantly face. Ong's visual poetry illustrates the many challenges of immigrant and multiethnic subjects, demonstrating not only the heterogeneity of Asian American experiences, as Lowe has emphasized, but also the importance of attending to particular visual-verbal sites of interpellation in order to confront the hegemonic ideologies that perpetuate homogenizing, myopic representations of Asian American women as strangers. As Ahmed has also pointed out, "the definition of the nation as space, body, or house *requires the proximity of 'strangers' within that space*, whether or not that

proximity is deemed threatening (monoculturalism) or is welcomed (multiculturalism)” (100, original emphasis). In order to envision the possibility of acknowledging difference without reinstating exclusionary boundaries, whether ideological or iconological, Ong’s poetry suggests that bodies must be met with empathy rather than hostility. When asked in an interview who poetry (in general and hers specifically) is for today, Ong responded:

It really depends on whom you ask. For some, it’s about self-reflection or expression of feeling. But for others, poetry is a form of survival, a way to process the hostility directed at our bodies, our sense of belonging. People tend to go about their lives in socially segregated circles, which are the very blinders that make it difficult to see things from other peoples’ shoes. Poetry is a gateway to shared empathy, a way to break down the blindness of privilege, and creates a space for all voices to be heard. (“Cultural Silences”)

As the hybrid poetry of Ong, as well as Hong, Perez, and Choi have demonstrated, in order to reach this point of shared empathy, it is necessary to first confront the hegemonic systems that silence and erase the realities of hybrid identities. Hybrid poetry creates new spaces in which these realities can be reanimated.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

As this dissertation has argued, hybridity is both an ontological category of identity as well as one that applies to form and medium. By engaging with multilingual and visual poetry by contemporary Asian American and Pacific Islander writers who navigate the complexities and challenges of globalization, colonialism, geopolitical warfare, and transnational immigration, this study has offered interdisciplinary models for analyzing formal experimentations that push the boundaries of lyric and avant-garde aesthetics. As Cathy Park Hong, Craig Santos Perez, Don Mee Choi, and Monica Ong have demonstrated, the formal hybridity of their poetry is not isolated from the larger socio-historical contexts of their linguistic, postcolonial, and transnational hybridity.

In order to negotiate the particular conditions of exclusion and difference within these contexts, each of the works examined here enact a unique poetics of resistance: against the commodification of multilingualism, against the colonial erasure of indigenous language and culture, against modes of translation that perpetuate empire's versions of history, and against interpellation into racist and patriarchal ideologies. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, one important means by which they enact such a poetics is through polyvocality. The "I"s in these works never pertain to a single subject or speaker. At times, they embody the voices of the migrant, the native, the civilian, and the ethnic Other in order to represent their subjugation and abjection; at other times, they also ventriloquize the rhetoric of oppressive and exploitative systems in order to critique them. Hong's invented creole constitutes a linguistic diversity that carries the traces of

conversational contact necessitated by colonial cosmopolitanism. Perez's incorporation of excerpted text—that of the colonizer as well as the colonized—insists upon the survival of indigenous language and culture. Choi and Ong present satirical projections of dominant modes of representation; whereas Choi mimics the aporias of official history, Ong creates objects that epitomize bigoted ideologies as well as collages that envision subjectivity and embodiment apart from them.

Importantly, within these poets' critiques of hegemonic power structures and their various manifestations, they also leave room for appreciating and taking pleasure in the creativity of their hybrid forms. Even as *Dance Dance Revolution* prompts readers to recognize the dire colonial contexts that necessitate multilingual practices, it also exhibits the sonic pleasures of the unique creole languages that Hong's characters use. Within the same pages that delineate the violent history of colonial settlers in Guam in *from unincorporated territory: [hacha]*, Perez also interweaves tender moments of reflection on the art of constructing a throw net as passed down by his grandfather and insertions of translated and untranslated Chamorro vocabulary. While describing military dictatorships, the use of chemical warfare, and atrocities against civilians in sarcastic tones that edge on playfulness and vehemence, Choi demonstrates in *Hardly War* that imprecise and deliberately erroneous translations—in combination with anachronistic placements of photographs—can yield truer interpretations of historical reality. In contrast to her unsettling representations of prescriptive ideologies of gender, beauty, and health that impinge on the ethnic female body in *Silent Anatomies*, Ong also presents evocative digital collages that illustrate the intimacies and tensions between personal experience and family history. As such, these poets exemplify formal strategies that

employ playfulness, absurdity, and, at times, wry humor as part and parcel of their hybrid poetics of resistance against the hegemonic structures that threaten the livelihood of their hybrid existence.

These formal experimentations are used to confront the poets' inherently hybrid positionings as racial and ethnic others. As diasporic migrants, postcolonial subjects, and children of immigrants, these poets articulate and visualize experiences that confront the enduring conditions that undermine their subjectivity. While the formal choices of their work ultimately exemplify poetic agency, the social, political, and colonial extremities from which their multimodal practices have emerged evince the existing structural mechanisms that repeatedly threaten their native language, indigenous land, cultural heritage, and their own bodies. As such, it is important to recognize hybrid poetic practices as necessary responses to the systems that continue to strip hybrid subjects of agency. For Hong, linguistic plurality is as much a means of survival within a hyper-globalized economy as it is an opportunity for phonic play. In the case of Perez, the incorporation of Chamorro language, culture, and history is an act of decolonization in response to Guam's unincorporated status under US imperialism. Choi's mistranslations and use of her father's photographs critique the US empire's neocolonial occupation of South Korea. The combination of medical ephemera with found family photographs is, for Ong, a means by which to confront ideological othering in both Eastern and Western contexts. As these poets show, hybridity does not simply refer to an in-between space that accommodates difference, but a site of constant struggle and negotiation of difference in the face of these inherited histories of subjugation.

The multilingual and visual strategies examined here demonstrate that celebrations of the innovative potential of hybrid forms must be tempered with a recognition that they are firstly modes of critique. While the growing anti-monolingualistic movement within the field of education, spearheaded by Gregg Roberts, argues that “monolingualism is the illiteracy of the twenty-first century,” this dissertation contends that multilingualism is the inevitable literacy of hybrid conditions. Hong and Perez’s linguistic practices, which elucidate the ways in which multilingualism does not always emerge from agential contexts, suggest that in affirming linguistic hybridity as a legitimate means of expression, one must also be cautious of wielding multilingualism as yet another imperialist tool. Therefore, rather than pinning monolingualism against multilingualism, it is necessary to recognize the systems of power they serve. Additionally, as Choi and Ong have demonstrated, languages and images have the potential to be used for or against hegemony; therefore, it is necessary to attend to the layered mediations of their construction in order to recognize the narratives and ideologies they portray or challenge.

The poetry discussed in this dissertation demonstrates that hybridity remains a central conflict of ethnic American identity and presence in the twenty-first century, a concern that is also palpable in popular culture. Recent years have evidently been replete with conflicting responses to Asian representation and visibility. In 2019, Marvel Studios cast Chinese Canadian actor Simu Liu as the lead role in *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*, its first superhero film featuring an Asian protagonist. Vietnamese American writer Ocean Vuong appeared on *Late Night with Seth Meyers* to discuss his debut novel *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*. In 2020, K-pop boy band BTS became the

first South Korean group to have a single reach #1 on Billboard's Hot 100 chart (Gross). South Korean director Bong Joon Ho's film *Parasite* garnered widespread acclaim, earning the Golden Globe for best foreign language film (*The Farewell* by Chinese American director Lulu Wang was another nominee) as well as the Academy Award for best picture—the first non-English film to ever win in the category (Coyle). In his Golden Globes speech, Bong memorably stated (translated by Sharon Choi), “once you overcome the one-inch barrier of subtitles, you will be introduced to so many more amazing films.” While these accolades and moments of recognition seemed to exemplify more inclusiveness and diversification in the entertainment industry, that one-inch barrier would apparently prove still too tall. In the following year, the Hollywood Foreign Press would also place *Minari*, a film based on Korean American director Lee Isaac Chung's upbringing, in the best foreign-language film category for the Golden Globes because although it is set in Arkansas, less than 50% of its dialogue is in English. This not only raises questions about what exactly qualifies as an “American” film and attests to the resilience of the perpetual foreigner stereotype, but also solidifies the inextricable correlation between English and Americanness. In other words, to *not* speak English—or at least enough of it—is to *not* be American.

This backhanded applause from the arbiters of cinematic standards is only the tamer side of racism's card, dealt by those who view foreignness as undesirable, detestable, or even threatening to *their* country. At the same time that *Parasite* was celebrating one award after another, there was influx of anti-Asian hate crimes in relation to COVID-19 in the US. Numerous news outlets and social media posts reported on the verbal and physical violence faced by Asian Americans. That former President Donald

Trump regularly called it the “China Virus” and “Kung Flu” had already made the xenophobic response to the pandemic unmistakable, but there were manifestations of this attitude that went far beyond words. For example, an Asian woman in New York City’s Chinatown wearing a face mask was assaulted by a man who called her “diseased”; in Texas, three members of a family from Myanmar were stabbed for fear of spreading the virus; an Asian American woman was doused with acid outside of her home in Brooklyn (Gover et al. 659). Such insults and attacks did not necessitate evidence of the individual’s citizenship or health records; they were justified on the basis of designating the Asian body as the metonymic representation of the virus itself. More recently, there has been a surge of unprovoked assaults against elderly Asian Americans. These examples of validation, exclusion, prejudice, and xenophobia that, in their worst forms, lean further into acts of violence evince a persistent ambivalence toward Asians in America. On the one hand, they are deemed admissible for their cultural production of entertainment but, on the other, they are disdained for their perceived embodiment of “yellow peril” (i.e., stealing jobs or spreading contagion). Such attitudes point to a larger question about the place of ethnic minorities in the US and the meaning of diversity within the American racial imagination. The hybrid poetry I have discussed exemplify just one particular strand within ethnic American literary production that offers models for making sense of and challenging the racialized conditions of the US.

Though this dissertation has examined an important sampling of experimental works by Asian American and Pacific Islander poets, it is only a small selection of hybrid poetry emerging in the twenty-first century that offer a more expansive conceptualization of hybridity in the context of ethnic difference. There are many more important works

that also use hybrid forms to represent the heterogeneous experiences of ethnic American hybridity. For example, writing from the context of Puerto Rican diaspora in New York, Edwin Torres' *The All-Union Day of the Shock Worker* (2001), explores the possibilities and challenges of representing Nuyorican identity through the typographic experimentations of Russian Futurism. In the long poem "A Nuyo-Futurists' Manifestiny," for instance, he uses paratactic speech that not only presents an amalgamation of Spanish and English but also dissects, misuses, and manipulates words in each language to emphasize what he calls an "aural extension" of the Nuyorican experience. "Mispronunciation"—a characteristic example of wordplay in the piece and an apt description of the work's poetics—is used to dramatize the complexities of bilingualism. By deconstructing syllables, interweaving Spanish and English, and experimenting with a cacophony of sounds, Torres' "Manifestiny" (a sardonic portmanteau of Manifest Destiny) presents a text exploding with neologisms that assert the singularity of the speaking subject and puts "[a] dent in the – I – of me" (108).

Poet and sound artist LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs also presents a playful work of multilingual poetry in *TwERK* (2013), where she fluidly intermixes languages such as English, Spanish, Japanese, Hindi, Hawaiian, Chamorro, Quechua, Yoruba, and others. At times, Diggs offers translations of these languages, but at others, she leaves the task as the reader's responsibility. *TwERK* is an intertextual work that constantly alludes to other texts, whether they be lyrics to pop songs, news articles, or works of poetry. The use of fragments, samplings, portmanteaus, and onomatopoeias—such as the extravagantly syllabic word-phrase "metromultilingopollonegrocarachasblablahblah" (45)—serve as sounding boards for the abundant references scattered throughout the text. Diggs uses

multiple languages to ultimately critique the processes of appropriation and prompt readers to question the source material of her countless references. Whether it is the use of a racist representation of black people for an anime character or the use of an ethnically specific word to name an American celebrity couple's child, Diggs inundates the text with examples of cultural production that problematically disregard the ethnic histories behind them, challenging readers to trace the contexts from which such language emerged.

Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) is also an important work that confronts the many ways in which Black bodies are read and perceived within the white imagination in the US. The book includes various media, such as photographs, images of African art, as well as different uses of typography. Central to the work is her use of the second person "you" when referring to Black people to portray the ways in which the "I" is treated as subject while the "you" is treated as object. The "you" is not only objectified but essentialized as always "fitting the description" of blackness as criminal or dangerous and therefore always being on the receiving end of microaggressions at best and fatal attacks at all too frequent worst (105). That the subtitle of her book identifies its genre as lyric calls attention to the subversive nature of this designation. Throughout the work, Rankine challenges the given-ness of the lyric "I"—the unquestioned, superior speaking subject—and how those who are permitted to identify themselves as "I" are rarely Black subjects.

These works by Torres, Diggs, and Rankine evince the wealth of hybrid forms activated by poets of diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds to explore their particular hybrid positionings within the US. I see their formal innovations as important examples

of literary production by minority poets that can further expand the implications of hybridity within the larger scope of race and ethnicity in America in ways that this dissertation, with its specific focus on Asian American and Pacific Islander experience, has not been able to address. Extending considerations of hybridity to the contexts of other ethnic minorities through a comparative approach would bring into sharper focus the reality that racism in the US has principally operated on the basis of a black/white hierarchy within which all other ethnic minorities are stratified. Although this dissertation has been limited in its attention to works by Asian American and Pacific Islander poets, its analyses of representations of hybridity hold relevance to literary studies of the Black American experience in US as well. Hong, Perez, Choi, and Ong's strategies for challenging official history, colonial power, oppressive ideologies, and racial othering provide useful models by which to examine the hegemonic structure of US politics that has systemically oppressed Black Americans. In particular, Choi's idiosyncratic use of photography to challenge empire's versions of history and Ong's visualization of the ethnic female body as seen from the gaze of her oppressor make evident that critically examining the ways in which the Other is viewed within the dominant imagination is a crucial component of addressing race relations in the US.

Attention to visuality and visual representation is all the more relevant to our present moment given the rampant killings of Black Americans at the hands of law enforcement in 2020. Though they were certainly not the first instances of such injustice, the civil unrest that erupted all across the US in response to them was largely galvanized by viral videos that were shared through social media. In many cases, words alone have not been enough to challenge the narratives of offenders. Video recordings taken by

witnesses of discrimination and brutality against Black Americans have been instrumental in verifying details and bringing incidents that would have otherwise been obscured from public knowledge to light. On February 23, 2020, in Glynn County, Georgia, Ahmaud Arbery was fatally shot after being pursued by three white men in pickup trucks, but they were not arrested until over two months later, only after a video of the incident (taken by one of the men during the encounter) surfaced and went viral online (Siddiqui). One case in which no videos of the incident were taken was the murder of Breonna Taylor on March 13, 2020 in Louisville, Kentucky by three police officers during a no-knock search. The police report was revealed to be mostly blank, only noting that the incident did not involve forced entry and that the victim did not sustain any injuries, though it was later found that a battering ram was used to break into her apartment and Taylor was shot eight times; none of the officers were charged for murder but placed on administrative reassignment (McNamara). Unfortunately, even the presence of witnesses and recordings have not prevented instances of police brutality against Black people. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was murdered by a white police officer, who knelt on his neck for eight minutes and forty-six seconds during his arrest while Floyd repeated that he could not breathe (Hill et al.).¹⁴⁹ The Minneapolis Police's statement on the incident made no mention of the officer kneeling on Floyd's neck; it was witnesses' videos and surveillance footage that provided evidence of the manner in which

¹⁴⁹ Earlier on the same day, Amy Cooper, a white woman called the police, claiming that an African American man, Christian Cooper (no relation), had threatened and attempted to assault her when he asked her to leash her dog in an area of Central Park where this was required (Miller). He filmed the incident and posted the video to social media, which quickly went viral; she was later charged with filing a false report, but those charges were later dismissed.

he was killed.¹⁵⁰ As Rankine poignantly states in *Citizen*, “because white men can’t/ police their imagination/ black people are dying” (135). These tragedies unequivocally demonstrate that the images that serve as evidence of violence against Black bodies are the tragic afterimages of the racist ideologies that motivate those acts of violence. They bear witness to the fact that despite celebrations of equality, multiculturalism, and diversity in this country, we evidently do not live in a post-racial society and not all bodies are “read” with the same degree of respect or are afforded the same privileges. As I hope my dissertation has demonstrated, by re-articulating and re-visualizing the ways in which Others are represented by hegemonic structures, hybrid poetry also offers critical tools for refining our modes of critique against them.

Written from within this particular moment in time, this dissertation offers a critical lens for examining the hostile conditions of hybrid identity in the US—where difference from the white male heteronormative majority is still read as invisible, wrong, or dangerous, hence warranting thingification—and acknowledges the unfinished and ongoing work of decolonization and anti-racism still left to be done. The fact that Rankine’s *Citizen* and Hong newest book of essays, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*, were featured on several anti-racist reading lists circulating widely on social media—along with books by other prominent writers on racial injustice such as Ibram X. Kendi, Ta-Nehisi Coates, and Angela Davis—in the wake of the recent Black Lives Matter protests not only attests to the influence that poets’ work can and do have in

¹⁵⁰ The statement mentions that Floyd “physically resisted officers. Officers were able to get the suspect into handcuffs and noted he appeared to be suffering medical distress. Officers called for an ambulance. He was transported to Hennepin County Medical Center by ambulance where he died a short time later. At no time were weapons of any type used by anyone involved in this incident” and “No officers were injured in the incident” (Elder).

shaping intellectual engagements with civil rights but also the general public's growing eagerness to turn to the work of poets now more than ever to productively inform efforts toward social justice.

This dissertation contributes to the literary scholarship of Asian American, Pacific Islander, and experimental poetry specifically as well as American studies more broadly with the hope that this monolithic field will become more inclusive of hybrid poetics that reflect the diversity of ethnic American experience. This dissertation also contributes to what appears to be a growing attention to multilingual and visual practices in poetry by writers and artists of other ethnic minorities. Given the instrumentality of scholarly attention in generating engagement with lesser-known works—the surge of scholarship on *Dictee* after the publication of *Writing Self, Writing Nation* being a noteworthy example—it is my hope that this dissertation will also initiate further literary studies of the Asian American and Pacific Islander poets I have examined here. It is also my hope that the proliferation of such scholarship will lead the work of Hong, Perez, Choi, Ong, as well as the many other hybrid works by ethnic American poets that have not been represented here to be included more regularly in course syllabi. It is my hope that the discussions that stem from their inclusion will provide students with useful critical apparatuses that will help them to thoughtfully engage with and respond to social, political, and racial injustices. Yet, along with these hopes, this dissertation acknowledges that the question of poetry's usefulness and value in effecting social change still stands. What is function of poetry beyond the page? How can hybrid poetry in particular help us respond to our present moment? As Choi has stated, if our creative

practices survive under the pressure of the languages and images that deny hybrid subjects presence, “then we made something happen.”

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