

National Narrative, Traumatic Memory and Testimony:
Reading Traces of the Cheju April Third Incident, South Korea, 1948

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I wrote to testify, to stop the dead from dying [...].

Elie Wiesel, All Rivers Run to the Sea

PREFACE

At the end of August 2002, a Typhoon named Rusa, the most powerful typhoon to have hit the Korean peninsula in forty years, struck land, leaving more than two hundred and forty people dead and missing and twenty-five thousand homeless. Coastal roads and railways had been washed away, houses and buildings devastated, as lands collapsed beneath deadly floodwaters and mudslides. The living felt deeply violated and troubled by this uncaring force of nature which interrupted, against their will, the continuity and solidity of life. The searches for the missing and the buried which immediately followed the destruction, however, were soon brought to a stop at a sudden, unexpected and – surely for many – distressing revelation.

In a small town at Masan in Kyōngsang-namdo, in the areas of coal mines and charcoal-burner's huts long abandoned, torrents of rain (was it nature's sheer whim or some other force which simply borrowed it?) broke open the outer skin of the earth to lay bare secret mass graves in which one hundred twenty-five dead bodies were discovered. The subsequent investigation led to the assumption that these bodies belonged to civilian victims mass-slaughtered right before or immediately following the Korean War, executed elsewhere and transported for secret entombment and camouflage to this old mine village's ready-made burial pits. Except for the presumed fact that they might be either members of the National

Guidance Allianceⁱ or political prisoners from nearby Chinju Prison, much still remains to be investigated, including when precisely, by whom, and under what specific political context this mass-murder and secret burial of civilians took place, along with the respective identifications of the victims.ⁱⁱ

In reading this report, I felt, for a moment, caught in a strange time zone where everything remains frozen, petrified, as if in a photographic image in which what is captured is revealed, flash-like, in the image of its own corpse, in the figure of its own afterlife. An odd sense of anxiety – or an epiphanic shudder at best – at an unanticipated realization that all these years I have contained in me, in the body of my world and in my living present, these one hundred twenty-five death’s-heads struck me, made my body shiver, and put the very ideas of my subjectivity, identity and life into question. Even before I realize and commit to respond, or even before I set up myself as a subject, I have begun to carry within me this uncanny remainder

ⁱ The National Guidance Alliance [*Kungmin podo yŏnmaeng*] was a punitive and intensely anti-Communist political organization established by the South Korean government in June 1949. Composed of leftist converts, its ostensible objective was to safeguard and reorient “amendable” leftists in the South, while its true aim was to track down and keep under control possible southern leftists and their political organizations and thereby to sustain and reinforce political base of the newly-established rightist southern regime. The League members were placed on a blacklist and watched closely. As many as 300,000 Koreans *suspected* of being communists were forcibly enrolled. When the Korean War broke out in 1950, an order was issued to all police and security units in the South to execute all League members before retreating. As its result, about 200,000 members, leftist or otherwise, were killed and buried in unmarked mass graves. See Kim Kijin, *Ggŭnnaji anŭn chŏnjaeng: podo yŏnmaeng [Unfinished War: The National Guidance Alliance]*, (Seoul: Yŏksa pip’yŏngsa, 2002); Kim Tongch’un, *Chŏnjaeng kwa sahoe [War and Society]*, (Seoul: Tolbegae, 2000).

ⁱⁱ The detailed report is available in Yun Sŏngghyo, “T’aep’ung ‘Rusa’ 50 nyŏn ūnpye ttuggŏng yŏlda [Typhoon Rusa Unlids 50 Years of Concealment],” *Ohmynews on the Web*, May 28, 2004 <http://www.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?menu=c10100&no=168911&rel_no=1>.

of the past, the remnant of the death of the other, the inviolable and unforgettable other who precedes me and exceeds my bounds. Beneath only a thin layer of dust upon which firmly and self-sufficiently I stand, something entirely other – something I will never fully know or be able to reduce into my interior, into my possession or into my idiom – has already broken in on me, my freedom and sovereignty, and introduced an internal fracture which indefinitely delays the identification of myself to itself. When Typhoon Rusa cracked open the surface of the ground and let the other who had lain underneath waiting to be rescued emerge out of the split to shock the living, perhaps it was from the other that this movement, or interruption, proceeded.

Rusa helped me see with my mind's eyes something I thought I already knew too well, without really grasping its meaning. She allowed me to see, not just metaphorically but literally, the scene of life always already contaminated by death, that of the present disjointed, anachronized by the past, by its deferred and fragmented arrival, and that of the other who is gone but whose death and memory I am left to carry with me. My teachers used to say that the dead are not mute, that they refuse to be forgotten and find ways to reach and to speak to us, the living. For me, in light of Rusa's discovery, this insight has obtained the force of actuality and further shed light on what it means to *live after* death, what it means, in other words, to *sur-vive* (to *sur-vivre*). It is with this ethical insight that I open this work.

Among many people I have known in my life, whose work, teaching, and friendship have helped me throughout the course of my life and this particular work, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to my teachers at New York University – Ulrich C. Baer, Avital Ronell, and Shireen R. K. Patell. The world would remain for me a much simpler and happier place to live in if I had not met them. Not quite unlike a spellbound, condemned listener in Coleridge’s “Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner” who cannot but listen to the traumatic tale he is chosen to hear, I have grown to become a possessed recipient of the stories they pass on, in uniquely compelling and passionate ways. A sadder person I may have become, and there would be no turning back, but I am grateful for their opening up for me the other side of this world and allowing me to hear the silent roar that comes out of it. They taught me, and this teaching has anchored me all along, that the practice of reading is an ethical demand, and that not to read, to remain uninterested and ignorant of another’s agony, would be to deny its existence and thereby choose to be, however unwittingly, on the side of the perpetrator. It is through them too that I learned to read, among others, Jacques Derrida, whom I had a privilege of knowing also as a teacher, and whose generosity, humor and unflagging passion I witnessed. I did not have the courage to say to him in person what his work means to me – something that will have to remain unsaid and regretful – but he, unbeknownst to him, gave me spirit that fills this dissertation. My profound gratitude also goes to Professor

Xudong Zhang and Jacques Lezra at NYU for their generous reading of this text and astute criticism and commentary which added a level of complexity to the project.

This work is dedicated to my parents, Kyujin Chang and Hyejung Kyung, who have taken it upon themselves to keep on reminding me from outside books that no matter what, life is worth living, that no matter what, one must affirm and appreciate living. Without them I would not be able to understand truly the enigmatic meaning of *survival*, and of *writing*, the extreme burden, and desire, of which is inseparable from who we are.

Seojin, my son whom we welcomed into the world two years ago, has been a sheer joy and wonder, a source of so much laughter and happiness. It is he who gave me strength to come back to this work every day during its most fragile final stages. To him and to my husband Heungsu Park, to his loving heart, generosity and unconditional trust in my path, I owe this work, and so much more.

Generous financial support which helped me build this dissertation came from NYU's Henry M. MacCracken Fellowship, the Anais Nin Memorial Fellowship, and the International Fellowship awarded by the American Association of University Women. The McCune-Reischauer system is used to Romanize Korean except for some personal names that are commonly known by personally idiosyncratic spellings. Korean names are written in the text according to the standard usage in Korea, with surnames followed by given names. All translations from Korean are mine unless noted otherwise.

ABSTRACT

The dissertation examines an instance of massive state violence and civilian massacre, the Cheju April Third Incident (South Korea, 1948) – a long-observed chapter in the modern history of Korea which has only just recently become part of its official history. In particular, the study investigates how the occurrence of this political violence is linked to post-liberation Korea’s modern nation-building, how not only the violent event but also the systemic suppression of its memory over fifty years served to engender and maintain national belonging through “othering.” But challenged by the recognition of the limits of representation in the face of trauma, my work also raises larger questions about the meaning of witnessing in the context of an extreme event and its transmission.

Chapter one establishes the ethical basis and theoretical lenses for the entire project. It explores the notion of the “trace,” its testimonial structure, and its relationship to survival and to writing in the works of Jacques Derrida, Maurice Blanchot, and Emmanuel Levinas. Chapter two draws on historical research to unravel the political logic that motivated the Cheju violence and the sustained social silence imposed upon it. The subsequent two chapters address challenges posed by the performance of testimony to the historical and legal appropriations of such a catastrophe. Chapter three reads Kim Tongman’s testimonial film, *Woman in Cotton Rag*, to probe the limits of representational language and trauma. This chapter also

traces the way language can nonetheless be used to address narrative breaches of traumatic history. Chapter four is concerned with deformed and denigrated bodies of sexually assaulted female victims of Cheju as literal sites of covert testimony. Careful study of extraordinary patterns of gendered violence sheds light on the particular role female sexuality was made to play in the making of Korean national identity.

Through close analyses not only of conventional “historically legible” materials, but also of the marginal spaces of historical archives, my dissertation identifies a possibility within language itself to bear witness to catastrophic history of the most excessive dimensions, without either obliterating it yet again under a narrative of necessary nation-building or sensationalizing it.

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INTRODUCTION

Everything about history that, from the very beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face – or in a death's head.

Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*

The task of philosophy no longer consists in neutralizing or domesticating the senseless, in rounding up the savagely unintelligible but in staying with the stupor of unaccountable excess and regressive brutality.

Avital Ronell, *The Test Drive*

This dissertation is an attempt to open up a long-obscured chapter in modern Korean history, to trace a traumatic historical event of the Cheju April Third Incident or 4.3 [*sasam*], which occurred on the island of Cheju in South Korea in 1948 – a large-scale civilian massacre perpetrated by the state which marks the beginning of modern Korea as a sovereign nation-state emancipated from colonial reign, yet was little known, deliberately kept out of national historiography and collective memory for some fifty years. This study intends, firstly, to unravel layers

of political logic that motivated this violence – not just the killings, but their indiscrimination and the unprecedented levels of brutality and sexual sadism with which these killings were carried out and put on display – and the sustained social silence imposed upon it. It asks in this regard, why the killings occurred (why with surplus savagery), why on Cheju, and why what happened had to sink into prolonged oblivion. These questions were prompted by a coincidence that a political transformation of postliberation Korea’s emergence as the modern nation and the originary delineation of the political subject (the delineation of “nationals”) were simultaneously marked by the occurrence of severe mass pogroms, callous state terrorism against innocent civilians, the emergency suspension of the law, and brutal physical tortures, arsons, loots, murders, and rapes and desexualization of women performed with unforeseen strategic and psychological sophistication, that the birth of the modern nation-state, conceived as the bulwark of civil and political rights for those who belong to its defined boundary, was marked out, precisely, by violent segregation, denigration, and suspension of rights and citizenship of a social group chosen *from inside* to become what it is not (what, as will be argued, is made into another race and women) and what it must drive to its own margins and slip into oblivion. Motivated by the speculation that neither such *excess* of violence in government actions completely uncalled-for for the containment of a spontaneous local revolt on a remote – and already politically marginalized – island nor the ways in which such gigantic human and national calamity unmatched both in scale and

savagery by Korea's any previously committed fratricidal atrocity remained forgotten for the subsequent half-century could be accidental, I closely look into the origins, process, and cultural knowledge involved in the specific ways in which this mass violence was patterned. Based on this examination, I contend that the Cheju violence erupted on the need for drawing contours of and keeping out an *other*, against which the nation defines and continues to reassert itself, that the extraordinary obscenity and gruesomeness involved in 4.3 were something necessary and essential for Korea's post-independence nation-building, its first and *foundational* injustice that served to demarcate the inaugural distinction between itself and its constitutive, definitional outside (Cheju, the Red).

But the aim of this dissertation is not only to seek historical accountability and explication for this long-suppressed event and to give it a precise historical placement; it also, and more importantly, intends to engage and probe into a different dimension of inquires into the understanding of *extreme* events (events whose radically unsettling nature marks a break with traditional conceptions of history, and precludes any totalizing or recuperative narrative appropriation): something profoundly "literary" in its maneuver or effect, that which gives way to or seeks to address what cannot be possessed through objective intelligibility, intuition, or proof. It gestures toward experiences that can no longer be determined, not be adequately accounted for by normative, discursive language, and that thus require another modality of knowing: namely, a knowing that consists in the openness to

witnessed truth. In unfolding this dilemma I turn to several key texts that examine the particular relation of language to extreme, catastrophic occurrences. In particular, I take recourse to the perspectives of recent critics who probe the limits of representational language and trauma, or the impact of trauma on our ways of historicizing, and who turn to literature and film to show the ways language can be used to address, or make expressive, “ruptured” experiences.¹ If my motivation in this research stems from the perceived *ethical* need to evoke (to stage, to *em-body*, or to give voice to) another strain of history – namely, an unaccountable and unclassifiable *excess of suffering* endured, without being fully owned, by the traumatized individuals who went through the worst of this crisis, but that the attempts at finding plausible historical explanations, meanings or rationales for such event might unintentionally eclipse or diminish – the dissertation also intends to bring into contact two fields that have not yet been placed in close conjunction: East Asian literary and cultural studies and trauma studies. In this encounter, I seek to respond to the demand issued from the event of 4.3 and to contribute to an understanding of contemporary Korea in light of some recent literary and cultural

¹ See, among others, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Felman, *Writing and Madness: Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Ulrich Baer, *Remnants of Song: Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

theory written in response to other, often similarly destabilizing and challenging histories. Much of this literature is, indeed, devoted to understanding the relation between “unbearable” events and their representations.²

Drowned under layers of political repression and denial, and underneath the inevitable deformations of traumatized victims’ memories, magnified by rupture opened by the inherent ungraspability of pain that lies at the very core where expression, memory and meaning are evacuated, what happened on Cheju continued to defy conceptual intelligibility, rendering no easy access to its traumatic inside. Even those who experienced it most close by, those who were most deeply involved in it, did not take in the fullness of the reality in which they were situated, both at the time of its occurrence and afterward. The memories of 4.3 that surviving victims have secretly and perhaps unwittingly possessed often consist of incommensurable, separate, broken pieces of ineffable images of victimization, with which truth has been substituted. They would remember 4.3 as one terrifying, incomprehensible morning when they woke up to find their family members missing; as burnt-down houses, ravaged villages, and the profound sense of humiliation and self-remorse for having survived the total, inhuman loss; as school playground where they were

² It is generally agreed that the field of trauma and testimonial studies has taken the event of the Holocaust as a paradigmatic reference point (while calling into question the traditional notion of reference). The question whether such trauma theory, generated largely from the Holocaust studies, can be “exported” to other, non-European cultures, histories, and events deserves a separate study, where problems of generalization, comparison, or hierarchization in the study of the “other” (defined as “other” precisely by their resistance to totalizing absorption by any larger conceptual or descriptive structure that allows for such generalization or comparison possible and meaningful) demand cautious scrutiny.

forced to gather to watch someone close to them being slaughtered in mass execution; as piercing cold, hunger, and the fear of being discovered at mountain hideouts; as the coerced labor of dumping away loads of unidentified corpses into the pits; as the sweet potato garden where years later remnants of dead bodies were discovered; or as unfathomable, enduring grief and guilt of not having been able to bury and mourn the dead properly. In these fragmentary, enigmatic, and obstinately private memories of the event, it was not even clear who the real perpetrators were.³ Often, victims accepted the calamity that befell them as “fate.” Some took it as punishment for their “sinfulness” and hid the poisonous truth deep inside them. After the event officially drew to a close in 1954, many survivors chose to leave Cheju forever and have tried their best to hide their association with the condemned island. Here, there is no shared, publicly validated story, no complete totality. The entire picture stubbornly remains out of grip. Even the victims themselves did not understand what they saw; they did not *truly grasp* what they might unwittingly know. Even if they could, terrible things they were forced to do to each other during the incident *and* the need to survive – the desire to *pass* as “normal” citizens, as ones

³ See for relevant sociological researches that concern the splitting of memory or the stratification of knowledge (the incommensurable differences in what different testimonial groups/individuals remember or know about 4.3): Kim Yōngbōm, “Chiptan haksal kwa chiptan kiōk: kŭ yōksahwa rūl wihayō [Collective Violence and Collective Memory: Toward a Historicization,” unpublished paper presented at the international conference on the history of civilian massacre in East Asia on the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the establishment of Cheju 4.3 Institute, Cheju, 1999, available from <http://www.jeju4.3.org> (the official website for Cheju 4.3 Institute); Kwōn Kwisuk, “Cheju 4.3 ūi sahoe jōk kiōk [Social Memory of the Cheju April Third Incident],” *Han’guk sahoehak [Korean Journal of Sociology]* 35, no. 5 (2001): 199-231.

who bore no stain of social stigmatization, no mark of the outcasted (the tattoo of the Red) – in the post-4.3 political climate of terror rarely allowed survivors to break the silence. At stake in this dissertation is this enduring and complexly-layered silence that thickly envelops the event – both the material insufficiency and falsification of historical source materials and of scholarly assessments resulted from deliberate and prolonging political trivialization and self-deceit *and* more fundamental conceptual difficulty of grasping what has secreted itself under the inevitable processes of fragmentation, privatization, and displacement of memory and meaning under the impact of trauma. At issue in this writing is how to contest this silence without simply reducing it to speech: how to represent, to listen to, or to pass on as knowledge the unarticulated depth of a history which has too long been assigned to a place at the periphery of history, politics, and epistemology without relegating its *constitutive* incommensurability.

Although it has extensively drawn and benefited from obtainable (although small in number) historical researches, commission and military reports, and other archived documents, especially from the recent release of the 4.3 National Commission's *Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report* in 2003 which marks a significant turning point in 4.3 scholarship and truth-searching⁴ – the promise made by which, however, seems once again being thwarted by the reignited and no less fierce urge to

⁴ National Assembly 4.3 Special Commission, *Cheju 4.3chinsang chosa pogosŏ [The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report]*, Seoul, 2003.

forgetting in the wake of the emergence of a strongly conservative regime in Korea in 2008⁵ – the primary object of this dissertation (which concerns a knowing of “inappropriable” human realities) focuses, rather, on what could be termed the *limit-zone* of representation, on the very margins of history (as documented, or documentable, knowledge) – on what is epistemologically off limits for historical utterance and explication. In contrast to dominant readings of 4.3, accomplished mostly in the field of history and political science, which treat the event as a “theme” of scholarship,⁶ the focused attention here is drawn to *minoritized* sites of experience or memory – *spatialized* history that stands on the site of, or *stands in for*, real history that is missing, or physical “lieux de mémoire” as used by Pierre Nora⁷:

⁵ In January 2008, the incumbent government’s Presidential Transition Team proposed the abolition of the National Commission on the Cheju April Third Incident – an organization which has played a key role in investigating the event and drafting the first official report on the national level since it launched in 2000 on the basis of the 1999 Special Act for Investigating Truth and Restoring Honor to the Victims of the Cheju April Third Incident. The matter, which forebodes an immature cessation in the long-delayed search for justice, remains unresolved as of the time of this writing. See Pak Mira, “4.3 wanjŏn haegyŏl tomin yŏmwŏn paeshin [Against Popular Demand for the Complete Resolution of 4.3],” *Chemin Daily*, January 23, 2008 <<http://www.jemin.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=193071>> and “4.3 wiwŏnhoe p’yeji – sanjŏkhan 4.3 kwaje ch’ajil [the Abolition of the 4.3 National Commission – A Setback for Stockpile 4.3 Problems],” *Chemin Daily*, January 24, 2008 <<http://www.jemin.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=193156>>.

⁶ See my conclusion for the list of 4.3-related researches.

⁷ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Lex Lieux de mémoire*,” trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26, special issue, *Memory and Counter-Memory* (Spring 1989): 7-25, reprinted from Nora, “Entre mémoire et histoire,” *Lex Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 1: *La République* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984). The sites of memory in Nora’s sense, and also in the sense used here, implicate that the existence of these sites, where history remains spatialized, is already a sign of interruption by (the intention of) history: they always already bear the trait of its resistance to the official grain. As Nora writes: “[i]f history did not besiege memory, deforming and transforming it, penetrating and petrifying it, there would be no *lieux de mémoire*. Indeed, it is the very push and pull that produces *lieux de mémoire* – moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then

palpable, unremitting, yet hardly intelligible traces of traumatic intensity that are also sites of history's disquiet (where non-discursive or non-conceptual modes of language break open and release a truth of trauma, disturbing, and surreptitiously altering, the landscape of history). But instead of emplotting them in a coherent narrative or turning them into public sites of commemoration, I suggest reading these traces as performing in a fundamentally *literary* (that is, not exclusively referential) way the discrepancy or the resistance to assimilation that signals a dimension of experience that remains unresolved or lost from view within any existing frame of reference. These traces, I argue, emerge as loci that allow a disavowed, illegitimate past to emerge, as such, against the dominant flow of history: they not only explode the strictures of prevailing nationalist and anti-communist framework for remembering which has served to sustain the national collective identity of South Korea for the last several decades; but they also perforate the shroud of forgetfulness and indifference under which the suffering of the Cheju victims remains buried.

The importance of reading traces of memory (which are at once the physical, literal indexes of the limits of reading and understanding, and where referential, communicative language stutters, faltering on its own ineptness and failures) in understanding the event of 4.3 – namely their *testimonial* potential, a potential to

returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded" (p. 12).

evoke a story of what resists facile narrative substitution, and to point to a meaning that cannot be simply articulated or understood – was not fully evident to me in the earlier stage of research, where 4.3 was approached as a subject of meticulous investigation and all available “source materials” were integrated into a means to render rational intelligibility. But even from the very beginning, perhaps without my clearly realizing it, my writing, and coherent thinking, were continually challenged, and failed, stumbling, unexpectedly, on these limit-zones, which have already and in a more or less explicit manner seeped into every historical text I encounter – where they were inserted as “supporting documents” – but which insistently and in an oddly disconcerting manner open it to become radically unclosed. Their presence continued to thwart my initial intention to place them into a reasoned narrative, to turn them into “evidence.” Even as my historical research on the event was progressing and I began to think at some point that I came close to the core of its historical meaning, some things, I felt, still remained slippery, and resistant to my desire of mastery. But intriguingly persistent here – what indeed has urged me to continue – was my inability to put aside this “inassimilable” void, the rupture and loss opened by what appears ungraspable by the exercise of the intellect alone, that is, my desire to hold onto the tie recognized through my *body*, a tie that powerfully, and incontestably, binds me to those who seem to bear no relation to me, those whom I may not even know and will never fully comprehend, and on whom I have never thought to have inflicted any harm, but who have already made on me, even

before my realization or commitment, a demand (of *writing*) I find impossible to renounce. In order to continue on, I needed to explain myself the point of this restlessness: why I have been driven to these *traces*, scars, residues of absence.

Even before probing into the history of and the hidden logic behind the event itself and setting out to read the traces, to cultivate them as ground for meditation, this dissertation chooses to begin, therefore, with responding to these rather personal – yet ultimately political, I presume – inquiries into the meanings of this inexplicable demand, the *obsession* of the other, or my inability to remain unaffected by the “traumatism of another” signified or addressed as the *traces*. These constitute the preoccupation of the dissertation’s first chapter, “The Ethics of Survival,” where I pursue such questions as, what is it that destines one to *write*? What is it that makes one related to the fate of an other, makes him or her someone unavoidable? How does suffering, which language falls short of expressing, find a way to speak to another? To whom is this very writing addressed? As was already anticipated, in addressing these questions, I turn to explore the enigmatic notion of *sur-vival* (life that always already entails or is inscribed by the unfinished death of another), in light of which I understand the ethical implications of this entire project. I try to examine the meanings of death and the relation of its implications in life in the writings of Jacques Derrida, Maurice Blanchot, and Emmanuel Levinas: particular consideration is given to the conception of the impossibility of death – or the interminability of *dying* – from which the possibility of writing issues, the trace

as the figure for the other's impossible death and as the locus/evidence of the irreducible antecedence of the other constitutive of us (which structures us, necessarily, as *sur*-vivors, deprived of imminence, and perpetually delayed behind ourselves), and the body as the source of one's involuntary tie with others, as the event of the other's calling. I propose to think in this chapter that the story of 4.3 that I am to write here is a story that I write as a (distant) *sur*-vivor, a witness for the witness – one who lives *after* and *in place of* another whose impossible death and whose story one inherits and must carry with oneself. As an allegory of the relation of death (the impossibility of death) and writing (the possibility of writing) that bases this entire work, I also tell in this chapter the tale of *Tarangshi* – a story of the uncanny return of the dead and their re-disappearance – which can also be read as epitomizing the *impure* history of the reception of 4.3.

Chapter two, "Nation and Its Other," closely examines the origins and development of the Cheju Incident based on historical research. The purpose of this chapter is to show how 4.3, a distinctly political process inspired by a compellingly political logic, was developed to constitute a focal point for the historical narrative of modern Korea, continually ensuing diverse patterns of hatred and violence utilized to essentialize difference. In regard to this concern, I take particular note of three major shifts in the political scene which occurred concurrently within the period of less than half-year after the launching of a separate rightist regime in the south in fall 1948, an examination of which would be extremely revealing about the

motivations and symbolic meanings of the Cheju violence: 1) a shift in the definition of the political character of the “armed rebels” on Cheju blamed for instigating, or used for justifying, the subsequent and enduring government brutality; 2) a shift in the course of the government’s counter-guerilla operations, directly reflecting the change in the characterization of the event, and prompted specifically by two drastic political decisions, namely the issuing of a forced evacuation order in October and the establishment of the state of emergency in November; and 3) a shift in the focus of the political agenda of liberated Korea, from anti-traitor and unification issues to anti-Communism. These decisions and shifts taken into effect or tested out on Cheju in late 1948 and early 1949, I argue, conform to a suspicious pattern that underlies the construction of the national body politic, being constituent, rather than accidental or derivative, part of what in many aspects was a vast ritual of purification, a ritual aiming to clear the nation of impeding beings, who in this case, I maintain, were deliberately chosen, comprised or raised from within on need. A close examination concerning the choice of Cheju as the test ground of these decisions and shifts – or the choice of it as the sacrificial victim – reveals that Cheju had already been a liminal and degraded space that had been left out from political power and suffered discrimination, that is, already perceived, to some extent, as Korea’s “internal other,” only exaggerated, embellished or amplified (pushed to the extreme) to the point of being conceived as external through violent processes of 4.3 and its systematically maintained afterlife that regulated or naturalized the distinction. The

gruesome acts of barbarity and excess of indiscriminate physical and psychological assault played out on Cheju during 4.3, the chapter suggests, functioned to fuel the fantasy of the enemy needed by the fledging nation – whose political and moral legitimacy was being questioned both internally and externally – to mark out its frontiers and organize itself as a powerful political entity.

Chapter three, “The Impossible Witness: Wounded Speech and the *Face* of the Other – On Kim Tongman’s *Mumyŏngch’ŏn halmŏni* [*Woman in Cotton Rag*],” and four, “The Denigrated Body: The Making of Red Women,” are motivated by the presence of something less determinate, more furtive in my pursuit of a systematic appropriation of the event attempted in chapter two. They locate challenges that *testimony* sets forth to the historical, political, and legal concerns of catastrophe and victimhood, faithful to the ways our recognition of “unresolved” questions about this event has taken us. Chapter three, “The Impossible Witness,” which is inspired by a mute and deformed victim named Chin Ayŏng the figure of whom exists through Kim Tongman’s testimonial film, *Mumyŏngch’ŏn halmŏni*, is devoted to the problem of the impossible, absolute witness: a victim who cannot testify, one who, deprived of language or excluded by it, cannot recount the very injustice which has condemned him or her into the position of the witness from which there is no escape, and whose experience of victimhood can thus exist only through the accounts of another – a secondary or proxy witness who is *not* the true witness, but who speaks in his or her stead as surrogate. Intrigued by the disruptive qualities of her

extraordinary image (the utter alterity of the face) and dissonance of her voice – what the film fails to state, yet insistently strives to give (literary) body, making tangible or audible that which endures – I have been drawn to explore a dimension of knowing open by an accidental testimonial power rendered by this (im)possible witness (the performance of her “undirected” stutter, or what Avital Ronell has termed in another yet deeply resonant context the “ethical scream” of the suffocated subject⁸), one that leads us to a reconceptualization of the limits of historical inquiries into difficult human realities. In further unfolding the implications and effects of the (im)possibility of witnessing into which Chin Ayōng was muted, which I consider as a *symptom* of the discrepancy between trauma and (perpetually delayed or denied) signification, the chapter turns to recent psychoanalytic explorations of trauma and the tradition of the oppressed in Walter Benjamin’s critique of historiography. This step allows for the rethinking of, or thinking *against*, what counts as historically legible or meaningful knowledge, and brings our attention to the possibility of another – more residual and less determinate – logic of history that withstands or undermines narratives of progress, historical continuity or national unity. I also probe here several repressive cultural exercises in post-4.3 Korea – cases of *law* and *rumor* – which participated in sustaining the post-

⁸ Avital Ronell, “Trauma TV: Twelve Steps beyond the Pleasure Principle,” in *Finitude’s Score: Essays for the End of Millennium* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 305-27. The “ethical scream” (p. 311) is not yet – not sufficiently – “language,” but an index of the muffled something that wants to get out, to jut out of the form, which, Ronell remarks, acts as the “call of conscience” to the culture’s self-deceit (p. 312).

traumatic tradition of social deniability, trivialization, and repression of memory built into the very strategy of original violence. Crucially, the chapter also chooses to let itself follow the direction to which Kim Tongman's testimonial – and profoundly *literary* in its functioning or impact – film takes us, responding to the way that its violent beckoning of us, the viewer witnesses, makes us no longer able to rest in our safe zone, in the uncontaminated outside of trauma: what the wounded speech uttered from behind Chin's shattered jaw wrapped with a white long folded cotton cloth that barely covers the utter destitution and impoverishment of her face that *faces* us, concerns us across the filmic screen from which we cannot choose to look away will evoke.

The fourth chapter, "The Denigrated Body: The Making of Red Women," is devoted to the reading of the *body* – the female body brutally mutilated, disfigured, and debased as a result of excruciating sexual violence used as a political means during 4.3, yet left outside politics. I consider the body here as the site of covert testimony, a depository that stores secret and poisonous knowledge about what the body was made to undergo – the *trace* of brutal intrusion, laceration, and annihilation, its reduction into a disposable object (its turning into a domain for assertion of elevated masculinity; into a vehicle of symbolic humiliation; into a price, or tangible reward, for national belonging; into a literal surrogate to be killed *in place* of the Red man; or into a trope for the site of the other), its denaturalization, and its forcible conversion into the alien body, the undesirable, the disgusting, the

woman. The chapter takes as its initial concern the issues surrounding the official “reconciliation” process for the Cheju Incident (the legislation of a special act, investigation and documentation for the production of the first official report on the national level, and the presidential apology offered) – not only the undeniable achievements marked by these historic events, but also their failure, or dilemma, marked, I argue, by “dishonorable” female trauma which could not be testified in a *documentable* manner or recognized as specifically problematic at the tribunals of history. The chapter thus turns to examine the warped and denigrated female body – the stained and disgraced body despised by history – where tales untold remain inscribed nonetheless. The major focus of the first half of the remainder of the chapter is given to the *raped body*. Extending my argument from social science findings of rape and perspectives gained from other histories that bear startling similarity (especially, the case of India during the Partition), I argue that the “contingency of rape” to which Cheju women and their men were subjected during 4.3 served to transform the entire Cheju people into a defiled *racial* body, that rape, or *rapability*, functioned on Cheju as a kind of genocidal weapon, an effective political tool of “othering.” What is coded as a message on the sexually intruded bodies of Cheju women and men to whom these women “belonged,” I argue, is their newly appointed *ethnic* identity (a mark of the “Red” race), created so as to be plunged into collective inferiority, defamation and otherness. Their severely deformed bodies contain – or become themselves – visible imprints of “exclusion.”

My argument then extends toward unraveling the existence of rather peculiar patterns of sexual assault which seems to have attained yet another, even more sinister level of destruction. They involved the persistent and unusual focus on destroying the particular body parts of Cheju women, especially those associated with their sexual and reproductive activity, namely their genitals, breasts, pregnant bellies and wombs. The violence included an inconceivable level of obscenity and grisliness, obsessive paranoia, irrational anger, fear, and revulsion toward what exclusively suggests the very femininity of women, signaling male assailants' (or the state-male's) grim fascination with eradicating or retaliating the female sexuality, or the threat it symbolizes for them. In unfolding the logic of this excess, I turn to Martha C. Nussbaum's discussion of the conception of misogynistic disgust – a term originally treated by Andrea Dworkin and related to depicting women as dirty, unrestrained, desiring (and inspiring desire), pathological, and potentially contaminating (male purity and rigidity). Further, I also look into the operation of the Japanese military “Comfort Station” as a quintessential example – both a trope and a domain for affirmation – of pre-war Japan's extremely xenophobic and misogynistic “ultra-nationalism” (its fascist obsession with racial/male bodily cleanliness and “self-defensive” hostility against the inferior, morally-depraved, and infectious Korean race, which shares qualities with women) which was directly passed on to Korea during colonial era and taken into action on the 1948 Cheju, making postcolonial Korean nationalism frighteningly and ironically similar to its

colonizer's. These examinations lead us closer toward understanding the gendered and racialized implications of the Cheju state terror, which I define as the nation's inaugural *hate crime*, both misogynistic and xenophobic in nature, directed against women *and* Reds (who were not only treated as another race, but *were*, in their essence, women).

The conclusion, "Toward Naming," concerns the issues surrounding the striving for an adequate name for the event, a name that is as faithful as possible to the enduring demand for justice for the long-suppressed history of the Cheju Incident – one that can grant its traumatized victims due measure of public recognition they deserve and need: a task that cannot be fully achieved, yet toward which we must strive, perpetually.

This dissertation serves both as a response to the event of 4.3 – referring not only to the occurrence of the original catastrophe itself, but also to the post-violence social repression of remembering and witnessing – and as a theoretical investigation into the historical, filmic, literary and testimonial representations of the event. Through close analyses not only of what is already available for reading – "historically legible" materials, documents, proofs – but also of the unassimilated margins of historical archives, the study identifies a possibility within language itself to bear witness to catastrophic history of the most excessive dimensions, without either obliterating it yet again (by burying it in a narrative of necessary nation-building) or sensationalizing it (as a "greater" truth about Korean history). The

dissertation, then, charts a path to respond to the demands uttered by history without being completely subdued by that paralyzing force.

CHAPTER ONE
THE ETHICS OF SURVIVAL

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fiber your blood.
(...)
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

The "within me" and "within us" acquire their sense and their bearing
only by carrying within themselves the death and the memory of the
other, of an other who is greater than them, greater than what they or we
can bear, carry, or comprehend.

Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires for Paul de Man*

The Enigma of Death, *Sur-vival*, Writing

In his final interview with *Le Monde* (with correspondent Jean Birnbaum) in
August 2004, less than two months before his death, Jacques Derrida returns to the

questions of survival.⁹ By the time this interview was being conducted, he was already aware that the time of his death was approaching, and the pressing thought of this impending death, of one's own and imminent death from which there is no escape and which he tells us he has never learned to accept, overrides heavily the philosopher's last conversation. Now that we know the loss is irrevocable, that he can no longer be here to teach us, to speak to us, to be questioned or to defend himself, his final words on survival seem to resonate, sadden, and haunt us with a demand even more urgent and poignant than ever.¹⁰

One always finds oneself unable not to tell a story, the story of the other. The inability not to speak of the other, or rather the inability not to let the other speak through me and before me, borrowing my mouth or my writing hand, with recourse to and yet without completely surrendering into my idioms, appears to link to our fundamental existence as survivors that is "structural." "Survival," says Derrida, "is an original concept that constitutes the structure of what we call existence itself. . . . Structurally we are survivors, marked by the structure of trace, of testament."¹¹ Even before the actual death of another happens, which we "survive" in an empirical sense, to be living or to be mortal, that is, to be exposed to the inevitable possibility

⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Je suis en guerre contre moi-même," interview with Jean Birnbaum, *Le Monde*, August 19, 2004, reprinted in a special supplement of *Le Monde* (October 12, 2004) dedicated to Derrida.

¹⁰ Derrida died of pancreatic cancer at a Paris hospital on October 8, 2004.

¹¹ Derrida, Interview with *Le Monde*.

of death, implicates that we are already survivors, left with the death and the memory of the other, and inscribed with a responsibility impossible to escape. This impossibility of escaping from the responsibility for another is inherent in who we are. It goes to the extent of putting the other *before* me and *in place of* me. And it is in this sense that one could say that to live always and necessarily means both to live *after* and to live *in the place of*.

Some twenty years earlier, in the lectures written in 1984 on the occasion of the death of his friend Paul de Man, Derrida contemplates that all that allows him to speak then of the death and memory of the lost friend – of the realization evoked by the event of death of the inexplicable alterity that constitutes one’s relation to the other as well as to oneself, of the necessary failure of appropriate mourning (one that attempts to interiorize and seize hold of the other), and of the infinite and unconditional responsibility for the other coming from the other and obliging one to write – would have been allowed even before death arrives in reality. The *possibility* of death happens, one could say, *before* the event, and we are already affected by this possibility of another’s death yet to come, constituted and rent, always already, by the memory of this possibility. Derrida writes: “[i]t suffices that I know him to be mortal, that he knows me to be mortal – there is no friendship without this knowledge of finitude. And everything that we inscribe in the living present of our relation to others already carries, always, the signature of *memoirs-from-beyond-the-*

grave.”¹² We exist through the others who have already addressed us from beyond the grave even before death occurs in actuality, through the others who have already challenged the very notion of ourselves as free, autonomous, and self-contained: “[t]he ‘me’ or the ‘us’ of which we speak . . . arise and are delimited in the way that they are only through the experience of the other, and of the other as other who can die, leaving in me or in us this memory of the other” (*Mémoires* 33). Without considering this “possibility of mourning” or “memory of *possible* mourning” (*Mémoires* 34) which precedes us and incessantly overwhelms the bounds of us, there can be no true understanding of who we are. Perhaps one could even say that we arrive at ourselves or become truly ourselves only by virtue of being a *wounded*, or ruptured, body, a body bearing and suffering a primordial and untreatable wound older than consciousness, made in a past older than any recallable or historically reconstructable past, a wound that, born *against* myself, refuses to become part of me and remains alien, the foreign other, in my body – an incision or tearing of the skin keeping me from closing myself upon itself and holding being tight and secure in its skin. Something constantly leaks out of the split body, out of the fissured skin, to obsessively (re-)open the confines of being. I thus remain undefined, dissimulated, and open-ended. My very existence, it could be said, already implicates this tearing

¹² Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires for Paul de Man*, rev. ed., trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 29. Hereafter cited in the text as *Mémoires* with page numbers.

of the skin, and the constant overflow of a certain force of alterity from underneath the skin, that which has already breached my autonomy and finitude.

This wound on my body is what we would call the trace, which is always the trace of the other. The cut in my body – or, as we will see, the cut which *is* my body – that opens me to become unbounded, that turns me out as exposed and waiting, is the mark of the other, or the other’s *writing* (on) me. Perhaps it is where the other speaks, or where the other has already spoken and has obliged me to speak to and for the other, as soon as I open my mouth to speak. The other *lives on* in the trace (of the other in me), not quite alive yet not completely dead either. And it is precisely this structure of the trace which constitutes us as *survivors*, as always already addressed and assigned by the others, as already *given* to the others, taken over by them, as already responsive to and responsible for them. Thus the trace of the other the other has left behind in me makes my life something *more*, and *other*, than a life: it turns life into *survival*, into “life beyond life, life more than life,” life that claims for multiple ownership, and thus is unable to be terminated, negated, or given up in any way on its own.¹³

But why does the *death* of the other or our expectation of its coming come to mark an indelible wound for us? What is the link between death and the trace, between the death of the other and an enigmatic, inarticulable and unarticulated void

¹³ Perhaps this is one of the implications of “survival”: the injunction against, or rather, the *impossibility* of committing suicide.

that opens up in our soul when we lose or when we anticipate loss? And what do the questions raised by this link further teach us about the unevadable demand of *writing*? As Derrida deliberates:

Upon the death of the other we are given to memory, and thus to interiorization, since the other, outside of us, is now nothing. And with the dark light of this nothing, we learn that the other resists the closure of our interiorizing memory. With the nothing of this irrevocable absence the other appears *as* other, as other for us, upon his death or at least in the anticipated possibility of a death, since death constitutes and makes manifest the limits of a *me* or an *us* who is obliged to harbor something that is greater and other than them; something *outside of them within them* (*Mémoires* 34).

It is only upon the death of the other that we come to realize that the other is completely other, irreducibly other. Death happens to the other surely, and it happens only once. When it happens, the other perishes, never to be seen or heard again. The loss is final and absolutely irreversible. The other is now “nothing” – without bodily substance and beyond accessibility and answerability. The other who in life has never let all of him or her rise to the surface to meet us would remain in death a secret, an enigma, a measureless depth. The key is lost forever which opens the door to the dark and abyssal inside of the other. At death the other is revealed before us as utterly other, singular and irreplaceable – irreducible to cognition, to mournful memory, or to a segment of time that can pass into a closure. With his or her death, the world loses and becomes irrevocably less. And a hole opens up.

A hole opens up for all the things I could have done with him or her before death severs us, the consequences of which would remain unknown to me and for which I am left to wonder for the rest of my life. For all the words that have never been uttered aloud between us, which, if ever delivered, could have made differences in our lives, but which, now that the other is gone forever, will never be able to unveil their significance, a hole opens up. And for all the innumerable and incalculable ways in which the other has shaped me – the ways in which the other has touched me, laughed with me, shared stories with me, and pointed out to the world to show it to me – which would rise up at the most unexpected hours to make my body ache with a longing that I know can never arrive at its addressee, a hole opens up. That which can never come to a present, which is put on hold, suspended, to be arrested in an open and unfinished present, in a perpetual state of longing and waiting, can only be retained in a hole – in an unfathomable and bottomless hole that can never be filled. A hole signifies nothing but the otherness of the other, an other who can die and who, precisely because of this possibility of death he or she harbors, has already emerged as uncontained and unceasing.

We might even say that what is revealed at death is, ironically, *not* the finitude of the other whose existence is put to an end by death and who can thus be kept alive only in us as part of us. What is revealed at death is rather a strange apprehension of the other who, indeed, *cannot* die, to whom death will never have arrived to punctuate life and to bring existence to a closure. Death itself, as such,

marks an utter absence, an absolute exteriority, in the other who can(not) die. No one – not even the one who passes in reality – can assure oneself of one’s own death. No one can have death. No one can live it. To mortals, death is always in the process of coming, it can only be met in its incompleteness, on the verge of occurring. Infinitely removed from the possibility of grasping and fulfilling death, we encounter and experience death only as that which is to come, only as an imminence, that is, as the impossibility of possibility. We could even say that death happens, if it happens, outside the limits of the human, outside the boundary of this world, over and beyond our capacity to conceptualize, to possess, to endure, and even to want. This is indeed Maurice Blanchot’s stunning insight. A passage from *The Space of Literature*, where Blanchot approaches the questions of death by comparing its two “test” cases – literature (art, work, or writing) and suicide (a “transgressive” act which, believing death as a possibility that can be grasped, vainly attempts to exert power over it, to live the whole of human existence, to the fullest, unto death, and thus to find a fulfillment for the totality of being) – brings to the fore the essential radicality and absurdity in the notion of death:

Each of these two movements [literature and suicide] is testing a singular form of *possibility*. Both involve a power that wants to be power even in the region of the ungraspable, where the domain of goals ends. . . . It is the fact of dying that includes a radical reversal, through which the death that was the extreme form of my power not only becomes what loosens my hold upon myself by casting me out of my power to begin and even to finish, but also becomes that which is without any relation to me, without power over me – that which is stripped of all possibility – the irreality of the indefinite. I

cannot represent this reversal to myself. I cannot even conceive of it as definitive.

Suicide is oriented toward this reversal as toward its end. The work seeks this reversal as its origin.¹⁴

Ironically enough, the very moment death “comes” is when we completely lose hold of it, to be severed from it. When it “comes,” we are no longer ourselves, or we are ourselves but utterly deprived of power and mastery over ourselves, expelled or vanishing outside ourselves. This is why suicide is conceived as radical impossibility for Blanchot, associated with notions such as deception, illusion, or madness.¹⁵

Since we cannot achieve or master death in any way, not even through the voluntary act of suicide, to complete existence, or to be certain of it as completed, this existence is to remain unfinished, *un-dead*, to be prolonged indefinitely beyond death, beyond *non-death*. It can never be anchored or affirmed fully. Blanchot refers to this interminable and indeterminate existence of ours as an “exile”:

¹⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 106. See also Gerald L. Bruns’s explanation of the concept of the irreal: “[i]rreality is neither real nor unreal; it is outside all metaphysical distinctions between true and untrue, outside all categories pertaining to knowledge. Essential death (essential solitude, essential art) belongs to this *irreal*, deterritorialized space” (*Maurice Blanchot: The Refusal of Philosophy* [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997], p. 295n22).

¹⁵ “[S]uicide remains essentially a bet, something hazardous: not because I leave myself a chance to survive, as sometimes happens, but because suicide is a leap. It is the passage from the certainty of an act that has been planned, consciously decided upon, and vigorously executed, to something which disorients every project, remains foreign to all decisions – the indecisive and uncertain, the crumbling of the inert and the obscurity of the nontrue. By committing suicide I want to kill myself at a determined moment. I link death the now: yes, now, now. But nothing better indicates the illusion, the madness of this ‘I want,’ for death is never present” (Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, p. 104).

Existence is interminable, it is nothing but an indeterminacy; we do not know if we are excluded from it (which is why we search vainly in it for something solid to hold onto) or whether we are forever imprisoned in it (and so we turn desperately toward the outside). The existence is an exile in the fullest sense: we are not there, we are elsewhere, and we will never stop being there.¹⁶

An exile at home, interminably. This conception of existence as an eternal exile may explain our impossible yet insatiable search for existence. Death at once inscribes our limits *and* invites us to become something incessantly more by luring us to cross the limits. Although this experience of crossing is ultimately blocked from us, it is precisely this impossibility of getting hold of death – death’s constant pushing away of us or our being suspended passively in the perpetual interval of *dying* – that can be said to constitute our relation to others, to structure us necessarily as *being-for-the-other*, to anticipate Levinas.

To understand this last statement, let us contemplate further what it means to conceive of death as impossibility and how this impossible death brings me to the relationship with another person. As was noted earlier, to consider death as impossibility implicates that *I* cannot have any determined relation to *my* death and that *I* am fundamentally inadequate in thinking of *my* future, a future which is premised upon the unwavering affirmation of *my* power, *my* freedom, *my* finitude. This is a future which is most likely projected by whoever thinks suicide is possible

¹⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *The Work of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 9.

and heroically marches into the midst of death, hoping to make sure he gets it, to possess it at his disposal. The fantasy of suicide or suicide's self-deceptive assertion about his power to die – a dream of having consciousness of death, of enduring and accomplishing death in this world, or of incorporating the instant of death within the horizon of his time, within the certainty of the living present – tricks the one who wants to commit suicide into believing that this death he is to execute at a determined moment of “now” – the “now” in which he is linked to death, in which he dies while still maintaining himself – will allow him to eliminate what he greatly fears, namely the thought of “the future as the mystery of death” (the future of uncertainty, the future slipped out of his grip), and will assure him, instead, of the future which “might hold no secrets, but might become clear and readable, no longer the obscure reserve of indecipherable death.”¹⁷ Suicide attempts, falsely and in vain, at establishing the future as *mine*, purely and definitively *mine*, and as graspable and finite. But this kind of future, one that can be tricked into *my* future, is, as Simon Critchley has remarked, “*never future enough for the time of dying,*” which consists

¹⁷ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, p. 104. “[T]he fear of death,” writes Blanchot, is, in effect, “the fear of not being able to die,” that is, the fear of being thrown into the ungraspable facticity of dying (*The Work of Fire*, 252). With regard to this fear of the impossibility of dying or of the impossibility of accomplishing existence, read also the following passage from “Literature and the Right to Death”: “death is man’s possibility, his chance, *it is through death that the future of a finished world is still there for us*; death is man’s greatest hope, his only hope of being man. This is why existence is his only real dread . . . ; existence frightens him, not because of death, which could put an end to it, but because it excludes death, because it is still there underneath death, a presence in the depths of absence, an inexorable day in which all days rise and set. And there is no question that we are preoccupied by dying” (*The Work of Fire*, 336-37; emphasis added).

in the basis of our true experience of time.¹⁸ Taking up Blanchot's articulation of "double death" – one death (what Blanchot calls *la mort*) which "circulates in the language of possibility, of liberty, which has for its furthest horizon the freedom to die and the power to take mortal risks,"¹⁹ and which, as we have seen, is the equivalent to suicide's conception of death, *versus* its double (what Blanchot calls *le mourir*, or dying), which is the truth of the nontruth of death, the experience of death as radical impossibility and nonarrival, or *dying* in the midst of which suicide will wake up (an odd kind of wakefulness, though) with his superhuman dream shattered²⁰ – Critchley claims that this second conception of death (namely, the nonevent of death, or death as the enigmatic and uncontained rupture of the *I*) orients us to *another* kind of future – an infinitely deferred future, a future of ambiguity and excess, a future that will never have come to a present but that lies *waiting*, incessantly. That is to say, in the impossibility or interminability of *dying* opens the passageway to *the time other – or infinitely greater – than my own*. As Critchley explains with a reference to the Levinasian idea of the dia-chronic structure of time, which I think amounts to the non-linear temporal structure of *sur-*

¹⁸ Simon Critchley, "Il y a – Holding Levinas's Hand to Blanchot's Fire," in *Maurice Blanchot: The Demand of Writing*, ed. Carolyn Bailey Gill (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 108-22, (p. 111).

¹⁹ Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, p. 104.

²⁰ All suicide remembers may be the feeling of "the rope tightening around his neck, binding him ever tighter to the existence he wanted to leave," and *not* the ecstasy of attaining what he has so desired. See Simon Critchley's "Il y a – A Dying Stronger than Death (Blanchot with Levinas)," *Oxford Literary Review* 15 (1993): 81-131 (82).

vival in light of which I understand the ethical implications of this entire writing (which is a writing *after* and *in place of* the other who is gone, missing):

Dying . . . opens a relation with the future which is always ungraspable, impossible and enigmatic; that is to say, it opens the possibility of a future without me, an infinite future, *a future which is not my future*.

What is a future that is not my future? It is another future or the future of an Other, that is, the future that is always ahead of me and my projective freedom, that is always to come and from where the basic phenomenon of time arises, what Levinas calls dia-chrony.²¹

The alterity of death is revealed in relation to the death of the other, and not in relation to my own death, which bears no relation to me. It is not in the sense that I *can know* that the other dies and thematize the other's death, but in the sense that it is upon the other's (im-possible) death, past or to come, that the foreignness or unknowingness of the other breaks in on me (the moment in which I emerge as related to the other), calling my self-sufficiency into question. Even before there is an *actual* demand, a call for help, or even an "accusation" by the other, as Levinas would say, I am already related, however unwillingly, to the fate of the other – the other who is always already pointing toward the outside, toward the elsewhere, toward the infinite, toward the mystery of death, even while he or she is alive. The other is, in a sense, already dead – or more accurately, *dying* – even during life. It is because the (im-)possibility of death can be assumed before death, and it is anticipated that the other is interminable in an existence, arrested in an existence that

²¹ Simon Critchley, "*Il y a* – Holding Levinas's Hand to Blanchot's Fire," p. 111.

can never draw to a close. The other, then, is immortal within life, *immortal in dying*. Dying has already begun before death in the other who can(not) die, whose life, shadowed by this anticipated relation to death, is already receding into this enigmatic darkness. That the other is always already in the time of dying, already in a future which is not my future but that precedes and is already impinged upon me – my time, my consciousness, my freedom – is why the *dying* other concerns me even before I decide, even before I commit. I always find myself accountable for his death he can never have or accomplish, for the existence he cannot bring to an end and leave, and I find it impossible to leave him alone in *dying*, to the impossibility of death, to the “dark light of [that] nothing.” “Death,” writes Levinas, “signifies in the concreteness of what for me is the impossibility of abandoning the other to his aloneness”; “[t]he death of the other man implicates and challenges me, as if, through its indifference, the *I* became the accomplice to, and had to answer for, this death of the other and not let him die alone.”²² The other, who can(not) die, who is *condemned* to wander, ghostlike, in a stretch of time – in the interval of *dying* – that holds, unable to find an eternal rest nor enter into the fulfillment of the future, stranded at the threshold of life/death, half-dead and half-alive, alone, *needs* me. And I am incapable of letting down this appeal from the other, not because I foresee in the death of the other my death in reflection and expect, when my time comes

²² Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), cited in Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious*, p. 51 and p. 37, respectively.

without coming enough, the same kind of compassion and concern from the other in return. To think that would be to think of death as something interchangeable and exemplary, and thus would result in effacing its radical alterity and betraying the utter singularity of the other who bears such immeasurable (im-)possibility. The request from the other is one-directional, unconditional, and unevadable, it has been made before any possible present, before any freedom, agency, or conscious deliberation, and has already ordained me to his or her claim. The impossibility of death, then, implicates for me both the impossibility of appropriating and closing up the other (the meaning of the impossibility of mourning) *and* the impossibility, or rather the ethical interdiction, of abandoning the other to *dying*, unrecognized and unheard, to that dreadful duration of emptiness and impotence, the terribly pure, unmediated, and interminable outside, the *inhuman surplus*. As we will see, this impossibility of evading the responsibility for the *dying* other is *structural*; it is *written* on my body, or rather, the writing *is* my body.

Since even at death the other remains unfinished – or one would rather say that it is precisely death that keeps the other open – this unfinished, infinitely prolonged, restless existence of the other cannot be said to bear its identity as an entity, a being possessing itself in an equality, closed upon itself and self-sufficient, it does not allow itself to appear to consciousness and remain in a theme. Like a ghost that cannot find a place to settle in – for the grave cannot be closed – and thus is restless, that is pervasive yet unseen and elusive, haunts without appearing fully,

disturbs but never reigns, surreptitiously breaks in from the back or the below when one is not looking or prepared, and brings one's whole house into disarray, the other disrupts and troubles without letting herself be fully captured. Interminably spectral and never settling down, the other escapes all schematism, defies and overwhelms all concepts, thoughts, and recollections. The other, to borrow Levinas, *obsesses*.

Obsession is a mode of discontent and of patience – the other feeling dissatisfied, deprived, difficult to breathe, too tight in a form, *yet* unable to stop banging her head against the wall, unable to give in. It is the desire of the other *as* other, an anxiety and restlessness with regard to any regulated schema, to the totality in which everything is mediated and intentionally assumed, which lets nothing fall outside of its closure, is equal with itself and self-conscious. This desire is the desire for singularity. This desire conflicts with consciousness which is all about intentionality, projective freedom, knowledge and equality (self-identity). But despite this conflict, the desire of the other, or obsession, goes through consciousness *in spite of* it, and *affects* it although persecuted by it. This is precisely why it can only be “obsessional.” In consciousness obsession marks an essential rupture or *caesura* in the very possibility for cognition, the unsaid residue of that which can neither be perceived by a symbol nor disappear unmarked. Levinas calls this movement of obsession – which bypasses and affects consciousness without its source becoming a theme of representation – *an-archival*:

Obsession is irreducible to consciousness, even if it overwhelms it. In consciousness it is betrayed, but thematized by a said in which it is manifested. Obsession traverses consciousness countercurrentwise, is inscribed in consciousness as something foreign, a disequilibrium, a delirium. It undoes thematization and escapes any *principle*, origin, will, or *ἀρχή*, which are put forth in every ray of consciousness. This movement is, in the original sense of the term, an-archival. Thus obsession can nowise be taken as a hypertrophy of consciousness.²³

Obsession, Levinas remarks and this must be emphasized, is “inscribed in consciousness as something foreign, a disequilibrium, a delirium.” Significantly, that it is *inscribed* or *written* – which probably appears something like a scratch mark, a trail of forcible expulsion or exile, or a ruinage – implicates that obsession neither falls under the orders of consciousness, in which it is assimilated (devoured immediately, it will leave no trace), nor occurs at the outside of consciousness, in which it reigns in its own way (undetected, it will not affect). The metaphor of writing here presupposes that although it escapes every ray of consciousness, frustrating its effort of forming an image of what is falling under it, obsession is *signaled* in consciousness and *contested* by it. Hindered by resistance always already at work in consciousness, obsession suffers and is hurled down – from the very beginning. But unrelenting and persistent, it works its way through consciousness, traverses it against the grain. And in this painful procession, it forcibly breaks open a pathway, tearing the skin of consciousness open, and bringing its exercise into a halt.

²³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Dequesne University Press, 1998), p. 101. Hereafter cited in the text as *OB* with page numbers.

This pathway or furrow produced by, say, breaching, or rather, by the difference between the violence of resistance always already at work in consciousness and the violence of breaching itself (the violence of obsession, or the perseverance of the other) is what we call a trace.²⁴ A mark of head-banging, a trail of defiance, or a refuge. The notion of consciousness mastering itself in self-equality and continuity is cancelled by this anarchic bypassing and tearing which occurs *in* consciousness without being appropriated by consciousness.

But the trace is *not* where we can find the other, where the other is revealed fully present, but where the other has already escaped, where the other has passed, where the other has been hurled down, forcibly, to the ruins of consciousness, suffocated and stifled, choked on expression.²⁵ It is where the other has never spoken or can no longer speak, or rather, where the other has already spoken, for the first time, in the trace of speech, in and against the abuse of normative language.²⁶ The trace, one could thus say, is the discourse of the other who cannot speak otherwise. It indicates the epistemological and ethical *dilemma* that the other faces,

²⁴ The trace, it must be noted, is *not* a pure breaching. The trace, or *writing*, would be unthinkable without taking into account the force of resistance which watches over and is always defensive against a (possible) threat, an effraction. One has to pay attention here to the difference – *not* opposition – within the exertion of these two forces, between what *reigns* and what *obsesses*. This irreducible difference – or *différance* – between these two forces is the condition of this primary *writing*.

²⁵ In the trace, the other simultaneously shows and does not show herself. The trace stands in for the *enigma* of the other.

²⁶ The trace suggests that what has been *written* or left behind as a trace has *never* been perceived fully, it has *never* lived consciously in the present, which has been, from the start, constituted by *writing*. What has been written has been written – *re-presented* – for the first time.

for whom speech is radically insufficient, and yet who cannot simply stop speaking either (or for whom and *from* whom we cannot stop speaking, for the other has already spoken in us before us, for the other has already addressed us in the trace of the other in us, prior to all languages, that is to say, for we are already *written* by the other). To be written by the other is the condition of all discourse (which is put forth by this original or pre-original language, or the *writing* of the other). As Derrida has articulated in *Mémoires*:

[The trace] speaks the other and makes the other speak, but it does so in order to let the other speak, for the other will have spoken first. It has no choice but to let the other speak, since it cannot make the other speak without the other having *already* spoken, without this *trace* of speech which comes from the other and which directs us to writing as much as to rhetoric. The trace results in speech always saying something other than what it says: it says the other who speaks “before” and “outside” it; it lets the other speak in an allegory. . . . It is the other as other, the nontotalizable trace which is inadequate to itself and to the same. This trace is interiorized *in* mourning *as* that which can no longer be interiorized . . . in and beyond mournful memory – constituting it, traversing it, exceeding it, defying all reappropriation . . . in the *exercices* of prosopopeia, allegory . . . (*Mémoires* 37-38).

The trace, one could say, signifies precisely a *surplus* of the other *in* us, the irreversible antecedence of the other constitutive of us, by which we are already undone, forever delayed behind the present, deprived of imminence, to be “in deficit of being, in itself and not in being” (*OB* 195n12), as if in an exile. It amounts to the enigmatic unknowingness, and unboundedness, of the other who remains unresolved even at death, precisely because of (the impossible facticity of) death. It is in light of

this insight that we learn to read: “[t]he trace is interiorized *in* mourning *as* that which can no longer be interiorized . . . in and beyond mournful memory.” This is a way of saying that there can be no true mourning (or this failure is the truth about mourning). For the other who is gone *cannot* be gone enough, a trace is left behind *in the place of* the other who is gone without going enough. The trace, then, is a figure for a *dying*, the interminability of *dying*, the remainder of the other’s impossible death, either already past or to come, inscribing us with a responsibility impossible to evade, a responsibility in which we always find ourselves. “The self appears to itself,” says Derrida, “only in this bereaved allegory, in this hallucinatory prosopopeia” (*Mémoires* 28), the voice of the other from beyond the grave, already grafted onto us and signed. The formidable ambiguity of *dying/writing*. Perhaps this signature the other leaves behind on our body, this inscription, this interruption, this breaching of being, that constitutes us and constantly opens us to become unbounded, that is not simply a memory, a conscious reminiscence, of the other, but that which can only remain a trace, unconvertible into a memory or history, irreducible to being’s interior yet having no other place to rest, designates the *future* of the other, a future whose arrival equally and at the same time remains continuously deferred and is always already taking place – *in us*.

Ultimately, the trace which is more than the simple representation of the other, it could be said, refers to the *relationship* with the other, namely the

relationship of *proximity*.²⁷ It is that by which the other, outside of us, is brought home to us, that by which the other becomes something unavoidable. The movement that brings the other into proximity with me, making the other my primary concern, does not originate with me but proceeds from the other. The trace as proximity thus would have to be seen as an approach of the other and a commitment set by this approach – an involuntary commitment which has not begun in my freedom but was decided prior to it, a devotion ordained by the other before I commit, an obligation without being able to hold back.²⁸ The trace marks the revelation of the other to me, or rather, the other having already turned me out as *exposed* to what Levinas refers to explicitly as “the trauma of the other’s approach.” The passivity of this exposure, that is, the passivity of being in the skin, has to be noted here. As Levinas contemplates:

²⁷ Proximity appears as the relationship with the other irreducible to consciousness and thematization, the other who cannot be appropriated nor obliterated. “The adjacency in proximity,” says Levinas, “is an absolute exteriority” (*OB* 100).

²⁸ The trace is what remains *irreducible*, an *exteriority*, after consciousness’s inductive exercise, which aims at presenting or representing everything that is coming to it. It marks a refusal of appearing, of being swallowed up by the present. As Levinas describes: “[i]ncommensurable with the present, unassemblable in it, [the trace] is always ‘already in the past’ behind which the present delays, over and beyond the ‘now’ which the exteriority disturbs or obsesses” (*OB* 100). This irrecoverability of the trace (it being only a trace, unconvertible into a sign, and obsessional, marking an essential break with being/time as the unity of consciousness and essence) implicates a certain sense of impotence and passivity with which responsibility for another was formed. It provokes a responsibility that has been decided before intentionality, a responsibility that cannot be renounced at will: what Levinas will call explicitly *a responsibility of a hostage*. Levinas refers to this mono-directional, predetermined, irreversible structure of responsibility under which we always already find ourselves, and from which there is no turning back, as *diachronic*.

This exposure is the frankness, sincerity, veracity of saying. Not saying dissimulating itself and protecting itself in the said, just giving out words in the face of the other, but saying uncovering itself, that is, denuding itself of its skin, sensibility on the surface of the skin, at the edge of the nerves, offering itself even in suffering – and thus wholly sign, signifying itself. . . . But this saying remains, in its activity, a passivity, more passive than all passivity, for it is a sacrifice without reserve – the sacrifice of a hostage designated who has not chosen himself to be hostage, but . . . in an involuntary election not assumed by the elected one (*OB* 15).

Levinas locates the self in its skin as the very locus of this exposure. The emergence of the self as exposed or in virtue of exposure marks the originary breakup of the identity, the changing of being into substitution, its subjection to the other, rendering itself a hostage, which is a radical, originary, and absolutely passive de-centering.²⁹ “The oneself,” says Levinas, “cannot form itself; it is already formed with absolute passivity. In this sense it is the victim of persecution” (*OB* 104). The self arises in this passivity of being persecuted, the passivity of exposure, of being in the skin. It is to blame and take charge for the destitution of the other whom it may not even know and on whom it has not inflicted any harm. Even before there is a fault, it is always under accusation, already persecuted, held hostage, by the other. Perhaps it is this irrecusable accusation, this unassumable guilt, this prehistoric wound against itself, that forms its basis.³⁰

²⁹ Let us mark here that for Levinas this sacrificial de-centering does not mean “altruistic will, instinct of ‘natural benevolence,’ or love,” but refers to “the *passivity* of obsession” (*OB* 111-12; emphasis added), the state of being seized, held hostage, by another, before any will.

³⁰ As Levinas remarks: “[t]he more I return to myself, the more I divest myself, under the traumatic effect of persecution, of my freedom as a constituted, willful, imperialist subject, the more I discover

The demand of responsibility is absolute, it requires me to offer myself to the other without condition, to sacrifice without reserve, a pure and unconditional sacrifice, a sacrifice of a hostage, a sacrifice that goes to the point of being substituted *for* the other. Substitution happens prior to my possession of myself (“the self, a hostage, is already substituted for the others” [OB 118]), and thus, “[t]he word *I* means *here I am*, answering for everything and for everyone” in responsibility (OB 114). The self is always secondary, posterior, a *sur-vivor* of the other. It cannot be in itself without being *from* the other and *for* the other. Life already entails, always, the trace of the other, the remnant of the other’s (impossible) death already inscribed in us and signed, and this *afterlife*, this *immortality in dying*, is what defines us necessarily as *sur-vivors*. “Structurally,” let us return to Derrida, “we are survivors, marked by the structure of trace, of testament.” Life is always already something more than life, beyond it, impassively undergoing the weight of the other, burdened with a responsibility from which there is no escape. Substitution, ultimately, is a mode of *sur-vival*.

This *afterlife* of the other – the inviolability or restlessness of the other – is somatically imprinted, it is *en-graved* on or as my body – something I have often so naively thought to be most purely and rigorously mine. The body is the site of

myself to be responsible; the more just I am, the more guilty I am. I am ‘in myself’ through the others” (OB 112).

responsibility, an event of calling. My *here-I-am-for-the-other* in responsibility, so to speak, is concretized in the form of incarnation. Levinas writes:

The body is neither an obstacle opposed to the soul, nor a tomb that imprisons it, but that by which the self is susceptibility itself. Incarnation is an extreme passivity; to be exposed to sickness, suffering, death, is to be exposed to compassion, and, as a self, to the gift that costs. The oneself . . . will be shown to be the bearer of the world, bearing it, suffering it, blocking rest and lacking a fatherland. It is the correlative of a persecution, a substitution for the other (*OB* 195n12).

The body constitutes evidence for a restlessness, which constitutes the identity of the subject. It is that by which I find that I am not at one with myself, not at home in my own body. The other is restless under my skin. And my body is the very manifestation of this restless other. To be a body is to bear, always already, the imprint of others, to be given over to them beyond the control I could have over them. One can think of the *materiality* of the body (the body being matter/flesh) – its standing *in* the world, to be made to contact it, to bear it, to depend on it, however unwillingly, the extreme fragility and passivity of the bare skin at once enclosing the self and exposing it to the exterior, and its subjection to the possibilities of gratuitous wounding. To be a body would be to be burdened and hindered by body, to be divested from oneself, deprived of being, in itself and not in being simultaneously.³¹ The body signifies the fact that the self is already interrupted, torn,

³¹ Levinas contemplates on this predicament of being a body: “[*t*]o be a body is on the one hand to stand [*se tenir*], to be master of oneself, and, on the other hand, to stand on the earth, to be in the

and inscribed by the other, already pregnant with the other, swollen with her, to the point of losing itself, to the point of putting itself in the place of the other *for* the other.³² The body, in this sense, could be seen as the site of one's unwilled ethical bond with others, the very basis of one's (involuntary) compassion for them.³³

The body – or the self-in-the-skin – is itself like the wax in which the other is impressed in relief, it is a mode of contradiction, breakup, contact and opening, or an event of my entering into a relation with another. Incarnation, says Levinas, is an extreme gift. The self is incarnated so that it can suffer and give (itself).

The body is not only an image or figure . . . ; it is the distinctive in-oneself of the contradiction of ipseity and its breakup. This contradiction is . . . a recurrence to oneself out of an irrecusable exigency of the other, a duty overflowing my being, a duty becoming a debt and an extreme passivity prior to the tranquility Here what is due goes beyond having, but makes giving possible. The recurrence is incarnation. In it the body which makes giving possible makes one *other* without alienating (*OB* 109).

other, and thus to be encumbered by one's body. . . . To be at home with oneself in something other than oneself, to be oneself while living from . . . , is concretized in corporeal existence" (Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis [Pittsburgh: Dequesne University Press, 1969], p. 164; the latter ellipsis is Levinas's).

³² This pregnancy, this swelling of being, could not mean a narcissistic extension of being into non-being, the universalization of the ego. It is, rather, a mode of alienation or exile, a being displaced in itself from itself, conflicting with itself in itself, at once in excess of and in deficit of being, it is to be, in Levinas's terms, *otherwise than being*. To be a body is to be other than or beyond being.

³³ Compassion cannot be understood in the function of reciprocity, but rather in the function of accusation characteristic of the self, of the persecution by the other that takes hold without any a priori. Compassion springs from the body – from the body as writing or writing as the body. It is, in this sense, an event of calling, a *passion* of responsibility.

“Substitution,” says Levinas, “is not an act,” it is an “incarnated passivity” (*OB* 117, 112), the passivity of being *written* by the other. The subject, always already a substitute for the other, is an effect of this writing, the other’s writing of my body, the other’s body-writing of me.³⁴

My body signifies at once the breakup or contradiction of my being (my being expropriated by breaching, writing, the very trace of the other), the continuously deferred and debilitated arrival of the other behind which “I” am delayed *and* the promise (that has grabbed me even before I commit) to continue to receive the other, to speak to her. To be incarnated or to be written, thus, is to be unable not to speak to and for the other, while respecting the other as other, an absolutely other – not to resuscitate, resurrect the other herself, but to rescue her

³⁴ The body is molded – the other already produces and reproduces my body through repeated inscriptions of the events of birth, circumcision, illness, loss, and death. These inscriptions place one in culture as one who is already traced and vulnerable. In Safaa Fathy’s beautifully directed film, *D’ailleurs, Derrida*, Derrida explains circumcision as a tropic site in which this writing as body, or body as writing, finds its place: “[w]henver inscription leaves a mark on the body, a mark that works on an unconscious level, that is not simply a memory, a conscious recollection; whenever what I called the *trace* focuses beyond presence and consciousness, it refers us to something like a circumcision. In this place – not just any place – that surrounds the penis, which is at the same time a place of desire, of erection, it is obvious that writing, as body writing, finds its place, finds an event in which the subject, de-symmetrically, receives the law. Before any expression, before any choice of membership, it is marked by the community, and whatever the movements of denial, emancipation or liberation it might develop towards this community, this mark remains. . . . We could evoke a kind of circumcision . . . metaphorical, allegorical, tropic circumcision. But wherever – this is what I’m trying to show – wherever there’s a trace, a cut, an incision, an inscription that marks the body, we find a figure of circumcision. That also means that in all the texts that I mention that speak of marks, of dates, of shibboleth, of traces, of inscriptions, a sign is given to circumcision, and even my circumcision” (Safaa Fathy, dir. *D’ailleurs, Derrida: Derrida’s Elsewhere*, 68 min. Gloria Films, 2000, my transcript). This would also lead us to an earlier autobiographical, confessional note entitled *Circumfession*, in which the originality of his account is realized as already canceled – *circumcised* – by the memory of the other (his mother’s) that has already been invested, and signed in his place (Jacques Derrida, *Circumfession*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, in *Jacques Derrida*, by Derrida and Bennington [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993]).

from the terrible solitude and unheardness at *dying*, from silence and forgetfulness that would otherwise devour her, close her, end her. I am in myself through the other naming me through writing, through *body-writing*. I am the other's namesake, addressed and destined beyond myself. Although I can never know who this other is, I must continue to seek for part of her to bear my name. To neglect this demand would be to renounce that which has formed me, it would be to deny my own identity, to defy and negate my own body. Incarnation is an ordeal of survival, having to carry with me – in my body, *as* my body, heavy and vulnerable – the *unbearable* weight of the other, interminably.

I never knew how to start this story and to whom I should address it. But here I am speaking to you, sharing with you the intriguing burden of sur-vival (the passivity of which is at stake in my attempt to gain control over the untold story of 4.3 that has haunted me for years) – a burden that has compelled me to *write*. The story I am about to write here is a story that I write as a survivor, one that is for someone else, for the other who is already past for me, whom I may never fully know and for whom I can never do enough, but whose impossible death and whose future I inherit and must carry within me.³⁵ The body, my body, constitutes its

³⁵ Even if I am the one who writes, I only speak in the place of the other, for the other, from the other, in her stead. The other is *irreplaceable* (the loss is absolute and irrevocable), and speech is radically insufficient to fully grip her. To the other I can never do enough. I necessarily betray the singularity of the other, no matter how hard I try. I speak only *in proxy*. Testimony, as we will see, is always a testimony by proxy – even if the one who testifies is the very person who claims to experience it. Structurally it is only and always a testimony by a survivor, a substitute, a proxy-witness, that is to say, a *writing*. Even an oral testimony is structurally a *writing*. I see in my writing the other's death.

evidence, invokes this demand. Living, always already a *sur-vival*, is a continued way of searching for the other, seeking to speak to and for the other, the irreducibly other, who precedes me and orients me to the future. Life is *from* . . . It is *in wait for* . . .

One may begin to see now – and this, I would claim, could further explicate the complex notion of survival and its relation to the imperious need to write – a deeper function that the body plays. The incarnation of the self would also and eventually amounts to the ethical and structural impossibility to renounce oneself, to forsake one’s own life, at will. To my mind, to be a body or to be written by the other means, ultimately, to be divested of one’s right to death, to no longer have death as one’s ownmost possibility, as the final affirmation of the absolute freedom and totality of the “I.” By virtue of being a bodily being, one’s life is no longer or has never been solely and completely one’s own, one is not strong enough to kill oneself that is infinitely greater, older, and more than one can kill and close up. Something stronger than a will to die or right to death, namely *a passion for the other*, the passion of responsibility, hinders or protects one from drawing one’s existence into a close. In responsibility one necessarily remains open-ended, unable to die, unable even to want to die.³⁶ In this impossibility of death/suicide is found the possibility of writing, the possibility of my writing *from* and *for* the other.

³⁶ Without wishing to erase essential differences between Blanchot and Levinas, I have tried to show that the thought of death as a radical ungraspability and unachievability (the absolute

The body – my body – signifies at once death (death is already there at the origin of life, which is constituted and is always already threatened by breaching, *writing*, the very economy of death) and the impossibility of death/suicide (life protects itself from death by means of death, by breaching, writing, which constitutes a reserve). Survival necessarily entails death, marked by the trace of the other; but survival, says Derrida, is more on the side of life and the future than on the side of death and the past, it prefers living, surviving, to death: “[s]urvival is life beyond life, life more than life, and the discourse I hold is not death-oriented, it is the affirmation of a living being who prefers living, and thus, surviving, to death, because survival is not simply what is left, it is the most intense life possible.”³⁷ Incarnated, we avert death, we are averted from death. Be that blessing or impotence. Writing issues from this absence of death, from the affirmation of life, *sur-vival*. The trace that the other leaves implicates, undeniably, that the other is dead, that this death is final and absolutely irreversible and nothing can save the other from this death; *yet* it also and at the same time harbors a certain hope, a hope that it will *sur-vive* this death, that someday it will be received by another who will reopen the cover of the tomb to bring into surface the other’s dead yet undecomposed

otherworldliness) in Blanchot could also and ultimately be read in terms of the structure of being-*for*-the other, or the diachronic temporal structure of responsibility, invoked in Levinasian ethics. That is, the impossibility of suicide Blanchot elaborates could be understood as the effect of the incarnated passivity or the irremissibility of accusation articulated in Levinas. The impossibility of suicide, then, amounts to the impossibility of letting the other (who is already dead without being dead enough) die *completely* and *alone*: an injunction against murder.

³⁷ Derrida, Interview with *Le Monde*.

(interminable) body. My own writing, likewise, is a wish that this that I leave behind – although, springing from and animated through the other’s writing, it necessarily repeats and thus reassures the unquestionable finality of the other’s death – will be taken up by someone (a recipient I cannot determine) who will learn to read this story and choose someone else in turn for continuation. Writing is at once a longing for the other who is gone and a waiting for another still to come, a distant *sur-vivor* who will arrive late to carry the story beyond an end, beyond death.

The Broken Seal of the Muteness of the Present: The Tale of *Tarangshi*³⁸

The story of *Tarangshi* begins in a small cave located at the slope of *Tarangshi oreum* in the east of Cheju island in South Korea in 1948.³⁹ Several months after the breakout of what came to be known as the Cheju April Third Incident – the very first “Red-hunt” perpetrated in South Korea – the punitive units of constabulary, police, and paramilitary forces undertook a “scorched-earth”

³⁸ The historical accounts of mass murder and burial at *Tarangshi* along with chronicled documentation of its discovery are available in: Kim Kisam and Kim Tongman’s photo journal, *Tarangshi gul ūi sŭlpŭn norae [A Sorrowful Song of Tarangshi Cave]* (Cheju: Kak, 2002); Chemin Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team, ed., *4.3 ūn malhanda [The April Third Speaks]*, 5 vols. (Seoul: Chŏnyewŏn, 1994-1998), vol. 2, pp. 416-39. My account of this incident is based on these historical researches.

³⁹ The volcanic island of Cheju is the largest island in South Korea, placed 60 miles below the southernmost tip of the Korean mainland. The 700-square-mile island is occupied by the extinct volcanic crater of Mount Halla, which rises up toward the center of the island to 6,500 feet (the country’s highest point). Omnipresent throughout Cheju over the slopes of Mount Halla, “*oreum*” refers in distinct Cheju dialect to small-sized volcanic cones or parasite volcanoes formed out of minor, sporadic volcanic eruptions.

strategy (the all-out guerilla extermination campaign) and began to deliberately burn, destroy, and forcibly evacuate villages located in the mid-slope regions of Mount Halla in the interior of the island, which had been declared by the suppression command as the “enemy zone.” In carrying out this campaign, they brutally and indiscriminately massacred people suspected of being Communists or their sympathizers, and those *determined* to display “subversive potential.” Anyone could be pointed to become *ppalgaengi*⁴⁰ and subjugated to torture and murder conducted “legally.”

In order not to fall victim to the indiscriminate violence encroaching the entire island, innocent civilians of Cheju, especially residents from the “enemy zone,” were forced to take to the mountains to seek refuge in cave hideouts. Those who fled to the hills were tagged as *ipsanja* (“mountain fugitives”), notwithstanding their age and gender, and fell under the category of suspects. If their hideouts were found, they were ruthlessly mass-slaughtered on the spot. On December 19, 1948 – the time when the government’s extermination drive reached its height – the government troops who were carrying out massive sweeps in the highlands in search of “hill-fugitives” (as part of the so-called “combing”) made a lethal stop at a tiny cave shelter on the slope of *Taranghi oreum*, only ten feet distant from the now lost and uncharted village of Tarangshi. Those spotted outside the cave were instantly shot to death. A hand grenade was thrown to the cave. As no one came out, the

⁴⁰ This Korean word used to refer to the “Red” (commie) has an immensely pejorative connotation.

punitive troops set fire to the cave's entrance, suffocated and burnt alive those hiding inside. A total of nineteen people were killed that day at Tarangshi. Their one-time cave home where they had endured piecing cold, hunger, and fear of untimely death turned into a live-burial chamber, a hideous catacomb for burnt-alive victims.

For the next forty-four years the cave grave remained closed, locked the victims inside, and kept them completely mute and invisible; it was not until December 1991 that the terrifying scene of suffocation and burial alive was split open and brought to light. The initial discovery of this mass burial site was made possible by a team of investigators organized by the Cheju 4.3 Institute who were collecting oral testimonies from the town of Kujwa on the villages destroyed and lost during the course of 4.3. A week-long search after they had been informed of a possible mass murder and entombment of a number of villagers in Tarangshi oreum, they found the cave. This initial trip was guided by a villager Moon Ŭnch'öl, who, as a civilian vigilante, had accompanied the punitive troops that day and eye-witnessed the killings. It was in their second visit to the cave made two days later on December 24, 1991, that they discovered eleven skeletons along with other remains. The full-scale investigations took place in the following year (March 22, 29, and April 1, 1992) by the cooperative efforts of the Cheju 4.3 Institute and Chemin Daily's 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team. The excavation was announced to the public on the following day.

As the initial investigation team reports, one is very likely to miss the tiny entrance of the cave only about two feet in diameter and covered with clogging banks of weeds. Only across this thinly-disguised threshold was waiting what may only be termed an “impossible history” – a traumatic truth or reality that history or historiography has either failed to detect or deliberately excluded from the scene. Included among the eleven skeletons found inside the cave, where, too low, one could not even stand upright, were bodies of one nine-year-old child and three women.⁴¹ Next to the skeletons were scattered broken kitchen utensils, farming tools, ritual vessels, and various life supplies and personal belongings.⁴² The investigators further report on their rather appalling encounter with a strange sense of life permeating the cave tomb full of death: the remnants of food leftover still preserved in a rusty cauldron, the pungent odor of gasoline from two small lidded-bottles instantly poking their nose trying to identify the yellowish liquid contained in

⁴¹ These victims were identified as the residents of Chongdal-ri and Hado-ri in Kujwa-ŭp. Based on the information later gathered from surviving victims and eyewitnesses, the original number of the dead at the site of Tarangshi is agreed to be at least nineteen, instead of eleven (the number discovered from the December 1991 search). Presumably, the missing eight bodies might have been secretly retrieved by their families soon after the killings. Despite the fact that the mass murder at Tarangshi had been an “open secret” for the villagers, the fear of being tagged as “the rebel family” and retaliated accordingly, as well as the physical difficulty of locating the cave, seems to have barred other families from trying to look for and retrieve the bodies for proper burial. Among the nineteen victims, who were related or close neighbors, were included three children aged under ten, three elderly citizens, and four women, which fortifies the presumed fact that what happened at Tarangshi was a massacre against the unarmed and defenseless civilians, *not* battles (Kim Kisam and Kim Tongman, pp. 97-101).

⁴² Discovered inside the cave were: a cauldron, a frying pan, a boiling pot, a jar, a knife, bowls and plates, spoons and chopsticks, a sickle, an axe, a saw, a pick, a whetstone, ritual vessels, a torch stand, gasoline bottles, a button, a belt, a buckle, clothing, a hairpin, rubber shoes, leather shoes, scissors, a chamber pot, etc. Next to one corpse discovered at the far end corner of the cave, apart from the rest of the bodies, lied a helmet, military boots and a Japanese sword, which appeared to belong to him.

them, a torch stand, lightly scorched, standing between two rocks in a corner, a belt, a rubber shoe, a hairpin still attached to what had once been a living body. The conditions of their sudden death and burial long held in secret might have allowed these bizarrely banal traces of everyday life to persist with striking vivacity and immediacy against all odds.

Ch'ae Chōngok, the only survivor of Tarangshi, who escaped the terrible fate waiting for him by staying out that specific day, has recalled:

When I returned to the cave that night . . . I could still see the trails of fire in the entrance, and the cave was still filled with smoke. The victims lay dead with their noses poked into the holes between stones and in the ground. Blood was still running from their noses and ears. They looked horrible. One person, a man from Hado-ri, was dead, digging into the ground with his fingers. They were all worn out from digging too hard.⁴³

Ch'ae also has recalled a handprint eerily engraved in relief on the cave wall.⁴⁴ The dead bodies reshaped the contours of the cave, which now bore their imprints, their pathways: the bodies of these abnormal deaths became molded, grafted into the material surface of history, counterclockwise (perhaps they had turned into earth at the very moment of death in order to take a revenge). History is the *bearer* of the trauma, it suffers from it and is reconfigured by it. No one dies invisible. No one

⁴³ Kim Kisam and Kim Tongman, p. 86.

⁴⁴ Yun Sōnghyo, "'Tarangshi gul' kwa 'nōbunsungi' ūi nunmul [Tears of 'Tarangshi Cave' and 'Nōbunsungi']," *Ohmynews on the Web*, March 31, 2003
<http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000115439>.

dies without leaving a mark. Landscape has been shifted, already and permanently, by what happened, by what it went through.⁴⁵

The terribly beautiful, exotic landscape of Cheju, the nation's most popular tourist attraction and honeymoon destination, bears within itself hundreds of Tarangshi caves – unmarked, shallow graves into which tens of thousands of its people had been, both literally and metaphorically, thrown, to fertilize its barren soil. The tortured island is still haunted by a multitude of specters who wander in search of truth and identity. Cheju, one might say, is a space of *différance*: the disjointed present made of modern hotels, casinos and golf clubs *and* secret catacombs. The cultivated refinement of life is fragily standing on the graves of the unmourned dead. Yet out of this gaping chasm, the unresolved merging of the linear, progressive time that runs on the surface of the city and in which history is narrated, remembered and celebrated *and* the time of *dying* underneath it, there arises a powerful and somber feeling that something long gone desperately calls out to us.

The cave grave, however, was abruptly sealed off again by the authorities, even tighter than before. On May 15, 1992, against the wishes of the surviving families and relatives who claimed for the bodies of the dead with which they could build burial mounds to weep over, the bodies were dug up from the cave grave, burnt to ashes, and thrown out to the sea, leaving no material traces behind – a

⁴⁵ “History,” writes Jacques Derrida, “never effaces what it buries; it always keeps within itself the secret of whatever it encrypts, the secret of its secret. This is a secret history of kept secrets” (*The Gift of Death*, trans. David Willis [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996], p. 21).

decision which was deemed unquestionable under the incumbent political circumstances. The dead did not even leave behind the dead bodies, the corpses: not even the cinders remained. The bodies (re-)disappeared, swallowed back again by the memory of the privileged minority, put back into the work of denial and oblivion. A huge rock was moved by a crane to block the cave's entrance, to pave up the untreatable wound. The fragments from the past retrogressed into a closure. With the past closed, it seems, perished the possibility of the future.

With (re-)disappeared bodies the possibility of genuine storytelling is lost too. The very body that grants power and authority to testify, the body that bears witness to what happened to the body, disappeared, succumbed to triumphant history's progressive forward movement. Now what is left is only the trail of (re-)disappearance, the trail of (re-)silencing – a grave without bodies. Perhaps it is, I think, this erasure of the trace (the forgetting of forgetting), the persistent political and cultural schema engaged in this work of denial and concealment, that needs to be read immediately and with urgency.

This writing is for me an effort to open up, to re-open this tightly resealed cover of Tarangshi. Or this writing, I would say, aspires to become a certain body (a certain mouthpiece perhaps), to be incarnated so as to lend itself, its own body (or the mouth), to the bodiless, corpseless victims of this gigantic human disaster, to let them resurface. The process of writing is, in this sense, a process of making itself tangible, a process of its becoming of matter/flesh. To anticipate myself a little, this

writing, however, can only be a *surrogate body*, only a proxy, a witness to the witness. In attempting to speak for the murdered, of their premature and extraordinary death, on their behalf and in their stead, writing continually and inevitably betrays the inherent unspeakability of what happened inside that cave that day, that impossible, inaccessible reality which only those who touched the disaster themselves – those who were murdered and no longer alive to testify for themselves – would be able to relay. But the atrocity would go unspoken at all, were it not for this substitute body, this proxy witness. Writing testifies, *posthumously*, to the death/void of the real, genuine witness and aspires to carry the tale beyond its seeming closure. Writing is, according to a passage from Blanchot's *The Step Not Beyond*, "an anxious search for what has never been written in the present, but in a past to come."⁴⁶ Effaced even before being written, the other/past is *trace* from the start, which directs us to writing, unremittingly.

In trying to understand one's persistent desire to excavate, the desire of writing, of witnessing, which is bound to one's fundamental existence as a survivor, I would now like to turn briefly to an illuminating tale of the "Women of Calama" in Chile, the survivors of the "disappeared," whose timely impact on me provided this rather personal journey with a more compelling and resonant illumination.⁴⁷ Shortly

⁴⁶ Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, trans. Lycette Nelson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 17.

⁴⁷ From September 10 through October 31, 2004, the King Juan Carlos I Spain Center of New York University held an exhibit of a series of photographs by Paula Allen who captured in camera the

after the military coup against the democratically-elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, five soldiers boarded a military helicopter and took off from Santiago on a tragic mission to the north, which came to be known later as the Caravan of Death. The outcome of this mission was the massacre of seventy-two political prisoners in four cities. On October 19, the Caravan made its final stop in the small town of Calama where they killed twenty-six “suspicious” men. Their bodies were mutilated and dumped in the unrelenting dust of the Atacama desert surrounding Calama. In the years following their “disappearance,” their mothers, wives and sisters tried in vain to find out what happened to their men. Frustrated by the authorities unwilling to give any information, these women set out to search in the desert themselves, digging with shovels, hoping to find the bodies of their loved ones. In 1990, after seventeen years of unremitting search, they uncovered a grave that contains partial remains, possibly of their men. Five years later the first thirteen bodies found were identified, and in 2003 two more were identified. The women have continued to search, as of today, for their men who are still missing.

Victoria Saavedra, sister of Jose Saavedra, one of the victims whose bodies were discovered and identified, has said:

Every time we go out digging, we go psychologically prepared to find something. Once we went to look in a cave. I took gloves and plastic bags,

unrelenting searches of the “Women of Calama,” Chile, for their “disappeared.” My reading of this story – which enlarged my vision of witnessing and writing for the Cheju victims – is based on this exhibit.

whatever I thought we might need. We found rocks that were immense, larger than a house. Of course, we could not even move one. Such a feeling of defeat, another attempt and nothing happened. But, I still think this could be the right place. Maybe in that pile of rocks there is a symbol, a sign. I always try to look for some sort of sign – if there are rocks with blood stains, a button, a scrap of paper, if the dirt is darker, anything. There is always the feeling that one must search for something.⁴⁸

The surviving women of Calama have persistently searched, with small shovels in their hands, through sand and pebbles, across the immense expanse of northern Chile's desert, where there seem no points of direction and no points of reference, for something, anything, which may signal the bodies of their men – their Ariadne's thread leading them through the vast desert labyrinth which hides yet holds. What makes them go on against the grain – what is stronger than the world's indifference, fatigue, loneliness, fear, anger, and consistent “[feelings] of defeat” – is *their determination to find their disappeared*. They offer their hands to reach uncertainly toward the dead, and their ears to their yet unclaimed suffering. This offering is not an attempt to save or resuscitate the dead. Pain is theirs forever and their wound is incurable, and they would know that. This indefatigable offering, it seems to me, is their resolute opposition to the amnesia and the vanishing of the trace.

Aren't these digging hands of the surviving women of Calama hands that write? Aren't the shovels in their hands which piece and cut open the crust of the earth to wrest the dead from where they lie the writing pen that, always writing

⁴⁸ Several quotes from the women, including this one, were included in the exhibit.

against the blankness of page (the death or disappearance of the witness, physical or metaphorical), searches for, excavates, and carries to the surface what would otherwise remain an untold secret? The shovel, one could say, is the ultimate trope for the survivor's determination to look for the other, the unfaltering demand of writing against concealment and denial. It is the figure for the unconditional and unending responsibility to respond to the other, the exigency of writing with which survivor is burdened, into which he or she is condemned, perpetually. One must write. One must dig into the desert, let it throw up the yet undecomposed past, the un-dead, rescue them, welcome them. Without our welcoming them, without our first stretching out our hands to reach them in the dark, they would have to remain trapped in that terrible solitude and unheardness at *dying*, half-dead and half-alive, like unmourned ghosts, condemned into the eternal oblivion under the dusts of the Atacama Desert, and the possibility of storytelling would be forever lost, which is an absolute annihilation, an annihilation even without a trace. Writing, surely, can never amount to proper mourning. It can never fully replace the other, nor can it make the other return alive and well. Writing is just – and ultimately – a way to refuse non-reading, a way to refuse silence and forgetting. It allows the otherwise dead-end tales to run again, to resurface. Writing is reading, it is rescuing. Writing is always writing of survivor. It is always writing by proxy.

Ultimately, perhaps I write to understand a part of me, looking for this inexplicable rupture I cannot swallow, a rupture in my memory shaped by Tarangshi

unknown and completely sealed off, a rupture in my narrative of 4.3 through which I did not live and for which I have never thought to be responsible. In searching for the other, I in effect search for a “me” whom I have never met. Perhaps the writing for the other is, to borrow from Derrida, “an impossible autobiography,”⁴⁹ an impossible autobiography one writes *for* the other *from* the other driven by the unremitting desire to find “me.”

⁴⁹ Safaa Fathy, dir. *D’ailleurs, Derrida’s Elsewhere*, my transcript. .

CHAPTER TWO

NATION AND ITS OTHER

If the ambivalent figure of the nation is a problem of its transitional history, its conceptual indeterminacy, its wavering between vocabularies, then what effect does this have on narratives and discourses that signify a sense of 'nationness': the *heimlich* pleasures of the hearth, the *unheimlich* terror of the space or race of the Other; the comfort of social belonging, the hidden injuries of class; the customs of taste, the powers of political affiliation; the sense of social order, the sensibility of sexuality; the blindness of bureaucracy, the strait insight of institutions; the quality of justice, the common sense of injustice; the *langue* of the law and the *parole* of the people.

Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*

A Suspicious Coincidence: the Origins of the Cheju April Third Incident

After being liberated from Japanese colonial rule in 1945 and before having the opportunity to launch as an independent and unified nation, the Korean peninsula became the battlefield of the ideological conflict of the Cold War. Two Koreas, with utterly incompatible official ideologies, were preparing to launch

themselves as newly defined nation-states in the south and north administered by the military occupation forces of the U. S. and Soviet, respectively. The purge of former pro-Japanese collaborators and liquidation of legacies of Japanese imperialism, which had been thought to be the most urgent task to be undertaken upon liberation, came to take a backseat to the ideological drives deranging – and holding up as well – the new regimes. It is this perturbed ideological struggle that crystallized around the Cheju April Third Massacre.

The Cheju April Third Incident (often called simply “4.3 [*sasam*]” after the date of its occurrence) refers, in effect, to a series of violent events that span seven years and seven months from March 1947 through September 1954. Although directly triggered by the incident on April 3, 1948 of the Cheju local leftists’ armed guerilla attacks on the police and rightwing youths on the island, its starting point could be dated a year earlier to the March 1947 police shootings of residents, which ignited the long-accumulated, already pent-up grievances on the island. But scandalously enough, the government’s initial punitive actions against these local insurgents – who, as will be argued, were mobilized into action in response, principally, to the regional matters specific to the island – drastically and irrationally grew into a large-scale civilian carnage indiscriminately preying upon virtually everyone inhabiting the island (who was blindly tagged and castigated as “anti-nationals”) soon after the establishment of a separate rightist regime in the south in fall 1948. This massive state terrorism was justified, and even encouraged, in the

name of national security and purification. The precise number of the dead cannot be determined, but according to *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, it is presumed to approximate 25,000 to 30,000 – nearly one tenth of the island’s total population.⁵⁰ Little of this civilian atrocity and the extreme gruesomeness with which it was carried out spread out to the outside world. Either dead in reality and thus unable to speak for themselves, or completely dumbfounded – dead inside – struck by the overwhelming catastrophe that exceeded their capacity to endure, comprehend, and communicate to others, the victims fell into silence, locked up pain deep inside their private, traumatized inside.

As the Japanese Occupation of Korea drew to a close in August 1945, Cheju island went through a sudden and massive influx of its natives returning home from overseas. These returnees swelled the island’s population by 60,000, which within a year reached over 280,000 (total population).⁵¹ The sharp gain of the population

⁵⁰ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 366.

⁵¹ Located near the southernmost tip of the Korean peninsula in the center of Northeast Asia, bridging Mainland China and Japan, Cheju’s geo-political importance in the Pacific region was already marked by both Japan and the U. S. during the war. Toward the end of the war in 1945, as Japan was literally trying to fortify the entire island of Cheju in order to cut off the Allied forces’ advance to its own home islands, the Cheju people’s suffering increased even more. Forced conscriptions, forced labors, extortions and expropriations caused by this added task on the island inflicted tremendous pain on its population. A huge number of islanders moved to the mainland during this last year of war in order to evade the added torment. But as early as 1920’s and 1930’s, the depopulation of the island had already been taking place. A large number of residents moved to Japan to work in factories and war-related industries. Cheju’s geographical closeness to Japan and its chronic poverty caused by frequent drought, gusty weather, and naturally low soil fertility must have made it even easier for the Japanese to exploit their cheap labor to promote heavy industries in their homeland. As many as 50,000 Cheju natives – nearly a quarter of the entire population of the island at the time – were reported to live in Japan in mid-1930’s. Most of these population returned home upon the end of war, which resulted in a much more massive population growth on Cheju compared

created serious shortage of jobs and supplies on the island. The embargo imposed on trade with Japan by the U. S. Military Government worsened the situation by cutting off significant supply sources of industrial products, a great portion of which had been supplied from Japan. Added suffering came from the cholera epidemic which hit the island in the summer of 1946 and poor harvest of barley in the fall that same year.⁵² The Military Government's failed grain collection program and thriving smugglings and black market dealings whose profiteers were often in collusion with government administrators and police high officials further worked to impoverish and marginalize the population while building up in them strong distrust and antagonism toward the military authorities.⁵³ The anti-imperialistic, anti-American sentiment was even deepened as the Military Government recruited former Japanese administrators and police officers and their Korean collaborators as new governing bodies in liberated Korea against the popular will.

In the meantime, while the U. S. Occupation Forces were slow in extending its control to Cheju busying themselves with political affairs of the mainland, the

to most other regions in Korea. This rapid change in social body came to cause severe disruptions to the island's established social and economic patterns, and added ailments to its already impoverished economy from the colonial rule and war (Chemin Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team, ed., *4.3 ūn malhanda [The April Third Speaks]*, vol. 1, pp. 25-48).

⁵² The naturally barren soil of Cheju is hardly suitable for cultivation of rice but allows only dry crops to grow – such as barley, millet, or sweet potato – which partly explains the island's endemic poverty. The poor harvest of barley, one of the main food sources for the islanders, thus caused a severe famine on the island that year.

⁵³ Chemin Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team, ed., *4.3 ūn malhanda [The April Third Speaks]*, vol. 1, pp. 53-56 and pp. 228-40.

political hegemony on the island was taken up, nearly completely, by the strong and relatively modest leftist leadership of the Cheju People's Committee [*Inmin wiwonhoe*]. Established in September 1945, about a month before the arrival of the U. S. forces on Cheju, the People's Committee exercised an unusually large measure of independent authority in governing the island, given full-scale support and legitimacy by both the Military Government and the residents of the island.⁵⁴ But as the clashes between rightists and leftists increased in the mainland, including the occurrence of the bloody *Taegu* riot in October 1946, which resulted in killing hundreds of riot police, and the need to gain firmer control over the entire southern zone became more urgent, the attitude of the U. S. Military Occupation forces toward the People's Committee on Cheju grew harsher. And this hardened attitude naturally rifted the U. S. Military Government's year-long cooperation with – or rather, neglect of – the Cheju Committee. Intimidated and embittered by the Military

⁵⁴ The Cheju People's Committee was recognized by the Military Government as "the only party on the island, and to all intents and purposes, the only government," that "functioned completely independently of provincial direction" (E. Grant Meade, *American Military Government in Korea* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1951], p. 185; John Merrill, "The Cheju-do Rebellion," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 2 [1980]: 137-97 [150]). As Bruce Cumings also observes, "the American Occupation preferred to ignore Cheju rather than to do much about the committees; it appointed a formal mainland leadership but let the people of the island run their own affairs. The result was an entrenched left-wing, one with no important ties to the North and few to the [South Korean Labor Party (SKLP)] on the mainland" (*The Origins of Korean War Volume II: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990], p. 252). The island's geographical remoteness from the mainland and consequent political isolation, or rather neglect, from the central government, which also explains the separatist tendency characteristic of the island, mainly account for this unusual political independence allowed to the Cheju People's Committee especially during the first year of the American Occupation period (1945-1948). This firmly-established pattern of strong and autonomous indigenous leadership of the Cheju Committee has to be taken into account when investigating the causes of the 4.3 insurgency.

Government's increasing restraints of its nearly total dominance over the island politics, the Committee prepared to organize the mounting disgruntlements of the islanders to resist the unwelcome intrusions of the outside authority. Meanwhile, the relatively moderate Cheju Committee gradually took on some radicality as the South Korean Labor Party [SKLP], South Korea's first effective Communist party, was established in the mainland in November 1946 as the unified and stronger leftist political organ in the South, and the Cheju People's Committee became re-organized as the Cheju branch of the SKLP. Its popularity with the residents of Cheju as well as the long-established pattern of self-government continued in this more radical local faction leadership.⁵⁵

Violence first broke out on Cheju on March 1, 1947, during the mass gatherings held to commemorate the 28th anniversary of the 1919 Korean Independence Movement against the Japanese rule. Backed up by the Cheju branch of the SKLP, the mass-gatherings of 25,000 to 30,000 people soon grew into massive street demonstrations against the looming partition of the peninsula and for the establishment of the unified and completely independent nation, to follow the spirit of the March 1, 1919 Movement. On 2:45 p.m. that day, when the mass protesters had already left the main city square, an accident occurred that a six-year-old child was injured after having been kicked by a mounted police horse. The injured child was among the observing crowd, only a few hundreds remaining in the

⁵⁵ Merrill, "The Cheju-do Rebellion," pp. 150-52.

square at this point. A group of angry crowd started to chase after the mounted policeman booing and throwing stones at him, who was about to leave the area toward his police box around the corner without even noticing the accident he caused. The nearby riot squad dispatched from the mainland by the Military Government fearing possible unrest opened fire at the charging crowd that was mistaken for the protesters attacking the police box. The police's stray bullets killed six people and injured six.⁵⁶ It is these police shootings that seem to have marked the beginning of a violent cycle of attacks and counterattacks which ultimately led to the April 1948 Insurgency and subsequent police and paramilitary terrorism against tens of thousands of innocent and unprotected residents on the island – “the most brutal, sustained, and intensive counterinsurgency campaign in postwar Asia,” as Bruce Cumings describes it.⁵⁷

A massive general strike was called on March 10 against this police attack. Also backed up by the Cheju branch of the SKLP, the strike was joined by workers from both public and private sectors on the island – from government officials and employees of public corporations to transit workers and factory workers, to teachers and students, and even to some policemen and rightwing sympathizers. The strikers demanded that the police engaged in the shootings be reprimanded, the police head

⁵⁶ Chemin Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team, ed., *4.3 ùn malhanda [The April Third Speaks]*, vol. 1, pp. 253-85.

⁵⁷ Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War Volume I: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 349.

quarters be resigned on responsibility, and the victims be compensated.⁵⁸ But instead of responding to these legitimate demands, the military authorities blinded themselves to the wrongs in the police actions and the growing public sensibility against them. Instead, they focused on pointing at the central SKLP in the mainland for masterminding the instigation of the events and began their suppression. They soon sent special security forces to the island to strengthen its control and restore order. These “Communist-inspired” disturbances on the island, as was defined by the government authorities, seemed to have worked as a “warning” for them (which they needed); from this point on, they began to take “hard-line” in dealing with disorders on the island.⁵⁹ In addition to introducing supplementary police forces, the Military Government replaced the locally-elected governor and military headquarters of Cheju with the “outsiders” (non-islanders) who were unfamiliar with the specific political and socio-economic problems that the island was facing and

⁵⁸ Chemin Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team, ed., *4.3 ũn malhanda [The April Third Speaks]*, vol. 1, pp. 297-302.

⁵⁹ Already during this period there was a growing tendency among the military leadership to see Cheju as the Communist-inspired or collaborated island. The Military Government’s *G-2 Report*, for instance, gave a warning message stating that about seventy percent of the entire population of the island had leftist tendency (Headquarters, the United States Armed Forces stationed in Korea [USAFIK], *G-2 Weekly Summary*, no. 79, March 20, 1947; *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 120). Similarly, Ch’oe Kyōgjin, Deputy Commissioner General of the Police Administration Bureau, stated in a media briefing on the March 1 general strike that ninety percent of the Cheju people are “red” (*Hansōg Daily*, March 13, 1947; *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 122). That is, a systematic effort to stigmatize the entire population of the island – what I will later call the *othering* process – already started to emerge at this point.

who were, thus, less sympathetic to its deep and growing discontents.⁶⁰ More crucially, the U. S. Military Government hired and brought in a large number of radical and irregular anti-Communist rightwing youth group members, such as the Northwest Youth Group [*Sōbuk ch'ōngnyōdan*, or *Sōh'ōg* in short]. Mostly paramilitary political activists, the members employed cold-blooded terrorist tactics in suppressing communists and their sympathizers on the island. In carrying out their punitive operations, they exerted literally omnipotent power over the residents, confined by no legal or political mediation. The tension thus grew even higher on the island with the arrival of these Youth Group members.⁶¹ These special suppression forces soon swept up strike leaders and participants in mass arrests: as many as 2,500 alleged SKLP members were arrested during the period of one year

⁶⁰ Chemin Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team, ed., *4.3 ūn malhanda [The April Third Speaks]*, vol. 1, pp. 399-415.

⁶¹ The members of the Northwest Youth Group consist mostly in North Korean political refugees who came down to the South disgruntled by the Soviet-led Communist regime in the North. These extreme haters of Communism ruthlessly took out their revenge on the Communists and their sympathizers in the South for being uprooted from their homes in the North, which well suited the disposition of southern leaders. Being homeless and also not getting paid for their “work,” the Group members dispatched to the island were instead permitted to live off the island’s residents. They had a virtually unlimited access to any resources on the island: they could, with the tacit (or even explicit) authorization of the officials, extort houses, farms, factories, shops, money and food from the islanders, who had already been suffering enough from the ailing local economy. In the aftermath of the March 1, 1947 Incident, about 500-700 Youth Group members were introduced to the island to join the punitive operations of the constabulary and police forces. The sheer excess and indiscriminate violence that they displayed in pillaging, raping, torturing, and murdering residents, it is widely agreed, further drove the islanders to edge and eventually worked to inflame the April uprising in 1948. See Yim Taesik, “Cheju 4.3 hangjaeng kwa uik ch'ōngnyōndan [The Cheju April Third Resistance and the Rightwing Youth Group,” in *Cheju 4.3 yōn'gu [Studies of the Cheju April Third Incident]*, eds. Institute for Korean Historical Studies et al. (Seoul: Yōksa pip'yōngsa, 1999), pp. 205-37.

since the strike and before the breakout of the April insurgency in 1948.⁶² Around March 1948 when three people in police custody were discovered dead of police torture, the rift between the Military Government and the local leftist leadership on the island appeared unhealable.⁶³ The island, literally, was on the verge of explosion.

The partition of the country was effectively visualized in early 1948 as Rhee Syngman, an American protégé soon to be elected as the first president of South Korea, announced the separate southern elections planned for May 10, 1948 (first proposed by the U. S). The Cheju faction of the SKLP then mobilized public support, already ripe for action, to protest on April 3, 1948. The insurgency first broke out around 2:00 a.m. with armed guerilla attacks on twelve police stations – half of the total twenty four throughout the island – and houses of rightwing youth along the northern coast. A few hundreds armed guerillas rose up on the slogans of 1) opposing the growing brutality of the police and paramilitary youth terrorism on the island, 2) denouncing the May 10 unilateral elections and the establishment of a separate rightist government in the South, 3) the support of the national unification with the North, and 4) the resistance to the imperialist American Military Government who brought fraction into the country.⁶⁴ Perhaps no one by this point yet could have imagined that these early-morning guerilla attacks and subsequent

⁶² *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 128.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-52.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

counterguerilla operations by the government would ultimately develop into a large-scale state terrorism and civilian massacre which would soon come to rend the entire island apart.

Two things about the breakout of the insurgency must be taken into account here in order to claim against the later-developed, state-defined causes of the incident which were used to justify the excessive measures the suppression command chose to undertake. First of all, *no* primary records or documents that exist indicate even remotest connection between these guerilla attacks and the central SKLP leadership in the mainland or the North. Testimonies from former Cheju SKLP members and military leaders of Korea rather suggest that although obviously partaking in and motivated by the SKLP general campaign against the separate May elections in the South, the April attacks on Cheju were set off, almost certainly, by the spontaneous and daring local faction leadership of the Cheju branch of the SKLP, which mobilized masses to rise up in response to the long-accumulated local ailments – chronic poverty, economic depression, failed governance of the military authorities, and the increasing police and rightwing brutality escalating the already intensified tension on the island in the aftermath of the March 1, 1947 police shootings – rather than centrally and strategically planned with a “bigger intension” by the mainland SKLP organ or the North.⁶⁵ The second point to bear in mind is

⁶⁵ See Sō Chungśök, “Cheju 4.3 ūi yōksajōk ūimi [The Historical Meaning of the Cheju April Third Incident],” in *Cheju 4.3 yōn’gu* [*Studies of the Cheju April Third Incident*], pp. 97-146, (pp. 107-15).

that the “armed rebels” who participated in the initial attacks on the police and rightwing youth were only about 350 men, and only one tenth of them were armed with rifles, while the majority were poorly equipped with Japanese swords, bamboo spears, farming tools, and other homemade weapons. And throughout the entire period of the insurgency it is said that the armed guerilla forces did not exceed 500 men.⁶⁶ The April attacks were way too incautious and premature – “inconvenient from the standpoint of SKLP strategy, which aimed at building a united front with southern opponents of [Rhee Syngman].”⁶⁷ Taking into consideration the geographical conditions of the island – easy to be completely blockaded by the government and difficult to secure communication with the mainland – as well as the lack of preparation of the attacks at the outset, it seems inconceivable that the April insurgency intended to overturn the southern regime and seize power. The political character of the insurgency, it seems, would be best described as a spontaneous local revolt against the excruciating political, social, and economic

As John Merrill also observes: the occurrence of 4.3 was “probably undertaken by the militant local leadership of the Cheju party on its own initiative. The deep-rooted grievances of the islanders, their tradition of separatism, the increasing repression that followed [the March 1 demonstrations and general strike], and the intensely politicized atmosphere that built up as the date for elections approached spurred the local leadership to action” (Merrill, “The Cheju-do Rebellion,” p. 166).

⁶⁶ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, pp. 174-88. Even according to the relatively objective – if not inclined to overstate the rebel forces – American archival source, “[the] strength of the insurgent’s main force units was about 500 men. Half were armed with rifles, while the rest carried an assortment of swords, sickles, sharpened bamboo spears, ‘homemade grenades, various types of explosives, and picks and shovels’” (The United States Far East Command [USFEC], *Intelligence Summary*, April 22, 1948; Merrill, “The Cheju-do Rebellion,” pp. 166-67.)

⁶⁷ Merrill, “The Cheju-do Rebellion,” p. 194.

circumstances specific to the island, which were pushed into action as anti-separatist and anti-imperialistic public sentiment matured on the island in early 1948, as elsewhere in Korea, before it soon changed into something else.

The government's counterguerilla operations were soon launched to suppress the insurgency. In the beginning the suppression command seemed to target the armed guerilla rebels who had directed the attacks. However, soon after the establishment of the separate rightist regime in the South in August 1948, the situation took a drastic and devastating turn. Special local conditions on the island, along with the widely supported and vindicated (throughout the entire nation) popular claim of national unification, to which the causes of the April popular protests on Cheju had been attributed, now came to recede into the background, and instead, subversive, "anti-state" Communist dissidents aiming to overthrow the opponent regime (the South) and discredit its founding ideology came to be brought to the fore to take the sole blame.

What must be noted here is that strong leftist protests and armed clashes between rightists and leftists were, in effect, frequently occurring phenomena throughout the entire southern zone as the day for the separate southern elections drew near. In the beginning, the U. S. Military Government did not seem to consider the April Cheju insurgency as any more serious than those occurring elsewhere in

Korea.⁶⁸ Of course, upon its breakout, the Military Government quickly dispatched reinforcements to Cheju to subdue the insurgents and to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. Approximately 1,500 additional police forces, two constabulary battalions, and some 500 Northwest Youth Group members were again brought to the island from the mainland.⁶⁹ These auxiliary punitive forces, however, only seemed to deepen the chaos by further suffocating the population as they overly enthusiastically carried out their Red-extermination campaign based on a blind conviction that labeled Cheju as the “Red-island.” Cheju, it seems, served for them as a physical outlet for their extreme abhorrence of the Red they had brought over from the mainland.

An attempt had been made, in the meantime, by Col. Kim Ingnyöl, the Commander of the Ninth Constabulary Regiment that was in charge of the counter-guerilla operations on Cheju, to peacefully resolve the matter. The settlements were reached on April 28 in a secret meeting held between Col. Kim and the rebel leader Kim Talsam of the non-violent resolution of the conflict.⁷⁰ But the peace was short-lived. The deal was broken in the incident called the “Ora-ri Arson Attack” committed by some radical right-wingers displeased with Col. Kim’s pacifist move. On May 1 a group of police and Northwest Youth Group members

⁶⁸ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 188.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 221-22 and p. 266; Merrill, *The Cheju-do Rebellion*, p. 168 and p. 170.

⁷⁰ Kim Ingnyöl, “4.3 ūi chinshil [The Truth of 4.3],” in *4.3 ūn malhanda [The April Third Speaks]*, ed. Chemin Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team, vol. 2, pp. 273-357.

attacked the village of Ora-ri and burned down twelve houses of the villagers suspected of having left-wing sympathy. The burning happened during bright daytime and was, strangely enough, filmed by the American Military camera. The silent documentary film, *May Day on Cheju-do*, stored in the U. S. National Archives in Washington, D. C., contains scenes of burning homes of Ora-ri, the police and constabulary troops proceeding to the flaming village, and dead bodies of the villagers attacked by the alleged Communist rebels. As *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report* points out, the camera, curiously, occupies diverse, multi-dimensional viewing positions in recording this emergency occurrence. The camera sometimes looks down from the mid-air from a plane, while at times following the moving subjects from the ground. More importantly, the film was edited to make the arson seen as the rebel attack. The filming, it seems quite obvious, must have been pre-planned by the U. S. authorities who knew about the attack in advance.⁷¹ It is highly conceivable that the film was fabricated to advocate the rationale of the much more hardened attitude on which the U. S.-directed suppression was soon to embark.

⁷¹ Film and "shot sheet," *May Day in Korea: Cheju-do, 31 April 1948*, Record Group 111, National Archives; *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, pp. 190-200; Merrill, "The Cheju-do Rebellion," pp. 169-70. Although it exceeds the range of this dissertation, I would want to point out that the Ora-ri Incident could be taken as an attestation to the U. S. involvement with the Cheju April Third Incident. It calls for the United States to admit its complicity to this politically motivated civilian atrocity committed by the U. S.-aided Rhee regime. The scholarly conscience has already led two leading American intellectuals, Noam Chomsky and Bruce Cumings, to call for the U. S. government to admit its moral guilt for the Cheju massacre. They suggested, with certain prudence, the possibility for the U. S to issue an official pardon and to compensate the victims. See Yang-Kim Chinwoong, "Noam Chomsky: 'Cheju 4.3 miguk e chuyohan chaekim' [Noam Chomsky: 'the U. S. Has Major Responsibility for the Cheju 4.3]," *Ohmynews on the Web*, March 23, 2004 <http://www.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?at_code=176876>.

Soon after the Ora-ri Incident, the U. S. Military Governor William F. Dean suddenly discharged Col. Kim Ingyŏl who had striven for a peaceful resolution of the affairs and instead appointed more ruthless and uncompromising Pak Chin'gyŏng to a new commander-in-chief of the Ninth Constabulary Regiment which now took on the chief and more critical responsibility in the operations against the Cheju guerillas. This meant that the U. S. determined, already at this point, for the speedy and thus necessarily harsher extermination.⁷²

The government forces became more and more unrestrained. The growing political pressure to clean up the rebels blinded the troops to the increasingly excessive measures they took to repress those subject to suspicion. The fear of strong government retaliation not only drove the guerillas to take to Mount Halla and continue hit-and-run attacks from there, but also pushed harmless inhabitants from the villages located on the mid-slopes of Mount Halla to flee to the hills as well. For, incapable of distinguishing rebels from civilians, the government troops often carried out indiscriminate warfare against entire villages in the highlands, which were taken as the "guerilla base." Those found inland on mountain slopes would arbitrarily be taken and detained in coastal relocation camps; but, ironically enough, it was mostly children, old people, and women that formed the majority of these

⁷² *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, pp. 203-205. About one month after his appointment, Col. Pak Chin'gyŏng was assassinated by one of his own men, who had grown repulsed by his ruthless and dictatorial counterinsurgency operations. His death, however, did not put a stop to the hard-line suppression command that was to follow (pp. 225-29).

detainees, for most young males, quicker in move, had already taken flight. These hard-line tactics intimidated the population and drove more and more residents to mountain redoubts.

A major offensive by the government was embarked in fall with the establishment of the pro-American and anti-Communist Rhee regime in the South. On October 17, 1948, a decree of evacuation was issued by the government that the entire interior of the island up to three miles from the shoreline would be cut off and that anyone trespassing on the designated area without permit would be automatically considered as communist and shot on the spot without trial⁷³ – a decision hardly justifiable even in wartime. Strikingly enough, this curfew-imposed interior included most mountain villages actually inhabited by residents. Although this “guerilla zone” had already been under close scrutiny by the constabulary, this decision to impose a ban on trespassing on civilian villages and to give the military the right to summary, arbitrary execution of citizens meant that the government’s counterguerilla operations now entered a much more coercive and bloody chapter, precipitating a worst crisis yet. The scorched earth tactics were used to completely uproot the guerillas. Everything that could be of their use were burned or destroyed.⁷⁴ And the evacuated villagers were forcibly herded to the coasts where

⁷³ Ibid., p. 264.

⁷⁴ As a result of these scorched-earth tactics which continued on to the following spring, about ninety-five percent of the entire villages located on the mid-slopes of Mount Halla were destroyed. And most of 39,285 homes burnt over the entire period of the insurgency were lost in fall and spring

conditions were no better than the highlands.⁷⁵ But the order of evacuation often arrived too late or did not reach the residents at all. Uninformed villagers, as well as those too young, too old, pregnant, or too sick to promptly respond to the eviction order, were treated summarily by the government troops. These atrocities were justified on the groundless assumption that the interior residents were helping out rebels, giving them food and supplies, or otherwise that these killings anyway worked to benefit the government side by demoralizing the guerillas by leaving their women and children ruthlessly abused and slaughtered in the enemy's hands. In the meantime, initially directing their attacks only at police and rightists, the guerillas, further driven to edge, were now forced to ransack villages for supplies. They at times took out their revenge on innocent villagers for the government retaliations, equally blinded in their hatred of their opponents. The tortured island suffered

as a result of this undertaking. It is also known that about 20,000 more villagers fled to the hills to escape the indiscriminate butchery (Ibid., p. 537).

⁷⁵ Villagers along the coasts were forced to mobilize themselves to support the government actions. Throughout the insurgency, as many as 50,000 men and women were conscripted as civilian vigilante forces [*Min-bo-dan*]. Supervised by the Korean police, they were obligated to prepare food for the troops, to stand guards, or to build bulwarks around the costal villages on their own expenses. About 3,000 of them, usually strong young males, were pulled to form a special civilian battalion [*Tük-gong-dae*]. Ill-equipped with sharpened bamboo spears, they joined the constabulary and police in their operations against the guerillas often in the very frontline as the "cannon fodder" (Chemin Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team, ed., *4.3 ün malhanda [The April Third Speaks]*, vol. 2, pp. 85-90).

doubly by the excessively coercive and indiscriminate retaliatory violence committed by both sides.⁷⁶

On November 17, 1948, President Rhee Syngman proclaimed martial law over Cheju island. Until lifted on December 31 that same year, it gave the legal basis to these politically motivated, extra-legal summary executions of the Cheju residents. Even in early 1949, its termination, curiously, remained unknown to many military leaders on Cheju, not to mention to its residents, and continued to take effect.⁷⁷ For the military it was an unreserved license to kill, and for the victims a valid enough reason for their abnormal death. The consequence of this legal authorization for violence: a despicable overkill, murders and destructions unmatched in enormity and savagery by any previously committed fratricidal atrocities in Korea, let alone on the island itself. Indeed, during the four-month period from mid-November when martial law was proclaimed to March the following year, civilian death rate steeply increased. Nearly eighty percent of the entire civilian casualties caused by the 4.3

⁷⁶ The government tried to take advantage of these erroneous excesses committed by the guerillas, which, by the way, were certainly much less common than those committed by the government side. For instance, the police would readily hire those aggrieved residents who had lost their families in the guerilla retaliations and incite as well as authorize them (let them do the dirty work for them) to kill the families and relatives of the suspected leftists, who would retaliate in kind in turn (*The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 223). The cycle of terror and counter-terror seemed unending and preyed on anyone unfortunate enough to live in the condemned island. In a similarly crooked way, the government troops disguised as rebels or rebels in army or police uniform would come into villages asking for food and shelter to see who responded. Those who responded, certainly for fear of being retaliated for not cooperating, would be shot on the spot (p. 299).

⁷⁷ In chapter three, I will examine further the political implications of the November 1948 proclamation of the martial law on Cheju – its production of the “legally unclassifiable” beings.

insurgency occurred during this period, more than eighty percent of which were inflicted by the government forces.⁷⁸

There had been, it needs to be pointed out, a couple of added catalysts at work to boost up the mass extermination. During the months of November and December, additional 1,000 Northwest Youth Group terrorists were dispatched to Cheju in the wake of the October 1948 Yösu mutiny in the mainland.⁷⁹ This local military mutiny was undoubtedly a challenge for Rhee, a threat to his political authority; yet it was, at the same time, an opportunity, a timely political device he could utilize to justify the purge of unwanted political enmities, including his most powerful competitor anti-separatist Kim Ku, and to reorganize sovereignty.⁸⁰ To Rhee's benefit, the focus of the political agenda of the First Republic could become smoothly shifted from anti-traitor and unification issues to anti-Communism, which newly surfaced as a "burning" problem for national security. The government's fall suppression campaign on Cheju certainly gained momentum by the rebellion in Yösu which was then taken up and gravely exaggerated by Rhee as a severe Communist conspiracy against the newly-defined nation.⁸¹ The large-group

⁷⁸ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, pp. 363-74.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁸⁰ Rhee's biggest supporters that constituted the base of his political authority and identity were the former Japanese collaborators who had reemerged in liberated Korea wearing a new identity: anti-communist nationalists.

paramilitary reinforcements sent to Cheju in the aftermath of Yōsu to join the army and police certainly worked to accelerate their extermination drive. Under the auspices of Rhee and the U. S. military authorities, these young terrorists were in the frontline of committing atrocious crimes against the Cheju people. Another and unforeseen stimulus was the Ninth Regiment's replacement with the Second Regiment scheduled for the end of that year. The Second Regiment's successful suppression of the Yōsu mutiny in the mainland must have made an impression on the U. S. military advisors, which led them to determine to bring them over to Cheju to "complete" the mission. This decision pushed the leaders of the Ninth Regiment to anxiously try to accumulate as many guerilla death tolls as possible to outmatch their replacement troops.⁸²

Spurred by these catalysts, it was reported that in mid-December about 630 "rebels" were killed every week.⁸³ But despite this high death rate on the part of the "rebels," none or very few of the government losses was reported during this time and few weapons captured.⁸⁴ And according to the National Assembly report filed

⁸¹ Merrill, "The Cheju-do Rebellion," p. 182. See also Pak Myōgnim, "Cheju-do 4.3 minjung hangjaeng e kwanhhan yōn'gu [A Study of the Cheju April Third Popular Resistance]," MA thesis, Korea University, 1988), p. 4.

⁸² Merrill, "The Cheju-do Rebellion," p. 184.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ For instance, on November 13, one hundred fifteen "armed rebels" were killed at the village of Haengwon-ri, and seventy-nine at Nohyōng-ri on November 24. No losses on the government side were reported in both cases (Headquarters, USAFIK, *G-2 Periodic Report*, no. 989, November 16, 1948 and no. 998, November 27, 1948; *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 294.)

in December, the total number of the “armed guerillas” remaining on Cheju at this point was estimated no more than sixty.⁸⁵ Moreover, *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report* presumes that more than seventy percent of all child victims under the age of fifteen and seniors over sixty were killed during this period.⁸⁶ How, now, can we explain this discrepancy between the guerilla casualties and constabulary losses, and the increased death rate of the victims who could hardly be claimed as “armed rebels”? The killings, most certainly, did not even occur in the armed fighting. Most atrocities were perpetrated against civilian residents who were killed – *consumed* – as a result of the excessive and indiscriminate government actions. Most of those executed and placed under the category of the “guerilla casualties” were tortured, stabbed, burned, and shot to death, while unprotected and panic-stricken at home or hideouts and mostly unaware of why what happened happened to them.

The New Year did not find the conditions much alleviated. The sporadically continued – although much weaker and rarer now – guerilla attacks on the government side were responded with ruthless retaliatory violence against the civilian population who were still subject to summary, arbitrary execution. One of the worst excesses was committed by the Second Regiment at Pukch’on-ri. On January 17, 1949, aggravated by the guerilla attack near the village of Pukch’on

⁸⁵ The National Assembly, stenographed records, no. 124, December 8, 1948; *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 295.

⁸⁶ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 293.

which had caused the deaths of the two army men, the constabulary retaliated by burning down the entire village and shooting three hundred terrified villagers to death. Unappeased, the troops traveled to Hamdök-ri where some of Pukch'on residents had been relocated and pulled out another hundred for summary execution.⁸⁷ Stories were told elsewhere of raided villages where there were found mass-slaughtered bodies of men, women and children shot multiple times or those run through with bamboo spears by the civilian vigilante forces.⁸⁸ The intensity of violence during this final pacification drive in spring 1949 was still great that it nearly matched the Ninth Regiment's deadliest final operations in December the previous year. For instance, in the late spring when the constabulary was conducting its ultimate extermination campaign to completely wipe out the last remnants of the Cheju guerillas, the report supplied to the United Nations Commission on Korea informed that from early March to mid-April, 2,345 rebels were killed, 1,668 civilians were lost, and 3,600 guerilla sympathizers surrendered.⁸⁹ Although the monthly statistics of death on the government side is not available, let us just note

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 314.

⁸⁸ On January 25, 1945, the U. S. military advisors discovered ninety-seven dead bodies in Ora-ri. The victims were shot five or six times with M-1 carbines used by the constabulary. And on February 20, 1949, seventy-six villagers were mass-executed with sharpened bamboo spears by the civilian vigilante forces at Todu-ri. Included among them were five women and numerous young children of middle-school age. The latter massacre was witnessed by the U. S. advisors. (Headquarters, USAFIK, *G-2 Periodic Report*, no. 1055, February 4, 1949 and no. 1077, March 3, 1949; *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 296).

⁸⁹ United Nations, General Assembly, 4th Session, *Report of the United Nations Commission on Korea, vol. 2: Annexes, Final Report of Subcommittee II (A/AC.26/34)*, p. 27, cited in Merrill, "The Cheju-do Rebellion," pp. 189-90.

that the *total* constabulary losses throughout the entire period of the insurgency were approximately 180 and the police death about 140.⁹⁰

Clearly, during the government's pacification drives in fall and spring, a certain change, a very drastic one, in the character of the "rebels" seemed to have occurred, one that caused the target of the government actions to outgrow its original outline to an unrealistic extent. What was and could have been resolved as a simple regional instance of popular resistance revolved into a grave national issue, one that concerned security and identity (ideological purity) of the entire nation, that upon which its fate depended. The link had been persistently tried to be made, both during and after the incident, between the local guerilla attacks on Cheju and the North Korea-aligned forces. The island had gradually been projected as an undesirable, impure, and infectious region, and survivors became further marginalized.

In April 1949 the guerillas were already too weakened to undertake further offensive actions, and the insurgency had effectively ended in June 1949 with the death of the guerilla leader Lee Tökku in the police attack.⁹¹ But it was not until September 21, 1954 when the curfew imposed on Mount Halla was finally lifted that the blood-shedding seven years and seven months of the Cheju April Third Incident had officially drew to a close, claiming 25,000 to 30,000 innocent lives as its

⁹⁰ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, pp. 374-75.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 334. After his death, Lee Tökku's body was hung on a cross and put on view in the front of the Cheju city police station.

victims.⁹² Among these, over 80% were attributed to government actions and about 10% to the guerilla attacks. About 300 of the total 400 villages on Cheju had been demolished and nearly 40,000 homes ravaged. While most lost villages were rebuilt in the 1950's and 1960's, 84 of them still remain uncharted from the map.⁹³ Many survivors chose to leave the island for ever. Those who had no choice remained trapped in sustained trauma – in great pain, shame, guilt and repulsion both self-imposed and defined by the others.

With successful containment of the rebellion and reinstatement of order, peace came, but it was, as Bruce Cumings puts it, “the peace of a political graveyard.”⁹⁴ The adverse public response to this unprecedented collective violence did not surface. The physical and psychological pain inflicted on the island's population (the majority of whom knew little about ideology) who endured the worst of this atrocity was shamed into silence and inferiority by “the anti-national Communist uprising” which blatantly defined the event. The atrocity thus became virtually forgotten in everyday life, its meaning evacuated, sunk below the horizon of historiography and public memory.

⁹² Ibid., p. 356 and p. 366. An accurate count of the death tolls is, surely, impossible to obtain. It varies depending on the sources. Bruce Cumings notes, for instance, that the former Governor of Cheju privately reported to American Intelligence that as many as 60,000 Cheju residents had been killed during the incident and that 40,000 had fled to Japan (Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War Volume II*, p. 258).

⁹³ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, pp. 376-77.

⁹⁴ Cumings, *The Origins of Korean War Volume II*, p. 258.

The “Othering” Process

The ways in which reasons to kill were determined and specific targets of violence were outlined on Cheju involved a particular absurdity and hideousness, and it has slowly come to my recognition that all these “deformities” might be intentional. What was called *taesal* (the symbolic implications of which I will explore further in chapter four) was widely performed during 4.3, taking lives of (mostly female) “surrogates” *in place of* those of (male) fugitives. Death was treated here as if it were interchangeable and replaceable, identical with one another, and consumable, like a thing. It was degraded, and reduced to a mere political tool. “Confession” was also used by the suppression command as an effective political tactic of screening suspected individuals and of rationalizing mass-murder. Villagers would be tricked into believing that only those who voluntarily confess previous leftist involvements of any kind would be granted pardon and guaranteed safety. Many made confession, often for what they did not even commit, to safeguard life; but instead of amnesties, they were granted summary executions.⁹⁵ Physical torture was also utilized to turn more people into communists, which often made them turn on their own neighbors. Randomly selected residents would be tortured until they

⁹⁵ For instance, on December 21, 1948, 150 residents who “made confession” were taken into a small creek named Paksöngnae for secret mass-execution (*The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 299).

give information on the guerillas. Those who could not give anything would be subject to suspicion themselves. A saying spread among the Cheju people those days, *do not let your name stolen*, warning them not to be around and seen by those who were being taken by the police, for severe torture might let them drop *any* name born in mind, most probably of those they last saw. This accidentally dropped name by a tortured informer served as an immediate death sentence for many. On Cheju “informant” or *milgoja* was, indeed, used as an equivalent term for “murderer.”⁹⁶ Occasionally, the punitive authorities let civilian vigilantes (villagers mobilized under compulsion to support the government actions during 4.3) execute guerilla suspects using sharpened bamboo spears when they could “more easily” kill them off by shooting. Appallingly enough, these civilian *victims-converted-into-perpetrators* (the doubly condemned) were often forced to stand close and face to face with their neighbors to slay, with no hesitation permitted. They were condemned to become cold-blooded assaulters themselves against their will. In the same way, village attacks caused by the guerillas – although much rarer than the government attacks – were often utilized by the government side to break up people’s solidarity, to stir up antagonism against one another. The attacks were often exaggerated or entirely faked as the guerilla attacks so as to inflame the masses to mobilize vengeful hatred against the guerilla sympathizers and suspects in their village. Unrestrained violence was permitted, and encouraged, by the authorities to

⁹⁶ Kim Chongmin, “4.3 ihu 50 nyŏn [50 Years since 4.3],” p. 390.

loot, burn, and murder their neighbors.⁹⁷ All these sickly deformities – not just the murders but extreme obscenities and hideousness engaged in them – effectively served to transform a large number of island populace into the *unwilled* collaborators of the crime, to turn the victims into the assailants. What even adds up to the absurdity and ferocity of the Cheju violence, I would suggest, is this very fact that here there was no clear line between the perpetrators and the victims, or rather, the distinction was *deliberately* sought to be obscured. By converting normal human beings into monsters capable of such insane, inhuman crimes (who could do such appalling things to one another), which further denigrated the victims, reduced them to something *below* or *other* than human, the aggressors justified their actions and further pushed the victims into the margins of human and national belonging.

Many survivor testimonies indeed make it obvious that during 4.3 the entire population of the island were treated as if they were non-humans or belonged to some undesirable, “untouchable” social group – or *another* inferior and detested *race* perhaps – that killing them incurred no guilt of homicide. Indeed, the extreme grisliness with which they were put to death was such that those who were shot would be deemed fortunate. In reading survivors’ accounts, I have indeed repeatedly come across witnessed incidents in which victims were not just killed, but were tortured, sexually abused, molested, raped or mock-raped with hard and sharp objects, or forced to play sadistic games with one another (including forced incest)

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 376.

before being killed. Those lucky enough to escape death would be forced to gather around the crime scene to clap their hands and shout “hurray” watching their families being shot and neighbors tormented and abandoned to death. It was, as one survivor laments, “a time that drove everyone crazy.”⁹⁸

After the event, a sense of community was completely shattered on Cheju, and people never trusted one another again. Many chose to leave their home forever and did their best to hide their roots on Cheju. Those who remained tried not to talk about it – either failed to mention what is too painful and dreadful to recall or *deliberately* erased and distorted the disgracing memory of having survived such inhuman loss. Even in the renewed communities where the surviving families, bystanders, and (unwitting) perpetrators had to live together, perhaps there would be no other way but to tacitly agree to be silent about “it.”

In order to unfold the political meanings that motivated this violence, and the effects that emanated from it, I delve further into such questions as, why they were killed (why with added deformities), why on Cheju, and why what happened had to plunge into prolonged oblivion. These inquisitions, I believe, make apparent the systems of exclusion and limits that constitute the very basis of our culture and history, systems that we daily exercise and vehemently participate in maintaining even without consciously realizing it. I consider in this regard the 1948 carnage in light of several particular dynamics, including the way in which difference or other

⁹⁸ Ibid.

is manufactured, the way that identity and social norms (or social taboos) are constructed and kept, and how unconscious cultural knowledge (cultural stereotype or fantasy) turns into ideologies of mass violence.

In repeatedly trying to think of the implications of this violence – not just the killings themselves, but the ways in which these killings were carried out – I have begun to realize that the 1948 massacre of Cheju is something without which the history of modern Korea could never be written, that this large-scale state-led atrocity constitutes the very threshold – the originary border line – of the Korean nation, that which marks what remains within the threshold only by what is excluded from it, through its necessary and posited outside.⁹⁹ I came to think that the emergence as well as maintenance of Korea's modern national sovereignty is indissolubly bound to this *inaugural historical decision* marked by 4.3 of creating and keeping out an *other* against or upon which the nation imagines and reasserts itself (a decision of turning Cheju into Korea's other/enemy to suppress). What indeed took place on Cheju, I would suggest, is this fundamental political transformation: the foundation of Korean modern nationhood and shaping of the national, or political, subject.

As examined earlier, the occurrence of the Cheju massacre – or more precisely, the steep intensification of the counterguerilla operations by the

⁹⁹ I owe this basic formulation to Benedict Anderson's account of the nation as limited, imagined, and conceived as community (as comradeship). Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

government in fall 1948 – *scandalously* coincides with postliberation Korea’s emergence as the modern nation-state. What simultaneously marked the significant political transformation of the founding of modern Korea as an independent political entity was the intense terrorist suppression by the state against its own people, murderous persecutions, extrajudicial killings, brutal physical tortures, rapes, and sexual sadism, and violent acts of marginalization, seclusion and ghettoization. All these hideous “excesses,” which seemed completely unnecessary, inappropriate, and hardly explicable for the suppression of a spontaneous local unrest on a far-off and politically insignificant island, were by no means “accidental.” Nor were the ways in which what happened on Cheju became systematically forgotten by the Korean government for the subsequent half-century, with the aid of formal education, state-sanctioned memorial practice, censorship, spread of rumors, law, and the working of cultural superego (collective guilt) which functioned just like the law – which have all worked to contribute to the prolongation of victimization, the sustained reproduction and infiltration into people, including the victims themselves, guilt, shame, repulsion and fear necessary for keeping the “other” to where it must belong. All these, I would argue, are political strategies utilized to administer the system of exclusion and difference – between the nation and what is to lie over its frontiers – from which the identity of the nation (its homogenous and privileged interior) came to be derived.

Unfortunately and ironically, the inauguration of Korea as the modern nation-state and originary delineation of national citizens were concurrently marked by the suspension of citizenship and deprivation of human rights. The nation-state which is supposed to protect its populace from violence, from intrusive forces, from outside threats, a national space in which, supposedly, human rights are advocated and citizenship is asserted and valued, was marked out, ironically enough, through violent eviction, differentiation and segregation of its definitional and necessary other/enemy (what it does not want, what it must plunge into oblivion, its limits, its outside), and 4.3, I argue in this light, constitutes the foundational violence – the inaugural injustice – which demarcated or announced this important historical segregation.

It is in this sense that I would contend that Cheju is *not* “a magnifying glass, a microscope on the politics of postwar Korea,” as Bruce Cumings describes it.¹⁰⁰ Neither is it a byproduct or “prey” of the Cold War politics, as was assessed in *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report* in its final remarks.¹⁰¹ The systematic *overkill* with which the state carried out its terrorist campaign against its population, which occurred at the time when it organized itself into a powerful nation-state, was *not*, to my mind, a simple “error” or failure of governance.¹⁰² Rather, the 1948 carnage on

¹⁰⁰ Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War Volume II*, p. 262.

¹⁰¹ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 539.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

Cheju was something entirely necessary and essential for Korea's postcolonial nation-building process, the originary injustice *constitutive* of the formation of the historical narrative of the nation, its founding myth.

After thirty-six years of an increasingly ruthless colonial regime, the foundation of a strong nation-state that could protect its populace against foreign imperialism and the eradication of the remnants of colonial legacy (prosecution of former pro-Japanese collaborators) emerged as widely-shared values in liberated Korea, to both the right and the left of its political spectrum. The creation of a separate southern state in August 1948 under the leadership of Rhee Syngman and his American supporters, with a strong political aid of pro-Japanese elements – the colonial elite who had opportunely reemerged as a suitable intermediary for the United State occupation forces during the transitional period in the immediate aftermath of Japan's surrender (1945-1948), and who had subsequently succeeded in channeling into central and local administration in postliberation Korea¹⁰³ – was

¹⁰³ Unprepared to take on the task of administering southern Korea, unacquainted with its political circumstances, and understaffed, the US military authorities ended up relying heavily on the compromised colonial elite who had formerly served in the colonial civil administration or colonial police force, and who sufficiently reemerged in public life of postliberation Korea with a new role/identity fit for the new era and new master – as advocates against the Communist threat – and effectively continued their bureaucratic infiltration also in the First Republic. Constituting the political backbone of the pro-American Rhee government, by laying the groundwork for sovereignty, these pro-Japanese elements were protected and reinforced, in turn, by Rhee and the military authorities (Koen De Ceuster, “The Nation Exorcised: The Historiography of Collaboration in South Korea,” *Korean Studies* 25, no. 2 [2002]: 207-42 [p. 211]; Pang Kijun, “8.15 ihu ūi ch'inilp'a chiptan – migunjōng-Rhee Syngman chōngkwōnha ūi ch'inilp'a chipdan gwa panmin tūkwi [Collaborationist Associations Following the Liberation: Pro-Japanese Associations and the Anti Traitors' Investigation Committee during the era of American Military and Rhee Syngman Rule],” in *Inmul lo*

what went precisely against this general feeling of the era. The issues of unification and collaboration immediately surfaced with renewed urgency to challenge the political as well as moral legitimacy of the fledging nation.

There are several political factors to consider closely regarding the legitimacy in question of the southern regime surrounding fall 1948 – the time when the suppression of the Cheju guerillas took a dire turn. In September 1948, an Anti-Traitor Law [*Panminjok haengwi ch'ōbōbōp*] drafted earlier by the Constitutional Assembly (and vetoed by the U. S. Military Government) was finally approved against Rhee's objection, to trace former collaborators and banish them from the public life of the liberated nation.¹⁰⁴ Initial American disinclination to eliminate pro-Japanese elements from the administration for the fear of creating a bureaucratic void (which they thought might be inviting the Soviet-led Communist penetration) had been followed by the unwillingness of the Rhee administration, for any attempt at wiping out former collaborators could mean to undermine Rhee's political foundation.¹⁰⁵ An anti-traitor law obviously worked to infringe on the internal feuds among powers and had a shattering effect on the regime's political foundation. In the meantime, the unification movement was being continued even after the establishment of the separate regimes, headed by Kim Ku and Kim Kyusik, while

ponŭn ch'inilp'a yōksa [History of Collaboration Seen through Biography], ed. Yōksamunje yōn'guso [Seoul: Yōksa pip'yōngsa, 1993], pp. 254-55).

¹⁰⁴ De Ceuster, "The Nation Exorcised," p. 213.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

the *official* legitimacy of the southern state remained yet in question: it was not until December that the southern Korea was recognized by the United Nations as a sovereign nation-state.¹⁰⁶ To make the matter even worse, it also appeared that the United States, under pressure from a Soviet announcement that they would withdraw from the North at the end of that year, were also preparing to pull its forces out of South Korea.¹⁰⁷ For the Rhee regime which was “more an American creation than any in postwar Asia”¹⁰⁸ and whose survival thus depended, consequently, on American backing, the news was daunting enough, further pushing Rhee into a corner.

In a situation where his regime’s political and moral standing was being questioned both internally and externally, his pro-Japanese political base being legally jeopardized, and the withdrawal of American troops appeared imminent, Rhee needed to make a certain decisive break with the current political agenda which had been working to his disadvantage, a drastic tool with which to turn the tables on his political opponents, perhaps another, more powerful political principle around which the regime could reorganize and reinforce itself with regained sovereignty and moral justification, something potent and “threatening” enough to eclipse its immediate challenges and to keep Americans from leaving the country.

¹⁰⁶ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 241.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War Volume II*, p. 232.

In November 1948, Rhee forced a National Security Law through the Assembly, which, as Bruce Cumings notes, so loosely outlined groups seeking to endanger national stability that the members of the Assembly feared that it might target against them.¹⁰⁹ This “loose outlining,” however, was not an error or lack of discretion; rather, it was a calculated decision made by Rhee to legitimize a extensive purge of so-called “anti-regime” activities – an eradication of his political enemies – he was about to undertake. What needed to be done was to create a link in some way between the intended target of removal and the “Communist conspiracy” connected to the opposing, Northern state. The focus of the political agenda of the South could now be shifted from the anti-traitor and unification issues (now obscured or regarded as less-important) to a much “graver” problem that was brought to the fore to worry about, namely, anti-Communism.¹¹⁰ Anti-Communism, deceptively marched as a purifying nationalism, surfaced as a powerfully binding political and moral principle around which the state organized itself and state power was legitimized, an ultimate and foremost civil virtue encompassing all citizens – one for which no sacrifice was deemed too much or unnecessary. Any struggles against or outside this power line became considered as anti-national, dissident, or treacherous.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 267.

¹¹⁰ Rhee announced that “at a time when we have to fight Communism, we cannot punish able people because of their past wrongdoings. Even collaborators who repent their past deeds and now struggle for the country I call them patriots” (cited in Pang Kijung, “8.15 ihu ũ ch’inilp’a chiptan [Collaborationist Associations Following the Liberation], p. 260).

It was on Cheju that this anti-Communism or purifying nationalism (opposite sides of the same coin) was effectively put into practice. By fall 1948, according to this impure political decision, the April guerilla attacks on Cheju became endowed with a new character. They were now regarded as *the* vital and pressing issue for the central government's authority and consequently treated as if the fate of the entire south had been hinged on this "North-aligned Communist challenge." The unleashing of a large number of the right-wing extremist youth group terrorists to Cheju to repress the "anti-state" activities in late August 1948 already forebode this historical turn in which "the Cheju problem" began to be seen as something *much bigger* than a regional matter that it was. But *why Cheju?*

Cheju is the remotest region one can get not only from the Communist base in the North but from the central Communist locus in the South (the central SKLP in Seoul), physically isolated by the ocean from support and reinforcements necessary for the revolutionary mobilization that is powerful enough to grow into the entire South. As was examined, the island had maintained, when compared to the mainland, a much greater political independence during the United State occupation period, relatively well governed by the mildly leftist Cheju People's Committee which had gained support from the majority of the islanders. It was facing problems, some big enough to develop into armed protests, but strictly to speak, the basic conditions favorable for building a socialist society had never been formed on Cheju. Extremely harsh living conditions on the island – naturally low soil fertility, bad

weather, water deficiency, etc. – did not allow the residents to care about anything other than life itself. Concerns of ideology would be a luxury they could not afford for whom daily survival was what mattered. Cheju also had a very low rate of tenancy. Most of its people engaged in agriculture owned their own lands. They were all poor, but not exploited. “Feudalism,” as Cumings has noted, “[had] never developed on the island.”¹¹¹ “Class conflict” prerequisite for Communist revolution, so to speak, had never been formed on Cheju.

It must be made clear that the 1948 Insurgency on Cheju was motivated less by the Soviet or North-led Communist ideology – as both South and North Korean accounts of the Incident for different reasons sought to maintain – than by immediate and specific local issues. Premature and short-sighted, the initial attacks themselves lacked the mark of able revolutionaries. To contain it could have been easier. In no way Cheju could be viewed as a serious security threat to the southern nation until it was *determined* that way in fall. It is nothing but this political, tactical determination that might explain, even if it would never justify, the unprecedented measure of state terrorism against the entire island populace and systematically-maintained climate of fear and hostility toward this crafted enemy. Then, once again, *why Cheju?* Among countless local struggles and unrests increasing over the South during this volatile period, why this island?

¹¹¹ Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War Volume II*, p. 255. See also Chemin Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team, ed., *4.3 ün malhanda [The April Third Speaks]*, vol. 1, pp. 49-53.

I would like to offer several conjectures for the question. One could start with the legacy of separatism characteristic of the island deriving from its ecological determinants (physical segregation and isolation) and its history as a place of political exile (which had been the sole political usage of the island for the central government). Deserted from central power, Cheju had long remained an isolated and condemned site far removed from the political, social, and cultural life of the country. Its people were poor, ill-educated, and downtrodden by the mainlanders, ignored as intellectually retarded and culturally stagnant, and treated as if they were second rate citizens or outcasts. A tragic sensibility – a sense of victimization – was pervasive among the islanders themselves. The sea surrounding their habitat was deemed as a barrier which suffocated and marginalized life, and loathed as the source of all calamities that befell them. Frustration at being trapped in an enclosed space, aspiration beyond the bounds, and resentment at the barrier-sea were deeply rooted in their mentality and severely constrained their perception of the self and the world. Its language, the only major dialect variation in Korean that is hardly understandable to the mainland Koreans, must have further served to reinforce this chronic sense of separation, marginality, and isolation.

Perhaps one could say that physical segregation, deportation, eviction, ghettoization, dissimilarization of language, and assignation of certain low and disgusting traits (similar to racist or sexual hatred) had been, to a certain extent, already there, at work on the island, latent in its history and culture. The volcanic

island had already been taken as an unwanted, downtrodden, alien habitat by the islanders themselves as well as by the rest of Koreans. The *outside*, one could even say, had already been there, *inside*, ready-made to a certain degree, constituted, chosen, fed from within. Difference was internal rather than external, or internal dissensions were exaggerated, fortified, promoted to the point of being perceived as external, through violent processes of 4.3 and its manipulated afterlife which naturalized, regulated, fixated as real emotionally resonant, unconscious cultural knowledge.

The fratricidal violence on Cheju in 1948, I would contend, marks the ultimate event of making external the emerging nation's internal other, its potential outside. It constitutes the foundational frontiers, the originary dividing line between inside and outside, between nation and its constitutive other, between what is Korean and its raised outside, Cheju, or the "Reds." Absurdly enough, gruesome acts of barbarity, deformities, and excess of violence played out by the state on Cheju were fundamental part of this *othering process*, not its side effect but the very core.¹¹² They served to fuel the fantasy of the enemy, to assign the Cheju people

¹¹² Drawing on Masao Maruyama's famous essay on "ultra-nationalism," Carter Eckert explains that postwar Korean nationalism is "eerily similar to pre-war Japanese nationalism." Directly transmitted from pre-war Japanese ultra-nationalism through colonial education, postcolonial Korean nationalism has also become "militant" and "xenophobic" like its colonial oppressor's. Perhaps here lies part of answer to the extremely exorbitant use of force utilized by the state in the process of de-naturalizing or de-nationalizing the populate of Cheju, which constituted, ultimately, the process of turning them into non-Koreans. See Masao Maruyama, "Theory and Psychology of Ultra-nationalism" (1946), trans. Ivan Morris, in *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*, ed. Ivan Morris (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 1-24; Carter J. Eckert, "Epilogue: Exorcising Hegel's Ghosts:

(already known as different and inferior) properties such as insane, inhuman, low, morally depraved, disorderly, injurious and dreadful – all captured in the term “Red.” Entire islanders became sufficiently converted into harmful and unwanted aliens who can be killed off with no remorse and without mediation by law. Against this dangerous enemy species, the nation demarcated its frontiers and emerged as a sovereign political body.

I would further claim that the Cheju 1948 massacre, ironically enough, has functioned as what Shoshana Felman in a different yet resonant context calls the “historical traumatic energy” for the Korean nation, the “motive-force of society, of culture, of tradition, and of history itself.” But it was, one has to note, not only the occurrence of the traumatic event of 4.3 itself, but also the ways in which the event has been passed on, survived through generation that constitute this force.¹¹³ But what has been passed on, survived, it has to be equally emphasized, is *not* the memory of the event, but, precisely, its lack, the very rupture of memory (the event’s being *written out* of national historiography), and it is this violent omission of a traumatic past, the denial or active disrememberment of the nation’s inaugural victimization of its own citizens – the raised, necessary other – that had served to hold the nation together, to make it go on. It is this breach in history, this narrative

Toward a Postnationalist Historiography of Korea,” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, eds. Shin Gi-Wook and Michael Robinson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 363-78, (p. 368 and p. 453n12).

¹¹³ Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 174n3.

void in collective memory, that constitutes, to be ironical, the founding narrative event/process of the Korean nation, the (illegitimate) focal point for its shared historical narrative from which meaning and identity are derived and through which the nation defines and continues to imagine itself as a nation.

South Korea has been a nation founded upon “democratic” ideology. It has never been “fascist” in principle. But the fetters on its political thought have been tremendously strong and binding. Indeed to almost all Koreans who were raised in the system, educated to fear and abhor *ppalgaengi*, or commies, these ideological fetters were real and so natural, effectively generating diverse patterns of blind hatred and violence. Indeed, as historian Carter Eckert terms, anti-Communism and nationalism have served as remarkably pervasive and judgmental “double sirens” in postwar Korean society.¹¹⁴ They have powerfully encompassed and severely restrained political, intellectual and moral life of Koreans during the past half-century. They were “narrow and unforgiving gate[s] through which the facts of history as well as the historians must pass”; all other and different – not to mention opposing – virtues have been ignored as insignificant or chastised entirely as “immoral” by these potent and all-seeing “intellectual panopticon[s].”¹¹⁵ The silence of forgetting placed on 4.3 precisely epitomizes this suffocating social climate in postwar Korea.

¹¹⁴ Eckert, “Epilogue: Exorcising Hegel’s Ghosts,” p. 370.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

CHAPTER THREE

THE IMPOSSIBLE WITNESS: WOUNDED SPEECH AND THE *FACE OF THE OTHER* – ON KIM TONGMAN’S *WOMAN IN COTTON RAG*

I could not possibly speak of the Other, make of the Other a theme, pronounce the Other as object, in the accusative. I can only, I *must* only speak to the other . . . in the vocative, which is not a category, a *case* of speech, but, rather a bursting forth, the very raising up of speech.

Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics”

What presents itself as astonishing, making it seem as though the attack were arriving from an inner limit – from inside – is the fact that the nearness or remoteness of the sudden outburst cannot be clearly determined, thus rendering its status as *outburst* or *invasion* undecidable.

Avital Ronell, *Stupidity*

Elusive Knowledge

This chapter is an effort to speak *to* someone *in the vocative* (and a response to her call) the encounter with whom dramatically altered my itinerary of this entire

project and my vision of witnessing to catastrophic history – the conceptual or referential crisis in history whose overwhelming impact is marked by the loss of experience and the loss of the memory of that loss – and of bearing witness for the “impossible witness” whose story falls outside the reach of intelligibility, communicability, and transmissibility.

Chin Ayŏng from P’anp’o-ri in the Northern part of Cheju is better known to the small world around her by a deeply stigmatized, historically-marked name, “Woman in Cotton Rag” or *Mumyŏngch’ŏn halmŏni*. Through a short yet poignantly visceral and profoundly resonating film bearing that iconic name of hers as its title, by a Cheju-based independent filmmaker Kim Tongman, I came to know her.¹¹⁶ During the course of research and writing that followed, I have had to repeatedly return to her, to her unforgettable image, to reorient myself: not in the way in which a philosopher would reorient himself around a concept, but reorient – to borrow Hannah Arendt’s appreciation of Walter Benjamin’s thinking – *poetically*, around a fragment from the past torn out of its context and saved and lifted into the present where reading or poetic thinking sets off – not quite unlike an impassioned “pearl diver” who delves into the depths of the sea “not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light,” “but to pry loose [and carry to the surface] the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral” into which what had once been alive and whole was sea-

¹¹⁶ Kim Tongman, dir. *Mumyŏngch’ŏn halmŏni [Woman in Cotton Rag]*, 20 min. Cheju Media Tech, 1998.

changed and newly crystallized, all the while “immune to the elements.”¹¹⁷ I have come back, often involuntarily, to this “sea-suffered,” fragmented, *petrified* trait of life that had endured the ruin of time, the process of decay, to the silent repository of the ultimate secrets, to the non-space (from philosophy’s perspective) of *suffering*, the stutter of the persecuted, or to the irreparable incision marked on history’s body and on language.

This chapter is primarily a reading of the film, *Mumyŏngch’ŏn halmŏni*, but not only a reading as an interpretation of its meaning (an explanation of what it says), but an attempt to respond to something that the film fails to state but insistently strives to stage or accidentally opens up: that is, a certain *speechlessness* which perpetually withdraws from, or remains unexhausted by, rational, conceptual intelligibility. I am interested in what the film gestures towards, in what it calls us into, namely that dimension of suffering irreducible to history or the law, but that the film, as an art form or as “literature” may help us in locating and transmitting.

Chin Ayŏng is a picture of familiarity. Her wrinkled, sun-worn face with small, squinty eyes, her loose white garments, her weathered hands, and her tiny, shrunken figure are those of thousands of grandmothers from rural Korea. What

¹¹⁷ Hannah Arendt, introduction to Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 1-55, (pp. 50-51). This kind of thinking, namely “thinking *poetically*” was, as Arendt sees it, a rare ability with which Benjamin was gifted, and what was indeed central to his dealing with the past, guiding his *passion* for the past – which is *not* “to resuscitate [the past] the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages” (p. 50), but to release, rescue it from its fettering context and to dissipate the habitual appearance of the world, its seeming, deceptive continuity and homogeneity. It is with this thinking, I would say, that I have tried to think of Chin.

distinguishes her is her rag-covered jaw and the speech that she lacks. One January night in 1949 – during the height of the government’s excessive and indiscriminate counterinsurgency operations against the Cheju guerillas – in her hometown at P’anp’o, at her own backyard, she was attacked by suppression police in mistaken identity – or in sheer blindness, or the unwillingness to see, on the part of the perpetrator. The stray bullets fired by the police missed her vital organs, yet penetrated her lower jaw, which was completely shattered, and robbed her of the capacity to speak. Instantly condemned to silence, to the breakdown of witnessing, what happened immediately plunged into obscurity, into the collapsing of meaning and of story, and enclosed within her dark, muddled, and inarticulate inside where all is lost, including language with which to signal the wound, to articulate the loss. Until “saved” by death on September 8, 2004, at the age of ninety, she had had to endure a life of absolute solitude and isolation, a death-in-life which had been hanging, one could only remotely assume, on the very edge of insanity, deadness, and unwilled secrecy.¹¹⁸

The film, which sets up its entire work in the present time, allows us to glimpse at the outset how the past determines and shadows the present, how the violence of the past seeps into the present and deforms its space where its

¹¹⁸ Kang Hojin, “55 nyŏn apŭm huson dŭli ggok p’ulgessŭmnida [55 Years of Agony Passing on to the Next Generation,” *Chemin Daily*, September 9, 2004
<<http://www.jemin.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=119563>>.

destructive impact persists. It takes us to see how she almost never takes off the white long folded cotton rag with which she keeps her head wrapped all the time to hide her disfigured face, how she rarely eats in other people's presence for the fear of repelling them, which plunges her into deeper isolation, how she has developed the compulsive habit of locking doors as a result of pathological anxiety, delusions of persecution and suspiciousness, how her broken jaw made chewing and swallowing tremendously difficult and thus deteriorated her health gravely, causing malnutrition, gastritis, and other digestion-related illnesses, and how she has had to suffer from extreme poverty and consequent physical agonies. "Even death," one distant relative poignantly puts it, "did not favor her, even it did not come to her aid to draw that damnified life to a close."¹¹⁹ One begins to see that the event of 4.3 does not solely belong to the past: it is lived through, continually incorporated into the world she now inhabits. The very violence that damaged her body, destroyed her habitat, and erased her speakability has folded into and impaired her present as well.

Although she lost the ability to speak (language's referential and communicative function is impaired), throughout the film she continues to utter words of her own – a private language that is unintelligible to others and has no public use (something akin to shrill and high-pitched animal shriek) – in an effort to address the film crews who are present in the film's screen and with whom she has been building a new bonding and trust. And the film (which does not speak much)

¹¹⁹ Kim, dir. *Mumyŏngchŏn Halmŏni* [*Woman in Cotton Rag*], my transcript.

patiently listens to those absurd, meaningless utterances – which signify, if anything, the impossibility of telling, the impossibility of communicating the very obscurity, or narrative rupture, of the inside of trauma – and somehow urges us the viewers to engage in attentively listening to and receiving that injured, senseless speech, to respond immediately, even before rational understanding takes place, to that violent call it issues.

Toward the end of the film, when the filmmaker takes her back to the place where the originary incident of violence had occurred and where neither the landscape nor the people remain the same, she paces around the area frantically, pointing at things in such agitated manners, and incessantly making harsh, piercing noises. Eventually the noises slow and she breaks down and begins to sob, pounding her chest with her fist, face contorted with strangled anguish. Pain, it seems, completely wracks her body. Something extra-ordinary seems to be happening all over again. A member of the crew steps up to comfort her, but all the while she is still trying to communicate something, still pointing, still emitting shrill, ear-piercing cries. The narrator recounts:

The memories of the day, the inarticulate grief and desolation that have never been uttered aloud are suddenly gushing out. Agitated, she raises her voice, bursting out her own, private language, her tongue-tied secret. She now utters with her whole body something no one is capable to hear or comprehend. The pain of this woman who has lived her life as the Woman in Cotton Rag continues unabated even today, fifty years after the event.

The bullet which pieced the history of Cheju in 1948 has not completely passed through her life.¹²⁰

The photographic closing shot is of her alone at close-up – alone and in pain, vulnerable and completely devastated – and shows only her aged, rag-covered, deformed, withered face, tears falling from her eyes, and her mouth gaping slightly open, and shivering, as if pleading.

When I first encountered her and considered of making her a subject of investigation, I experienced that all the general conjectures, set of theoretical assumptions and hypothetic theses which I was to readily employ to grasp more firmly the essence of 4.3 seemed to be eluding the space she occupies. In trying to read what remains of her – her unusual face bearing the unusual scar, the maimed language she utters, and the white long folded cotton cloth that hides and shames the wounds, and also her stares, sorrowful, aged and impoverished, and her worn, craggy hands looking like dead tree bark, and her desperately pointing fingers and her tears – I have begun to see that all that indeed remains of her is only these *insignificant*, hardly legible markers of erasure, impotence, and lack. All that remains of her to be read is only these physical remnants of the limits of reading and of understanding, the markers of the void of meaning, of the disruption of signification, or of the breach in the flow of thinking. I could not theorize around them, pin them down thematically, but I knew somehow that they were speaking

¹²⁰ Ibid.

more powerfully to me than any astutely organized historical narratives, than any “proofs.” Obstinate irreducible to thematic conception, to intelligibility, or to historical mastery, that which is elusive of grasp has constantly confused my itinerary and undermined the grasp of this writing – rendering it ambiguous, insecure, and fragile – rather than anchoring me firmly, leading me closer to the factual reality of how things were, and making things more visible and more comprehensive. They have provoked perspectives that open up toward interruption, toward the discontinuity in my habitual structures of knowledge and representation. And I had to think further – or rather, think *another way* – to think of this *non-site* (the non-philosophical site radically irreducible to philosophical statement) occupied by the “other” and the “other of language,” as Derrida would formulate it.¹²¹

The burden of this chapter, thus, is not to render her pain or her injury (which resists reading or where reading/thinking breaks off) visible or knowable in the way that historical studies on casualties of mass atrocities whose alleged objective is to establish the historical accuracy of the damage, and where, thus, a crucial dimension of *testimony* (that is, the non-conceptual or non-judicial dimension) is often missing, have accustomed us. I do not intend to turn her face, and her muteness, into statements, into historical texts, or into proofs, and to explore

¹²¹ Jacques Derrida with Richard Kearney, “Dialogue with Jacques Derrida,” in *Dialogues with Contemporary Conceptual Thinkers*, ed. Richard Kearney (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 105-126, (p. 123).

their historical etiology.¹²² I am concerned less with her as a material evidence of what happened, how and why, than with her as a site of knowledge of another kind: a knowledge that can only be engaged through what Shoshana Felman has termed in another yet deeply resonant context “the *intelligence* of the emotion”¹²³: a knowing that works not just by rational perception or intuition, but through the engagement of the *body* or of the *emotion* of the reader or the listener – a knowing that “*physically [illuminates]*,” and that makes one listen for what cannot be heard or signified in extant words, giving way, ultimately, to “an openness towards the other.”¹²⁴ These thinkings, I would suggest, represent some of the most difficult and ethically-charged challenges that testimony sets forth to the historical, political and legal concerns of atrocity and of victimhood, by introducing “literature” or art – a mode of witnessing which seeks not only to reconstruct facts and history, but to *transmit* or to performatively project beyond the frames of written words (the said and the sayable) the otherwise unavailable knowledge of a minoritized, marginalized history – into the discourse.

¹²² This is not to say that the historical record is not insignificant in itself and ought to be corrected, but that it might be *insufficient* to capture what has been called *testimony*, which, I will argue, is irreducible to facts and knowledge in juridical or historical sense.

¹²³ Felman notes that this intelligence (through which, she reads, Claude Lanzmann’s powerful film of Holocaust testimonies, *Shoah*, seeks to reach its viewers, succeeds in *performatively* conveying to them the very darkness and disconnection of the inside of the catastrophic history) is “not a *concept*” “but something like a metaphor: a metaphor similar to that of light, not, however, in the sense of an *enlightenment* . . . but in the sense of a *physical illumination*,” the process of which might still involve obscurity or non-knowing. See “The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,” in Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony*, pp. 204-83, (p. 239, 239n19).

¹²⁴ Derrida with Kearney, “Dialogue with Jacques Derrida,” p. 118.

Historical Narrative versus Traumatic Truth

On contemplating upon the appropriate method of historical writing, renowned historian of modern Korea Carter Eckert contends that “the presentation of a reasoned interpretation or narrative that lies at the core of all good historical writing . . . must be constructed on the basis of a fair assessment of all the available evidence.”¹²⁵ While agreeing that historical writing is necessarily plural – which he welcomes – and at the same time can only be partial by nature due to “the inherent limits and biases of historical source material, and even of human knowledge itself,” Eckert nonetheless underscores the necessary recourse of the historian to the evidence that must serve as the authorizing ground for historical truth or reality.¹²⁶ He insists that the adept historians must always write inductively and objectively, drawing on the existing evidence – a methodology which, he points out, is essentially different from the study of “literature”:

[T]he study of history cannot be directly equated with the study of literature. Although literature can often reflect and illuminate the past, the past itself is not fantasy or fiction. It is not an unbounded “text” subject to unrestrained semiotic speculation and play. The best historians always writes creatively,

¹²⁵ Eckert. “Epilogue: Exorcising Hegel’s Ghosts,” p. 376.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

but to do so within the compass of the totality of the evidence available to them.¹²⁷

Historical research driven by the curiosity of the inductive historian toward a particular historical phenomenon itself, governed by “a zeal for finding out what happened, how, and why,” is, for Eckert, what constitutes the study of history, which is distinct from fiction that is a domain of literature and is driven by “a blind passion” (creativity unsustainable on the basis of proof) rather than by “an intellectual passion for truth” (a dedication to “objective reality” irreducible beyond, and before, any discourse, interpretation, or narrative).¹²⁸ Thus, “[t]he inductive historian [must] begin research with a simple what-how-why question about a particular historical phenomenon.”¹²⁹ In searching for the non-site that *Mumyõngch’õn halmõni* occupies, into which she was muted, or for the wounded, deprived, or obscured zone of her speech (an alterity lodged by the “other” and the “other of language”), I, in a way, answer and challenge Eckert’s – and many faithful, adroit historians’ for that matter – notion of history, their inductive quest for the historical factuality and reference which must always be governed and curbed by the *evidence available to them*.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 373.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 376.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 373.

Thus I would ask such questions as, how do we read historically or write historically about an event that harbors within its very core *extreme* injustice – injustice that is felt but remains unspeakable, unclaimed, and un-owned? Can a *felt* experience be evidence, the authorizing ground for historical knowledge? What if there remains *only* the witness – if singular witness is the only possible and only available validation to a historical happening – yet language as a tool of witnessing is missing, injured, both literally and figuratively, by the violent enactment which inscribed him or her into the witness, condemned him or her, precisely, into the *impossible witness*?¹³⁰ Can an inductive historian detect and seek accountability of the impossibility of telling, the refusal of witnessing? How, ultimately, can one write objectively, inductively about the *unbearable* – historically untenable or inappropriate – event or experience that exceeds and overwhelms the (perceptual) reality's hold, drawn to the margins of the totality of available evidence? Eckert's indignation or refusal of "literature," I would say, is itself symptomatic of the nature

¹³⁰ See Giorgio Agamben's relevant discussion of the *Muselmann*, or the Muslim, in Nazi concentration camps. It is known that the term, which previously appeared in Primo Levi among other survivors of the death camps, was used in the camps to designate the "worst" (most devastated, inept, abject) humans for whom nothing human had left: inmates "from whom extreme humiliation, horror, and fear had so taken away all consciousness and all personality so as to make [them] apathetic," despite continuing life of some sort (Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: the Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen [New York: Zone Books, 1999], p. 184). Being perhaps the only true, and complete, witnesses (the pure and absolute witnesses) who "touch[ed] the bottom" (and who saw things from *inside*), as Levi has phrased it, they at once mark *the impossible witnesses* – victims who cannot testify for themselves, cannot recount their own deadness (where language, meaning and memory have been lost), and whose experience of victimhood can thus exist, ironically, only through the accounts of the survivors (the proxy witnesses) who are not the true witnesses but who speak in their place as surrogates (Primo Levi, *the Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal [New York: Summit Books, 1988], pp. 83-4).

of history, of history's need to remain knowledge and remain identical to itself. For further guidance and reflection in these problematics and questions, I turn to recent meditations on the psychoanalytic conceptions of trauma and the tradition of the victims in Walter Benjamin.

The genuine internal truth of the Cheju Incident, to my mind, lies in the historians' blind spot, standing on the very edge of the sum total of the obtainable proof, behind (perceptual) reality's veil. The unbearably horrible nature of the crime – the sheer indiscrimination of violence and the innovative, unforeseen techniques of brutality used in murdering, raping, torturing and demeaning the victims – was such that it drove the victims' cognitive ability to the very limits, and harmed their capacity to perceive, to understand, to fully live, to experience, to remember or to speak about the truthful dimension of what happened. The very inside of the event was missing, thus, from the start, never quite grappled by the person who was most closely engaged in it. It was the event, one could say, which put into crisis the very possibility of historical cognition, remembrance, and accountability.

The conceptual impossibility of this existential extremity (bordering on the impossibility of conceptual categorization and reference) or of the limit experience (defined by the impossibility of experiencing the event, or by the impossibility of defining it by its content itself) and its requiring of an understanding of another sort – a requiring of our trying to reach a “beyond” of historical phenomenon, a “beyond” of perceived reality, and of our being attentive to the not-said, the unheard,

the unsayable – seem to have a critical bearing on psychoanalytic discussions of trauma. Psychoanalysts J. Laplanche and J. –B. Pontalis have defined trauma as “an event in the subject’s life defined by its intensity, by the subject’s incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the psychical organization.” It is “characterized by an influx of excitations that is excessive by the standard of the subject’s tolerance and capacity to master such excitations and work them out psychically.”¹³¹ Having occurred too suddenly, too unexpectedly, and in the intensity that exceeds the level of excitation that the subject can tolerate psychically, the unprepared-for and unwelcome incursion of excessive stimuli, as Geoffrey Hartman has explained, “seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness and falls directly into the psyche”¹³² – that is, registers directly into the psyche without having been experienced or screened through by consciousness. Without, thus, having fully passed into consciousness and been fully integrated into or accounted for by the existing symbolic order, and separated from the one who has passed through and is most deeply involved in it, the trauma insists on remaining singular, unverbalizable, incomprehensible, and thus, as Ulrich Baer has noted, “largely immune to revision in accordance with existing

¹³¹ J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), p. 465.

¹³² Geoffrey Hartman, “On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Study,” *New Literary History* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 537-63, (p. 537).

memories of other events.”¹³³ It often remains an estranged foreign body in the psyche, resistant to symbolization, to conscious recollection, and to communication. The traumatized, one could say, undergoes something that they cannot identify or claim as their own, determined by an event that has never been experienced, and possessed by a knowledge the conscious access to which has remained blocked.

In his reading of Charles Baudelaire whose poetic utterance deals with the loss of experienceability under the impact of shock in mass society and the resultant fragmentation of the sense of self, Walter Benjamin, drawing on Freud, makes some instructive remarks on the relation of consciousness and shock experience, which resonates in our discussion here. “That the shock is thus cushioned, parried by consciousness,” says Benjamin, “would lend the incident that occasions it the character of having been lived, in the strict sense,”¹³⁴ meaning that becoming conscious implies becoming protective against the effects of the external stimuli which have destructive impact to organism’s equilibrium. When consciousness fails to acknowledge or to live the external shocks, to reduce or to sterilize them, the unfiltered, raw reality of the incident is thought to be lost in the mind’s dark, unreigned, bottomless fund, and remains inaccessible beyond the reach of the intellect. The more readily consciousness registers the shock experiences, the less likely are they to have traumatic effects. Psychoanalytic theory, as Benjamin has

¹³³ Ulrich Baer, *Remnants of Song*, p. 10.

¹³⁴ Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Illuminations*, p. 162.

observed, strives to understand the nature of traumatic shock on the basis of its breaking through the protective shield of consciousness that works against excessive external energies. This ultimately allows Benjamin to say: memories – or more precisely, memory fragments – are “often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness.”¹³⁵ That is, what has not been experienced consciously, attentively, and with intention (that is, without having been sifted through and adulterated by protective system), what has thus been buried deep in the psyche in the form of memory-trace, immune to modification, and rises up only momentarily and unexpectedly in an involuntary return, has a far more powerful force of illuminating the past – the past which, ironically enough, can only be grasped in unassimilable (unfamiliar, unhabitual, unintegrated) forms (images) that cannot be translated into statements.¹³⁶ The truth of trauma, the very heart of the catastrophic happening, one might say, lodges or is secretly deposited in traumatic memory, in the *petrified* trait of the real world whose utterly unusual, uncommon form and shape repeatedly return to rupture normative narratives of history.

Cathy Caruth has similarly underlined in her important introductions to the subject that to the precise extent that it remains unmediated, unfiltered through by

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 160.

¹³⁶ Note here Benjamin’s important quotes of Freud’s famous hypothesis that “consciousness comes into being at the site of a memory trace,” that “becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory trace are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system” (Ibid.).

consciousness, and unintegrated into the existing order of signification, the trauma registers, crucially, a belated impact: “in trauma the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, [and] immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness.”¹³⁷ What has never been lived consciously, what has registered without having been experienced, namely the traumatic truth or reality, insistently returns to the subject at a later time *in the symptom* – a symptom, precisely, of “the expropriation of the victim’s self”¹³⁸: “[t]he traumatized . . . carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess”¹³⁹; the trauma thus “evokes the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence.”¹⁴⁰ The impossibility of knowing or witnessing to a traumatic reality in its original account is closely bound to the fundamental incomprehensibility (which is, however, inherently more than the mere negativity or mere absence of meaning) constitutive of the event characterized as traumatic. Thus, the trauma, carrying this constitutive breach of understanding, can

¹³⁷ Cathy Caruth, introductions to *Trauma*, p. 6.

¹³⁸ Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence*, p. 20. The symptom could be said to result from the discrepancy between trauma and (perpetually delayed) signification, the discrepancy generated from the inadequacy of the receptive capacity. It is the (symbolic) substitute, surrogate, or gratification for something that is missing (repressed), the belated and debilitated arrival of an un-owned reality. It is the obsession of what has been closed or denied (of what would otherwise be unavailable at all). It is, one could say, a mode of questioning posed by “the other of language” to our familiar, reasoned understanding of the world.

¹³⁹ Caruth, introductions to *Trauma*, p. 5.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

be said to “[open] up and [challenge] us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, of impossibility.”¹⁴¹ This epistemological void (where representation, narrative memory, or conscious thinking collapses) inherent in traumatic experience is precisely what I have called the inductive historians’ blind spot. *Proof* seems very at odds with the truth of trauma that can only be perceived in incomprehensible, unassimilable, unrepresentable forms that are inherently resistant to phenomenology. Perhaps *Mumyǒngch’ǒn halmoni* – her deprivation, her deformity, her impotence – might be read as a symptom herself of *an impossible history* (the less determinate, yet powerfully residual strain of history) that she cannot fully contain, yet is possessive of her.

It is in light of this inherent failure of representing or narrativizing trauma that the question of *transmission* arises with an uncompromising urgency: the transmission of catastrophic, incommunicable knowledge against its utter perishing, against its plunging into the complete isolation and oblivion, unsaid and unknown to anyone else, and remaining true only to itself, or against the social denial of the traumatic event’s occurrence itself (including the perpetrator who will not speak), which can by no means be *proved*. Trauma studies, one could say, is above all else preoccupied with this epistemologically and ethically-charged problem of transmission: the predicament of listening, of representing, or of conveying as knowledge the catastrophic rupture of expression. It concerns the question of how to

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 10.

testify to an event that is marked, precisely, by the breakdown of witnessing, the failure of transmission. It is precisely, apropos Eckert, the act of *literature* – which, I will argue, obsessively strives to *stage* (em-body) this failure – that works through this dilemma.

The psychoanalytic notion of trauma can be applied as well on collective level and is particularly resonant in twentieth-century critique of history (its practice of exclusions) and the tradition of the oppressed whose history is not readable in historiography. Repression, denial and self-deception work on social as well as individual level. Cultural consciousness is equally preoccupied with working through the effects of excessive stimuli which threaten self-preservation of collective organism. But here too, what has been repressed and withdrawn from history's perception and consciousness (from the command of its will) must persistently be going under its perceptual surface, and is expected to return belatedly to historiography in the form of symptom – which is *not* proof, but the pathology of history (the sign of its discomfort) – to dissipate its habitual appearance (its seemingly clean and uncrooked surface). This later returning (the appearing of pathological symptoms) could be read, as Benjamin will say, as the belated due claims of the oppressed, or traumatized, subjects. In order to think further of the relationship between history and trauma, between historical memory and traumatic truth, and the connection of history's self-understanding and the right of the victims,

I turn to Benjamin's critique of historiography in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History."¹⁴²

For Benjamin, history is a suspicious concept. Preoccupied with giving an unchanging, totalized and final image of the past, history or historicism contents itself with establishing a causal, progressive connection of discrete moments in history. In doing so, it musters separate, disconnected and particular materials to fill homogeneous and empty time, which is far from being *historical*. Real history is not the linear and progressive sequence of events. The idea of continuity is a sheer fiction. History, for Benjamin, is always collaborated with totalitarian, fascist power. The ideas of progress, unity, linearity and homogeneity are all linked to the discourse of the victors, and suggest a violent reduction.

All rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers. . . . [Cultural treasures which are to be carried along the victor's triumphal procession] owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents who have created them, but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is not document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism ("Theses" 256).

The neglect, forgetting and silencing of "the anonymous toil" of the oppressed – "moral barbarism," "mental obtuseness" and "physical wretchedness" that "have always been found in juxtaposition with cultured refinement of life," as Benjamin

¹⁴² Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illumination*, pp. 253-64. Hereafter cited in the text as "Theses" with page numbers.

elsewhere puts it, citing Hermann Lotze¹⁴³ – are in effect constitutive, rather than accidental, part of the working of history.

Benjamin's depiction of the famous image of an angel in Paul Klee's painting, "Angelus Novus," draws on this grim vision of history:

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress ("Theses" 257-58).

What this "angel of history" sees with his face turned toward the humanity's past is a wreckage of disaster piled over before him. Overwhelmed, he cannot take his eyes off of what he sees, nor can he utter a word about it. The storm called "progress" is violently propelling him toward the future, against his will, which is to "stay, [to] awaken the dead, and [to] make whole what has been smashed." Whereas "we" – the uncritical mass – see the events of the past nicely chained in the name of progress, the angel of history sees a pile of catastrophe. He penetrates the appearance of history, and sees that progress presupposes the violent muffling and marginalization

¹⁴³ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Roy Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), [N 14a, 1].

of the traumatized. This angel, who might be *weak* in power – not strong enough to undo the wrongs of the past – yet who *sees through*, is a true historian or a historical materialist.

Benjamin sees himself, as a historical materialist, in a special position to “brush history against the grain” in order to make presuppositions inherent in our representation of the world (our perception of reality) overt (“Theses” 257). He realizes that “history is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]” (“Theses” 261):

Materialistic historiography . . . is based on a constructive principle. Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tension, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history (“Theses” 262-63).

For a historical materialist the past is always considered as incomplete. He perceives the blind spot behind the idea of progress, the illusion of which has filled the work of the past. The idea that mankind as a whole has achieved progress dismisses individuals and ignores their singular suffering that is resistant to historical categorization – the innumerable and anonymous singular loci of traumatic intensity suffered by those who have been subjugated, persecuted, denigrated, and exterminated on the earth. Certainly the historicist appropriation of progress yields a

hapless injustice, for no era, no ideology, no collective identity can permeate the entirety of its bearers.

The past is something that needs to be revisited, reread indefinitely. And this redemptive revisitation, this Messianic rereading – something like a pearl-diver’s delving into the depths of the sea to bring into the world of the living the shards of the past – is crucially tied to the work of memory, which is linked, ultimately, to the idea of justice. Memory of the traumatized – that is, traumatic memory that has never entered into historical consciousness and has never attained narrative form – that is *read* has an ethical potential to break open, to drive a *caesuric* wedge into the progressive, catastrophic continuum of history, putting into trial history’s memory and knowledge of itself. “The image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger” – a past that “can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again” (“Theses” 255), namely the unexpected and unsettling return of trauma – challenges and complicates with its revolutionary, disruptive potential our traditional perceptions about history, identity, and nation: it poses *the question of the other* to official or normative narratives of progress, unity, and civilization. “Remembrance,” says Benjamin, “can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete and the complete (suffering) into something

incomplete.”¹⁴⁴ Perhaps redemption starts with our calling for the specters of the dead and the persecuted – who not only have fallen victim to the act of violence itself, but have been denied of the status of remembering and speaking subject – and letting them testify to the very collapse of memory and of story.

Crucially Benjamin’s vision of how history is inherently deprived of (traumatic) memory, how forgetting (silencing, denial or self-deception) is itself critical part of the intention of history, teaches that the violence of history not only refers to the enactment of terror itself, but extends to the post-violence tradition of the repression of public grieving – the breathless cultural climate of terror and intimidation in the aftermath of violence that disallows the victims of the political injustice from bearing witness (from becoming the agents of history). Political brutality of 4.3, one could say, harmed not only the victims but also the cultural capacity to acknowledge and tolerate the social suffering. It is this repressive social atmosphere that sustains the narratives of history, communal unity and progress. The tradition of the oppressed in Walter Benjamin, I would suggest, draws critical attention to this post-traumatic tradition of social deniability (the tradition of the repression of proper mourning) built into the political strategy of the originary violence.

The Cheju violence – postliberation Korea’s at once foundational and repressive historical trauma – has played a key role in engendering and maintaining

¹⁴⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, [N8, 1]

national collective identity of modern Korea, by providing the basis for its shared/dominant nationalist and anti-communist framework for remembering (which surely has no endurance for the cults of memory as regards 4.3). This collective identity (social solidarity) is one that not only has instigated continual collective violence, hatred and blind fear, but also defers indefinitely the questions of justice, the questions of the right of the traumatized, marginalized victims. The fragmentation, privatization and deformation of 4.3 memories for the last half-century were politically manipulated outcomes generated from varied repressive social practices, including practices of law and rumors, which, as I will now show, functioned to inferiorize, shame and trivialize the traumatized victims, and thus prolongate the effects of power.

Techniques of Exception: Law and Rumor

Martial law [*kyeōmnyōng*] proclaimed on the island of Cheju on November 7, 1948 and the subsequent emergency rule established gave the legal basis for the extra-judicial, arbitrary or summary executions and other forms of iniquitous violations of Cheju people during 4.3, which was responsible, as was discovered later, for nearly eighty percent of the entire civilian casualties caused by the Incident. Putting citizens – the entire group of citizens suspected of jeopardizing national security and purity, *chosen* on the basis of unconscious cultural knowledge – to

death without going through legal processes was made fully legitimate, even entirely necessary, by this unusual extension of power instituted by the government – the power to suspend the law in what Giorgio Agamben refers to as a “state of exception.”¹⁴⁵

The 1948 martial law which declared the entire Cheju as a zone exterior to the law or devoid of it, and at once excepted from *and* captured by the law, marks a fundamental breakdown of the rule of law within law. It signals the law’s expulsion of certain citizens, its turning into a legitimate tool to kill by bringing its own exercise into an emergency halt. The law here functions not to punish the one who trespasses the law (which can happen only within the rule of law). Instead, it produces the outlaws – recognizes and marginalizes the legally unacknowledgeable, unclassified, indeterminate beings. They are lives uncovered by any legal or civil rights, *the absolutely eradicated* who are left out of juridical protection and can no longer count on law’s coming to their aid, and whose killing does *not* amount to the violation of the penal law. The production of these lives – namely, “[lives] taken into the sovereign ban,” as Agamben terms it – is closely bound to the purpose of the state.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988) and Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁶ Relevant here is Agamben’s discussion of *homo sacer*, a Roman juridical term defined roughly as bare life and referring to a “sacred” person who can be killed but not sacrificed and without death being considered a homicide. *Homo sacer*, says Agamben, “presents the originary figure of life taken

In a different but related context, Agamben has suggested that the state of exception, which was meant to be a temporally and spatially specific problem, “has become the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics.”¹⁴⁷ It has become a strategy of the modern state by which it grants itself a sovereign power defined over and against the existing legal domain. In the very act by which state sovereignty suspends the law, by which it establishes the possibility of the rule of law by deciding on the exception, it secures its own political functioning. The existence of such space devoid of law, where any legal status of the individual has been temporarily brought to a halt, is thus essential to the constitution of the legal and political order itself. The law must thus need the constant appeal to its other, to its outside, to the juridical vacuum where law effaces itself and becomes “a force without law.”¹⁴⁸ As Agamben relevantly insists, “what is excluded in the exception maintains itself in relation to the rule in the form of the rule’s suspension. The rule applies to the exception in no longer applying, in withdrawing from it.”¹⁴⁹ The ability to decide over the exception, the power to declare the annulment of the rule within the state of exception, is that through which the very norm is defined and guaranteed. That is, the extra-judicial or apolitical sphere of exception constitutes

into the sovereign ban and preserves the memory of the originary exclusion through which the political dimension was first constituted” (Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 83).

¹⁴⁷ Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁴⁹ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 17-18.

the very core of the political in modern states. Drawing on the specific case of the Nazi State of Germany under Hitler's rule that he sees as a prolonged state of exception, Agamben remarks: "modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system."¹⁵⁰ "The establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war," it seems to me, is analogous to what happened on the island of Cheju in 1948, which signals the emergence of a permanent state of exception (modern totalitarianism) in South Korea.

The committing of mass-murders, rapes, arsons, loots "outside the law" and the production of "bare" lives that can be killed with impunity, without this killing being regarded as a homicide – for this killing occurred, once again, outside regular jurisdiction and does not constitute juridical violation – have veiled violence as justice and blocked the issue's entrance to historiography and to the court of law in post-4.3 Korea. The study of 4.3 as "a legal civil war" and of the suffering of the absolutely deprived (the legally faceless) Cheju victims must first take into account this *constitutive* failure of law, and ultimately of historiography and public memory, to recognize and to bring into trial the atrocity that had occurred in the state of exception. "The law," writes Shoshana Felman in her study of the complex link

¹⁵⁰ Agamben, *State of Exception*, p. 2.

between trauma and law, is “not entirely (and not by definition) on the side of justice; [it] partake[s] of the violence of history.”¹⁵¹ In some instances, the law is an accomplice in the process through which history is written and social unity is forged – through exclusion, silencing, and perpetual delay of justice.

The bewildering acts of violence and terror on the 1948 Cheju – the originary acts of exclusion through which, as I have discussed earlier, the political dimension of modern Korea as a sovereign nation-state was first constituted – effectively persisted into the event’s after-life, transformed, or perpetuated, into the structures of everyday in the post-4.3 Korean society, not only in the sense of life’s continued subjection to the *possibility* of sovereign ban (as Agamben’s state of exception has taught us); the originary exception/traumatization is revisited, prolonged and intensified in a more systematic and direct manner by repeated legal decisions concerning inclusion and exclusion, the continuous categorizations, denigrations, and trivializations of the originary “homo sacer.” The law, as history’s collaborator (as the organizing tool of history), participating in regulating this constant exorcism of the defiled, illicit, harmful other out of the nation’s self-instituted boundary. South Korea’s *yŏnjwaje* or guilt-by-association system – a leftist-exclusion policy terminated only in the mid-1980’s, which had prohibited family members of those massacred during 4.3 from pursuing professions, without

¹⁵¹ Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious*, p. 16.

giving right to defend themselves¹⁵² – can be considered as a representative of this legalized practice of calculated negation of the other. *Yŏnjwaje* functioned to re-victimize not only surviving victims of 4.3 but also their families, relatives and neighbors by producing a culture of antagonism against them, where disparagement, ignorance and repulsion were so openly, ordinarily and legally advocated and practiced, and where victimization – being othered – was structured as inferiority. The pain and grief of the Cheju victims have been denied, drowned further by the cultural failure of acknowledging this legally-codified, ritualized hatred and denigration (which we daily and perhaps unwittingly exercise and endorse) added to resonant feelings of guilt, shame and self-disgust gradually evolved and internalized in the victims themselves (who have come into social beings, paradoxically, through the voluntary as well as involuntary incorporation of these injurious traits).

The post-4.3 culture of coercion and antagonism was inspired and sustained also by *rumor* spread by the national government, which was used as a powerful cultural instrument of suppressing pro-democratic sentiment. I will explore two particular incidents here of the force of rumor, which invaded, just like the law, the very interior of the post-violent culture and produced the climate of hate and fear that encircles scenes of “ordinary” life. The first incident concerns the 1987 mid-air disappearance of a Korean Airlines jetliner.¹⁵³ On November 29, 1987, a Korean

¹⁵² See for the casualties caused by *yŏnjwaje* *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, pp. 496-508.

Airlines flight 858 en route from Baghdad to Seoul reportedly exploded over the Bengal Bay in the Myanmar territory. No trace of the body both of the plane and of the passengers was located, and all 95 passengers and 20 crew members on board were announced killed. The incident, which occurred, scandalously enough, only eighteen days before the scheduled presidential election, instantly shocked the entire nation, causing people grave dismay and alarm. The Agency for National Security Planning (NSP), South Korea's secret services agency, almost immediately issued a statement that the explosion was triggered by the North Korean terrorists' bombing attack. Three days later, two suspects were arrested at Bahrain International Airport where they attempted to leave the city using fake Japanese passports. The report tells that one person, 70-year-old male Kim Sŭngil, immediately killed himself swallowing cyanide capsule, and the other, 26-year-old female Kim Hyŏnhi, allegedly failed a suicide attempt and was transferred to Seoul on December 15, the eve of the election. Kim announced at the press conference held by NSP that both she and her partner were trained North Korean operatives and acted upon a direct order from North Korean leader Kim Jong-il – which seemed to precisely confirm the earlier government claim. Her “voluntary confession” also described their travels under guidance of North Korean agents from Pyŏngyang to Baghdad where a time-bomb was planted on the passenger's rack in the plane during its stopover in Abu Dhabi. Despite that *no* crashed bodies of the plane, including its black box, were

¹⁵³ Kim Chongmin, “4.3 ihu 50 nyŏn [50 Years since 4.3],” p. 369.

found, the government, to the surprise and dismay of many, pulled out its mere two-week on-spot survey of the crash site. The case was hurriedly closed, with the death sentence, and then the special pardon for her “diplomatic utility,” given to Kim.¹⁵⁴ In the meantime, intent public attention was also drawn to a man named Lee Kyöngwoo, a North Korean spy operating in Japan pointed as another key figure in this alleged terrorist bombing incident. Lee had been named by NSP as the key evidence which had initially led them to assure of the incident’s “Northern connection,” before Kim’s “confession” came along to confirm it. Specially relevant to our present concern, the NSP announcement also included a disturbing piece of information regarding Lee’s past, namely that this alleged “heavy-weight North Korean operative” had been vehemently involved as leftist leader in the “anti-national Uprising” of the 1948 Cheju violence. While having triggered a heated nationwide reaction, this announcement, after all, turned out to be a faked story.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ There have been growing conspiracy theories surrounding this “disappearance,” much-shared suspicions that this whole incident was a political scheme predetermined by the South Korean government whose anxiety was deepening as the day of election drew near and the growing popular resistance to ultra right-wing military dictatorship (boosted by the June 1987 pro-democratic movement) was calling for the change of regime. They are based on: the scandalous timing of the event’s occurrence (which indeed worked for the authoritarian military regime and ultra right-wing groups to maximize their political gains in the election); the abrupt closure of the government investigation (which ended even before the retrieval of the plane’s black box); the finding of *no* crashed plane bodies and *no* remnants of the victims; and most of all, numerous suspicions surrounding the alleged terrorist Kim Hyöngni’s connection to the North. For further details on KAL 858 conspiracy theories, see Kim Hyön, “KAL858 p’okp’a saggön kajokhoe ga tönjinün 33 kae üi chilmun [33 Doubts Cast by KAL858 Survivor Families],” *Hangyöre Daily on the Web*, November 29, 2003 <<http://www.hani.co.kr/section-005000000/2003/11/005000000200311292203001.html>>; “KAL858 üi Mystery [The Mystery of KAL858],” *KBS Special* (Seoul: Korean Broadcasting System, May 22 and 23, 2004); “KAL858, Chojak toen paeu [KAL858, Fabricated Back-story],” *KBS Open Channel* (Seoul: Koran Broadcasting System, December 3, 2004).

The second occasion of the use of rumor concerns the so-called “Lee Sönsil Affair” or “the South Korean Labor Party Incident,” which broke out on October 6, 1992 – another year scheduled for presidential election – to instantly create another nationwide sensation.¹⁵⁶ NSP’s detailed press release opportunely issued on November 20 – less than a month before the election – disclosing “the identity of the North Korean spy Lee Sönsil” once again heightened the nation’s red-anxiety. According to the NSP release, Lee was a high-ranking North Korean Labor Party official who had been conducting, as head agent, North Korea’s espionage operation in the South over the past ten years, from 1980 through 1990. This well-trained, heavy-weight senior operative had been in charge of infiltrating political organizations of the South, recruiting political converts, and establishing an underground command center for subversive operations, which include, ultimately, Communized unification. But, here too, focused public attention was largely drawn to the reported claim that Lee was a Cheju native and had frequently appeared on the Cheju seaboards, and that many of her families and relatives were still living on the

¹⁵⁵ According to the later investigations carried out by non-governmental organizations and individuals, there did exist a Cheju native identified as Lee Kyöngwoo, but this man had left Cheju and arrived in Japan *before* the breakout of 4.3, and died two years before the 1987 occurrence of the KAL858 crash. The NSP report that this man was a North Korean operative also remained highly questionable. See for further details “KAL 858, Chojak toen pæhu [KAL858, Fabricated Back-story]” and Noda Mineo, *Kim Hyöñhi nün katchada [Kim Hyöñhi Is Made-up]*, trans. Choe Ŭnmi (Seoul: Turi, 2003), pp. 103-29.

¹⁵⁶ Kim Chongmin, “4.3 ihu 50 nyön [50 Years since 4.3],” pp. 369-70.

island. Cheju shores were packed with government agents and newspaper reporters who wanted to investigate and confirm this disclosed information.¹⁵⁷

These rumors spread by the national government – which were largely unsustainable, yet deeply invasive and disrupting – plunged not only 4.3 victims and survivors, but, in effect, anyone even remotely associated with Cheju into potential shame and guilt. Regardless of their dubious credibility, they attracted intense national attention and became the focal points for the re-ignited “red-complex” (a term referring to South Korea’s excessive ideological phobia toward Communism or the North), feeding on and fostering social fantasies needed to maintain the imagined borders of the national community. Under these political circumstances, the Cheju people had to remain seized by severe defeatism, self-remorse and inferiority as well as deadening fatalism and nihilism, and 4.3 became further isolated, its memories extremely privatized and fragmented. Many thus chose to leave the island forever and did their best to conceal their association with it. Those who had no choice but to remain stuck in the condemned land barely spoke of it. In the rehabilitated communities where surviving victims, bystanders, unwilling collaborators, and even perpetrators (mostly homeless former rightwing youth

¹⁵⁷ In 2006, against the widely-shared suspicions that the story was being fabricated by the government for organizing anti-Communism and manipulating public opinion for the upcoming election, the National Intelligence Service – which is the direct descendent of the former NSP – confirmed that most of the past NSP findings regarding the identity of Lee Sönsil remains true, while admitting that the case had been overstressed and used politically by the ruling party (Cho Chunhyöng, “Chosön nodongdang saggön saero türönan sasilün [Newly Discovered Facts about South Korean Labor Party Incident],” *Hangyöre Daily on the Web*, August 1, 2006 <http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/145657.html>).

league members who had been drifted away from their homes in the north, and took root on Cheju after 4.3 by forcibly marrying off its widowed women) had to live together, perhaps there would be no other way but to leave it unstated, to upset no one, as strategies of coexistence and survival. Perhaps only by *passing* as non-islanders, by choosing to abide by or collaborating with the social logic of denial and secrecy (which precludes telling, witnessing), *inclusion* – rights and citizenship – would have been safeguarded.

To bear witness to 4.3, one could then say, is to *speak against* this dominant and pervasive cultural logic of denial and concealment, *against* legally codified and publicly sanctioned shame, guilt and inferiority, *against* rumor-inspired fantasies (fantasies of fear and stigma), *against* mutism and unreadability that have stemmed from the violence of foreclosure, exclusion and non-tolerance (the violence of history itself). It is to *speak against* what has been deformed, compromised, or altogether ignored and trivialized under layers of political repression and self-deceit imposed through decades, and *against* what has undergone the inevitable fragmentations and privatizations of the traumatized individuals' sustained torment and struggle to survive (the struggle to *pass* as normal citizens, as non-victims). Perhaps, bearing witness to 4.3, one could say, amounts to transgressing modern Korea's most foundational taboo – the foundational injunctions and prohibitions that have served as the organizing force in the forward movement of history.

What psychoanalytic theories of trauma and Benjamin's reflections on the oppressed teach and what the post-traumatic situation of 4.3 survivors allows us to see are, in Stanley Cavell's words: "the study of social suffering must contain a study of a society's silence toward it,"¹⁵⁸ a society's sustained repression of speaking (the removal of expression) that precludes the traumatized victims' emergence out of forgetting and out of unwilled secrecy. The impossibility of telling or of witnessing, the story's falling silent, unnoticed by anyone, even including the victims themselves, ought not to be taken as a private matter alone limited to an individual victim. What challenges 4.3 testimonies and memories is the prolonged and prevalent social silence (magnified by the victims' self-imposed silence) built into the inherent difficulty of accessing and fully narrating trauma. That *Mumyöngch'ön halmöni* Chin Ayöng's utterance sounds "crazy" to our ears should be read in light of this understanding. Without hoping to turn her into a symbol, to reduce her into a closed and stagnant icon of a phenomenon of trauma, which would be another form of injustice, I would want to read her as a signifier of this challenge.

Speechlessness and the Face of the Other

¹⁵⁸ Stanley Cavell, "Comments on Veena Das's Essay 'Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain,'" *Social Suffering*, eds. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 93-98, (p. 95).

Let us now return to where we began our story, to the unusual and irresistibly compulsive image of Chin Ayōng, captured and transmitted through Kim's film, to the indecipherable traits (the very signs of destruction) that the witness carries in her body, the markers of historical erasure, deprivation and impotence (imposed by historical violence, including the violence of denial), the wound, the traumatism, the date (which is the condition of possibility for testimony) that cannot be rendered fully into a determinate statement nor entirely forgotten or effaced. I would like to think closely here, with an enriched way of thinking, of the implications of her speechlessness, to reflect, precisely, the *testimonial* power of her maimed speech – or to invoke what Derrida has called “a poetic experience of language [that all responsible witnessing engages].”¹⁵⁹

Chin Ayōng's *speechlessness* might be read on several levels. It signifies, first of all, a certain failure of words, a muteness generated by unbearable disaster. Language is itself so deeply marked by the extremity of 4.3 that it cannot easily function as a sign. The body of the significant itself has been wounded, deformed by the enactment of terror. That is, the very possibility of telling, of witnessing, is obliterated by the injustice that is constituted in part, precisely, by the wounding of language (the deprivation of expression), both literally and figuratively to say, which perpetuates victimhood by prolonging imprisonment in isolation. But speechlessness,

¹⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” in *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, eds. and trans. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 65-96, (p. 66).

it should be marked, is fundamentally more than the simple inability to speak or the simple void or negation of meaning. Carrying a traumatic incision in her body – that is, condemned into bearing the unbearable knowledge, carved in and *as* her punctured body – Chin unwittingly persists into the position of the witness from which there is no escape: marked – embodied – by the catastrophic event, *not to testify thus is impossible for her*. Yet language as a tool of witnessing is missing, damaged by the very violence it is to signify: deprived of language, *to testify thus is impossible for her*. Perhaps Chin’s speechlessness is situated at this very dilemma – an impasse where *both to speak and not to speak appear impossible* – which is the dilemma that I think is the stake of every testimony. Even when the language of the victim appears to remain “intact” after going through a violent happening.¹⁶⁰

Relevantly, speechlessness also implicates the non-substitutability of the witness. Testimony is burdened with absolute responsibility and utter solitude of the witness: no one can replace the position of the witness, no one can share the absolute secret he or she alone bears – the irreducible singularity of experience that no one else can know and have access to, that only the victim himself or herself has undergone, felt, and has the authority to testify.¹⁶¹ “No one bears witness for the witness,” the poet and survivor of the Holocaust Paul Celan grieves in “Ashglory,”

¹⁶⁰ Speechlessness that is at the very heart of *every* testimony is, one could say, is the index of a certain *excess*, the surplus of meaning, or the delay (or promise) of the arrival of language, whose meaning comes belatedly, not from the referent that it *fails* to denote, but from its reception, the transmission from one person, the witness, to another, the listener.

¹⁶¹ Testimony, in effect, loses its force without this claim of singularity.

echoing this impossibility of substitution.¹⁶² Testimony – which is the act of passing on of an understanding, representing an experience which must remain, in a way, a private matter in a language that always already exceeds a private dimension – inevitably betrays the essential unassimilability of the limit experience. It carries off the “date” (the singular experience of a wound), rendering it readable, accessible to other people, and thereby effaces the fundamental enigma or unreadability of the inherently private trauma that refuses to be disclosed fully. Speechlessness, then, might be read as the desire to keep this singularity, this unreadability somehow intact, an inclination to remain true to the unnarratable secret – the secret of death or of suffering – that cannot be communicated (transmitted as knowledge) to others, and that, in a way, *ought to* remain sealed, unsaid, as a sign of solidarity and faithfulness to the unresolved abyss of extreme human disaster, the solidarity with the “unspeakable” pain or bereavement.¹⁶³ This speechlessness, this impotence regarding the limits of speaking or of reading, this tendency toward silence must somehow be taken into consideration, be respected. It points to those resistant qualities of the individual (the singular victim or the singular experience of wounding) that remain after or in spite of the violence of symbolization and

¹⁶² Paul Celan, “Ashglory/Aschenglorie, in *Breathturn/Atemwende*, bilingual ed., trans. Pierre Joris (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon, 1995), pp. 178-79.

¹⁶³ Perhaps speechlessness here also links to *despair* to communicate to others – the self-imposed mutism generated from the post-violent climate of hate and antagonism (the collective denial and non-tolerance which force the victims to retreat to their solitude).

understanding. “The possibility of the secret,” says Derrida, “must remain sealed at the very moment when bearing witness unveils it.”¹⁶⁴

But Celan’s utterance of “no one bears witness for the witness” does not stop here. The utterance says more than what it says. The impossibility of substitution (the utter singularity and irreplaceability of the witness or of the witnessing) does not simply refer to the impossibility of or the resistance to communication and transmission: rather, this impossibility is rendered, essentially, as a summons and an appeal. It makes a demand for recognition, a plea for the listening of another who will *believe* the witness’s claim to truth before and beyond any possible proof and without deliberation – a recipient who can accept, without condition or reserve, the singular claim rendered by the non-interchangeable witness, although and precisely because the experience of the witness (the knowledge of testimony) cannot be “proved” in an objective way. As Derrida has claimed:

The secret always remains the very experience of bearing witness, the privilege of a witness for whom no one can be substituted, because he is, in essence, the only one to know what he has seen, lived, felt; he must thus be *believed*, taken at his word, at the very moment when he is making public a secret that nonetheless remains secret. A secret *as such*.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Derrida, “Poetics and Politics of Witnessing,” p. 87.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

It is this “secret *as such*” that is at the heart of testimony – which is the ground of the impossibility of substitution – that simultaneously resists to *and* calls for testimony.

In every testimony there is an expectation of the witness’s death and of the (singular) story’s fading into the eternal oblivion, into the perpetual silence, with this death. Testimony always already forebodes and is threatened by death in the future, a future in which there will remain, eventually, no survivor alive to bear witness (a future marked by the *utter* disappearance of memory, by the *complete* annihilation of the trace of injustice). It is precisely this harboring of death, this anticipated possibility of perishing of someone or something radically irreplaceable (which is already implicated in testimony’s claim of singularity itself), that alerts us to the responsibility for the unique one (of whom death is always the stake) – the responsibility to become a witness for the witness who is going to die and whose singular tale that cannot be told by anyone else will die with her, fade away irrevocably. In testimony, the innate wish to remain silent and the inherent impossibility to speak are always in struggle with the *need* to tell the story to others – an imperative to somehow exceed that bind of singularity and secrecy and to make heard or transmit the experience that is in danger of becoming a “dead” history, entombed in time’s chasm, closed, unheard, unnoticed at all.

I try to understand this implication (the so-called double bind of testimony) not only within and by virtue of the poetics of Celan (to which I will continue to

refer) – whose poetry is charged with the responsibility of the solitary witness (poet) to speak against and despite the impossibility of speaking, seeking to express or make audible in poetry (against the possible cessation of memory) the unnarratable depth of the most tragic and extreme human experience, the Holocaust, that largely eludes cognition and articulation – but also in light of Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics of face (which bears a particularly striking resonance here) that can be read as the allegory for Chin Ayōng (the mute, impossible witness), or as the figure for the wound (the trace of memory as a breach of consciousness and reference in history) from which the mute agony of the suffocated subject forcefully voices out as a desperate and unrenounceable call to listen. Levinas writes:

Before all particular expression of the other and beneath all expression that, being already a bearing given to oneself, protect, there is a bareness and stripping away of expression as such. Exposure, point blank, extradition of the beleaguered, the tracked down – tracked down before all tracking and all beating for game. Face as the very mortality of the other man.

But in the *facing* of the face, in this mortality – a summons and a demand that concerns the *I*, that concerns me. As if the invisible death which the face of the other faces were *my* business, as if the death “had to do with me.” The death of the other man implicates and challenges me, as if, through its indifference, the *I* became the accomplice to, and had to answer for, this death of the other and not let him die alone. It is precisely in this reminder of the responsibility of the *I* by the face that summons it, that demands it, that claims it, that the other is my fellowman.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, “The philosophical Determination of the Idea of Culture,” in *Entre Nous*, pp. 179-87, (p. 186).

The unavoidable claim of responsibility issuing from the face of the other to which Levinas alerts us seems to link to an unusual *force* that concerns me, a force evoked by the *extra-ordinary* face of Chin Ayōng – the extremely “bare” (bare to the point of becoming sheer alterity) and “beleaguered” face of that immeasurably destitute, frail, forsaken woman to whom death appears, indeed, imminent.¹⁶⁷ This force has made its way to me through the disquiet and soreness of the body – *my body that aches*, albeit to a lesser degree, *with her pain*, as I imagine the sustained torment and isolation she has had to go through with no means of release, pain that has never been, and probably will never, be understood, put to words, yet remains stubbornly ineffaceable, enduring, and strives to get out, to be expressed, seeking for an inhabitable habitat, a place to exhale, which is my body (which is to become her mouthpiece, a distant survivor, who bears witness in her stead by proxy). What might also be referred to as the “event of calling,” so to speak, occurs in the form of bodily agitation and uneasiness on the part of the addressee: through the distress at looking at her severely malformed, inept, utterly uncommon face covered with a rag (which perhaps signifies the violence of our culture itself, which fails to see or actively excludes from the field of perception what is too “repellent” or “dangerous” to behold), a face that violently looks back at us across the filmic screen (that looks out from our vantage point) and erupts into the pretense of cultural grounding; or through the shudder over her shrill, senseless, ear-scraping shriek (the wounded

¹⁶⁷ Perhaps the face of Chin Ayōng is the face of the other *par excellence*.

words desperately pointing, yet giving no sensible explanation, to the secret of trauma that even she herself cannot fully decipher) which perforates the comfort of deafness outside the screen, where we – unmindful “outsiders” – belong. Chin’s unique and intriguingly insistent and unsettling voice, which is charged with an explosive urgency to speak, her warped, rag-wrapped jaw, her relentlessly pointing fingers, the dreaded look in her eyes, her feebly open, trembling mouth, and tears that bursts out her muffled affliction all designate and powerfully alert us to a meaning that cannot be signaled otherwise. Testimony, one could say, is not just a matter of language, but engages *obsession* (which is a non-referential or non-discursive mode of expression): the incarnated passivity of being exposed to and affected by what Levinas has referred to as “the trauma of the other’s approach” (*OB* 15) – the passivity of being persecuted, held hostage, by the demand of responsibility issuing from the enigma of the other’s *face* from which I cannot choose to look away. The body knows what language can no longer utter aloud. The discomfort, or shudder, of the body can be said to be the very evidence or event of my being called, or interrupted, by the other, a sign of the other’s seeking out to me.¹⁶⁸

Accusation has already begun before I know, with respect to the “invisible death” announced in the face of the other person, a death for which I am already

¹⁶⁸ Chapter one discusses more in detail Levinas’s concept of obsession, and a mode of knowing with the body (the embodied knowledge of the other’s pain).

responsible, which already directs me to the responsibility not to leave her alone in her death, not to abandon her into the solitary and undetected sphere of the victim. The face of the other already suspects me, it already forbids me from becoming, however unwittingly, an accomplice to the crime of putting the other to prolonging death. It already chastises me for my indifference, for my impatience, for my lack of compassion and of vigilance, and for my unwillingness to open up to the traumatism of another which I could probably never finish receiving and which could perhaps crush me to an unexpected and unwanted degree. The crumpled, broke, utterly impoverished rag-wrapped face of *Mumyöngch'ön halmöni* – like her disfigured speech itself – is the expression of the other (said before and beyond all cognitive and referential statements) who is desperately searching for and in need of me. Her face tells me that my responsibility for her is an absolute and unconditional one, that her wretchedness, her infirmity and her imprisonment in secrecy is my fault, my crime. Read in this light, Paul Celan's "no one bears witness for the witness" signifies, ultimately, a violent and desolate plea coming from the solitary and non-substitutable witness making a *speechless* claim for the listening of another, a distant survivor, who can wholly open up to the "other of language" – receive without holding back and beyond any authentic proof – and bear witness for the witness (against testimony's inherent predicament) in order to carry the story, or rather the eclipse of story, beyond an end, beyond death, to transmit before memory runs out completely.

Testimony is suspended indefinitely, waiting to happen in the telling, in the address to another. Meaning does not lie in the object of signification but in its reception or delivery. Celan suggests that truth happens only in the act of speaking (addressing), only in the encounter with another who will accept the witness's (poet's) testimony with unreserved hospitality. For him poetry is the space for this encounter, a site for a hospitable welcoming of an altogether other: it marks, as Ulrich Baer puts it, "a passage . . . into the realm where [the other's] 'unheard-of demand' becomes audible."¹⁶⁹ In a speech entitled "The Meridian," delivered in 1960 in Darmstadt upon receiving the George Büchner Literature Prize, Celan had stated:

The poem holds its ground, if you will permit me yet another extreme formulation, the poem holds its ground on its own margin. In order to endure, it constantly calls and pulls itself back from an 'already-no-more' into a 'still-here.'

This 'still-here' can only mean speaking. Not language as such, but responding and – not just verbally – 'corresponding' to something.

In other words: language actualized, set free under the sign of a radical individuation which, however, remains as aware of the limits drawn by language as of the possibilities it opens.¹⁷⁰

The passage from an "already-no-more" into a "still-here" would mean: from the bind of singularity – isolation, secrecy, and silence – into the possibility of speaking,

¹⁶⁹ Ulrich Baer, "The Perfection of Poetry: Rainer Maria Rilke and Paul Celan," *New German Critique* 91, special issue, *Paul Celan*, eds. Ulrich Baer and Amir Eshel (Winter 2004): 171-89 (183).

¹⁷⁰ Paul Celan, "The Meridian," in *Paul Celan: Collected Prose*, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (New York: Sheep Meadow Press, 1986), pp. 37-55, (p. 49). Hereafter cited in the text as "Meridian" with page numbers.

a possibility toward which every poem is headed. A poem, for Celan, is a *performative* space in which *language becomes voice* – a site of *dialogue* always in search for and in need of an attentive and avid listener who “listens, not without fear, for something beyond [himself], beyond words” (“Meridian” 54) in order to receive, or to let happen, a poetic or testimonial knowledge.¹⁷¹ As Celan writes:

The poem is lonely: it is lonely and *en route*. Its author stays with it. Does this very fact not place the poem already here, at its inception, in the encounter, *in the mystery of encounter*?

The poem intends another, needs this other, needs an opposite. It goes toward it, bespeaks it. For the poem, everything and everybody is a figure of this other toward which it is heading” (“Meridian” 47).

A poem, being an instance of language, hence essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea with the – surely not always strong – hope that it may somehow wash up somewhere, perhaps on a shoreline of the heart. In this way, too, poems are *en route*: they are headed toward.

Toward what? Toward something open, inhabitable, an approachable you, perhaps, an approachable reality.”¹⁷²

In this instant in which this “inception” or “corresponding” occurs in poetry where philosophical or hermeneutic knowledge stammers upon its own limits, the other sets himself free from the role of the isolated, passive victim, and turns himself into *breathing*: “[there occurs in a poem] an *Atemwende*, a turning of breath”

¹⁷¹ For a relevant discussion on the “constitutive” role of the listener already inscribed in the process of testimony and its transmission, see Jared Stark, “The Task of Testimony: On *No Common Place: The Holocaust Testimony of Alina Bacall-Zwirn*,” in *History and Memory* 11:2 (Fall/Winter, 1999): 37-61.

¹⁷² Paul Celan, “Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen,” in *Paul Celan: Collected Prose*, pp. 33-35, (pp. 34-35).

(“Meridian” 52). Breathing here would mean the solitary victim’s or witness’s entering into the relationship with another, his or her reintegrating into the social realm, through the telling or through the “handshake.”¹⁷³

Testimony necessarily betrays, but only through it experience becomes available: this betrayal – the compromise or desecration of testimony – would be its only possibility for transmission. The “absolute date” – the singular historical moment or the singular wounding – from which every poem writes and of which it is always mindful must at the same time overcome and efface its irreducible singularity (unreadability) in order to speak, in order to communicate to others.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ “I cannot see any basic difference between a handshake and a poem,” writes Celan, comparing the poetry to the handshake, a rite of both asserting – here I am – and handing over a self to another (“Letter to Hans Bender,” in *Paul Celan: Collected Prose*, pp. 25-26, [p. 26]).

¹⁷⁴ “The absolute poem,” says Celan, “does not, cannot exist” (“Meridian” 51), a statement which could, to some extent, be said to sum up his entire poetic endeavor (of writing the “impossible”) and which could also be read, perhaps, as a response to Theodor Adorno’s much cited injunction of composing poetry (or any other forms of artistic representation) after Auschwitz, which runs the risk of neutralizing its staggering, “unutterable” horror: “after Auschwitz, it is no longer possible to write poems” (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton [New York: Continuum, 1973], p. 362). It was presumably the poetry of Celan that moved Adorno to retract this pronouncement, written in 1949, emerged as a central tune in discussions addressing the situation of art (including poetry) and aesthetic consciousness in the post-Holocaust era. In a later essay written in 1960, Adorno was able to combine the audacity of his original statement (“I have no wish to soften the saying that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”) with a claim that artistic expression was solely qualified to express the agonies inherent to the twentieth-century human existence: “yet . . . suffering . . . also demands the continued existence of art while it prohibits it; it is virtually in art alone that suffering can find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it. . . . [I]t is to works of art that has fallen the burden of wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics” (Adorno, “Commitment,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt [New York: Continuum, 1982], pp. 300-318, [p. 312, 318]). Art or literature after the Holocaust – or any other forms of extreme historical crisis – might be situated between the impossibility and the necessity of attesting to the unbearably gigantic human affliction, between the inclination to speechlessness and the refusal to remain silent. The muffled suffering of the other demands expression – art. It requires our responsiveness. To respond to the suffering of another that is wordlessly signaled or staged through art would, then, ultimately mean that we must take into

As Ulrich Baer has suggested, “each poem . . . makes an uncompromising claim for its singularity; each poem demands to be read on its own terms. Yet at the same time and in the same words, each poem opens itself to iteration, understanding, and address. Without opening itself to understanding, the very claim for singularity would remain unnoticed.”¹⁷⁵ Language cannot do justice to reality, but without this incompetent and perhaps incriminated cultural medium that we have at our disposal, the obscure inside of trauma would never be brought to light for reflection and restitution. Only that would allow the survivors to transcend the captivity in solitude and the inarticulate and indiscernible death-in-life.

Both poetry and testimony attempt to address what is not already occupied by words. Both are dialogically determined and processual – always intending and reliant on another, their possible, future recipients with whom meaning resides. Both require to be accepted immediately, even before “understanding” sets in. Both have strong tendency towards silence, towards the singular secret, towards the “date,” *but* both nonetheless speak, speak “in order to endure.” But to hear in poetry or in testimony something beyond the limits of words, beyond one’s capacity to understand or to hear, it should be noted, may no longer be a simple matter of choice. As Cathy Caruth has suggested, “to be able to listen to the impossible . . . is also to

account both the victim’s compulsion to speak and his/her incapacity to do it. Art is faithful to this double quandary.

¹⁷⁵ Ulrich Baer, *Remnants of Song*, p. 11.

have been *chosen* by it, *before* the possibility of mastering it with knowledge.” It implies a grave danger, namely a danger of trauma’s contagion, or the “traumatization of the ones who listen.”¹⁷⁶ Psychiatrist Judith Herman’s caution is resonant here. Professional therapists, says Herman, should be wary of the possibility of going through the excessive emotional overwhelming as the listener (namely the counter-transference) – the possibility that they might “experience, to a lesser degree, the same terror, rage, and despair as the patient,” which could jeopardize their sanity and safety.¹⁷⁷ But without risking this danger, nothing could happen. Without exposing to this possibility of being taken over and crushed beyond one’s endurance and fortitude, there would be no experience of reading, no event of telling. The difficulty of moral positioning with respect to the reception of trauma seems to lie in the conflict between the desire for safety, for normality (the desire not to know too much, not to be destroyed by someone else’s trauma) and the ethical imperative (amplified by the structural impossibility to deny an appeal from the other, or the impossibility to remain an absolutely neutral bystander¹⁷⁸) to actively participate in another’s agony, to commit to the task of responding to the enormous

¹⁷⁶ Cathy Caruth, Introductions to *Trauma*, p. 10.

¹⁷⁷ Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 140.

¹⁷⁸ There is perhaps no outside of trauma, no completely detached “outsider” position that can claim no relation to trauma. It is that even bystanders, if not active, are on the side of the perpetrators, for they overlook the form of trauma and, while doing so, inadvertently endorse and participate in the depraved cultural dynamics of denial and concealment.

demands of suffering coming from the other side of *speechlessness* (a task that is inherently more than the meticulous historical investigation and documentation of facts) – or more specifically, the task of *writing* on behalf of the mute witness who needs me in order to speak from within the impossibility of speaking. Literature – or poetry or art – takes this burden onto itself, under the category of which I include the testimonial film, *Mumyõngch’õn halmõni*, and also this very writing of mine writing it hoping to become, in its own turn, a transmitter of a story of what she, and the film, insistently strive – and fail – to tell.¹⁷⁹

Literature and Posthumous Testimony

Literature is not static and does not exist on its own, but like a kind of performative speech act, the disclosure or reading – that is, the performative engagement of the reader/listener/spectator witness (the secondary witness) – takes its knowledge into effect. Literature’s performative potential (the aesthetic force of literature, or what Shoshana Felman has termed, accordingly, “literary *shock*”

¹⁷⁹ My conception of “literature” here – which is not limited to or perhaps significantly different from literature in the institutional or disciplinary sense of the word – is indebted to Shoshana Felman’s exemplary use of it: what she has called “the literary thing,” which connotes this thing’s resistance to definition and closure. “The literary thing,” defines Felman, “is not exactly literature as institution: it is, rather, the original, originative drive that makes us read. It is what makes texts literary, what turns them into events, what constitutes their literary life, their continued emotional and rhetorical vitality” (Felman, Preface to *Writing and Madness: Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003], pp. 1-10, [p. 5n6]). See for the further clarification of the term: “The Literary Thing (Interview with Jacques-Alain Miller)” and “The Literary Thing, Its Madness, Its Power (Interview with Philippe Sollers),” in *Writing and Madness*, pp. 259-62 and pp. 263-89, respectively.

*value*¹⁸⁰) – its capacity to generate an implosive reaction in the reader (the power to speak to human emotions, to signify beyond the said and the sayable), the ability to take us up and drag us back to the claims of the unique, the concrete, the real, the non-identical (all that continually threatens to get lost, erased, covered over by cultural/rational practices and false needs) – is what is most essential in the literary experience that constitutes the very heart of the witnessing. “[T]he purpose of the literary text,” writes Felman, “is . . . to show or to expose again the severance and the schism, to reveal once more the opening, the hollowness of the abyss, *to wrench apart what was precisely covered over, closed, or covered up by [history or the pretense of historical/legal justice]*. The literary text casts open the abyss so as to let us look, once more, into its depth and see its bottomlessness.”¹⁸¹ Literature perhaps allows us to see – to see through – the deceptive dimension of historicist understanding, by revealing the event or experience as a crisis of understanding and reference itself, by revealing, so to speak, the very lostness and ungraspability, as such, of the traumatic historical event, and holding our attention, precisely, to the very void and breach of consciousness, memory and speech. Literature does not intend to represent (rationally codify) or make sense of the abyssal and senseless (by reason’s standards) nature of the reality by means of turning it into a sign of

¹⁸⁰ Felman, “The Literary Thing, Its Madness, Its Power,” p. 285. Felman poignantly states in a relevant remark: “[l]iterature is concerned with “the preservation . . . both of the uniqueness of experience in the face of its theorization, and of the shock of the unintelligible in the face of the attempt at its interpretation” (Felman, *Testimony*, p. xx).

¹⁸¹ Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious*, p. 95.

something else. It does not attempt to subdue under intelligibility and thereby alleviate and domesticate suffering. Literature, instead, stays within, speaks from within the wounded, inarticulate region of speech. It stutters, chokes on its own powerlessness and ineptness. Like Celan's poetry itself, which, as Geoffrey Hartman has noted, "does not shine in the darkness to abolish it," but rather, "is as 'darkness to a dying flame,'" ¹⁸² the literary text or the testimonial address lives off its own incapacity, of its own constant failing. It is out of this very failure, this ceaseless enactment of speechlessness (which is also the enactment of the refusal of speechlessness), that a minoritized past, or the tradition of the traumatized, performatively voices beyond the frames of spoken/written words, and issues its own way of historical accountability/transmissibility that goes beyond what can be attained by inductive historiography.

What matters most in Kim Tongman's testimonial (or literary or artistic) film which enacts, stages or gives voice to the abyss of trauma would be, once again, this question of *transmission* prior to which no true knowledge can be said to exist: the question of how to seek accountability of a history robbed of expression and common memory. The film obsessively puts to work the possibility of *dialogue* between the mute witness and the viewer/receiver in order to facilitate the singular witness's departure out of silence and forgetting, out of the very inexpressibility and

¹⁸² Geoffrey Hartman, "Shoah and Intellectual Witness," *Partisan Review* 65, no.1 (1998): 37-48, (p. 48).

annulling of a traumatic historical experience that cannot be sufficiently signified by any existing modes of reference. It carries the very darkness of the event beyond its obstinately covert, hidden, private inside, or beyond the closure of the past present, and opens it to us, the viewer witnesses, who inhabit the future where the redemptive potential of “reading” – or “turning of breath” – lies: its possible, potential receivers who will “[listen], not without fear, for something beyond [ourselves], beyond words.” The film thus remains faithful to the insignificant, hardly legible traces of wounding. It does not explain or make sense of them, yet gives (literary) body, making tangible or audible that which endures, insisting on remaining unthematized: namely *the utter alterity in shape and dissonance of suffering* Chin Ayōng embodies. The film, one might say, has become a body itself – the body through which the figure of Chin Ayōng (the voiceless and dead/bodiless witness) largely exists.

Nothing, of course, is controlled or expected in this film. Something might happen only beyond the filmmaker’s will to frame it. Even his decision to leave the utterly “beleaguered,” bare face of that weak, muted, persecuted woman at the terrifying close-up in the compelling final scene, where the film at once stops moving and takes off as open-ended, cannot anticipate or appropriate what will happen to the viewers, if anything will even happen to them. The film cannot know, and cannot articulate what it may unwittingly know, but it may inadvertently crack something open, the potential of which, once again, may lie with us, with our refusal

to look away from what we see in it, from what the film mutely yet formidably stages, giving Chin's indiscernible scar (the broken jaw veiled behind the cotton cloth, and her maimed speech) a random, undirected testimonial power that pierces open the shroud of amnesia and indifference.

I wish that what I have tried so far here is something different from simply adding one more witness (counted as a historical evidence, a source for verification of fact) to the 4.3 archive for the further accretion of facts and documents. I have tried to read Chin Ayŏng – whose figure, once again, could not have reached me in the first place and would remain outside my concern if not for Kim's film – not just to obtain the historical what, how and why about the incident of her tragedy which adds to a larger and more precise picture of the Cheju Incident. I have, instead, sought to follow the path to which the film has taken me, trying to be faithful to the way she, and the film, have moved and questioned me – how my encounter with her comes to make a difference in my approach to the Cheju victims (and victims of any traumatic historical atrocities by extension), how the knowledge unexpectedly awakened by this encounter makes me no longer able to rest in my safe zone, in a detached bystander position, and how this restlessness (my own lack of words; the feeling of insufficiency) opens up to a new dimension of historical inquiring into *extreme* human realities that require a modality of knowing fundamentally more than the scrupulous historical examination and accumulation of facts and proofs. Rather than becoming a criticism, a claim or an demonstration, I have wanted this

writing to become a body itself, in its own right and in its own turn – a lent body through which Chin’s punctured, stigmatized, covered-up (and now absent, too, vanished with actual death we now know has occurred to her) body presented to me through Kim’s evocation and passing on could return and resurface, a surrogate body through which she could resurrect from where she lies – indignity, self-guilt, and social deadness – into light, into the domain of the public and of the fully human, and also and ultimately into the accounts of history. For the question which has preoccupied me during the course of this writing, what kind of ethical implication does this writing bear?, Primo Levi’s contemplation on Hurbinek, a little child victim he encountered in the Nazi death camp, whom no one knew and who had no name and spoke no sensible language (and who was taken up by Levi, and later by Agamben, as the figure of the complete, and impossible, witness), seems powerfully resonant here:

Hurbinek, the nameless, whose tiny forearm . . . bore the tattoo of Auschwitz; Hurbinek died in the first day of March 1945, free but not redeemed. Nothing remains of him: he bears witness through the words of mine.¹⁸³

Perhaps nothing, indeed, remains of Chin Ayǒng as well, yet she bears witness through Kim Tongman’s filmic attestation of her, and through this very writing of mine writing it seeking to evoke her from a step removed: through distant yet possessed *sur-vivors* – witnesses for the witness – who speak on her behalf in her

¹⁸³ Primo Levi, *The Reawakening*, as cited in Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, p. 38.

stead by proxy, and who are waiting, in their turns, for another one to come along.

Without these *posthumous* testimonies – that is, *writing*, in both the literal and

metaphorical sense of the term – the story of Chin would not survive.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ One could say that witnessing by proxy or secondary witness's inevitable *removal* from the original account (due to the inherent failure or deficit of words through which the experience of the victim is communicated) might be what *protects* us from the possibility of being completely destroyed by the traumatism, precludes us from that of repeating or coinciding with the abysmal fate of the victim from whom we serve as surrogates. Language – or writing – at once delimits *and* saves.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE DENIGRATED BODY:
THE MAKING OF RED WOMEN

The dream of death begins. It is woman.

Jacques Derrida, *Spurs*

Documentation of Pain and the Denial of “Absolute Victimhood”

We read that among the total 14,028 “registered victims” with the Government Commission (registered during the twelve-month reporting period from June 8, 2000 to May 30, 2001 with the National Commission on the Cheju April Third Incident), 11,043 victims are men and 2,985 victims are women.¹⁸⁵ These are

¹⁸⁵ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, pp. 369-71. According to the Article 2 of a Special Act for Investigating Truth and Restoring Honor to the Victims of the Cheju April Third Incident, a “victim” is defined as one who is deceased, missing, or diagnosed with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)

just are numbers. I want to peel back the surface and try to look for what this surface misguidedly hides: a gulf of pain, unending and uncontained, which cannot be enclosed, integrated or assimilated within the facticity of numbers, the statistics of loss; pain (too powerful for expression or comprehension) that defies and undermines all the known vocabularies, all the figures, conscious recollections and common assumptions of the book – a remainder, a certain bodily residue perhaps, *something else* on the brink of the book (neither inside nor outside) which continually plagues and opens it to be unbounded. This chapter is concerned with this *something else* (that which endures, insisting on remaining unthematized): it strives for, namely, the *body* – the body exiled from the logic of the book.

The anti-Communist state terror on the 1948 Cheju took place in the form of sexual and genocidal crime against the feminized and racialized other.¹⁸⁶ What

as a result of the Cheju Incident *and* is recognized as such through the investigative procedures outlined in the Article 3. See <http://www.jeju43.go.kr>.

¹⁸⁶ Drawing on Zillah Eisenstein's analysis of the racialized and sexualized complexities of modern wars and communal violence, and Foucault's notion of bio-politics as an organizational apparatus of the liberal state, the anthropologist Kim Seong-nae, who has played a significant role in raising ethical issues about the Cheju victims, has claimed that the violence of Cheju, which had systematically sought to bring about serious bodily and mental harm to people in the designated region a large number of whose women had been subjected to deliberate sexual violence, could be approached in terms of ethnic and gender conflict aiming at organizing political subjection. This assumption (the terms and the questions) has become a crucial stepping stone for my work that I take up and build upon further in this chapter. See Zillah R. Eisenstein, *Hatreds: Racialized and Sexualized Conflicts in the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Michel Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick H. Hutton (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1988); Kim Seong-nae, "Sexual Politics of State Violence: On the Cheju April Third Massacre of 1948," *Traces 2*, special issue, "Race" Panic and the Memory of Migration (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001): 259-91, originally appeared in Korean in *Tong asia ūi p'yŏnghwa wa inkkon: Cheju 4.3 che 50 chunyŏn kinyŏm che 2 hoe tong asia p'yŏnghwa wa inkkwŏn haksul taehoe*

happened on Cheju, one could say, is epitomized by what happened to its women, by the unprecedented physical and psychological ferocity of the attack targeted against the women who bore the worst of this atrocity. Women were not *just* killed on Cheju: they were raped or gang-raped, tortured, molested, forcibly impregnated, hung, strip, paraded naked, burnt alive, and killed as substitutes for men by the army, police and right-wing youth group terrorists who were on the mission of clearing the island of the Reds. According to survivors' accounts, one finds a pattern of aggression widespread during the pogrom, one that concerns the *uncalled-for surplus* of sexual assault of women. Women were forced into committing incest in front of troops and neighbors, after which they were executed, or mock-raped with hard and sharp objects which simultaneously killed them. They were battered, dangled upside down, and dragged naked, often in public. Their sexual and reproductive organs were assaulted with a particular brutality. Objects such as sharpened bamboo spears, swords, rifles or hand grenades were inserted into them. Breast were cut off or burnt with heated iron rods. Among the tormented and mutilated in this grim manner were pregnant women, whose stomach was sliced open and fetus spewed with a sword. Some were murdered during childbirth or while tending to their infants. Some had to watch helplessly their children being

pogosŏ [Peace and Human Rights in East Asia: Report of the Second International Conference on Peace and Human Rights in East Asia in Commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Cheju 4.3 Incident], ed. Cheju 4.3 Institute (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 1999), pp. 154-72.

molested and killed in front of them.¹⁸⁷ What prompted this radically innovative and disconcerting act of sadism, the undreamt of perversion and excruciating sexual abuse of women never observed in any previously committed carnages in the country, seems far more sinister than the mere revenge or punishment for rebellious bodies.

Despite the intensity and savage nature of the atrocities, however, the crimes against women were not always validated publicly, and remained “outside politics,” outside the court of law and the domain of the public. The torture and rape of (enemy) women during the time of war or communal riot are often considered “typical,” and put aside (by men) for there is nothing “new” to talk about. Pain clung to women who endured severe sexual torment and humiliation (the experience of which often remains alien, unavailable, even to themselves, having plunged into the state of denial or into the sustained trauma) becomes mustered in a single count of “female victims” in the Commission Report. At the same time, women survivors themselves are extremely reluctant, or find it all but impossible, to appear before the court of law or other authorized institutions to testify to their experience of having been sexually violated and “dishonored.” Many tend to blame themselves, their unfortunate, condemned fate, and bury their “sin” deep inside their injured, shamed,

¹⁸⁷ Limited eyewitness accounts on sexual violation against women are found in the following works among others, from which my discussion here has benefited: *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report* (esp., pp. 378-421); Chemin Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team, ed., *4.3 ün malhandā [The April Third Speaks]* (esp., vol. 4, 5); O Kūmsuk, “4.3 ūl t’onghae parabon yōsōng inkkwōn sarye [Cases of Violation of Women’s Human Rights during 4.3],” *Tong asia ūi p’yōnghwa wa inkkwōn [Peace and Human Rights in East Asia]*, ed. Cheju 4.3 Institute, pp. 236-56.

guilt-laden body. Even if they try to speak out, language's inherent inability to amount to the body of suffering leaves most of them tongue-tied.¹⁸⁸ But the tales untold remain deposited, wordlessly yet persistently, *in the body*, the victim's severely mutilated, warped, stigmatized body that went through and suffered from what happened to itself, the flesh and blood body despised by (narrative) history, the body that history must force out of itself in order to secure its epistemological basis and count as knowledge.

In this chapter, I attempt to read, exclusively, the extreme measure of cruelty and obscenity of distorted sexual violence exercised upon women's bodies during the course of 4.3. I read the savagely assaulted, incinerated, swollen, punctured, gashed, bomb-inserted bodies of female victims of Cheju as the literal site of covert testimony to the immeasurable wrongs (the conceptually ungraspable dimension of suffering) done to the victims during and after the events. I want to explore further the *political role* these morbid sexual crimes against the Cheju women were made to play, the ways in which women's bodies were converted into practical cultural resources in engineering hatred and otherness, and in subsequently crafting a rigid, disciplined, non-fluid male national body (the common national identity that is apparently male). Particularly, with the aid of social sciences, I probe the state-

¹⁸⁸ Kim Seong-nae draws attention to the fact that eyewitness accounts with regards to sexual violation of women, such as rape, are told mostly by male observers (often, their male relatives or neighbors) and in startling graphic details (which is hardly the case with women speaking of their own victimization), which once again prompts the survivors of sexual violence into the position of being viewed/assaulted as objects of male gaze (Kim, "Sexual Politics of State Violence," p. 277).

male's dark obsession with obliterating women's genital organs – what this employment of sickly political apparatus has to do with the “genocidal violence” Cheju was made into. The body here reads as the repository of the hidden and secret knowledge of what the body was made to undergo – the *trace* of its collapse, dissection and destruction, and also its depravation of human rights and citizenship, its denaturalization, the forcible conversion into the alien body, the undesirable, the low, the *woman*.

I begin in this chapter with the issues surrounding the official “reconciliation” process for the 4.3 Incident – the process of legislation, investigation and documentation for the first official report on the national level, and the presidential decree of pardon offered to the surviving victims – the “paradox” of which is allegorized, I will argue, by “female experience.” As a result of the collaborated endeavors put by the Cheju Provincial Council's 4.3 Special Commission, various non-governmental organizations, such as Cheju 4.3 Institute, and other prominent individuals, a Special Act for Investigating Truth and Restoring Honor to the Victims of the Cheju April Third Incident was passed by the National Assembly in December 1999. On the basis of this Act, a National Commission on the Cheju April Third Incident directly accountable to the prime minister launched on August 28, 2000. The Commission, which included surviving families, former army commanders, government administrators, lawyers, scholars, and representatives of civil society organizations, was assigned the tasks of 1) clarifying

the historical truth of the Incident (establishing as “objective and neutral historical facts as possible” of the “background, development and extent of gross violations of civil rights” of the Cheju Incident) and 2) restoring human and civil dignity of the victims and their relatives who had been previously dishonored as *ppalgaengi* (a derogatory term for the Red).¹⁸⁹ The Act also appointed the Commission to draft a report on the investigation and to direct the erection of the memorial. But the ultimate purpose of the legislation and of the investigation is – as clearly spelled out in the legislative proposal – to “heal the wounds inflicted by the ideological conflict” so as to “promote the dynamics of human rights and democracy and to reinstate national reconciliation and accord.”¹⁹⁰

The Commission drew its data from official and unofficial documents scattered in South Korea, the United States, Russia and Japan, and also from the testimonies of those it selected and acknowledged as “culpable parties” and as “victims.” On March 29, 2003, the Commission published its report on the investigation, which lay open for public scrutiny for amendment for the next six months. The final draft was completed on September 28, 2003.¹⁹¹ The release of this first national investigation report on the Cheju Incident is, surely, a significant historical event, for it *publicly* declared, for the first time in history, the 1948

¹⁸⁹ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 44.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁹¹ Consult <http://www.jeju43.go.kr> (the official website for the Cheju 4.3 Commission, available both in Korean and, for selected pages, in English).

Incident on Cheju as human rights violations committed by the state, and identified, *formally*, former President Rhee Syngman as the individual who bears the major portion of the criminal culpability for the atrocities. The previously whispered memory of 4.3 as a state-sponsored terrorism and civilian carnage became openly decreed, and came to fill in the long-blanked chapter in the national narratives.

On October 31, 2003, recommended by the Commission, President Roh Moo Hyun issued an official apology to the Cheju people and the surviving relatives of the victims in particular for “the wrongdoings committed by the previous government.” Hoping to “tie up loose ends to this unfortunate occasion and [to] move on,” the presidential decree subsequently insists that the National Commission’s underlined tasks of searching for the truth and retrieving honor to the victims mean “not only to bring justice to the victims and the bereaved, but also to pay tribute to those who served to build the nation, and to learn from past mistakes to enhance social solidarity and bring about a better future.” Asserting that Cheju will grow into the “symbol of human rights” and into the “cornerstone of peace,” the decree of *apology* concludes, urging “cessation of all conflicts and dissents” and “turning a new page in the nation’s history.”¹⁹²

The presidential statement that the victims had long anticipated and much deserved (and which, in effect, might have served to help some come to terms with

¹⁹² “Presidential Statement on the Cheju April Third Incident,” Appendix to *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 543.

their long-unresolved past) has nonetheless brought up an ethical issue to deal with. The *felt* experience of suffering the victims had undergone during and after the events, an experience that is hardly legible yet undeniably real and unending, is too abruptly replaced and covered over by moral slogans of forgiveness and reconciliation, which too soon steps into and encloses the unfillable void in the life of the victims created by the missing languages for pain. Pain is inadvertently denied, shrouded, or misguidedly made bearable or reconciliatory, converted into something that can consciously draw to a close, by much too loud and hasty vocabularies of closing up and moving on, of peace, reconciliation and healing, and of facile claims to the future. As soon as being recognized and identified as “victim,” the victim is robbed of the right to mourn, the right to be in pain, to say to herself and to others that her wound is incurable and that it still aches, insufferably. Her inarticulate sorrow, her buried anger, terror, despair and humiliation – which have become a festered wound in her maimed body – are requested, unhesitatingly, to be replaced by an endeavor to forgive, which once again silences her and drives the experience of pain into deeper darkness.

The gallant act of apology is being unwittingly trivialized or eclipsed here in favor of political expediency.¹⁹³ Marking a decisive break with its own past,

¹⁹³ Compare with the national apology recently made by Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in his parliament speech on February 13, 2008 to the forcible removal of Australian Aboriginal children from their families (the so-called “Stolen Generation”) under the earlier administrations’ assimilation policy. This national apology sought for 11 years since the 1997 release of *Bringing Them Home* national inquiry report certainly marks the crucial first step toward the possible restitution and the

consciously separating itself from its own culpable past (“the wrongdoings committed by the previous government”), the incumbent government apparently draws a punctuation mark here, announcing a kind of political transformation, marking a renewal or refoundation of national narrative and identity with a regained moral and political justification untainted by its political predecessors from whom it is differentiating itself here. By doing so, it inadvertently draws a boundary around the atrocities and the suffering for which it is “apologizing,” and which it simultaneously encapsulates within some obsolete and closed past to which the blame will belong. And the victim is alienated from her pain, detached from or divested of her own experience of being victimized (what is left of the victim now? A wound evacuated of pain?), and once again pushed into silence and denial, submerged under the nation’s newly imagined, reinforced hegemonic boundary (the extended homogeneity) where it is no longer quite possible or deemed *moral* to distinguish the agency of violence and the victims, and where responsibility and claims of justice are swamped. Before hastening to embrace the reinforced contours of the national collectivity and to promote the dynamics of peace, prosperity and

recognition of the pain on the national level (persistently denied by the previous John Howard administration); but, to my mind, its carefully-crafted – and no less noisy – message of “reconciliation” (the removal of a “stain” from the nation’s past and moving forward to the future with less dissent), within which the apology is framed, tends to override and to block from intruding the long-suppressed story of pain and destruction which now appears to be buried in the national sorry and zeal for turning a new chapter in history. The full apology is available from Kevin Rudd, “Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples,” Hansard, House of Representatives, Parliament of Australia, February 13, 2008, pp. 167–173
<<http://www.aph.gov.au/Hansard/reps/dailys/dr130208.pdf>>.

reconciliation in a refined boundary of the nation (a reassumed social whole or coherency), one may need to scrutinize the legitimacy of that boundary, or the manipulated effect it will emanate. Most certainly, the same nationalist anxiety that had driven the Cheju victims into the margins of the civil (national) community might be detected here, too.

As made perfectly clear in the legislative proposal and the investigation report itself and also underscored in the presidential statement, the primary task assigned to the Commission is to search for and document the objective and unbiased historical reality of the atrocities pertaining to “what actually happened at that time.”¹⁹⁴ As stated earlier, pursuant of this goal, the tribunal brought together survivors’ eyewitness accounts as well as already documented official and unofficial evidences. For the survivors’ accounts, a list of 2,870 names of the victims was created based on the previously published materials (the casualties report by the local council, newspapers, testimonials, etc.), recommendations from related institutions, and its own search. Out of these 2,870 names, 503 survivors were finally chosen to testify at the four-month hearing sessions that would be used and documented in the investigation report. In selecting this final pool, priority was given to those who “have distinctive backgrounds” with regard to profession, ideological disposition, or experience, and who came from the villages that had gone through particularly atrocious incidents or been severely devastated – that is, to

¹⁹⁴ *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 51.

those who might have something substantial to offer. “Credibility of the prospective witnesses and their competence to give testimony” were also judged and taken into consideration in selecting *documentable* testimonies. At the hearings, the questioner adopted an approach of first letting witnesses freely talk about their experiences, and then of soliciting intersecting data and information (consensus) by letting them answer the pre-composed questionnaire. The testimonies given at the hearings were both voice-recorded and videotaped.¹⁹⁵

But there are questions that arise here: what is it that makes someone’s testimony more important or more accountable than someone else’s? Whose experience of suffering counts as valuable, as *documentable*? What makes a competent witness? What makes a testament to a massacre a credible one? What can be spoken clearly and meaningfully and with certainty about the extermination of human beings and the unreigned savagery with which it had been committed, which had been systematically forgotten, and distorted, for nearly half a century? And who has the authority to determine all that?

“The most important thing in documenting oral testimonies,” it is unhesitatingly articulated in the opening of the tribunal report, is “[to judge] whether or not the given testimonial accounts correspond to the *factual reality*,” for “it is only when they are *factual* that materials attain historical value,” which is applied by the tribunal to the task of compiling oral testimonies, too. It is subsequently argued

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

in the report that because of “the inherent limits and selectiveness of memory,” certain portions of witnesses’ accounts would necessarily remain murky and that it is thus highly probable that witnesses are, at times, unable to offer precise data. In order to correct this problem, the tribunal adopts the method of *cross-check* to evaluate the truth-claim of each oral testimonial account: “it is critical . . . to verify the facticity of each oral testimonial remark through cross-examination with the accounts given by other witnesses as well as with the existing written documents and also through historical and contextual analysis.”¹⁹⁶ The aim of investigation: *establishing the facts*. The methodology used: *cross-check*. Something, I think, is at stake here.

Something fundamental, I would suggest, is lost in the tribunal’s exclusive focus on “fact-finding,” its effort to set up by accord the crime and its provable quantity. What is lost? What is unintentionally excluded from the scene, misguidedly closed and covered over? “If someone else could have written my stories,” says Holocaust survivor and writer Elie Wiesel, “I would not have written them. I have written them in order to testify. And this is the origin of the loneliness that can be glimpsed in each of my sentences, in each of my silences.”¹⁹⁷ The utter singularity and irreplaceability of the witness, the absolute solitude of the one who

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 53-4.

¹⁹⁷ Elie Wiesel, “The Loneliness of God,” published in *Dvar Hashavu’a* (magazine of the newspaper *Davar*), Tel-Aviv, 1984, cited in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony*, p. 3.

went through an *extreme* experience (the undescribed and indescribable private trauma and secret memory) that only he or she can convey (to which no one else can testify in his or her stead), is at odds with the methodology taken up by the 4.3 Commission of putting witnesses and their experiences into the position of being evaluated, contextually analyzed, or compared to other witnesses and other experiences of pain. The moment one begins to qualify suffering, a crucial impact of testimony collapses.¹⁹⁸ The uniqueness and privacy of human suffering – that is, the (conceptual) impossibility of being in the body of suffering, an impossibility of communicating or documenting the pain of a wound, physical or psychological, or *silence* that is at the very heart of every testimony, its very essence – is violently negated here, consumed, exhausted and evacuated of meaning in the very moment of its conception, verification, validation. Perhaps, as the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard has claimed, what must be taken into consideration is “not only the testimony, but also what is left of the testimony when it is destroyed (by dilemma), namely, the feeling” – a *feeling* of something immense and immeasurable (something irreducible to the science of language) having occurred, something elusive of grasp yet unable to be denied, either, a *feeling* that is detected only in

¹⁹⁸ I am trying to draw out a distinction between two understandings of testimony here – possibly, a difference *within* testimony itself. First, there is the juridical way of understanding testimony, whose goal is to elicit facts, to certify, or to *prove*. Then, there is the poetic or philosophical understanding of testimony, or testimony *delegitimated* into a compelling work of art (or literature). The latter seeks to *transmit* (the evacuated narrative core of trauma), to testify to the event as a crisis of witnessing itself, to let something *happen* to the receiver of testimony beyond the totality of appropriable facts (information, archive) sought by the court.

silence (a mode of excess; the remainder of words) signaled only in negation (in resistance to understanding).¹⁹⁹

“The absolute victim,” says Derrida, “is a victim who cannot even protest. One cannot even identify the victim as victim. He or she cannot even present himself or herself as such. He or she is totally excluded or covered over by language, annihilated by history, a victim one cannot identify.”²⁰⁰ The absolute, real, genuine victim is marked by the utter incapacity to identify himself or herself, even to himself or to herself. He or she cannot defend, accuse, even forgive. He or she cannot even say what he or she does (not) know. Deprived of life – whether in reality or unto himself or herself – and also of language with which to point to or make sense of the pain and the wound, the experience of the absolute victim remains inexpressible and unclaimed.

Denied to the witnesses meticulously *chosen* by the tribunal who were taken as the providers of “information” about the past and whose testimonies were used to fill in the missing pieces of the puzzle, compiling toward the completion of the one, unequivocal, clean-surfaced “what-happened,” might be the *absolute victimhood* (the unreadability of an extreme atrocity suffered and carried by them) to which they have been imprisoned. Refused to them, I think, is the (impossible) possibility of

¹⁹⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 57.

²⁰⁰ Jacques Derrida, “Passages: From Traumatism to Promise,” interview with Elizabeth Weber, in *Points . . . : Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elizabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 372-95, (p. 389).

being recognized and, in a way, respected as the absolute victims that they are. “By beginning to speak in the common idiom of . . . authorized politics,” says Lyotard, “[survivors] put an end to the silence to which they had been condemned. But the reality of the wrong suffered . . . remained and remains to be established, and it cannot be established because it is in the nature of a wrong not to be established by consensus. What could be established by historical inquiry would be [the damages and not the wrong].”²⁰¹ The 4.3 tribunal fails to acknowledge, or needs – by dint of its self-created mandate – to gloss over, precisely *the impossibility or failure of witnessing*, the conscious or unconscious resistance to pain’s conversion into language which is inherent in every act of testimony. It fails, or avoids, to give itself a chance to hear the inaudible cry – stuttering, faltering, moaning, denying, collapsing, or plunging into the non-senses – of the absolute victim of *I can’t speak*, to discern a zone of silence surrounding, say, brutally tormented, pierced, battered, raped, debased, shamed (to the point of becoming inhuman) bodies of female victims – which represent for me the quintessential sign or symptom of the unprecedented nature of human assault on the human body perpetrated during 4.3 – that could not be testified in a *documentable* manner at the public hearings.

By saying these, I am not trying to denigrate the importance of the search for the historical truth altogether or to belittle the conscious and deliberate efforts made by the historians and the tribunal to gather the documents and to construct a

²⁰¹ Lyotard, *The Differend*, p. 56.

historical, shared narrative of what had actually happened on Cheju, to generate a collective knowledge – a society’s memory – of its formerly denied, altogether silenced history, which will have a profound political importance. In composing this work, I myself have drawn extensively from the Commission report and other various historical reports and have had tremendous and growing respect for their contribution to investigating, accumulating and circulating the truth. What has previously existed only in the repressed form of obscure and incoherent private tales and traumatic memories was for the first time given a formal name here, one by which the crime against the Cheju people will be known to the outside world and passed on to the generations to follow. A jumbled, inarticulate and otherwise unacknowledgeable mass of private traumas – the secret, covert, muffled individual traumas of the survivors that even the survivors themselves could hardly identify – came to materialize as a tangible and communal knowledge that would continue to offer itself as a subject of open discussion. And most importantly, public hearings and documentation enabled the formally marginalized Cheju victims – the mute, shamed, drowned bearers of the historical atrocity – to enter, for the first time, the public domain and to emerge as historical writers, and there subsequently came into shape the “community of the victims.” All were achieved by the remarkable efforts made by the tribunal and the related and dedicated institutions and individuals, which must be fully acclaimed.

There will continue to be an urge to falsify the truth about Cheju, an attempt to prolong a will to forgetting, to let what happened be effaced from history and cultural memory, and a temptation not to look back at all at a stained chapter in the country's past and to move, blindly, forward. The story rigorously documented in the Commission report of what happened on Cheju in 1948 will serve as our resource for struggle against these, our groundwork for restitution. *But* at the same time, one needs to remain vigilant, as Lawrence Langer alerts us in his speculation of the narratives of Holocaust survivors – which I believe could be said of any survivors of extreme human atrocity – of the ways in which this chronologically reconstituted narrative, this sequentially organized time, this first formal and generalized re-presentation of Cheju that is made up of a past, present and future and filled with verifiable proofs and documentable knowledge (its first common, public memory in and by which the experience of the Cheju victims will be designated and the crime against Cheju will be publicly referred to) may challenge us with “[its] absent meaning that continues to distress us all.”²⁰² This alert cannot be taken aside cheaply.

When crises become the norm of life, what Langer calls “durational time” sets in. This is time without past or future and with a recurring experience of an intrusive, uncontrolled present that is difficult to organize, to articulate or to forget.

²⁰² Lawrence L. Langer, “Memory’s Time: Chronology and Duration in Holocaust Testimonies,” in *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 13-23, (p. 23).

It is time that “relentlessly stalks the memory of the witness, imprinting there moments immune to the ebbs and flow of chronological time.” “No public ritual,” says Langer, “can ease the sting of such private recall, which persists outside the frame of consolation or closure.”²⁰³ By its refusal of consolation and its lack of closure, durational past, the force of its recurrent, obsessive memory, continues to take over the present. Without, once again, wishing to denigrate the tribunal’s effort to establish facts and histories, to promote and to distribute a common knowledge and meaning of the events of Cheju, I would suggest that no personal suffering can and must fully be settled in, enclosed or regulated, integrated or assimilated, within any socially and collectively constructed assumptions of suffering. No generalized notion of victimhood, so to speak, can unshackle the survivor from the position of the victim, from the persistent imprisonment in durational time. One must continue to remember this inability, the fundamental impossibility of anchoring *pain* (that which is *left* of the victim when his or her testimony is documented, when his or her pain is converted into knowledge) which no truth claim can adequately account for and do justice to. One must strive to open up (to endlessly re-open) thousands of yet-unheard, personal voices of the victims that have not yet been properly received and will never finish arriving in historical or chronological narratives.

Women’s injured and stigmatized bodies to which I will now turn signify for me the very dilemma that the tribunal – or any authorized institution’s attempt to

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 22.

substantiate suffering, to aggregate or regulate many discrete, contending sites of pain in order to assign a common meaning – faces. They materialize, to my mind, the unsubsumable and unoblatable suffering that is immune to narration (the somatic knowledge of suffering – which is not yet language – that only the body knows and cannot forget), a certain *excess* either undetected or repudiated by the analytical, discursive language used, or only picked up, at the public hearings and documentation. They epitomize the very impossibility of making a decisive break with the past, the impossibility of closure, and perhaps of forgiving.

The Raped Body

The appalling practice of rape and abuse of women on Cheju served multiple purposes, it both shared the “general” functions of rape, as known in social sciences, and played a unique and unusual role. Added sexual torture, mutilation, and actual and mock-rapes to which bodies of Cheju women were consistently subjected during 4.3 were played out and exhibited for perverse sadistic pleasure, *which had political value*. Here there had been virtually no principled restraint to protect the victims, no legal or moral reins against the assailant’s brutal intrusion and manipulation of woman, his trespassing forcibly on her body, selfhood and integrity, his violating and conquering her autonomy, human dignity and self-esteem. Total contempt for and dehumanization of woman, the treading of everything that makes her unique and

meaningful (makes her *human*), the taking of all that can be taken from a person, are central to this grim violation. Completely broken, defiled and debased, the victim is reduced to impotence and powerlessness, dwarfed into something *less than human*, something worthless except for what her magnified sexuality, her hyper-visible femininity, is made to represent for her male assailants.

The insistent and unusual focus on sexual assault of “Red” women during the course of 4.3 could be understood, to a certain extent, by examining the intricate relationships among gender, nationalism, and the colonial experience of Korea at the time of its occurrence.²⁰⁴ The impure concomitance of the modern nation-building underway in the immediate aftermath of independence and the scenes of excessive sexual abuse and subjugation of Cheju women might offer some explanation for the occurrence of the 1948 political violence on Cheju. What may be termed as *sexualized hatred* against the Red women (or, as I will argue, against *any* woman who is, in her essence, Red), which, on Cheju, took the form of *genocidal anxiety*

²⁰⁴ My analysis of the sexual violence of Cheju women here partially owes to postcolonialist and feminist Indian scholars whose work focuses on the suffering of women endured during the Partition of India in 1947 (in which, reportedly, one million people perished, over ten million were displaced, and seventy-five thousand women were abducted and raped by men of religious/national difference). They allowed me to think critically toward the intricate relations between colonialism, gender and nationalism in the context of my own focus of study – three of the most definitive criteria which, to my mind, pierced through the volatile history of postliberation Korea, as they did India, and which indeed takes me closer toward unraveling the particular meanings of sexual violence directed toward Cheju women during 4.3. Read, among others, Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis, ed. *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women’s Sexuality in South Asia* (London: Zed, 1993); Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995); Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998); Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta, ed. *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India* (Kolkata: Stree, 2003).

directed against the *feminized species* of the Red, is, to my mind, the gruesome reminder of how gender – or rather, the warped conception of gender or gender relations – participated in constituting Korean nationalism, or of how gender or the male fantasy of amplified female sexuality was made to serve as a tool for shaping the national/political subject (or the state-male) and collectivity in the immediate post-independence era. That is, the rape and other forms of criminal sexual violation of Cheju women were utilized as a potent political technology that postcolonial – and patriarchal, heterosexual, and misogynistic – nationalism brought to the creation of a common identity, a fuel for nationalist zeal (as a displaced male fantasy) needed to engender and sustain a *fraternal* male bonding that is nation. By radically denigrating and inferiorizing women – and subsequently the entire community to which they belong – by sexual means, the state agency effectively pushes “women” (signifying both real women and “womanness” that they represent for men) into the margins of the moral – national – community.

On Cheju, the desire for autonomy from colonial suppression (the desire for recovering manly pride and dignity damaged by colonial submission) and the desire for nationalism (the desire for a strong and invulnerable masculine nation) were invested or materialized as the sexual subjugation and colonialization of women. The raided, injured bodies of women were not only seen as the symptom or byproduct of the long-repressed male anger, shame, and longing for domination, but taken as the ground for assertion upon which power and control of the fledging

nation (the hegemony or ideological monopoly of the nationalist ruling class) were visualized, announced openly, and celebrated. The nation as a fictive entity was made increasingly tangible, real, actualized around the bodies of women, substantiated through the corporeal-sexual manipulation and/or territorial aggression of these bodies. The female body, in other words, served as the material through which male desire for power and dominance was channeled, into which the suppressed impulse was transformed or transferred to find (substitute) fulfillment. Inflicting sexually additional aggression and damage on the body thus could be seen as a *political* act of establishing male/national superiority and control, a device through which men try out and demonstrate their manliness necessary to effect a political turn.

The female body became in this way an essential domain in which the entire plot of the war against Communism (explicitly and exaggeratingly defined as *anti-national*) was enacted/written, in which “Red anxiety” as a displaced nationalist vehemence found expression, invested and gratified, implemented and exhibited for sexual satisfaction, advertisement and approval. According to this reasoning, violence against women must have been believed by men to put men back into the sphere of rule, or at least gave them such an illusion by allowing them to establish or to extend to the outer world the sense of domination that had so far been limited to the domestic world, confined only over “their own” woman’s body. Manly dignity and self-worth previously impaired by the imposed colonial ideology of racial

inferiority in the political and social realm (by which men had been belittled, made inferior and impotent – that is, *feminized*) were sought to be restored upon liberation by placing women – “the sexually inferior” – into the position of the abused subject. For women, this would merely mean to transfer them from one form of political subjection to another (a distorted extension of the existing sexual politics). The illusion of control, dominance and supremacy is built up, so to speak, as the formerly subjugated and oppressed group (the colonized males) emerges, or elevates itself, as the very agents of subjugation and oppression. And it does so by creating a necessary medium to suppress, or rather, in this case, by simply turning to a ready-made cultural product of such kind – an “other” whose otherness is already immanent in culture, who is already preoccupying the position of being consistently used and abused, subordinated, dominated and downtrodden, already, in “normal” everyday context. Reduced to this medium, the female body becomes a mere outlet for male (sexual/political) desire, a vent for his submerged anger and aggression, and for his suffocated masculinity, an open ground upon which robust, masculinist national identity is attested, promoted, and made appallingly real.

In short, the desire for strong nationalism (for a “Red-free” nation) full-fledged in the immediate postcolonial context and the feelings of hatred and contempt of women deep-seated in everyday politics are met on the bodies of (Red) women, the ruthless violation of which served as a potent advertisement and motivator for male/national drive (it is both its source and its effect). The sustained

acts of torture, mutilation, rape and murder of Red women of Cheju during the 1948 state carnage fulfilled in this way the *purpose of the nation*, and were justified for that sake. They played a role of establishing sovereign power and hegemonic national unity, a belonging that is defined through “othering.”

In order to understand further the value of sexual violation and subjection of Cheju women (the political message they give with regard to the veneration of masculinity and the construction of national collectivity), I would like to draw on the social science findings of the criminal sexual assault, or rape, in both civilian context and in war, which will also help shed light on the *unique* role the rape of Cheju functioned in its specific historical and cultural context that I shall subsequently try to elaborate. Social studies of rape refer to the criminal act as “sexualized violence that seeks to humiliate, terrorize, and destroy a woman based on her identity as a woman.”²⁰⁵ Rather than viewed simply and primarily as a sexual crime, rape is viewed, prevalently, as an extreme aggression achieved by sexual means, which has as its purpose the wounding of the victim’s human dignity, autonomy, self-worth, and her standing in her society.²⁰⁶ As social scientist Ruth

²⁰⁵ Rhonda Copelon, “Surfacing Gender: Reconceptualizing Crimes against Women in Time of War,” in *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, ed. Alexandra Stiglmeier, trans. Marion Faber (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1994), pp. 197-218 (p. 198).

²⁰⁶ Susan Brownmiller offers one of the first accounts of such view. In her pioneering and compelling – and controversial – 1975 study of the rape, she rejects the view of rape as fundamentally sexual, constructing it instead as an act of violence deployed by men to perpetuate their preeminence and control over women – by keeping them in a state of fear – which are already

Seifert points out, the violence used in the form of battering, strangling, verbal threats, and other forms of abuse which often accompany rape tends to surpass the violence needed for carrying out the act of rape itself. And very often, the rape victim does not think that she has been exposed to a sexual act, but rather to an excessive and humiliating form of physical and psychological attack directed against her internal self as well as her body. Even rapists themselves often speak of the deep and overwhelming emotions of rage, aggression and antagonism toward the victim when asked to recall the experience, instead of describing it as a sexual experience.²⁰⁷ Rape, one could even say, would not be possible at all without a degree of anger, hatred and disdain toward women (already at work in the rape scene) that are already prevalent in our culture, which was brought to surface and carried out in the most disconcerting manner imaginable in extreme circumstances. Against the popular myth about rape, critical social studies thus tend to stress its obvious *political* implications, drawing attention to it not as a means to attain personal sexual satisfaction of the offender, but as a radical and deliberate manifestation of hostility, bigotry, coercion, intimidation, and supremacy over women. Its purpose, once again, is far beyond what can be explained by distorted and irrepressible male sexual need.

prevalent in existent gender relations. See Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975).

²⁰⁷ Ruth Seifert, "War and Rape: A Preliminary Analysis," in *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, pp. 54-72 (pp. 55-6).

Crucially, rape engages in transforming the assailant into the agent of power, and the victim into his inferior, degraded, subjugated “other” – into one he can abuse, manipulate, and conquer at will, and without feeling guilt. Implicit in this abhorrent crime is this transformative function that generates *power structure*. Or one could say that in order for the rape to occur, or for it to be accomplished, the assailant and the victim must *already* be situated in a certain power relation (the dominance-submission relation).²⁰⁸ The raped – forcibly trespassed and open for viewing – body of the victim is, thus, both the source and the proof of the assailant’s maleness and increased superiority, and of the victim’s becoming subjected to his power, and becoming inferior to him. The naked injured body of a raped and molested woman – her open, vulnerable, severely damaged and stigmatized body – is the very domain where the male offender can ensure his superior strength, a concrete and tangible evidence to prove it to himself, to the woman he assaulted, and to other men. The sexual violence that aims at the *complete* tarnishing of a person, the destruction of everything that makes her valuable and meaningful (the attack on one’s identity, private selfhood, dignity, integrity, and secrecy), relegates the victim into a mere instrument, a mere tool for the verification of male desire. What matters here, one must note, is not woman as a real, concrete person; the intended target of this sort of victimization is *woman as such*, woman as a symbol or an impersonal,

²⁰⁸ Kim Ŭnsil, “P’ongnyŏk kwa yŏsŏng [Violence and Women],” in *Tong asia ũi p’yŏnghwa wa inkkwŏn [Peace and Human Rights in East Asia]*, ed. Cheju 4.3 Institute, pp. 182-85 (p. 183).

interchangeable, consumable object. All this becomes more apparent in cases of (mass) rape and other forms of sexual violence that occur during the time of war, an extreme situation in which the destructive male fantasy is vindicated, encouraged, and even granted immunity as an effective weapon for victory.

Susan Brownmiller writes:

Sexual sadism arises with astonishing rapidity in ground warfare, when the penis becomes justified as a weapon in a logistical reality of unarmed noncombatants, encircled and trapped. Rape of an object doubly dehumanized – as woman, as enemy – carries its own terrible logic. In one act of aggression, the collective spirit of women *and* of the nation is broken, leaving a reminder long after the troops depart. And if she survives the assault, what does the victim of wartime rape become to her people? Evidence of the enemy's bestiality. Symbol of her nation's defeat. A pariah. Damaged property. A pawn in the subtle wars of international propaganda.²⁰⁹

Rape has always been an important technique of warfare. By conquering enemy women's bodies, rape at war seeks to colonize the enemy's terrain and to dilute the symbolic identity of the enemy group. By violating *their* women, rape fundamentally dishonors and injures the enemy men. Raping *its* women, men taint the entire collectivity and communal values of the enemy nation. Soldiers thus turn to rape as a potent military equipment, a weapon for conquest. The body of a raped woman subsequently becomes "a ceremonial battlefield," "[a] parade ground for the

²⁰⁹ Susan Brownmiller, "Making Female Bodies the Battlefield," in *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, pp. 180-82 (p. 181).

victor's trooping of the colors."²¹⁰ On this corporeal battle zone, men contest for a greater manliness and territory. The real target of wartime rape, therefore, is not just the victimized woman herself whose terrorized body is callously looted and consumed by the conquering soldiers, but the whole enemy group of which she is a part and a symbol.

Wartime rape is taken by men of both sides as a message of collective dishonoring and demoralization – an ultimate wound to masculinity, honor, and competence of the enemy males who could not guard their women – and an unequivocal token for the conqueror's superior power and elevated masculinity as well as a tangible medal for the victors. Relevantly, as Seifert has noted, the report on gang rapes committed by American soldiers in Vietnam suggests the significance of the merging of violence and masculinity on the enemy women's bodies in wartime, which are ultimately taken as ground/source for constructing male identity of the military. The surplus of cruelty inflicted on the gang rape victims is thus conceived by male assailants as "a competition for greater masculinity."²¹¹ Added abusive violence and sexual torture which "embellish" the act of rape would thus be applauded by the offenders as a proof of their masculinity and a manifestation of belligerence and destructiveness that men at arms must constantly display and imbue into themselves as a token of a greater, and more capable, combatant. Soldiers who

²¹⁰ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 38.

²¹¹ Ruth Seifert, "War and Rape," p. 61; see also Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 102.

refuse to take their turns in gang rapes would thus be ridiculed by their peers for their lack of manhood, and taken as the “outcast[s]” from their military male bonding.²¹² The rape of this kind was promoted also as a means of disposing “feminine qualities” inside any soldier-male – tenderness, care, empathy, compassion, reluctance, etc. – which must be suppressed and denied for the sake of collective solidarity, hardness and discipline.²¹³ This is rape as a tool of shaping the very maleness of the military – a self-cleansing mechanism for men to obliterate the “feminine” out of themselves, or a military strategy for men’s reemergence into the masculine.

What sustains this logic is, of course, the patriarchal ideology of female chastity, the female body as an icon of the unsullied, fertile and moral community, a symbolic depository of its principled values. A forcible rupture and damaging of the woman’s closed, pure, carefully-shielded, moral body is taken as a threat not only to her own selfhood, but to the community and the people to which she belongs. If rape is considered as a serious crime, it would be largely because of the effect it brings about to men, for it offends the honor of men by violating their exclusive rights to appropriate and sexually subjugate their women (as their property). Certainly more than a byproduct of war or an evidence of its violent excess, rape actively and

²¹² Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 102.

²¹³ Ruth Seifert, “War and Rape,” p. 62.

deliberately engages in this way both the physical and the symbolic battleground of war.

The sexual violence of women during the Partition of India and Pakistan obviously performed the similar function.²¹⁴ Widespread during the Partition was the idea of the female body as the symbol or as the possession of the nation. Collective and systematic sexual violence against enemy nation's women, perpetrated in the forms of sexual torture, abduction, rape, forced marriage and impregnation, meant for men from respective nation to usurp and damage the enemy's domain, to punish and dishonor men and the national or religious community to whom/which these women belonged, and thus to taint their identity, and to destroy, both literally and symbolically, the enemy seeds and future these women were to nurture and to embody. Acts of raping women in public in full view of their relatives and neighbors as well as the conquering males, or tattooing on their body the nationalist slogans as a message for the other side, marked the women for life. They never permitted them and their family and their community the possibility of being released from the pain and the horror. Once the repository of community purity and lineage, now the evidence, and symptom, of corruption and defeat, the occupied territory, and the grim reminder of collective inferiority and diluted communal identity, the body of a raped woman has become a parchment onto which the pain of terrible history is permanently inscribed, etched, tattooed, and branded in

²¹⁴ See note 202 above.

a manner that will never be forgotten. Countless abducted and converted Muslim, and Hindu, women who were forced to bear children of their assailants and who refused to return to their own country for the fear of being rejected by their own families and relatives (whom she dishonored by being raped by outsiders) stand as a horrible epitome of this suffocating male logic, a logic that participates in reducing woman from being counted as a unique and meaningful human being to being used and abused as a mere message, a mere instrument for politics.

There is indeed a shroud of silence surrounding the social and emotional death that so many women have experienced as a result of abduction, rape and torture. Mostly the women themselves do not talk about their experience, and men prefer it that way, laying blame on the assaulted women themselves for the denigration of their masculinity and for their symbolic defeat. The victims are not only brutalized by their abductors, but when/if they return to their home with broken bodies, they find none of the comfort implied in the term “home,” for their kinsmen are essentially ashamed of their pain and turn away from it. The experience of victimization is never discussed openly. The victim is killed twice in this way – in the rape and in the social murder her own family resigns her into. Indeed, it is the same patriarchal order which uses rape as a weapon for war and as a message for the other men that shames her into silence and social disgrace, designating her polluted, stigmatized body as a site of communal guilt and depravity. It is known that, in Indian society, the attempt to prevent the chastity of one’s own women became so

great that a new form of violence erupted among some religious groups. Men construed their kinship obligations to kill their beloved wife, sister and daughter, rather than let her fall into the hands of the men from the enemy community, lest her raided, polluted body should tarnish the honor of her community.²¹⁵ In condemning the victim this way, no one is exempt from accusation – the abductors/rapists, the family and the society. What is left to the woman now whose body is brutally conflated with political slogans, pierced, cut, punctured by perverse male logic? Anthropologist Veena Das quotes from real victims of the Partition violence: “what is a woman – she is always used”; “what is there to be proud in a woman’s body – everyday it is polluted by being consumed.”²¹⁶ What matters is not only the particular suffering endured by singular, individual victims, but also the act played out upon their body that is passed as a sign. The pain remains inarticulate, swallowed by woman, silently imprisoned inside her assaulted, maimed, and shamed body, and in nowhere else.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ See Veena Das, “Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain,” in *Social Suffering*, ed. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 67-92 (p. 79).

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²¹⁷ Perhaps the women choose to take the stance of silence themselves. They choose to hide the crimes of their assaulters within themselves and swallow the painful memory. Very relevantly, in case of Korean “comfort women,” forced military prostitutes serving for Japanese soldiers during World War II (to which I shall return shortly), research shows that women survivors often regard themselves as unfit for normal marriage and child bearing – for the fear of contracting venereal disease or as a “price” to pay for the loss of their chastity. The majority of former comfort women would thus voluntarily give up the chance of having normal woman’s life. This “self-shaming mechanism,” observes Yang Hyunah, “makes the victims apologize for herself” (Yang, “Revisiting

All these “general” functions of rape took effect on Cheju, too. And at the same time, things were also a little different there. 4.3, strictly to say, was not a “war.” Unlike in the briefly treated case of India and Pakistan (the war between two religious communities) or – to take another instance among numerous warring regions in history – the ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia, where rape was widespread as a forcible instrument of war, a vehicle of (male) communication between warring opponents, the “enemy” to which the message of collective humiliation and degradation was to be sent was *not* there on Cheju as a definite and perceptible entity. Unquestionably, “the Reds” were the declared enemy of the state, yet ironically, there had *not* been formed a distinct, clearly-outlined community of the enemy, no enemy *per se* to collectively defame by raping *its* women. I have discussed earlier how the target of the government’s initial punitive actions on Cheju – the “armed rebels” which did not seem to exceed 500 men throughout the entire period of the insurgency – drastically and unrealistically outgrew its original outline only within less than half a year after the launching of the separate southern regime in fall 1948. Whom to kill was never too clear: impossible to discern elusive and flighty guerilla fighters from panic-stricken noncombatants (there was *no* essential way to identify the “Reds”), the state agency directed indiscriminate attack toward the entire civilian villages in the highlands, which resulted in a vast number of

the Issue of Korean ‘Military Comfort Women’: The Question of Truth and Positionality,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 5, no. 1, special issue, *The Comfort Women: Colonialism, War, and Sex* [Spring 1997]: 57-71 [p. 66]).

civilian slaughters falsely categorized/justified as “guerilla death.” The growing political pressure to clean up the “rebels” during the government’s intense final extermination drives in fall 1948 and spring 1949 further blinded the punitive troops to the increasingly excessive and brutal measure they took to liquidate their target (which was extended to virtually *everyone* inhabiting the “Red island”).

Most rape victims were, likewise, innocent and politically naïve civilian women who took no ideological side, and who were chosen, almost completely, *at random*. For instance, on December 15, 1948, a bright full moon night, the punitive troops made an unanticipated visit to T’osan-ri in P’yosŏn-myŏn – a region which was not even listed in the declared “enemy zone” – and gathered all villagers (all of whom were unarmed noncombatants) into a village administration building. After first separating young males aged between eighteen and forty as “suspicious persons,” the troops forced all village women to stand toward the full moon in order to “pick out by the moonlight the young and pretty-faced ones.” They then took them to a nearby elementary school, held them there for several days before slaughtering them in mass execution on December 18 and 19. 157 out of the total 200 villagers were killed by the incident, where there seemed to be no why. Only one woman could return alive from this random execution – and most certainly, as surviving villagers assume with certainty, mass rape as well. She never uttered a

word about what happened to herself and others inside that school building for those several days before the killings took place.²¹⁸

The sheer *contingency of rape* – the arbitrariness in targeting the victims – effectively worked to render *every* woman of Cheju *rapable*. It functioned to identify *all* Cheju women as *potential victims of rape*, and consequently served to denigrate and inferiorize the entire island community to which these (raped and/or *rapable*) women belonged. That is to say, rather than disgracing the existing enemy at hand, the rapes on Cheju functioned to define, to construct, or to give visible shape to the yet-indeterminate – or yet-inexistent – “enemy” of the state. It served to build anew the collective identity of Cheju – whose women were raped or exposed to the potential danger of being raped at any time (and rendered completely impotent as well in the face of their imminent murder at the hands of their rapists – as impure, dirty and undesirable, and as feeble and immoral, and to spread the message to the island populace as well as to the conquering males themselves (or the state-male in formation) that it is okay to violate and abuse them, that they lie outside the protection of law, outside the boundary of the civil/national community and of the human, and that they are corrupt, low, and unclean “enemy” of the state, its unwanted, debased, dangerous “other” (seen as another, inferior, and infected race) that needs to be pushed into its margins to keep itself pure and moral – *male*. What

²¹⁸ Based on the testimony of a T’osan-ri resident Kim Yanghak (*The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, pp. 390-91).

is happening here, one could say, is a kind of *ethnic rape* (*ethnic hatred sexualized*), or *genocidal rape against the racialized other*.

This is rape that transforms the entire Cheju people into a defiled racial body, rape that serves to draw contours of the “Red”/enemy group (rape that facilitates the enemy’s – or the state-male’s – coming into being), rape that demarcates the necessary dividing line between *in* and *out* of the national collectivity/unity. That is, the mass rapes on Cheju were *not* a sexual aggression as retribution directed against the women whose “communist” identities had been already known and perceptible, but a state tactic to marginalize and alienate, by sexual means, the entire Cheju citizens (a new, “Red” race in the making, created so as to be plunged into collective inferiority and corruption, into real and potential victimhood and otherness). What is created as a message on the bodies of the sexually intruded Cheju women, one might say, is their newly appointed *ethnic* identity. It is taken as a state-issued signature – a kind of social stigmatization – that prevents them from “passing,” that precludes the raped and rapable women of Cheju and their men from being seen and admitted as members of the enclosed national community of which they cannot be a part. This refusal, this banishment, constitutes the nation, its sovereign power and hegemonic unity affirmed and announced through the grim sexual attack of Cheju/Red women. The deformity of the female body is, in essence, the very mark of the outcasted, the indelible tattoo of forced exile and denied membership.

The body here stands *not* as the ultimate testament to the injustice done to her, but rather, as the stain of the “untouchable,” the signature of disgrace and repulsion, the very symbol of the site of pollution (non-identity), guilt and disgust. It is worthy to note, once again, that sexual atrocities committed against women can hardly be perceived as a serious political issue under a patriarchal system and be publicly discussed and analyzed in the language of nationalism, for, generally, the “patriarchally constituted nationalist discourse, with its presumptions about ‘proper’ sexuality and gender roles,” would only continue to eclipse “improper” female experiences, and relegate the traumatized women to “a site of national shame.”²¹⁹ The scarred, polluted female body, self-shamed, thus castigates itself, conceals the poisonous truth deep inside itself, and remains, voluntarily as much as involuntarily, outside the publicly validated reality, outside the contours of the communal, national “we.” So far, indeed, the crimes of sexual violence perpetrated against Cheju women have been – and *still* are – repressed from cultural memory, or rather attributed to “male nature” and hurled into the illegible margins of politics and law.

But the violated and muffled female body (the epitome of social – if not literal – death) that signifies *inexpressible* pain (the body’s pain that, undetected under discursive knowledge, can only be addressed, or made expressive, by the body itself) is precisely where at once lies a possibility of expression, where a yet unborn

²¹⁹ Takashi Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama, “Introduction” to *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, eds. Fujitani, White, and Yoneyama (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 1-32, (p. 8).

word is sheltered. It is where the body, the body-writing, interrupts, and compels the false, errant cultural totality into a halt. Its tortured – swollen, cut, stripped, bruised, incinerated, punctured – form perhaps embodies the site of history's discomfort (the site of genuine, *traumatic* truth that cannot be fully accounted for in historiography) which is, at once, the very locus of (covert) witnessing. The deformed female body, one might further say, allegorizes the very paradox of the official 4.3 reconciliation process, which failed to recognize the *double* layers of victimization and of restitution on the part of women, and which thus unwittingly subsumes female trauma under the general category of national trauma (or which subordinates the crimes of sexual assault within the general category of human rights violation). This body must be brought back to the center of the political discourses and subject to vigilant *reading*.

The Surrogate Body

Among these outcast bodies were severely mutilated bodies of women sacrificed (or rather, merely consumed) as *surrogate victims*: namely, the victims of *taesal* or death-as-substitution – a *gendered* mechanism to kill blatantly used by the state troops during 4.3 (yet little known). Women of Cheju were arbitrarily chosen to be tortured, abused, and slaughtered *in place of* men – their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons who had fled and were thus missing, and hence placed under

suspicion. The hatred and fear of “Communists” as the designated enemy of the emerging state, anxiously advertized as a “vital threat” to national order and tranquility (and yet whose fleeting identity remained yet ungraspable), were rerouted as the feelings of hostility and aggression toward women, who were exposed and vulnerable and close at hand; being already the object of profound hatred ingrained in the cultural unconscious, they have come readily to mind as an immediate and more tangible target to direct the fury and the dread, taken as a suitable substitute to take the place of or stand in for the absent bodies of *ppalgaengi* men.

I would argue that *taesal* constitutes the ultimate example that signifies the gendered and racialized complexities of the Cheju state terror, female bodies’ being converted into cultural resources in engineering collective hatred and otherness and in subsequently crafting the powerfully male – clean, rigid, bounded – body of the masculine nation-state. It is at the very intersection of ethnic and gender violence that took a particularly drastic and appalling path on Cheju in its specific sociopolitical context. Who/what is victimized in this absurd and unusual practice of surrogate murder, sacrificed or merely exploited in place of or on behalf of *ppalgaengi* man, is not a woman as a person whose particular identity counts and makes any difference here – a woman who has a name and a face (human individuation, human depth) and a life worth noting (a life that is unfathomably deep and unending and impossible to close at will), but a woman conceived of and treated primarily and merely as a thing, an instrument or means of achieving someone else’s

ends, the male ends (which is perhaps her only meaning here), a terminable entity, breakable, usable, possessable, an impersonal something that is thus replaceable and interchangeable, unconcerned of her emotions and pain. The substitution requires no explanation here, no excuse, no remorse. The act is self-justificatory. The answer simply lies in what she is or has been turned into in society : a mere *object* of male desire or use.²²⁰ What counts in this grim violence is, once again, not a woman who is human and individual, but a woman who is seen merely as a vehicle of this violence. What counts is what her magnified or hyper-visible sexuality signifies for men, the role this woman-killing is made to play in forging and re forging the identity and sovereignty of the male state.

Several questions that preoccupy me in light of this surrogate victimhood are, Can one indeed *die in place of* another? Is life, and death, *substitutable*, and *consumable*? Can death be rendered as a tool, a tactic, a device? If it is – as I have tried to understand in my first chapter – at death, whether already past or to come, that someone is revealed as utterly *other*, unknowable, enigmatic, and absolutely singular, as an *other* who defies all intentionality and disavows any reductive totality, then, what would it mean to say that death, or life that harbors the (im)possibility of

²²⁰ What is relevant here is the feminist critique of “objectification,” a term that entails seeing and treating as a thing or instrument something that is not a thing but is, in fact, a human being. This morally and politically problematic notion that is normally applied to the conception of women in society have inspired and justified multifarious forms of torture and abuse targeted against them (who are readily taken as impersonal objects, meaningless except as a means of achieving someone else’s purpose, the male purpose). But this problem hardly surfaces as a serious political or moral issue, naturalized in culture that fails to see its particular obscenity. See Martha C. Nussbaum’s dissection of this critical notion: “Objectification,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 24:4 (Autumn 1995): 249-91.

death, is offered, or used, as the surrogate, as the fungible and terminable instrument, as the closed symbol? Would such death, replaceable and instrumentalized, leave behind any mark, a trace, a remainder/reminder of an unknowable surplus of the interminable, irreducible other? If the work of mourning is constituted by the otherness of the other that is, as Judith Butler has phrased, “maintained by its enigmatic dimension, by the experience of not knowing incited by losing what we cannot fully fathom,”²²¹ would the loss of these *thingified, instrumentalized, substituting* women amount to the loss that meets the criteria of truthful mourning? Or is there such death that is *not worthy of mourning*, loss that does not count as grievable, loss that would not make the world irretrievably less when it happens or is anticipated to happen, or loss that can indeed be drawn to a complete close?

As I have shown earlier, women of Cheju were abused and manipulated by men, the agency of the state, as an expressive vessel of masculinity previously harmed under colonialism, a vent for the repressed male anxiety, rage, and desire for dominance, an investment of nation-worship, or an inevitable cost – or reward – for belonging. Women were made to serve as a substitute battlefield for “Red-hunt” (a symbolic ground upon which anti-Communism as the founding state ideology and organizational principle takes root), a domain for asserting state sovereignty (the political establishment and ideological monopoly of the emerging nation-state),

²²¹ Judith Butler, *Prekarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), p. 21.

surrogate animals literally taking the place of the missing *ppalgaengi* men, and a symbol of the site of the other in the making. As the consequence of these, the other, the Red race, or “Cheju” came to be constructed *as gendered – as woman*. That is to say, gender violence was exercised on Cheju as a state strategy for a kind of ethnic killing, a vehicle of racial hostility mobilized in the name of national purity and order, and a political means of propping up the borders against the (raised and necessary) outside/other for which women served here as a substitute. The gendered practice of *taesal*, so to speak, is the very manifestation of a heightened racial hysteria where communal anxiety and rage were unanimously directed toward the gendered other.

The loss of women who were violated and murdered as surrogate victims in the acts of *taesal* was, crucially, loss that neither happened nor was recognized as a loss that deserves particular political attention, numbed by unconscious social consensus widespread in gender relations that sustained the logic, and that consequently failed to see such pattern of assault as specially obscene. It was loss that has, continuously and in a deliberate and systematic manner, been prohibited from public mourning and from politicization. And it is this sustained ban against public grieving (a conscious political and cultural failure to recognize these women as “victims,” as lives unduly violated, as *human* lives) that has served to maintain the historical identity of the modern Korean nation (its nationalist and anti-communist identity). To try to retrace these bodies, to find out about these losses,

about these unmourned and unidentified victims, their unjustly usurped lives, would thus amount, in a way, to the political risks of challenging the moral and historical legitimacy of the nation, of disavowing the sovereign political ban placed against public mourning over these abnormal deaths, over their outcasted, deformed, socially imperceptible bodies. It signifies a resolute opposition against the continued victimization of nationalist and patriarchal violence that these nameless and faceless women have had to endure even after the events, even after their deaths. It would be to reconvert them into human, to recognize them anew as victims of unnatural, gravely political, and de-humanizing state terror which took a gendered and racialized form.

The Disgusted Body

In reading testimonies about sexual violence of Cheju women – there are not many such accounts (of “dishonoring female experiences”) available, and those available are told mostly by men who eyewitnessed the events and recount what they saw often with intimate, almost voyeuristic, graphic details, whereas women remain silent about pain and deformation suffered by their own and other women’s sexually abused, stigmatized bodies (bodies ingrained with social disgrace and infamy) – it came to my attention that there are patterns of violence which involve an extraordinary level of ruthlessness, paranoid anxiety, rage and revulsion directing

toward the specific body parts of women, particularly those associated with or reminding of women's sexual and reproductive activity, namely their genitals, breasts, or pregnant bellies and wombs.²²² The female body, sexually intense and genitally focused, often became the exclusive target of the quasi-ritualized sadism which was carried out with an unforeseen degree of psychological sophistication, with an unexampled ruthlessness, which suggests male assailants' (or the state-male's) grim fascination with annihilating – *retaliating*, as we will see – the female sexual and genital organs. The attacks were done so consciously and so intentionally, with excessive cruelty and grisliness that went to an inconceivable extent, as seen in inserting hard metal objects or hand-grenades into women's genitals or destroying them by fire, cutting their breasts off, slashing their pregnant bellies open, or coerced copulation, often in public and incestuous, which prompted or were followed by their killing.

²²² I owe this attention to Martha C. Nussbaum's insightful study of the 2002 violence of Gujarat in India, where nearly 2,000 Gujarat Muslims were killed in arsons, loots, sexual tortures, and other forms of mob violence during three weeks of murderous reprisals by Hindus. The incident was triggered by the deaths of fifty-eight men, women and children, mostly Hindu, in a train fire erupted in the areas of Muslim dwellings in India. The flame, the words quickly spread, was set by a Muslim mob agitated by Hindu anti-Muslim sentiment, but many compelling later studies claim that it was pre-planned and ignited by Hindu nationalists attempting to provoke a rampage, with an intent to create a "pure" India unsullied by other faiths. In this study, Nussbaum asks, among others, the political meaning of the Hindu men's obsession with violating Muslim women's sexual parts, a pattern much witnessed during the rampage, which allowed me to understand further, in the context of Korea, 4.3 as the nation's first and foundational hate crime, both misogynistic and xenophobic in nature, which erupted on the need for drawing the distinction between self and non-self. See Nussbaum, *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007).

Ko Pongsu, the then leader of a squad of a rightist youth organization on Cheju, had testified at a hearing that one morning at a police station he saw a young woman, later identified as Kim Chinok, 21 years old and pregnant wife of a fugitive Kim T'aesaeng, held hostage in the police station in place of her missing husband. There she was stripped naked and her pregnant belly and bigger-than-usual breasts were showing, he said. An officer named Chōng was, to Ko's curiosity, heating up the muzzle of his rifle on the hearth. With the red-hot rifle, he then approached the woman and started to poke the muzzle into her vagina. He kept doing it – which was, said Ko, too horrifying to watch – and then took the woman outside, poured gasoline over her head, and set fire on it. Ko was told to cover the corpse with dirt, but “it wasn't finished completely,” he recalled, “the soil was, faintly, moving.”²²³ Hong Kyōngt'o, a schoolteacher, while detained in a factory building used as a refugee camp, repeatedly observed that men and women, arbitrarily chosen, were forced to copulate in an open stage. He also said that at nights women's genitals were burned with hot irons. The stench of rotting flesh made it difficult for him to sleep, he said.²²⁴ Yi Ch'unhyōng's eyewitness account tells of a young woman who was killed by having her breasts amputated. Yi added that she, too painful, scratched the

²²³ Testimony of Ko Pongsu, *The Cheju 4.3 Investigation Report*, p. 419; originally documented in *Chemin Daily*, August 28, 1999.

²²⁴ Testimony of Hong Kyōngt'o, cited in O Kūmsuk's “4.3 ūl t'onghae parabon yōsōng inkkwōn p'ihae sarae [Cases of Violation of Women's Human Rights during 4.3],” p. 246.

ground with her fingers to death.²²⁵ According to An Insun's testimony, at Hagwi-ri, a wife of an alleged Communist rebel was dragged out to an open field during childbirth by two men from a Special Attack Corps, stabbed thirteen times with a metal spear, including eight times in the breasts, and then left to death. Hanging between her legs was a baby half-delivered.²²⁶

What is the point of this excess, the irrational surplus of brutality and sadistic torture explicitly targeting women's genitals and other sex organs? What does this morbid anxiety, this frenzied obsession, an extreme and unusual fascination with the female body parts which exclusively hint at the very femininity of the body (or the intensified sexuality) entail? How do we read these unprecedented variations of genital abuse? What role do they play?

Earlier I have tried to argue that on Cheju, gender violence was used to mobilize the ethnic hatred against the Red (constructed as the other of the state and as racialized and gendered), that sexual violence against Cheju women ultimately amounts to a kind of genocidal violence, used first as a tool of ethnic formation and then as a weapon of ethnic cleansing. And the technique of *taesal* – a gender-based mechanism to kill the-other-in-the-making – has been discussed as a critical example of such process/strategy. What inspired and sustained the logic of this

²²⁵ Testimony of Yi Ch'unhyōng, *ibid.*, p. 239.

²²⁶ Testimony of An Insun, cited in Kim Seong-nae, "Sexual Politics of State Violence," p. 274; originally documented in *Sisa Journal*, April 9, 1998.

substitution, the reduction and exploitation of women in such manners, I have argued, is: the enduring social consensus about women that both men and women daily and unconsciously exercise and have participated in consolidating, namely the inequality of the sexes implicit in the so-called normal relationships of men and women, one that has defined women as sexual and civil inferiors to men; society's expectation of women as passive receptacles of aggressive and active male thrusts and, relevantly, a stereotypical association of women with the virtues of submission, obedience and self-sacrifice; and the female body's being often relegated into a communal symbol, a message, a tool, and into the property of men to own, to protect, to use, which effects, as a result, voiding women of subjectivity and autonomy. All these culturally prevalent stereotypes of women participate in explaining why the 1948 state violence on Cheju came to take a gendered form – a “normal” level of hatred and disdain for women already known as cultural inferiors was pushed to the extreme at the time of complex political and historical juncture in 1948 – *but* they do not quite explain certain ways in which this gendered violence was perpetrated, that is, the particularly savage and hideous ways in which female genitals were attacked and destroyed. They fall short of illuminating the dark male psychology behind this unprecedented hysteria. This psychology seems to involve something more than the male desire to inflict damage upon women's bodies as a visible proof or gratification of masculinity or to disgrace them as a means of disgracing their men and their community, and more even than seeing women as inhuman, fungible objects that

can be consumed in place of men. How, then, do we read this extraordinary ferocity, the utter excess of ruthlessness and sadism associated with the fantasy of annihilating woman's body that is radically reduced to or intensified as her sex organs? How do we read her abnormally vandalized, horribly shattered and pieced body killed by having a long, hard object into her vagina? Why torture woman like that? Why not *just* kill her, why not *just* rape her? What is the cause of this indignation, this loathing, this dread? An account of misogynistic disgust analyzed by Martha C. Nussbaum, a term originally developed in Andrea Dworkin's *Intercourse*, and related to portraying women as dirty, uncontrolled, desiring (and desired), repellent, and potentially contaminating (alluring men out of their purity and stiffness) is tremendously relevant in considering the logic of this surplus and sheds further light to the gendered and racialized implications of the Cheju state terror which I have sought to unfold.²²⁷

The view of women as inferior and lower components of society is, indeed, a value firmly established in Korean culture too, prescribed by Confucian ideology which had long served as the dominant political and social ideology of Korea. According to Confucian gender roles, male-female gender hierarchy was taken as a "natural" and morally righteous order. There had been no room for questioning it. *But* emotions of misogynistic disgust (feelings of deep repugnance at female

²²⁷ Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), esp., Chapter I, "Intercourse" (pp. 3-20); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

sexuality and the resultant convergence of sadism and sex on the woman's body), that is, the extreme abhorrence of woman and paranoid anxiety about female genitals or other body parts reminding of sex act, are *not* something rooted in its tradition. It is something new. This gruesome genital-loathing, I suspect, was borrowed from a fascist ideology of male/racial bodily purity – the idea of the nation as an imperiled body ceaselessly at war to quell alien invaders that constantly besiege and threaten the nation's sharply defined borders and internal purity (which is precisely what is incessantly required to maintain them) – that had been directly transmitted to Korea from Imperial Japan during colonial era.²²⁸ The anxiety about having a clean hard body of the Japanese male self had gradually been imposed through colonial education, making postcolonial Korean nationalism alarmingly and ironically akin to pre-war Japan's "ultra-nationalism." which was extremely "militant" and "xenophobic" in character.²²⁹ That is, the method/strategy adopted in the formation of Korean nationalism – namely, fantasies of destruction directing against another race (the Red) and women, by reference to whom it sought to define its identity and to establish political hegemony – was learned, unfortunately and paradoxically, from its colonial oppressor, whose collective identity had been

²²⁸ See, relevantly, the well-known Nazi obsession with cleanliness, purity and self-defense against "corruption" of the physical and social body, and its imputation of low and impure traits to Jews/women to essentialize difference. See Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, pp. 107-15. For more detailed accounts, see also Sander L. Gilman's *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

²²⁹ Carter J. Eckert, "Epilogue: Exorcising Hegel's Ghosts," p. 368, p. 453n12.

obtained precisely through denigrating its colonized subjects (Koreans as non-Japanese aliens) to whom “disgust properties” (Nussbaum’s term) had been assigned, granting them inferior human and racial status, and who had come to bear the projections of anxiety and been rendered as an insistent target of hatred and discrimination. As a quintessential proof of this, I would like to look into the so-called “Comfort Station,” euphemistically named for the facility used for military rape and sex enslavement of women and girls who were mobilized by force from Japanese occupied territories – the majority reportedly came from Korea and China – to provide “sexual services” and thus to promote the military efficacy of Japanese soldiers during World War II.

It has been reported that brutal, and often excessively obscene and sadistic, tortures and abuse of women, both physical and psychological, had been carried out on a daily basis inside the rape station (the military brothel), including whipping naked, cutting off breasts, slashing bellies open, shooting genitals, or burning them with cigarette butts, not to mention vitriolic name-calling.²³⁰ The station where soldiers were allowed free pass to sexual possession and exploitation of women – who were viewed as no more than “sanitary toilet[s]’ for the disposal of Japanese sexual needs, the tension and neurosis”²³¹ – and where, consequently, sex acts

²³⁰ An Yönsön, *Söngnoye wa pyöngsa mandülgi [The Making of Sex Slave and Soldier]* (Seoul: Samin, 2003), p. 148.

almost always accompanied violence and wounding is a place where male assailants emerged as powerful exploiters, sexual superiors, and more effective – more destructive, more aggressive, more masculine – military men. It is also and relevantly a place where women were made inferior, converted into mere objects for sex or enlarged sex organs, which, in turn, inspired and justified the violence at the station.

Disgust properties were naturally imputed to the women at the station who were, in effect, not only simply made inferior in the “normal” sense of the word as being sex objects (which would be implicit in *any* sexual intercourse that is implicitly violent to a “normal” extent²³²), but explicitly and in a systematic manner named/designated as the objects of forced instrumentalized intercourse and portrayed as specially dirty, low and promiscuous – seen, so to speak, as the radical *par excellence*. Very relevantly, it is worthy to note here that the prevention of the spread of venereal disease was one of the top medical priorities in the areas where comfort stations were running, for it was believed, and feared, that venereal disease threatened to undermine the strength of men, their morale, and their fighting ability. Women at the station were thus given regular medical examinations for venereal disease, reportedly once in every ten days, and received preventive injections called

²³¹ Yang Hyunah, “Revisiting the Issue of Korean ‘Military Comfort Women,’” p. 64. The term “sanitary toilet” was originally used in Tetsuo Asō’s “Karyūbyo no sekkyoku-teki yobōbō [Methods to Prevent Venereal Disease]” (1936) (Yang, p. 71n39).

²³² Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse*, p. 19.

“Number 606,” which was also effective in inducing abortion. Army doctors also provided condoms for the soldiers who were required to use them. According to the testimonies of former comfort women and soldiers, men were jokingly told that entering the station without wearing a condom is like entering the gas chamber without wearing a gas mask. But some soldiers just chose not to use condoms, or condoms – which were insufficient and had to be repeatedly reused – were useless in many cases to prevent the infection. Women who were found to be carrying infectious diseases were instantly alienated to be put into harsh intense treatment program and greatly repelled by men who feared of being infected by these “polluted” women, or otherwise deserted or even killed as “expired materials” of no more use.²³³ In addition to the machinery of “animal copulation” into which women were subjected daily – where one woman had to deal with dozens of soldiers every day²³⁴ – and poor hygienic conditions of the station which resembles a filthy animal stall, this uncontrollable spread of venereal disease, for which women bore the sole blame, I suspect, mainly accounts for why women at the station were readily associated with the image of hyperanimal and hypersexual beings – wild, wanton, foul and inherently pathological and out of control – and thus dreaded and disgusted

²³³ An Yōnsōn, *Sōngnoye wa pyōngsa mandūlgi* [*The Making of Sex Slave and Soldier*], p. 101, p. 103 and p. 226.

²³⁴ Yang Hyunah, “Revisiting the Issues of Korean ‘Military Comfort Women,’” p. 65.

as the source of contamination and, eventually, of disintegration and death of the soldier body.²³⁵

Such perceptions (denigration and moral indignation of Korean women) helped Japanese soldiers build their ethnic self-image – as the militant, erect and powerfully male “Emperor’s subjects” (who can rule, thrust and destroy) who are proud of their disciplined, soldierly body and who also participate in their own disciplining through persistent hate campaigns, and as the “master race” with superior and pure blood – unlike and sharply distinct from weak (helplessly ruled, thrust and destroyed, that is, *feminized*), unclean, morally depraved, and potentially threatening (of Japanese blood) Korean racial body of which the bodies of comfort women served to represent both as a trope and as a domain for assertion.

Misogynistic disgust at the “dangerous” woman who must be kept at bay and retaliated for her potential of sullyng the male bodily purity and yet whom man cannot stop wanting – it is precisely her exaggerated sexuality, her being seen as merely and entirely sex and sexual and solely as the object of sensuality and sexual exploitation, that makes man so powerless about wanting her, indulging in sex and

²³⁵ But even before this “historical” construction, association of women with disgusting traits – which is a “universal” tendency in virtually all cultures – has some empirical backups, as Nussbaum points out: “[w]omen give birth, and are thus closely linked to the continuity of animal life and the morality of the body. Women also receive semen: thus, if (as research suggests) semen disgusts male only after it leaves the male body, males will very likely come to view women as contaminated by this (to them) disgusting substance, while the male will view himself as uncontaminated, except insofar as he is in contact with her. In connection with these facts, women have often been imagined as soft, sticky, fluid, smelly, their bodies as filthy zones of pollutions” (*Hiding from Humanity*, p. 111).

satiating his need, and it is precisely here (what woman, by her sexuality, which is all that man can see in her, is capable of doing to man, how she has real power over him by alluring him to what he cannot resist) that rage and repugnance against woman are located, feeding his anxiety and fantasies of destruction²³⁶ – *and* racial disgust (xenophobia) at another racial body (“inferior” and “dirty-blooded” Korean body) that is abhorred and dreaded as the source of corruption (racial infiltration and comingling) of the Japanese racial purity and superiority converge on the body of comfort woman.²³⁷ Her naked vulnerability, her emasculated and emasculating sexuality, her genital, her breasts – the holes, the stickiness, and the stench of the body – allude for man a terrifying vision of annihilation, a dream of being intoxicated, demoralized or demented, and were thus seen with horror and disgust.

The misogynistic and xenophobic Japanese fascism – its preoccupation with bodily cleanliness and boundedness, the fear of losing control, of breaking up of borders and being comingled with “disgusting” other races – came to form the very technological and psychological basis of postliberation Korea’s own nation-building, taken into action on the 1948 Cheju. The revulsion that men have against women and Reds (who were not only treated as another race, but treated as or just *were*, in

²³⁶ Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse*, p. 14.

²³⁷ It was reported that almost all Korean comfort women who were impregnated by Japanese soldiers were forced into abortion in order to “prevent the production of hybrid [beings]” which would adulterate Japanese racial identity (Choi Chungmoo, “Guest Editor’s Introduction,” *Positions* 5, no. 1, pp. v-xiv [p. ix]). This is sharply contrasted with childbirth campaign and strict antiabortion laws in Japan. See Yang Hyunah, “Revisiting the Issue of Korean ‘Military Comfort Women,’” p. 64.

their essence, women) – the conception of women as inherently dirty, pathological and immoral, and who precisely for that matter were thought to be bringing morbid consequences to Korea’s masculine nationalism and its ideological purity and monopoly – ultimately became in this way a central idea in the formation of the modern Korean national identity. A tragic irony lies here: the abused subject borrowed the abuser’s tools and mindset to craft and secure its own fantasy of identity. Perhaps, Cheju, one could say, is the extended space of – or the space that uncritically mimics – the comfort station, where a theme borrowed from the oppressor’s impossible and much resented ambition was once again dramatized, resulting in no less dismal consequences than its original.

“Redness” is pathology, disorder, foulness, it is everything deviant, unseen, unruly, and insidiously infiltrating, engulfing, intoxicating, the very marker of difference, the bad, the non-self – which are all “feminine” functions, too. Associated with the image of volatile red flood lava which surreptitiously runs beneath the porous skin of the volcanic island of Cheju with some treacherous intention (unbridled, uncontained, formless, unseen, messy, sticky, oozy, and all-devouring), the Red woman, who was appointed from within, raised from inside to become an outside, perhaps represents everything that the state-male fears in confronting in itself – its own animality, weakness and vulnerability that could lead

to its own dissolution, to the collapse of power and loss of control.²³⁸ She is what needs to be pushed to the margins of man, and maintained in the edges of normalcy, reason, morality and order, by being projected onto real woman (who is there not as real woman, but as a symbol or tangible replacement of “woman” inside man), for it is precisely shame and disgust at her (at what she embodies for man) and aggression inspired by these emotions that keep him sterile and invulnerable – *male*. This male fantasy – misogyny and xenophobia – as a technique of self-cleansing had been encoded, internalized even before the formation of the national subject, even before the foundation of the social ego, and it is, I contend, this political role that the Cheju violence – the nation’s originary and foundational hate crime – had played. The (illusory) ideal of the pure and infiltrable stiffness of the Korean male nationhood has been successfully sustained through defense against Red-female plagued fluids on the already (to a certain extent) othered, marginalized and disgusted habitat of Cheju island.

Thus, insertion of hard objects into (Red) women’s genitals, which simultaneously functioned to kill them, would be explained in terms of male anxiety for integrity and hardness, as a mechanism of male self-defense. The act satisfies

²³⁸ On a general note, Nussbaum contends that “[d]isgust has been used throughout history to exclude and marginalize groups and people who come to embody the dominant group’s fear and loathing of its own animality and mortality” (*Hiding from Humanity*, p. 14). In a way, this (historically-sustained) conception of disgust as a (deceptive) emotion at one’s *own* and inherent imperfection and weakness (the very fact of being human) projected outward and located in the other who can be openly controlled and disgraced underlies the basis of Nussbaum’s many impressive analyses of historical/cultural exclusions of subordinated groups.

both the irrepressible male sexual desire for woman (who seduces) and his desire to extinguish her (who contaminates). In this kind of violence, Nussbaum poignantly puts it, “[s]exuality itself carries out the project of annihilating the sexual”: here, “the murder just *is* the sex.”²³⁹ That is, by killing woman by having large metal weapons penetrate through her genital, man destroys, *retaliates*, the sexual – which is what he wants, what he cannot *not* want, and what can engulf, emasculate, terminate him – while simultaneously (mock-)raping her to gratify himself sexually. She, not a real and concrete person, was offered here as a symbol, a surrogate animal for her (enlarged) sex organs, or for the “feminine” inside any male that needs to be purged out of him.

²³⁹ Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, p. 209.

CONCLUSION

TOWARD NAMING

How do we refer to an event which has been systematically suppressed by official historiography and remembered only partly, and distortedly, by those who suffered through it? What name do we give such an event that binds this experience together? How do we assign it a place in memory and history and give the victims' previously unheard narrative a historical and legal voice? How do we address that marginalized experience which were either denied by state authority or failed to be properly integrated into personal and collective recollections?

For more than forty years since the occurrence, the official name – and the only truth – of the Cheju 4.3 Incident had remained the “Communist insurgency.”²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ This official, state-governed memorial practice was brought to a brief halt upon the breakout of the April 19, 1960 Student Revolution in South Korea which finally brought down Rhee Syngman's twelve-year-long dictatorship. Encouraged by the pro-democratic movements in the mainland spurred by the April 19th Revolution, the Cheju people, too, demanded the 1948 Incident be investigated. But the expectation was short-lived, dismayed by the May 16, 1961 Military Coup which marked the arrival of another military regime in South Korea and the immediate resumption of the culture of terror. For more detailed accounts different naming positions of 4.3 and history of its truth-searching, see, especially, Kim Chongmin, “4.3 ihu 50 nyŏn [50 Years since 4.3],” in *Cheju sasam yŏn'gu [Studies of the Cheju April Third Incident]*, eds. Institute of Korean History et al. (Seoul: Yŏksa pip'yŏngsa, 1999), pp. 338-424; Kim Seong-nae, “Mourning Korean Modernity in the Memory of the Cheju April Thrid Incident,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1, no. 3 (2000): 461-76; Kim Yŏngbŏm, “Kiŏk esŏ taehangkiŏk ũro, hokŭn yŏksajŏk chinsil ũi hoebok: kiŏk tujaeng ũrosŏŭi 4.3 munhwa undong sŏsŏl [From Memory to Countermemory, or Recovery of Historical Truth: Cultural

The access to *traumatic truth* had been almost completely blocked, its memory monopolized and appropriated by the state. The suffering inflicted on the population of the island became silenced, defined as invisible by culture. The collective identity of the nation had been effectively constructed according to this dominant, state-administered historical memory, sustained and reinforced through multiple repressive social practices: law, spread of rumors, propaganda, textbook censorship, control of mass media, etc. The government-approved 1982 edition of official high school history textbook, for example, describes 4.3 as “an armed Communist insurgency set off by the Communist Party of North Korea – a tactical means that North Korea employed to disrupt state affairs of South Korea and to collapse its political order.”²⁴¹ Similarly, Cheju District School Board’s 1979 publication of *Cheju Kyōyuksa [Cheju History of Education]* sums up 4.3 as “the Communist insurrection instigated by Communist fundamentalists.”²⁴²

The dominant memory also granted the very agents of violence and their political heirs (who were endowed with the authority to determine the truth about the past) an official pardon for their crime, while denying to acknowledge the victims and to validate their experience of suffering. The victims were uniformly

Representation of the 4.3 Movements as a Memory Struggle],” *Minjujuŭi wa Inkkwŏn [Democracy and Human Rights]* 3, no. 2 (2003): 67-104.

²⁴¹ Kim Chongmin, “4.3 ihu 50 nyŏn [50 Years since 4.3],” p. 351.

²⁴² Kim Chŏnghun, “Cheju 4.3 saggŏn paro algi kongsik hakkyo kyoyuk [Correcting Distorted History of 4.3 through Formal Education],” *Ohmynews on the Web*, March 8, 2004 <http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000173374>.

branded and denigrated as Red rebels against the state, tagged as *ppalgaengi*. Preoccupied by guilt, humiliation and self-accusation and also by prolonging traumatic pain, even the victims themselves have relegated their experience of victimization into further invisibility and silence, choosing to abide by the corrupt social logic of secrecy and denial. The event became virtually forgotten in everyday life, sunk below the horizon of national historiography. As the consequence of this prolonged practice, 4.3 *still* remains, for the majority of young Koreans, an uncomfortable if not completely meaningless signifier. Crucially, it is this censored memory, the active and collective denial of its own traumatic past, that has served to make the nation go on, hold it together as a collective community with a shared identity.

But silence does not enforce forgetting. The memory of the traumatized had been persistently enduring under this coerced consensus. Ironically but not too surprisingly, the first and only scholarly investigation of 4.3 during this period was done by an American scholar, John Merrill. Originally written for the Master's thesis in history at Harvard University in 1975, Merrill's pioneering study put together recently and partially declassified American military documents stored in the National Archives and fragmentary Korean accounts.²⁴³ His meticulous analysis of the forgotten violence in Korea is considered a significant stepping stone from which 4.3 scholarship to launch in Korea in subsequent decades. Another

²⁴³ Reprinted in "The Cheju-do Rebellion," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 2 [1980]: 137-97.

groundbreaking testimonial event happened in 1978 when Cheju-born novelist Hyŏn Kiyŏng published a fictional narrative of the tabooed topic in “Aunt Suni.”²⁴⁴ Soon after its publication, the novelist was arrested and tortured by the South Korean secret police, and a ban was imposed on the book. The novelist fell into silence, and 4.3 once again, it seemed, retrogressed into a silence, into denial and oblivion. Yet the *work* survived the imposed silence: the story has circulated underground and eventually worked to open up a sluice gate for the emergence of voices other than the one sanctioned by the state.

The change of political climate in South Korea in the late 1980’s, stemming from generational shift, the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War, the democratic transition incited by the June 1987 Popular Revolution and the waning of military dictatorship, prepared for a new and more liberated discursive practice for 4.3²⁴⁵: the memory of the April Incident as the “popular

²⁴⁴ Hyŏn Kiyŏng. *Suni samch'on [Aunt Suni]* (Seoul: Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏngsa, 1994), originally published in 1978 in the literary journal *Ch'angjak kwa pip'yŏng [Creation and Criticism]*.

²⁴⁵ The opening of this new era in 4.3 scholarship was marked, in particular, by the coming-out of two Master's theses in Korean universities in 1988, which added on extensive documentary evidences on the event (Yang Han'gwŏn, “Cheju-do 4.3 p'oktong ūi paegyŏng e kwanhan yŏn'gu [A Study of the Historical Background of the Cheju April Third Insurrection],” MA thesis, Seoul National University, 1988; Pak Myŏngnim, “Cheju-do 4.3 minjung hangjaeng e kwanhan yŏn'gu [A Study of the Cheju April Third Popular Resistance],” MA thesis, Korea University, 1988), the 1989 establishment of Cheju 4.3 Institute on Cheju island as a research center and social action group exclusively devoted to the historical investigation of 4.3, and the launching of the investigative newspaper report serial, “4.3 ūi chŭngŏn [The Testimony of the April Third],” by the island's local newspaper *Cheju Daily* in 1989 (later taken up for continuation by *Chemin Daily* as “4.3 ūn malhanda [The April Third Speaks]”). The publication and introduction to Korea of Bruce Cumings's milestone study of the Korean War which accelerated the scholarship of Korean modern history in general also influenced this growing new sentiment: *The Origins of the Korean War Volume I: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947* and *The Origins of the Korean War*

uprising” emerged to compete with the official account of the event.²⁴⁶ This counter-memory assessed 4.3 as the Cheju people’s political resistance against national partition and deprivation of indigenous autonomy, and against American military imperialism masterminding these political decisions. It calls attention to the special sociopolitical and historical circumstances of Korea as well as on Cheju in particular at the outset of the event, in order to analyze closely its background and course to support its ideological stance. Here the victims who had been previously denigrated as anti-state rebels and castigated as morally deficient were honored as popular resistance heroes who fought for their nation and their community; those previously submerged as the silenced bearers of traumatic history emerged as the initiators of collective action and conscious historical writers.

But the practice of this counter-memory fell short of writing history against its dominant flow. Still fierce was the desire to deny the atrocity. The cement of the culture which has already determined the way things are categorized, inscribed and perceived in it (the way we understand and represent things) seemed impregnable. In Cheju Provincial Police Department’s 1990 publication of *Cheju kyōngch’alsa*

Volume II: The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981 and 1990).

²⁴⁶ This memorial practice was introduced by Pak Myōngnim, “Chejudo 4.3 minjung hangjaeng e kwanhan yōn’gu [A Study of the Cheju April Third Popular Resistance]”; Ko Ch’anghun, “4.3 minjung hangjaeng ūi chōn’gae wa sōnggyōk [The Development and Character of the April Third Popular Resistance],” *Haebang chōnhusa ūi insik [The Understanding of History Before and After the Liberation]*, vol. 4 (Seoul: Han’gilsa, 1989); Cheju 4.3 Institute, *Cheju hangjaeng [The Cheju Popular Uprising]* (Seoul: Silch’ōnmunhaksa, 1991).

[*History of Cheju Police System*], for instance, the large-scale massacre and burning of dwellings at Pukch'on-ri in January 1949, where 400 villagers were mass executed in the retaliatory violence committed by the constabulary and the entire village destroyed by arson, are documented as having been committed by the guerrillas. The book also strives to sustain the official discourse of the event by faulting “the leftists who carried out the direct order from the [central] SKLP [in the mainland]” for “the sanguinary slaughter which took place on Cheju.” Surprisingly, no amendments have been made in its 2000 revised edition.²⁴⁷ Likewise, the 1996 version of official high school history textbook edited by the Korean Ministry of Education still defines 4.3 as the Communist rebellion aiming to disable South Korea.²⁴⁸

Another thing to point out about this naming position of 4.3 as the “popular resistance” is that this overly ambitious, heavily meaning-laden alternative to the dominant narrative equally fails to account for the reality of the wrong lived by the Cheju people. Both discourses, politically-loaded (caught in the same nationalist paradigm), result in narrowing our gaze, and closing our ears, to what remains

²⁴⁷ *Chemin Daily*, “4.3 – chǒngbu nūn chinsang kyumyǒng ‘t’ŭkbyǒlppǒb,’ kyǒngch’al ūn ch’waikpunja ‘p’okddong saggǒn’ [4.3 – ‘Special Act’ for Clarification of Truth Queried by the Government and Leftist ‘Insurgency’ Claimed by the Police],” November 13, 2000 <<http://www.jemin.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=30364>>; *Chemin Daily*, “4.3 waegok sagwahara [Demand for Apology for the Warped History of 4.3],” November 16, 2000 <<http://www.jemin.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=30767>>.

²⁴⁸ Chwa Yongch’ŏl, “Kyogwasǒ ‘4.3 waegok’ yǒjǒn [Persistent Textbook Distortion of 4.3],” *Chemin Daily*, March 10, 2003 <<http://www.jemin.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=82095>>.

unresolved by historical understanding of the violence (that is, by cause-effect explanation, political rationalization or meaning-giving). “In spite of the nobility of objectives,” as Kim Seong-nae puts it, “its political over-determination betrays [its] ethical stance against [its] will.”²⁴⁹ What is dismissed, obfuscated by its ideological zeal is the fact that most of the dead on Cheju were far from being determined resistance fighters whose acts were inspired by noble political causes and objectives and who died in honor in pursuit of them; rather, they were mere innocents, politically ignorant, who were driven by fear, not by ideology. They were victims of meaningless slaughter – consumed, not sacrificed. The effort to elevate the status of the traumatized (the victims who were marked by the destruction of experience and speakability) into the conscious acting and speaking subject of history and to place the adversity suffered on the island where ‘tens of thousands of human beings were exterminated’ – a statement whose full meaning can never be grasped – within its historical or political framework to make it meaningful would result in the grave reduction of truth. Ultimately, this memorial practice inadvertently participates in holding up the corrupt cultural dynamics of negation and concealment it seeks to undermine and to write against, by overlooking the form of trauma and silencing the traumatized people against its will.

²⁴⁹ Kim Seoung-nae, “Mourning Korean Modernity in the Memory of Cheju April Third Incident,” p. 466.

In the mid 1990's, a new naming position began to surface under this self-reflection to liberate 4.3 from any politically-motivated, ideologically-bound discourses and to *turn to the victims themselves*. The emerging new truth of 4.3 is now the "civilian massacre." This critical movement was boosted up by the establishment of the Cheju Provincial Council's 4.3 Special Commission in 1993 and publication of its first casualties report in 1995 and, more importantly, by the Cheju Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team's (later taken up by *Chemin Daily*) sustained efforts to investigate and document the events through its extensive newspaper serial.²⁵⁰ By attempting to collect, among others, numerous testimonial accounts from survivors they discovered, the local newspaper's passionate search for the repressed memories allowed the dispossessed to emerge from silence and to finally unleash their poisonous secrets to others. The private memories of the events began to be released from each victim's isolated and unrecognized inside to become *testimonies*.

However, even the term "massacre" is, to my mind, far from being the ultimate signifier for the enormity of the crime endured by the Cheju people, for the "unregistered" experience of trauma that even the victims themselves cannot entirely possess or claim as their own. The term is too worn-out, too stale to display the full range and reality of the human and national calamity of such magnitude and

²⁵⁰ The serial was published in book form in 1994-1998: Chemin Daily 4.3 Special Investigation and Report Team, ed., *4.3 ün malhanda [The April Third Speaks]*, 5 vols. (Seoul: Chönyewön, 1994-1998).

savagery, a sheer irrationality and inconceivability of pain endured at what can be termed only negatively the *limit-experience*. By uniformly generating a shared imaginary of collective victimization and identity, as if for a singular trauma, the concept musters and evens out other and different loci of pain. The immeasurable traumatic suffering that constitutes the very heart of this violence tends to be domesticated and naturalized by this facile, and inevitably diminishing and homogenizing, categorization.

The searching for an adequate name for 4.3 is that of finding a language that is as faithful as possible to the enduring demand for justice for the traumatized people, granting them due measure of public recognition and historicization they deserve and need. Naming 4.3, in this sense, surely represents an essential first step towards healing and restitution. Yet, at the same time, it should not be dismissed that no single, integrated discourse, no stable reference, no commemorative practice, would be able to permeate the entirety of the innumerable singular and heterogeneous sites of victimhood it strives to encompass or collectively signify. Elusive of names, alien to naming, is countless cries of *inhuman* suffering, fear, anger, terrorized body, insanity, loss of trust, and despair. The striving for a name for what happened on the 1948 Cheju would, thus, eventually and necessarily confront a certain silence, a certain negation, a refusal of naming. And this refusal ought not to be treated dismissively.

This sense of refusal, a feeling of negation or indeterminacy, to return to Jean-François Lyotard, is to be taken as a “sign.” In a discussion of the difficulty of naming a contested event, Lyotard takes the term “Auschwitz” as reference to demonstrate the inadequacy or insufficiency of any single, overarching discourse for a historical event or experience the meaning of which or even the occurrence of which is in dispute. As for the indeterminacy which imposes the term, he proposes a striking analogy that resonates in our issues at hand, that of an earthquake which is so powerful as to destroy even the instruments of measurement with which to assess it. “Suppose,” says Lyotard,

Suppose that an earthquake destroys not only lives, buildings, and objects but also the instruments used to measure earthquakes directly and indirectly. The impossibility of quantitatively measuring it does not prohibit, but rather inspires in the minds of the survivors the idea of a very seismic force. The scholars claim to know nothing about it, but the common person has a complex feeling, the one aroused by the negative presentation of the indeterminate.²⁵¹

The unprecedented catastrophe of the Holocaust imposes a restriction on historians who rely on provable knowledge and measurable truth, but this restriction does not impose forgetting for the “common person” “who has a complex feeling” about something immense having taken place, something that cannot be easily identified, elusive of grasp, but that cannot be denied either. This “feeling” (that is felt before being known) which would remain in their memory is a “sign” that “something

²⁵¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend*, p. 56

remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined.”²⁵² This feeling signifies the injunction against closure, against the historical or juridical pretense that stories have been fully heard, that what took place has been understood.

Communist insurgency, popular resistance, state terrorism and civilian massacre – 4.3 is perhaps all that *and* none of them. Surrounding the (refusal of) naming 4.3, it seems, is the *feeling* of something indefinite having occurred, that which cannot be negated completely nor possessed fully under the discursive knowledge, and which exists in the memory of the traumatized individuals, remaining to be phrased, unremittingly. This feeling of indetermination, the sense of insufficiency at stake in any name of 4.3 has to be taken as a call, an indication that the story or the past cannot be closed, that the *proper name* for the Cheju violence remains to be determined, without end.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 57.

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