

Speculative Capital and Its Wastes:  
Race, Labor, and War in the Age of Financialization

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A dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2021

Reading Committee

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

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**Abstract**

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This dissertation attends to overlapping, entangled histories of US militarism, speculation, and extraction in Asia and the Pacific to rethink the relationship between race, labor, and war in our current moment of predatory capitalism. It seeks to theorize disposability and racialization in contexts where war-making comes hand in hand with lucrative financial projects and investments, as well as the dumping of waste both human and material. Through an engagement with Asian American, Pacific Islander, and African American literature, I argue that disposability and racialization are signaled by proximity to complex forms violence that reduce bodies to trash and datasets, as well as susceptibility to financial endeavors and extractive logics that monetize both destruction and reconstruction to manage not labor power and resources but wasted populations and ruined ecosystems. As such, tracking the relationship between race,

labor, and war in our contemporary moment puts pressure on more familiar paradigms of (Asian) American studies that have historically theorized racialization through the analytics of labor exploitation, national exclusion, and national (un)belonging.

Chapter one engages with Craig Santos Perez's *from unincorporated territory [guma']* (2014) to resituate the question of Asian racialization and labor within a framework that foregrounds the entwined histories of US militarism in the Pacific, settler colonialism, and finance capitalism. Chapter two takes up Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) to ask what resistance and opposition might look like in a world where populations are mobilized by an administration that seems to operate entirely in service of capital. Chapter three focuses on Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011) to point to spatializing practices by which the forces of race, labor, and war are created, preserved, lived, and recreated in service of capital to connect histories of racial expropriation, terror, and violence to modes of accumulation that are secured through the management of destitution. Chapter four reads Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* (1990) alongside Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* (2017) and Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990) to ask how the analytics of waste and trash can allow us to rethink the ways disposability has been theorized in relation to race and the racialized subject.

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## Acknowledgments

When I reflect back on my graduate school experience, one thing becomes clear: my dissertation would have never reached this stage if not for the many brilliant, kind, generous people I've been lucky enough to know.

I cannot stress enough how grateful I am to my Chair, Eva Cherniavsky, who guided me through the arduous process of writing the dissertation at every step and always encouraged me to be a better thinker. This dissertation would not exist without her endless patience, support, and care. She has been the most present, compassionate, and inspiring Chair possible and this project has benefitted enormously from her countless readings. I would also like to offer my sincerest thanks to Chandan Reddy, who has influenced, transformed, and shaped my thinking in profound ways since the very first day we met. His imprint on this project truly cannot be overstated. I am so lucky to have had the chance to learn from Gillian Harkins since I started grad school in 2014: her exciting classes, deep commitment to public scholarship and community engagement, and thoughtful feedback over the years have motivated me to be a better scholar. I feel truly privileged to have had the opportunity to learn from and work with such brilliant, supportive, and dedicated scholars who believed in me even when I couldn't.

Outside my committee, I really appreciate Shirley Yee, my GSR, whose class on the history of feminisms continues to inform my thinking. I am also so grateful to Purnima Bose, my undergraduate honors thesis advisor at Indiana University, who has mentored and supported me from afar. I deeply appreciate the many professors at UW who have taught generative classes, including Habiba Ibrahim, Kate Cummings, Carolyn Allen, Ileana Rodríguez-Silva, and more.

Many thanks to my dissertation group, Daniel Roberts, Lubna Alzaroo, Liz Janssen, Matthew Hitchman, David Kumler, and Kathleen Reeves, who read various drafts of my chapters and offered valuable feedback. I am also grateful to the Asian American Studies Research Collective, which gave me the opportunity to be a part of many engaging conversations. I would not have been able to finish my dissertation without the support from the English department's Teaching Fellowship, Phyllis F. and Donald E. Dorset Fellowship, and Hilan Fellowship, as well as the University of Washington Press's Soden-Trueblood Graduate Publishing Fellowship. Thank you, Ali Dahmer, Candice Rai, and Anis Bawarshi, for supporting me both as a graduate student and a teacher.

I would like to thank Eric Cheuk, Amber Hendricks, Safi Karmy-Jones, Claire Lee, Claudia Linares, Hanni Jalil-Paier, Lauryn Quick, Daniel Roberts, Holly Shelton, and Tyler Shoop—I really appreciate their generous friendship, time, and conversation.

I am deeply grateful to my parents, Ock Hwan Kim and Keum Hee Choi, two brilliant scholars and teachers who early on instilled in me the value of education and a passion for literature. I am lucky to have the love and support of my sister, Sae Byok Kim, who has cheered me on through all the chaos of grad school. Thank you all for your strength and resilience.

Last, but never least, I want to express my tremendous gratitude and love for my partner, Rafael Omar Mendez Marin, who has been my rock and constant source of strength in every way imaginable. I don't know where I would be without his unconditional love and support, and I'm truly lucky for the life we have together.

### Introduction:

#### Overlapping Histories of US Militarism, Speculation, and Extraction in Asia and the Pacific

In August 2017, just hours after Trump vowed to meet North Korea with “fire and fury like the world has never seen,” the Korean Central News Agency reported that its country’s military was “carefully examining the operational plan for making an enveloping fire at the areas around Guam with medium-to-long-range strategic ballistic rocket Hwasong-12.” The escalating tensions came days after the UN Security Council unanimously voted to impose the toughest sanctions yet on North Korea, which called for a total ban on the country’s major exports, including coal, iron, lead, and seafood. According to *The Atlantic*, these sanctions were estimated to cost the country \$1 billion a year—a third of its annual export revenue. In the days following, news media outlets across the US released a flurry of articles and reports that sought to contextualize North Korea’s threat to a bewildered audience unsure of this Pacific Island’s significance to the US military: “What Is Guam and Why Is North Korea Threatening It?” (NPR), “North Korea Is Threatening to Attack Guam. Why Guam?” (Times), “North Korea’s Threat Against Guam, Explained” (Vox), “Guam: Tiny Island Thrust into the Center of North Korea Dispute” (NBC News), “Where Is Guam and Why Would North Korea Attack It?” (Fox).

As the various articles noted, Guam is a heavily militarized island and “unincorporated territory of the US” that contains an anti-missile unit focused almost exclusively on North Korea. According to reports from the Andersen Air Force Base stationed on the island, as of 2014, Guam holds “the largest munitions stockpile in the world, valued at \$1.3 billion.” The report continues, “Deep into the jungle, surrounded by brown tree snakes and wild boar, are a number of unassuming grass-covered munitions igloos filled with small-arms ammunition and

conventional warheads ready to take the fight to the enemy.” In addition to storing a massive quantity of weapons, Guam has also served as the staging site for the US’s various war games and joint exercises. Unsurprisingly, North Korea has long seen the military presence on Guam as a provocation, reporting that bombers “deployed from Guam frequently come flying in the skies over South Korea and explicitly carry out drills for actual war,” and calling Guam “the United States’ outpost and starting base for invasion.”

This particular moment clarifies histories of US militarism in Asia and the Pacific that overlap in complex ways. On the one hand, it highlights the disposability of Chamorros, Guam’s Indigenous population, whose lives are readily discounted both in North Korea’s threat to the “the United States’ outpost and starting base for invasion” and in the Andersen Air Force Base’s depiction of the island as uninhabited “jungles” full of “brown tree snakes” (a non-native species introduced by the US military that caused the local extinction of most of the island’s native bird and lizard population). It signals the status of Guam as an occupied, colonized territory, whose lands and waters have been captured by US military bases and infrastructure worth millions of dollars that continually degrade the island’s ecosystem. At the same time, Guam has higher rates of military enlistment than any US state, participated in various US wars in Asia, served as a detention site for displaced Asian refugees, and remains a key part of a US defense strategy that maintains bases all across Asia. Guam’s fully militarized economy and its ongoing status as “US staging ground” thus complicates our understanding of what disposability looks like in our current moment.

The threat of attack against Guam also highlights the disposability of North Korea, an impoverished country under multiple, severe international sanctions and the recipient of ceaseless saturation bombings and napalm dumping during the Korean War that laid waste to

vast stretches of land, wiped out 12 to 20 percent of the peninsula's population, and displaced and maimed many more millions. While popular media continues to portray North Korea as an unstable, irrational, ridiculous threat to eliminate or forcibly intervene in, North Korea's economic crises are a direct result of histories of US war-making, sanctions, and ongoing attempts to overthrow the country's government with little regard for the lives of the people most directly affected. Also significant is the fact that it is precisely this impoverishment that produces North Korea as a desirable site of intervention through the promise of reconstruction.

Following months of escalating tension, apocalyptic rhetoric, and explicit threats of nuclear annihilation after North Korea successfully tested its first hydrogen bomb and Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile, Donald Trump and Kim Jong-Un gathered in Singapore in the first summit between the US and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on June 12, 2018. On the list of agenda items for the day was the screening of a short US-produced film—styled in the form of a movie trailer—that shared Trump's vision for an “advanced” and “prosperous” North Korea fully opened to global capital. Against the backdrop of images of war, industry, and commerce, the voiceover urges its audience to “Be part of that world, where doors of opportunity are ready to be open—investment from around the world, where you can have medical breakthroughs, an abundance of resources, innovative technology, and new discoveries.” This promise of progress is perhaps best captured by a satellite image of a dark North Korea being dramatically lit up like its southern counterpart in the film, followed by the “hook” of the movie trailer: “Will this leader choose to advance his country and be part of a new world, be the hero of his people? Will he shake the hand of peace and enjoy prosperity like he has never seen? A great life or more isolation?”

The use of a satellite image to signal unprecedented prosperity and potentiality seems especially significant for a number of reasons: first, it conveniently forgets the fact that the US condemned North Korea's attempts to launch its Kwangmyongsong-3 observation satellite into space in December 2012—the stated purpose of which was to “assess the nation's natural resources and forest distribution and to collect crop estimates”—as a “threat” and “provocation” (Hong 584), reminding us of a decades-long history of US sanctions against North Korea following the irresolution of the Korean War in an ongoing attempt to trigger a regime collapse. As Liberty in North Korea (LiNK) cofounder Adrian Hong stated, “With the right inputs, a North Korea free of the Kim regime would bring about...opportunities for economic development, investment, and trade.” Second, it recalls the ways in which defector testimony and the discourse of human rights, together with satellite imaging meticulously “read” by a massive speculative intelligence industry, have been mobilized together as the primary interpretive lens through which North Korea (as well as Iran and Iraq) has been produced as “an axis of evil,” a “totalitarian regime,” a “dark abyss,” and a “rogue state” in need of militarized intervention—an intervention led by key corporate actors that would enable accumulation by destruction and reconstruction. It is worth noting that in the months of rising tension between North Korea and the US, the value of major defense contractors including Lockheed Martin (the largest in the world), Raytheon, Northrop Grumman, and L3 Technologies reached record highs, while the S&P 500 Aerospace and Defense Industry Index climbed by 14.3 percent just three months after North Korea fired its first intercontinental missile in July 2017.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For media coverage on the impact US-North Korea tensions had on defense stocks, see “These Stocks Went Up After Trump's ‘Fire and Fury’ Comments to North Korea” (Fortune), “Defense Stocks Pop After Trump's N. Korea Nuclear Rhetoric” (CNN), “Defense Stocks Soar on the Spectre of War with North Korea” (CNBC). Conversely, in moments of negotiation: “Defense Stocks Fall As Trump Makes Key Concession At North Korea Summit” (Investor's Business Daily), “Trump, Kim handshake, talk of peace sinks US defense stocks”

I begin with a discussion of the US-North Korea summit here for what it makes visible about our contemporary moment of late capitalism. The video exemplifies the racializing logics that have produced North Korea as a problem to be solved by and for capital—as a site of destitution in need of intervention and enrichment through both the lingering promise of warfare and investment. At the same time, this moment brings into focus overlapping histories of refugee displacement, Pacific Islander dispossession, US militarism in Asia, and settler colonialism in Pacific that are not often thought together. For instance, while the Korean War produced hundreds of thousands of refugees and was the condition of possibility for the emergence of both the Kim Jong-Un regime in North Korea and the Korean diaspora in the US, it is not usually thought in relation to Chamorros in Guam who fought in this and other US-Asian wars, were forced to receive huge numbers of Asian refugees, and stripped of their lands and seas by toxic US military bases on the island. I am interested in the layering of histories occurring here for the ways in which it helps us interrogate the relays and relationship between race, labor, and war (commonly theorized in terms of state power, production, militarized governmentality, etc.) and finance/speculative capital. I want to suggest that our present moment requires us to theorize this conjuncture together to complicate and undo more familiar constellations of ways in which these terms have been thought.

Ultimately, it was in trying to make sense of and unpack these layered histories of US militarism, speculation, and extraction in Asia and the Pacific that the larger questions and stakes of my own argument became clear. Rather than reading for a linear trajectory of Asian immigration to the US that seeks recognition and rights under the settler state, I am interested in attending to overlapping, entangled histories of displacement and dispossession that allow us to rethink the relationship between war, racialization, indigeneity, disposability, and speculative

capital. How do we theorize disposability and racialization in contexts where war-making comes hand in hand with lucrative financial projects and investments, as well as the dumping of waste both human and material? Here, disposability and racialization are signaled by proximity to military violence; financial endeavors and logics that monetize both destruction and reconstruction; and extractive logics that seek to manage not labor power and resources but wasted populations and ruined ecosystems. As such, tracking the relationship between race, labor, and war in our contemporary moment puts pressure on more familiar paradigms of (Asian) American studies that have historically theorized racialization through the analytics of labor exploitation, national exclusion, and national (un)belonging. Within this model, Asian racialization is thought primarily in relation to exploitable labor that is managed through social disqualification, strategic disenfranchisement, and exclusion. Yet, a key limitation of this understanding is that it ties our understanding of race and racialization to the framework of the nation. By taking up multiple histories of militarism, extraction, and accumulation in the Pacific alongside literary narratives that seek to complicate linearity, chronology, and futurity, I attempt to move away from abstracted models of hyperexploitable labor that have the tendency to be parachuted into various historical moments—thus eroding disparities between different moments and reproducing an understanding of race-making as successive projects that repeat the same basic formula.

As I will discuss throughout the dissertation, our current moment is characterized by unfettered financialization and speculation that have secured the concentration of asset and equity ownership to the top 1 percent; a widening gap between labor and capital income in the gross domestic product, as well as ever-increasing levels of private debt; the devaluation, stagnation, and displacement of wage work; and the immiseration and surplus of populations.

In this contemporary context, capital no longer seems to operate through the nation in quite the same ways; that is, its tactics of accumulation are no longer simply or primarily served by creating distinctions between protected and nonprotected subjects. What, then, does this do to our understanding of race which has historically remained bound to the nation-form? Speculative capital continually exceeds and defies attempts to read for a coherent, conventional imperialist project organized around nationalist actors, nationalist architecture, and nationalist capital. Instead, it speculates on destruction to turn conditions of immiseration into sites of accumulation and occupies itself not with managing production but with managing forms of disposability and detritus/waste. This dissertation is thus interested in meditating on these historical transformations and their implications.

What does this moment of predatory capitalism make visible about the conjuncture of race, labor, and war? How does this critical approach allow us to rethink war as the ultimate producer of detritus and waste—both through the depositing of hundreds of millions of land mines from wars ongoing/those concluded decades ago and the ceaseless creation of toxic production zones and military bases, as well as through the disposable populations and life-worlds it leaves behind? How does war both secure, set the stage for, and become a primary function of speculative capital through its production of detritus by ushering in projects of reconstruction and capital investment—remembering Naomi Klein’s argument that “where there is destruction there is reconstruction, a chance to grab hold of ‘the most terrible barrenness,...and fill it with the most perfect, beautiful plans’”? How might war also be read as itself an act of speculation by providing rich security structures and commercially fungible police and military infrastructure, defense stocks, and private military corporations that serve as a crucial site of accumulation through gambling on destruction and instability?

The emphasis on directly connecting war to predatory capitalism also seeks to interrupt a tendency to describe speculative finance as a “narrative production” and “engine of speculation, extrapolation, and projection [that] render[s] value out of the not yet” through ““abstract symbolic violence...symbolic in the sense that it is not accomplished physically by means of military force or colonialism, though it may, of course, engender the conditions (such as impoverishment) that precipitate violent crime and warfare”” (Bahng 2-3). Rather than thinking about war as merely the secondary effect or as that which secures the distinction between abstract financial/economic and material violence, I want to ask how tracking the conjuncture of race, labor, and war in relation to speculative capital complicates attempts to narrate the project of speculative capital and finance as primarily derealized, virtual, discursive, and ideological “extrapolative figuration[s] that particulate in the cultural production of futurity” (2).

At the same time, this project counters and pushes against a lingering tendency within (Asian) American Studies to foreground labor exploitation and exclusion in our analyses of racialization. A crucial, foundational claim of Asian American studies has been that understanding Asian immigration to the US is fundamental to understanding both the racialized foundation of the US as a nation and the development of its capitalism. Within the field, many critical thinkers have sought to advance crucial materialist critiques of citizenship by connecting the genealogy of legal exclusion, disenfranchisement, and selective enfranchisement of Asian immigrants to that of the US institution of citizenship.<sup>2</sup> Such analyses have highlighted the ways in which racialized Asian immigrants have been simultaneously recruited and exploited by capital for cheap, expendable labor and rejected by the nation seeking to preserve a white

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<sup>2</sup> Some key thinkers here include Lisa Lowe (1996), Bill Ong Hing (1993, 2004), Ronald Takaki (1990), Gary Okihiro (1994), Angelo Ancheta (1998), Claire Kim (2000), Nayan Shah (2001), Mae Ngai (2004), Lynn Fujiwara (2008), Helen Jun (2011), and more.

national citizenry and produce a particular vision of desirable national subject. This emphasis on labor exploitation and exclusion clarifies a particular understanding of racialization as vulnerability or precarity rising from lack of access to and qualification for citizenship or legal personhood.

Yet, a model of racialization that is attentive to the language of labor exploitation, rights, and (un)belonging makes it difficult to attend to continued forms of US settler colonialism in the Pacific Islands, as well as ongoing histories of US imperialism in Asia that have produced diasporic subjects irreducible to their labor power. The orientation toward labor and exploitation remains in studies of US war-making in Asia: the brutal extraction of natural resources, seizure of land through military occupation, and administration of violence produce populations of refugees that serve as a cheap labor source and can be easily managed through various state practices. Resisting this return to labor exploitation and the nation-state, I want to advance a reading of war that does not intuitively make this connection by reading for populations and their life-worlds that become sites of monetary accumulation purely as trash to be disposed of, contained, or dumped. In sites such as Guam, the collusion of war and speculative capital stages scenes of precarity and immiseration that are then curated and monetized in new ways. This dissertation thus seeks to identify and track a perversity of capital that extinguishes something only to turn it into another site of profit.

Another central aspect of Asian American critique has sought to establish and interrogate the genealogy of Asian racialization as “model minority” and “yellow peril” in relation to other racial/ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup> Such attempts have sought to define racialization as a triangulation that, in

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<sup>3</sup> According to Elaine Kim’s definition, the “model minority” Asian, “by never challenging white society, at once vindicates that society from the charge of racism and points up the folly of those less obliging minorities who are ill-advised enough to protest against inequality” (18). This figure term remains prevalent in contemporary discussions of Asian racialization that seek to chart its, situate it in larger

differentially elevating or disciplining particular groups depending on specific needs and shifting contexts, contingently and relatively locates Asian between white and Black; or, as a form of devaluation in comparison to whiteness that exists on a fixed scale with Blackness as the category of total abjection and objectification; or, more recently, as a triangulation between Native, alien, and settler positions who are subject to different logics of exclusion and elimination.<sup>4</sup> In tracking the relays between race, labor, war, and indigeneity through the analytic of waste in our moment of speculative capital, I seek to move away from critical approaches that advance distinct, separate genealogies of discrete groups. To be clear, I am not arguing that we shouldn't have discrete identity and cultural formations—particularly given the problematic ways in which the “Asian Pacific Islander” category has been complicit in further silencing and marginalizing the specific needs, interests, and work of Native Pacific Islanders. Rather, I am interested in asking how we might think *across* these categories rather than by schema or analogy that seeks to clearly distinguish flexible, shifting structures of power.

That is, I seek to move away from the assumption that there are relatively discrete strategies for the production of different kinds of racial vulnerabilities within the settler-colonial project that can be thought by analogy to each other. Rather than arguing that Indigenous

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geopolitical contexts, debunk the myth, and argue that it continues to have profound implications for how race and nationhood are understood in the US. See Hsu's *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* (2015), Wu's *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (2013), Bascara's *Model-Minority Imperialism* (2006), and Ty's *Asianfail: Narratives of Disenchantment and the Model Minority* (2017).

<sup>4</sup> Here, I am thinking of texts such as Claire Kim's *Bitter Fruit* (1999), which advanced a theory of racial triangulation that continues to be taken up in more recent scholarship (see Lai (2012) and Xu (2013)); Helen Heran Jun's *Race for Citizenship* (2011), which examines how the logic of citizenship and politics of inclusion have produced comparative racializations of Asian and African Americans; Edlie L. Wong's *Racial Reconstruction* (2015), which engages with immigration law and cultural productions to interrogate how Afro-Asian comparisons have shored up or contested the links between US citizenship and whiteness; and Iyko Day's *Alien Capital* (2016), which takes a comparative approach to racialization by establishing a fundamental distinction between land (Native) and labor (Asian).

populations are subject to a discrete logic of elimination that operates through the dispossession of land while Asian Americans are mobilized through a logic of exclusion that recruits and extracts alien labor, for instance, I am interested in looking at contexts where this comparative logic breaks down. As I will discuss in depth in Chapter 1, in sites such as Guam, a national framework that assumes different kinds of racial groups are expropriated differently is thrown in crisis given the complicated ways in which Asian immigrants/refugees and Chamorros have been mobilized and instrumentalized for capital. Thus, I am interested in advancing both a historical and geographical argument attentive to new strategies of accumulation in our contemporary moment of speculative capital that build upon, pressure, and coexist alongside earlier regimes of power.

Ultimately, this dissertation suggests that centering capital's production and management of waste has profound implications for how we read race. I want to investigate how the present conjuncture of race, labor, and war with speculative/finance capital challenges familiar national paradigms of racialized (un)belonging and incorporation/exclusion for understanding who is rendered precarious. How might reading for and theorizing detritus/waste allow us to reorganize and rethink Asian American critique by delinking race from nation and refocusing our attentions on the role race plays in securing the uneven distributions of life chances and death, value and disposability through programs of surveillance, risk assessment, speculation, and securitization in our current moment? How do we attend to the uneven distribution of new genres of disposability that map onto and reorganize legacies of colonial world-making as the basis for a new world order?<sup>5</sup> How might denationalizing familiar narratives of race also push us to rethink

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<sup>5</sup> As Byrd, Goldstein, Melamed, and Reddy (2018) have argued, “colonization and the economies of racial subjection serve as conditions of possibility in the US for the ways in which financial institutions

paradigms of complicity/resistance and contamination that have historically relied upon tactics such as building racial solidarity, resisting assimilation, seeking alternative subject-formations from those naturalized and recognized by the state, and demanding redress from the state? In denationalizing our understanding of race, we must rethink not only how race operates but also how resistance functions. If our understanding of resistance can no longer be built around a nation-based model of uneven incorporation that encourages us to engage in racial comparisons by analogy, what might the alternatives look like?

In thinking through these questions, I turn to a collection of literary texts variously identified as magical realist, postmodern, or dystopian that have a speculative dimension but are not conventionally read as “speculative fiction.” I suggest these texts complicate the critical heuristics and theoretical understandings that prevail within (Asian) American literary production and criticism precisely because they are engaging in modes of speculation that ally them to the genre of speculative fiction. For the purposes of this dissertation, then, I want to further expand or defamiliarize our understanding of the category of speculative fiction to capture not genre writing per se, but writing that imports elements of speculation to clarify what the speculative can elucidate about our contemporary moment. As such, I want to think about speculative fiction as texts that facilitate temporal and spatial disorientations to defamiliarize us from a “known”/knowable world; decisively disrupt teleological orderings of the past, present, and future; and, through conjecture and experimentation, invent and imagine other possibilities,

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and land and market speculators have produced and profited from those most economically disenfranchised. Imperialism provides the vectors of economic speculation and the enmeshment of administrative, plantation, and multiple colonial formations that have underpinned the rise of the world economy. It is precisely in this overdetermined configuration of dispossession that the speculative and crony capitalist expropriations of the crisis this time have accelerated” (2).

realities, and interventions. I want to suggest speculative fiction, thus conceived, opens up space for us to speculate on questions that we don't have developed political rubrics and analytical language for yet. Taking up Aimee Bahng's claim that "financial speculation produces a kind of speculative fiction" (4), one of the questions my project is interested in thinking about is how the form of speculative fiction lends itself to thinking about financialization, given that finance capital institutes temporalities distinct from the time-scale of value creating within industrial capitalism.

Ultimately, I'm interested in what the collection of texts gathered here make visible—both on how the conjuncture of race, labor, and war in the context of speculative capital plays out in the present as well as what they might help us understand about earlier historical formations not already read for that conjuncture. As such, this is a project that draws from Asian American Studies, American Studies, Transpacific Studies<sup>6</sup>, and critical work on the political economy of late capitalism (variously described as neoliberalism, finance/speculative capital, disaster capitalism, etc). While each chapter is anchored around one or two central primary texts, this project also ultimately seeks to identify a larger archive of works that both work against and bridge conventional genre descriptions in order to arrive at a better sense of what exactly speculative fiction looks like and what literary objects belong in this category. The literary texts I engage with don't neatly fall into any one category; yet, trash is teeming in each one—from wasted populations of zombies that wade through New York City's prime real estate, to enormous amounts of toxins and pollutants dumped in Guam over decades of war-making, to

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<sup>6</sup> Yunte Huang describes the "transpacific imagination" as a "host of literary and historical imaginations that have emerged under tremendous geopolitical pressure of the Pacific encounters" (2). The term "transpacific" has been mobilized to address various economic, military, environmental, and cultural contexts; yet, some scholars have pointed out that transpacific readings can "often rely on the same units of analysis...that have long anchored the traditional framework of Asian American Studies" even as they seek to "reconceptualize the scope and span of oceanic exchange" (M. Huang 76)

wasted bodies poisoned by radioactive fallout that become objects of scientific knowledge, to piles of material waste both commodifiable and utterly drained of use value; to populations living at the margins in trash-filled slums. The genre and subject matter of each text also returns us to trash: the zombies that figure in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*, for instance, are everywhere in contemporary popular culture, or "trash culture"; Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, while a canonical Asian American literary text, is all about the consumption of low-brow popular culture; Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* offers a version of doomsday dystopian society that has been the subject of many recent TV shows and movies.

The first chapter of this dissertation asks what is eclipsed when we theorize the racialization of Asian immigrants primarily through the analytics of civil rights, belonging, and recognition from the state. How might thinking through the relays between war, speculative capital, indigeneity, and waste complicate our contemporary understanding of what it means to be rendered disposable? In exploring this question, I turn to Guam—a heavily militarized "unincorporated territory" of the US that has been the staging area for countless US wars in the Pacific and hailed as the "linchpin" of the US's "force-structure strategy" while simultaneously serving as the "dumping ground" of Vietnamese refugees, many tons of toxic, hazardous waste, and most recently, the US Marine Corps personnel previously stationed in Okinawa. In preparation for this relocation-to-come, the US military has awarded private companies like Granite-Obayashi multimillion-dollar contracts for construction (including transportation, housing, Marine bases, live-fire training range complexes, utilities, etc.) and engaged in an active recruitment and importation of cheap, migrant Filipino labor. Ironically, elsewhere in the Pacific, the US has critiqued the ongoing presence of Filipino workers in the CNMI and instrumentalized

their labor rights discourses to further militarize and “federalize” the archipelago. Crucially, the material impact this military buildup has on Chamorros, who have higher rates of both military enlistment and death rates than any US state as a direct result of Guam’s fully militarized economy, has been disregarded despite their ongoing centrality to the US security state (epitomized by North Korea’s threats to launch its nuclear missiles to Guam). In offering a reading these overlapping histories alongside Craig Santos Perez’s *from unincorporated territory*, I take up recent calls to decontinentalize American Studies to both refuse the subordination of island spaces to the continental US and also to resituate the question of Asian racialization and labor within a framework that foregrounds the entwined histories of US militarism in the Pacific, settler colonialism, and finance capitalism.

Chapter two takes up Chang-rae Lee’s *On Such a Full Sea* (2014), a dystopian novel in which the world has been remapped to comprise of Charter villages, facility settlements, and the open counties: within the gated Charter villages are the elite entrepreneurial professionals who have corralled most of the world’s existing resources; the facility settlements are comprised primarily of New China descendants whose sole function and purpose are to provide labor power for the production of food and goods consumed by the Charters and who receive guarantees of (limited) stability and protection in exchange; and the open counties remain spaces abandoned by the state, where no pretense of law or security remains, and chaos and disorder reigns. Reversing the spatial logics of *Zone One* in which Black protagonist Mark Spitz lays claim to Chinatown, Chang-rae Lee’s B-Mor settlement is located in what was previously the historically Black city of Baltimore that has since been annexed by New China descendants. In reading for histories of accumulation that are layered at this site—hyper-exploitation through labor extraction and prostration through military intervention—a central question that I seek to explore is what

resistance and opposition can look like in a world where populations are mobilized by an administration that seems to operate entirely in service of capital. In the context of a corporate sovereignty, where organizing tactics such as building racial solidarity, resisting assimilation, seeking alternative subject-formations and collectivities, demanding redress from the state, collectively withholding labor, and imagining/designing projects for the self-determination of the dispossessed no longer seem to yield political efficacy, what shape does resistance take? Where do we locate resistance now and to whom is it directed? What kind of political imaginary does it hope to generate?

In chapter three, I read Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993) alongside Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011), two starkly different novels twenty years apart that both choose US Chinatowns as their setting. Chinatowns have long been read as the site for explicating the US's history of racialized labor exploitation, exclusion, and (un)belonging. Yet, recent speculative novels pressure this familiar paradigm of Asian American (literary) studies in new ways. Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* is set in New York after a zombie apocalypse that has seemingly stabilized to allow reconstruction and the establishment of a new corporate-sponsored government called the American Phoenix. Over a three-day span, the protagonist and his fellow "sweepers"—volunteers for a civilian militia that has been deployed to clear out and secure the city—patrol portions of New York City, engaging in a systematic elimination and incineration of the remaining zombies that continue to haunt the city. Significantly, these sweeper units' base is located in the city's Chinatown: this claiming of Chinatown as the most strategic location in the city from which to organize military patrols becomes a focal part of my analysis because of the multiple histories such a space evokes. Through his experimentations with temporality/chronology and spatiality/territory, Whitehead puts into conversation histories of

labor exploitation, racial exclusion, militarized policing, and US imperial wars in Asia with new modes of extraction to offer us a defamiliarized account of the relays between race, labor, and war. That is, rather than imagining racialized social life as being constituted through processes of interpellation, belonging, and social exclusion that operate at the level of the (national) subject, this novel points to spatializing practices by which the forces of race, labor, and war are created, preserved, lived, and recreated in service of capital to connect histories of racial expropriation, terror, and violence to modes of accumulation that are secured through the management of destitution. Whitehead thus usefully complicates any accounts of comparative racializations that are routed through the optic of the nation-form. In doing so, the novel dislodges forms of comparativism that establish discrete accounts of racializing forces and requires us to revisit and rethink earlier historical formations that have not tended to be read for this conjuncture.

In examining how the analytics of waste and trash can allow us to rethink various ways that disposability has been theorized in relation to race and racialization, I turn to Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* (1990) in chapter four to attend not to disposable life but to material waste—that which has fallen out of capitalist systems of circulation. Here, I'm interested in engaging in a reading of detritus—discarded, forgotten, decayed objects that have exhausted their use value against commodifiable waste that can be transformed into sites of accumulation—to think about what might be opened up when we theorize racialization through material objects rather than through the production of subjects and excluded communities. Narrated from the perspective of a floating sentient ball that was once attached to the forehead of one of the main protagonists, the novel follows a tight cast of characters across Japan, the United States, and Brazil whose seemingly disparate storylines converge explosively following the discovery of the Matacão in the Brazilian rainforest. My analysis suggests that reading for

discounted objects no longer in circulation that cannot be reducible to the commodity-form or thought merely as the receptacle of congealed labor helps us attend to disavowed histories and circulations of capital (over and against histories of productive relations), exercised to the mutual constitution of settler colonialism and US imperialism, that both produce and manage waste. As such, I also insist on the theoretical possibilities of a reading practice that engages with material objects in literary texts to move beyond the narrative that is always attended to a human protagonist.

I then conclude by turning to Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* (2017) and Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* (1990) to interrogate how capitalism manages not production but detritus and waste in the larger context of speculation and financialization. Jetñil-Kijiner's poems excavate histories of US nuclear testing in the Pacific and its impact on the Marshall Islands. Here, disposability is defined by proximity to nuclear fallout and the degree to which one's radiated body is seen as available for data mining and scientific knowledge. My reading of *Dogeaters* focuses on the trash-filled district of Manila and its inhabitants as well as a sex club where the slum-dwelling performers play with and manipulate colonial fantasies by engaging in a compulsive, protracted cleaning of their bodies. Ultimately, rather than thinking about valued versus wasted life as being a zero-sum game routed around political subjectivity, I want to ask how this opposition can be undone and pressured by taking into account both the processes through which surpluses are produced, extracted, appropriated, and destroyed and the creative modes and means through which the work of living is engaged by those remaindered in the process of value-production.

## Chapter One

### Detritus and Disposability:

#### Militarized Labor, Speculative Capital, and US Settler Colonialism in Contemporary Guam

“Since US foreign policy claimed the twenty-first century as ‘America’s Pacific Century’ and began negotiations for the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the further militarization and territorialization of the Asia-Pacific region, it is crucial for American studies to follow the flag toward the Pacific Islands. As the ‘westernmost “border” of the U.S. geopolitical imaginary,’ Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands could provocatively become where American studies begins.”

Craig Santos Perez, “Guam and Archipelagic American Studies”

### **Labor, Race, and Indigeneity in Neoliberalism**

In “After Labor,” Jean Comaroff asks why labor remains so central to our theoretical understanding of life under capitalism when it has always been threatened by erasure (given that capital has always sought to free itself as much as possible from a dependency on labor)—especially in our current context of its imminent demise. She argues that as capital has “recommissioned the structures of colonial extraction to build commodity chains in such a way as to decentralize, fragment, and recalibrate in space and time its sites of manufacture,” northern labor has been put in unfavorable competition with its more abject, vulnerable southern counterparts and the various conditions we associate with the colonial periphery (creeping informalization, the capturing of more and more people in a life-world of debt, commodification of means of ordinary life once viewed as outside the purview of the market in mainstream Euro-America), have increasingly become ubiquitous. That is, Comaroff flags the centuries-long history of colonization and empire that have produced key differences between the global North

and South in order to articulate and specify a historical problem: what happens when, in our contemporary moment, the global North has moved South?

At the same time, despite the fact that labor both continues to be undone by the historical conditions under which it has evolved and has always been a consequence of dispossession in a system that accrues profit through variously dehumanizing and exploitative means, it has been invested with dignifying, emancipatory potential by theories of Marxist and liberals alike. Comaroff argues that labor as the “prime basis of social value, the source of human dignity, the core of social and material existence has lost little of its fetishized purpose.” I begin with a discussion of Comaroff here because her critique of the normative centrality of labor has crucial implications for how we envision solidarity and resistance in our current moment. If not a demand for more work and better wages (which are bound to disappearing entities), to what do we aspire?

This question is especially interesting to consider in the context of field formations such as Asian American Studies, which has tended to route its understanding of precarity and vulnerability through the question of racialized labor exploitation. Scholars in American Studies have explored the history of Asian immigration to the US as the production of a hyperexploitable, transplanted labor force regulated through exclusionary state practices that constructed racial bars to citizenship. Tracking late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century immigration restrictions and segregation, wartime internment of Japanese civilians, and the liberalization of immigration policy from the 1960s and onwards, such a reading interrogates the racialized development of capitalism and the ways in which the privileged status of US citizenship has been constantly defined against the material conditions of existence for those whose lives have been disavowed by the US nation-state and its nationalist modes of knowing.

Asian American scholars Mae Ngai (2004), Nayan Shah (2001), Grace Hong (2006), and Helen Jun (2011), among others, have analyzed the careful regulation, management, and policing of racialized bodies and labors across borders that constructs and reproduces (racially and sexually) differentiated categories, identities, and norms within relations of inequality in order to reflect upon the ways in which the ongoing extraction of racialized labor situated outside the US has been central to the formation of the US's political and economical power. Significantly, such analyses have tended to foreground labor as the primary analytic through which to understand the racialization of Asian immigrants across different historical moments. For instance, Colleen Lye suggests that “yellow peril and model minority are best understood as two aspects of the same, long-running racial form, a form whose most salient feature, whether it has been made the basis for exclusion or assimilation, is the trope of economic efficiency” (5). More recently, Iyko Day asserts (2016) that “as migrants to North America, Asians’ primary relationship to settler colonizers was historically based on labor” (31).

Yet, such approaches feel limiting for several reasons: first, an understanding of the relationship between race and capital through the analytic of racialized labor exploitation doesn't seem to be able to grapple with our present context, characterized by the global attenuation of the labor market in the north (such that it becomes a facsimile of the informal sectors of the south), where populations are actually competing for the *privilege* of being exploited as labor. Second, the emphasis on racialized labor tends to make clear our model of resistance—where we locate it and how we perform it (through racial and class solidarity, for instance)—that becomes confounded in contexts where diverse populations are being mobilized in asymmetrical ways that pressure how either race or class could serve as a unifying rallying point. Third, in reinforcing the normativity and sentimentalism around labor as the “primary constituter of the social world,”

such an approach forecloses the possibility of envisioning social and economic justice where waged work and employment are not seen as the primary way to achieve self-actualization and define political institutions and imaginaries. Fourth, an overemphasis on labor exploitation always orients us toward thinking about relations of production, which makes it difficult for us to theorize capital's management of destitution and waste—both human and material—that operates through very different tactics. Finally, relying on Western-centric analyses of labor forecloses the possibility of seeing Indigenous models of domination and freedom, relationality, and governance that are not organized around labor but instead advance radically different horizons that think about the widest conceivable collective (including ecologies, nonhuman beings, social beings that are more than human).

The above points are the five central claims I want to unpack throughout the course of this chapter. Along the way, I want to note that in addition to complicating the models that have been prevalent within Asian American studies, there is potentially a way of intervening in certain limiting discussions in neoliberalism. For example, Slobodian's book, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (2018), has received much attention for its careful historicization of neoliberalism and attention to questions of empire. Yet, despite its many critical contributions, *Globalists* does not directly engage with the actual structures of power within ongoing settler colonial formations. In *Globalists*, Slobodian argues that the neoliberal project focused on designing institutions to encase markets, inoculate capitalism against the threat of democracy, create a framework to contain (irrational) human behavior, and “reorder the world after empire as a space of competing states in which borders fulfill a necessary function” (2). One of his many useful interventions in bringing together the intellectual history of the neoliberal movement and the study of neoliberal globalist theory was to “put the neoliberal

project into a broader framework than other scholars have provided to date...the questions of empire, decolonization, and the world economy were at the heart of the neoliberal project from its inception” (25). To grapple with the “post-colonial context,” he argues “a key point of origin of neoliberal globalist thinking within the epochal shift of order that occurred at the end of empire. Decolonization, I argue, was central to the emergence of the neoliberal model of world governance... the end of global empires was essential to the emergence of neoliberalism as an intellectual movement” (5, 14). Such an approach leaves intact assumptions that formal empires have officially ended and decolonization projects concluded.

My point here is not to offer a strawman’s critique Slobodian for not taking up those contexts and sites where decolonization is very much an ongoing, contested struggle, given that he is interested in a very different project that presents an incisive intellectual and institutional history of neoliberal thinkers from 1920s Austria and onwards. Rather, I am interested in questioning versions of neoliberalism that remain inattentive to actual structures of power within settler colonial formations and see such contexts as peripheral to their argument even when the using the language of empire and decolonization. What I find interesting is that those contexts and sites are seen as largely irrelevant to discussions of political economy despite the fact that settler colonialism remains the ongoing condition of possibility for neoliberalism and capitalism in their various mutations. It seems to me that the question of race and indigeneity and its relevance or centrality to neoliberalism has been left largely undertheorized by other critical thinkers of the political economy (Mirowski, Streeck, Dean, etc), whose location of the “condition of the present” usually remains a Western-centric one. What my dissertation is interested in, then, is to bring together some of the conversations in neoliberalism, racial

capitalism, (Asian) American Studies, and Pacific Islander Studies that have typically tended to occur in isolation from each other.

Ultimately, it seems to me that reading such an argument as Comaroff's alongside established and emerging conversations in Asian American Studies, Transpacific Studies, and Indigenous Studies has profound implications for how we understand the present moment that is characterized by the *uneven* generalization of radical precarity—of the condition of susceptibility to hyperexploitation. Even as protections from expropriability and immiseration formerly granted to and secured by privileged segments of the global population are increasingly stripped away, it is clear that such a generalization is always uneven and layered over the long, ongoing histories, legacies, and practices of racialization that have secured distinctions between life worth expending and life worth living. How, then, do we theorize the relationship between disposability, hypervulnerability, race, and capital in ways that move beyond the interpretive limits of our established analytics and language (which remain attached to the very imaginaries and institutions capitalism is outliving) while also carefully attending to capital's continued mobilizations (old and new) of racial difference to its own ends?

Here, I want to turn to Guam—where decolonization is not a historical legacy but rather, an ongoing, highly contested, and unachieved project—as a useful site for thinking through this set of questions that remain central to my dissertation. This heavily militarized island has been variously described as “unincorporated territory” of the US; “staging area” for countless US wars in Asia; “pivot point” in a realignment of US forces in the Pacific; “linchpin” of the US's “force-structure strategy”; and “dumping ground” of displaced Vietnamese refugees, tons of toxic, hazardous waste, and the US Marine Corps personnel previously stationed in Okinawa. Reading for histories of accumulation that are layered here—extraction, expropriation, prostration through

military intervention—productively complicates our understanding of precarity and disposability in our current moment. Guam is a privileged site of analysis precisely for the many layers of histories that can be unearthed here, including decades of US military intervention in Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Afghanistan, Iraq, and more; the accompanied histories of refugee displacement and military internment; and the US's historic project of containing communism in Southeast Asia, as well as its ongoing investment in protecting US energy, oil supply, and military interests in the Pacific. Attending to these histories also shows us that we need to be able to attend to not just one analytic (labor exploitation) but to multiple that can make sense of and respond to the flexible modes of accumulation executed here.

In attending to ongoing legacies of racialization at this site, I also ask what is eclipsed when we theorize the racialization of Asian immigrants through the analytics of labor, civil rights, belonging, and recognition from the state by interrogating this familiar trajectory that reads the history of Asian immigration to the US as a *continental* project. What is opened up when we reject the assumption that the landfall and point of arrival for the Asian immigrant must necessarily be the continental US? How might thinking through the relays between labor, war, indigeneity, and speculative capital in US territories in the Pacific complicate our contemporary understanding of what it means to be rendered disposable by disrupting our tendency to narrate race-making as the chronological and sequential creation, exploitation, and distribution of labor power through population management? What shifts when we think about Guam and the larger Pacific Islands not as one of many peripheral sites but rather, *the* privileged site to think about these questions?

In *Archipelagic American Studies*, Roberts and Stephens write that the narrative of continental America—central to US historiography and its self-conception—has completely

eclipsed the “‘archipelagic Americas,’ or the temporally shifting and spatially splayed set of islands, island chains, and island-ocean-continent relations which have exceeded US-Americanism and have been affiliated with and indeed constitutive of competing notions of the Americas” (1). Arguing that the presumption of the American Hemisphere and the US as fundamentally continental spaces has informed the “heart of the method, content, and politics of American Studies” (9), they call for a “decontinentalization” of perceptions of the US that recognizes the Americas as a “set of spaces that has been persistently intertwined with, constituted by, and grounded in the archipelagic” (17). This chapter ultimately takes up that call to both refuse the subordination of island spaces to the continental US and also to resituate the question of Asian racialization and labor within a framework that foregrounds the entwined histories of US militarism in the Pacific, settler colonialism, and finance capitalism.

### **“Ideal Dumping Ground”**

In 1975, the US transformed Guam into an “ideal dumping ground” for the discards of US war in Vietnam—that is, the displaced Vietnamese refugees. While the Pacific Command on Guam estimated that Guam could shelter at most 13,000 people for a short period of time, more than 115,000 evacuees passed through the island between 1975 and 1976 and overwhelmed Guam’s limited resources. The dumping of refugees profoundly impacted Chamorros who “found their access to lagoons and beaches reduced, their water supply rationed, and their travel restricted...Children had no transportation to school because all of the 181 school buses were being used to transfer refugees from the various air and ship terminals to the temporary military housing and campsites. Overall health conditions also deteriorated, as mosquito and sewage-borne diseases proliferated” (Espiritu 31). This crisis further highlighted the Guamanian

government's lack of sovereignty: the Guamanian Senate's vote to forcibly deport the refugees due to fears that their presence threatened local civilians' safety as well as Guam's international reputation was ignored by the US Interagency Task Force on Refugees.

Crucially, the US military established 12 refugee camps on Guam by repurposing existing military bases and leased corporate facilities: private companies such as BlackConstruction, J&G Construction, and the Tokyu Hotel became temporary refugee camps that interned, detained, and surveilled the discards of the Vietnam War (Lipman 6). Here, both military bases and corporate facilities were instrumentalized to jointly manage war's production of detritus. While Vietnamese refugees eventually relocated to the US are typically read as low wage, exploitable labor, the interned Vietnamese refugees in the context of Guam prefigure what is today the far more widespread problem of redundant labor and surplus populations managed through detention. Crucially, the Vietnamese refugees' disposability becomes yet another site of monetization not for the extraction of labor but for the enactment of strategies of containment, detention, and population control that are themselves profitable for the corporate facilities marshaled to manage them. As such, they point us to the complex ways in which the military and private capital have colluded to manage forms of disposability and waste itself. Their presence here also reminds us of the key role Chamorros have played in US wars in Asia, where capital accumulation occurs not through the managing of a hyper-exploitable labor force but through military occupation and seizing of key geographic sites.

According to the 2017 Index of US Military Strength, the US's status as a military superpower is secured through the vast number of military bases and infrastructure it has established in Asia sponsored primarily by the occupied countries. For instance, there are 28,500 US troops in South Korea alone, for which the country pays \$900 million a year to the US. The

US also routinely engages in joint military exercises and training programs with the Philippines, Thailand, India, South Korea, and Malaysia, and holds a \$14 billion contract with India for the supply of military equipment and the development of “pathfinder” technology projects through the Defense Trade and Technology Initiative. Such details remind us that within “war capitalism’s differentiation between the internally ordered, rule-bound spaces of production and market exchange and the exceptional zones of armed appropriation...the latter are domains not only for enacting ‘plunder’ but also for developing cutting edge procedures and commercially fungible police and military infrastructures” (Singh 92).

The sites of these military bases scattered throughout Asia and the Pacific Islands are “plagued by histories of land appropriation fatal accidents caused by high-risk military exercises, extreme noise, and other health and environmental hazards” (Yoneyama 43) that have displaced, maimed, and killed local residents. Attending to ongoing struggles over military appropriation of land in Asia (including recent mobilizations in South Korea against the establishment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense missile defense system designed to protect US bases from a North Korean missile attack that has taken over the rural village of Seongju) that produces unlivable conditions for its inhabitants who are forced to migrate elsewhere thus complicates attempts to theorize Asian racialization and disposability primarily in terms of labor. As Singh suggests, structurally separating “economic compulsion” (the production of a hyperexploitable Asian labor force) from “direct domination” (the accumulation of capital through the administration of violence in Asia) “fails to recognize what may be an even greater novelty of capitalism: the consistent extraeconomic processes of appropriation by which capital is able to ‘identify, secure and channel unpaid work outside the commodity system into the circuit of

capital” (91). The violent conditions of emergence for Asian diasporic subjects in the US thus reminds us their racial formation is not simply reducible to their living labor.

As such, the layering of histories in Guam complicates attempts to read Asian racialization as a straightforward narrative of labor extraction and exploitation, as well as binary theories of settler colonialism structured around an opposition between Indigenous peoples and settlers. Here, it is worth returning to Day’s theorization of Asians’ primary relationship to settler colonizers as being “historically based on labor” (31). In seeking to map out the triangulation of Native, alien, and settler positions, Day emphasizes that “the logic of exclusion is the *prerequisite* for the recruitment of alien labor, functioning...to render an Asian labor presence highly conditional to the demands of capital” (34). It is this labor-based relationship Asian migrants have to settler colonial capitalism that distinguishes them from Indigenous populations, whose primary relationship to settler colonizers is understood to be land, “underscored by an overarching logic of elimination” (26) that seeks to eradicate and extinguish, rather than control. For Day, interrogating the comparative racialization of Indigenous peoples, Asian laborers, and African Americans highlights “the heterogeneity of race that is anchored by a foundational distinction between land and labor” (29).

While Day makes an important intervention by foregrounding and insisting upon the importance of attending to a history of settler colonialism often ignored in accounts of Asian immigration, her move to rethink Asian racialization through a comparative approach that disentangles a logic of exclusion reserved for “a disposable army labor force” (34) from a logic of elimination feels limiting because it does not attend to ongoing histories of US imperialism in both Asia and the Pacific Islands, in which capital accumulation occurs through the waging of war and management of war trash. An understanding of Asian racialization as a single, stable,

monolithic structure built around the exploitation of Asian family structures for capital remains incapable of attending to the problem Comaroff defines—that is, what happens when capital no longer needs labor?

Rather than theorizing the taking of land, life, and labor as distinct endeavors and logics attributed to the discrete genealogies of particular racial groups, then, I want to suggest that taking up the ongoing histories of importation of labor and immiseration (encompassing the wholesale discounting of life, destruction of ecosystems, forced conscription into military service, etc.) of Asian peoples together as conjoined modes of accumulation occurring in simultaneity can open up the possibility of conceptualizing a different approach to racial formation that decisively interrupts attempts to think about racial groups in analogy to each other. How might thinking through the triangulation of race, labor, and war (rather than settler, Native, and alien or white, Black, and Asian, for instance) complicate our understanding of what it means to be rendered disposable in the current moment by disrupting a genealogy of racial formation that understands race-making as the creation of labor power through population management; narrates linear, chronological sequences for the accessing, exploitation, and distribution of labor power; and understands the present moment as merely a new sequence? I That is, I am interested in disrupting a tendency to think about race-making as successive projects built around a model of abstracted labor exploitation and population management that is applied over and over again across different historical moments.

Ultimately, I seek to move away from producing discrete genealogies of racial groups precisely because capitalism operates by invalidating terms of relationality and separating forms of humanity so that they can then be connected in terms that are useful for capital. Melamed has argued that “the production of social separateness—the disjoining or deactivating of relations

between human beings (and humans and nature)—[is] needed for capital expropriation to work” (78). She suggests “processes of differentiation and dominant comparative logics create ‘certainties’ of discreteness, distinctness, and discontinuity—of discrete identities, distinct territorializations and sovereignties, and discontinuities between the political and the economic, the internal and the external, and the valued and the devalued” (79). Theoretical and methodological approaches that contribute to the constitution of discrete entities that constitute valued versus devalued life, then, run the risk of reifying the ways in which “people and situations are made incommensurable to one another as a disavowed condition of possibility for world-systems of profit and governance” (79). The emphasis on relationality rather than comparison also draws from and is inspired by “Predatory Value: Economies of Dispossession and Disturbed Relationalities,” in which Byrd, Goldstein, Melamed, and Reddy “differentiate those forms of inquiry attentive to the dynamics of co-constitution, interaction, and friction from those conventional methods of comparison—comparative literature, comparative politics, and so forth—that insist upon disconnection and equivalence as their point of analytic departure” (4). This dissertation’s desire to bring together the separate conversations I have been tracking, as well as its refusal to think about racial groups in analogy, can thus be thought as an attempt to engage in Manu Vimalassery’s call for “relational modes of analysis” (2) that can “consider the produced incomprehensibility between different forms of colonialism, such as the comparative and connective nature of settler colonialisms and franchise colonialisms, as well as differential and contingent racializations and racialized violences” (3).

The practice of using Guam as a dumping site is an ongoing one: currently, the US plans to relocate thousands of US Marine Corps personnel and their dependents from Okinawa to this

island, a third of which is already seized by the US military. This military buildup comes hand in hand with the US's aggressive agenda of privatization on the island, which remains "one of the largest efforts at resource privatization on US soil" (Na'puti 303). A prime example is Gershman, Brickner & Bratton Inc, a US-based private firm that assumed oversight of the Guam Solid Waste Division in 2008. While the US Navy had owned and operated the Ordot dump before and after World War II and has been responsible for most of the polluting in and around the island, Guam was tasked with closing the dump. The Ordot Dump site contains 17 toxic chemicals, including arsenic, lead, chromium, peb's and cyanide—the same 17 pollutants that can be found in landfills located over the island's aquifer at Anderson Air Force Base in northern Guam (Perez 83). In 2008, the US District Court of Guam placed the Solid Waste Management Division in Receivership, citing the "government of Guam's noncompliance with the mandates of the Clean Water Act and the Consent Decree." Since then, Guam has paid \$14.4 million to this firm that has assumed control of existing contracts as well as the power to award all future contracts.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, in preparation for the relocation-to-come, the US's Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Pacific has awarded private companies multimillion-dollar contracts for construction. Most notably, Granite-Obayashi received a \$165 million contract to prepare the Marine Corps Base Guam that will house a third of the relocated US Marines. According to the company, the project entails preparing the 400-acre site for future construction as well as "clearing the site of unexploded ordnance and munitions of explosive concern."<sup>8</sup> Here, war's detritus becomes a new corporate and military project of literal waste management in which previous sites of destitution and destruction become recast as the prime opportunity to

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<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.guamsolidwastereceiver.org/faqs.html#q14>

<sup>8</sup> See "Granite Construction Joint Venture Team Awarded \$165 Million Military Infrastructure Project in Guam," <https://investor.graniteconstruction.com/press-releases/2017/08-30-2017-223005554>

grab land, accumulate assets, and reinvest. At the same time, expectations from the military buildup have “more than doubled real estate prices and tripled home costs” (Perez 83), forcing many Chamorros off the island while others have become homeless.

Crucially, these efforts at privatization are inextricably linked with, and cannot be thought outside of, the larger scheme of militarizing Guam. Within Guam, it is war that secures, sets the stage for, and becomes a primary function of speculative capital through its management of waste (human and material) by ushering in projects of reconstruction and capital investment and providing rich security structures, commercially fungible police and military infrastructure, and defense stocks that serve as crucial sites of accumulation through gambling on destruction and instability. In establishing the militarized build-up as a marriage of corporate actors to military institutions, Guam refocuses our attention not to the relationship between labor, capital, and the nation-state that we are perhaps more used to theorizing but rather, to the relays between militarization, private capital, and disposability.

Ultimately, I want to approach the question of how Asian and Pacific Islander life and labor are rendered precarious by rethinking war as the ultimate producer of detritus and waste—both through the ceaseless creation of toxic production zones and military bases and through the disposable populations and life-worlds it leaves behind. The largely-privatized US military’s history of dumping and nuclear testing has contaminated the Pacific with large quantities of peb’s, radiation, and other toxic waste that have “choked the breath out of the largest barrier reef system of guam, poisoning fish and fishing grounds” (Perez 60). The military’s use of Guam as a decontamination site during its nuclear testing in the 1970s resulted in Agent Orange and Purple exposure (powerful herbicides and defoliants used liberally in the Vietnam War that were designed to destroy the plant-based ecosystem on which agricultural food production relies, as

well as any foliage providing “enemy cover”), which have produced “high incidences of various kinds of cancer and neuro-degenerative diseases, such amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, parkinsonism dementia, and lytico botig plague the chamoru people...diseases have killed most of our elders: only five percent of the island is over the age of 65” (Perez 91, 114).

Here, situating Guam alongside other sites of US military bases in Asia helps us think about shared pasts and the deeply “ambivalent” kinships of Chamorros and those Asian populations whose life-worlds have been similarly devastated. As Nixon has argued in his “Slow Violence,” the tactics pursued by the US military have resulted in the destruction of multiple ecosystems: “One hundred million unexploded land mines lie inches beneath our planet’s skin, from wars officially concluded decades ago. Whether in Cambodia, Laos, Somalia, or Angola, those still-active mines have made vast tracts of precious agricultural land and pastures no-go zones, further stressing oversubscribed resources and compounding malnutrition.” The depositing of toxic waste is an ongoing project rather than a distant past: as recently as July of 2010, the USS Houston, a US navy nuclear submarine home ported on the island, leaked trace amounts of radioactivity into Guam’s waters. In July 2007, an F/A 18C Hornet crashed in the waters around Guam during a training mission; in 2010, at least three other military aircrafts have crashed in or around the Anderson Air Force Base (Perez 60).<sup>9</sup>

Despite the ongoing centrality of Guam to the US security state (epitomized by North Korea’s threats to launch its nuclear missiles to Guam in 2017), the material impact that the military buildup will have on Chamorros has been largely disregarded. Here, the disposability of

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<sup>9</sup> This is an ongoing problem in other US military bases in Asia. Maehyang-ri, a small fishing village in Korea, is located near the largest US Air Force bombing training site in Asia. According to Cho, “there it is not uncommon to encounter people whose body parts have been torn off by misfired bombs or whose hearing is impaired by the sound of low-flying planes” (56). In May 2008, a USAF fighter pilot lost control of his plane and dropped six five-hundred-pound bombs over Maehyang-ri in an attempt to rid the plane’s cargo of excess weight, destroying 170 homes.

Chamorros in Guam is highlighted by their close proximity to commercial hazardous waste facilities and industries that engage in a ceaseless extraction of natural resources through the most expedient means and take for granted the slow poisoning of local ecologies. It is this population living at the margins that becomes mobilized, dispersed, and instrumentalized into a new configuration of economic and social formation serviceable to (military and corporate) capital.

Significantly, Chamorros have higher rates of both military enlistment and death rates than any other state as a result of Guam's fully militarized economy. Perez writes that "in 2005, four of the u.s. army's top twelve recruitment producers were based on guam. In 2007, guam ranked no.1 for recruiting success in the army national guard's assessment of 54 states and territories. In the current war on terror, our killed in action rate is now five times the u.s. national average" (127). In an interview, Lisa Natividad explains that "'militarism is everywhere here. Career day at the high school is like an advertisement for different parts of the military'" (Alexander 877). Bevacqua has argued elsewhere that Chamorros have mobilized their participation in militarized labor to claim voting rights, recognition from the US state, visibility in mainstream media as symbols of patriotism, and the possibility of staking out the voice of American universality. Their labor, then, becomes an important mode through which they protest their exclusion from the US. At the same time, in attending to the prominent role Chamorros have taken in US wars in Asia (from the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Cambodian Campaign, and the "Secret War in Laos" to the Iraq War and more), it becomes clear that the "logic of elimination" Day describes plays out not only through the seizure of land but also through funneling populations into forms of militarized labor as the only real opportunity for security, employment, and stability. Here, the process of controlling and managing a hyper-

exploitable labor force is one that cannot be easily untangled and separated from a logic of elimination and necropolitical project that absolutely discounts the value of Chamorro life through the enactment of both genocide and slow violence.

### **Rethinking Resistance and Solidarity**

Ultimately, I want to suggest that taking up the mutually co-constitutive histories of US militarism in the Pacific, settler colonialism, and finance capitalism has profound implications for how we think about resistance and solidarity in our current moment. Within analyses that read the project of racialization as the production of a hyper-exploitable, disenfranchised labor force, calls for redress typically involve some combination of securing civil rights and leveraging those to assert labor power. Take, for example, the Dekada movement—a labor rights organization in the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) that advocates for the rights of immigrants as an exploited labor force. Dekada has critiqued the local government for economic inequity, gender violence, and political exclusion; categorized the CNMI as a “third world” site of labor abuse; and advocated for the granting of US residency to the Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Nepalese, Korean, Filipino, and Sri Lankan immigrant laborers working within its borders.

Yet, their political efforts, which mobilize the discourse of rights to claim a sense of belonging and recognition from the state, have had some unintended consequences. As Camacho argues, Dekada’s labor rights discourses have “conveniently provide[d] the US [with] an opportunity to critique the CNMI’s labor and immigration laws, to evade further responsibility for their involvement in the creation of the CNMI’s garment industry, and to further militarize the archipelago’s ocean borders” (696). Partly in response to Dekada’s claims, the US sought to

“federalize” the CNMI by eliminating the CNMI’s labor and immigration systems in favor of its own. As such, the tactics and strategies pursued by Dekada have elided indigenous claims for freedom from US military rule in the CNMI and Guam.

At the same time, in opposition to the proposed military buildup, activist organization We Are Guåhan has pursued diverse tactics such as initiating education campaigns; organizing rallies, cleanups, and media appearances; and suing the US Department of Defense. Alongside We Are Guåhan, Fuetsan Famalao‘an, a women’s and indigenous rights group in Guam, has sought to foster coalitions among Chamorros, Filipinos, and others who seek to decolonize the island by launching a public service campaign to unite local women, demanding transparency and an open line of communication with US leaders, and calling for an impact studies of the proposed military buildup. According to Camacho, the main limitations of these groups’ approach lies in the fact that “Guam, in their view, persists as the *center* of indigenous injury, thereby foreclosing discussion of other ‘grievable’ subjects in the Mariana Islands” (Camacho 704). Such “Guam-centrism” ensures that “the majority of the Catholic debates, indigenous literatures, oral traditions, political issues, popular cultures, and women’s organizations representing Chamorro society almost exclusively focus on Guam, if not portray Chamorros as indigenous only to this island” (704). At the same time, I want to suggest that the centering of indigenous injury as an organizational strategy, while crucial and necessary, can also make it difficult for us to think about immigration and diaspora in the same conversation in ways that extend these groups’ activisms to social movements like Dekada.

The differences in these approaches seem especially important to consider in the context of Guam, where the staging of military-corporate projects has been coupled with an active recruitment and importation of cheap, migrant Filipino labor—the same practice the US

condemns as immoral in the CNMI. In Guam, then, resistance to capitalist extraction cannot be waged purely along the lines of labor given the flexible tactics of destitution management that turn populations into sites of accumulation in diverse ways. Crucially, various communities on Guam are made to compete for the right to be exploited as labor: the cheap Filipino workers and interned refugee populations, for instance, function as a deterrent to labor organizing among Chamorros, given that there is no shortage of expendable people willing to work for less. What does it mean, then, to take up simultaneously the US's continued practice of dumping refugees on Guam (a more contemporary example being the six thousand refugees from Iraq relocated here), exporting cheap migrant labor onto the island, and consigning Chamorros to military service and early death?<sup>10</sup>

Guam thus profoundly disrupts a model of Asian racialization that is fixated around labor exploitation by illuminating populations redundant to capital that become sites of profitability only as so much waste to be contained. Here, there are various populations caught up in different moments of capital through this layering of diverse (rather than successive) projects of imperialist domination and capitalist extraction that exist simultaneously. As such, Guam confounds attempts to identify a single, stable structure of power iterated over and over again that makes clear the standpoint from which that power can be unthought and dismantled. Here, the search for a stabilizing locus of resistance and solidarity becomes confounded.

Given this context, a crucial question that emerges is how to wage resistance across multiple, seemingly crossed lines given that each population is being instrumentalized in asymmetrical ways that pressure how either race or class could function as an easily identifiable rallying point. Under what conditions, and within what political imaginary, would the

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<sup>10</sup> See “792 Kurds, Fearing Reprisals, Depart for Guam” (AP News), “Guam Welcomes Kurdish refugees” (United Press International), and “The Guam Option” (The New Yorker)

dispossessed Chamorros establish common cause with the warehoused refugees (Vietnamese, Iraqi, or otherwise) and exploited Filipino laborers? In the context of Guam, conditions of racialization and disposability are secured not by land or labor, but both, through regimes of accumulation that turn waste and ruination into profit. What political moves does this disallow? What does it open up? What possibilities arise when our analyses move away from privileging forms of comparativism that establish discrete racial histories and processes even as they seek to connect them?

### **Craig Santos Perez's *from unincorporated territory***

In the *Archipelagic American Studies*, Craig Santos Perez argues that Guam has often been treated as a mere “footnote to the US-American empire and an intellectual footnote to the field of American studies.” Yet, attending to the footnotes—the unincorporated, superfluous, marginal excess—yields for Perez a productive framework that challenges the ongoing “subordination of island spaces to dominant continental spaces” (100).<sup>11</sup> In his close reading of Bevacqua’s poem, “My Island is One Big American Footnote,” Perez reads the footnotes appended to the poem that describes Guam as a “small island of text no one bothers to read or quote [because it is simply] conditional, contextual, so dependent on the [main] text.” Yet, it is through a careful scrutiny of the footnote island of Guam—and its colonial relationship to the

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<sup>11</sup> Perez’s work also makes a crucial intervention in a version of Pacific Islander studies produced by US anthropologists and area studies experts who sought to generate academic knowledge about Pacific Islanders in ways that would further American military aspirations and serve the interests of the US Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Interior, Navy, and State (See Hall (2009), Hanlon (1999), Wesley-Smith (1995)). Such area studies scholarship “aimed to influence and control,” reduced Pacific Islanders to “mere objects of study,” and “further reified the geopolitical and national demarcations which have come to define the Pacific as an ‘area’ of study” (Camacho “Transoceanic” x).

main text of the US—that Guam no longer emerges as a celebratory signifier of US democracy but instead becomes “Where America’s Empire Begins” (100).

Perez, a Chamorro scholar and poet, seeks to excavate these histories of militarized occupation, extraction, exploitation, and displacement in his series of poems *from unincorporated territory* through a strategic assemblage of a diverse array of texts, including his own testimony to the UN Special Political and Decolonization Committee, a collage of language from various travel magazines, the Organic Act of Guam (1950) and Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, names of Chamorro soldiers killed in action, signs seen in Guam’s main tourist village, excerpts of press releases and articles on the Guam Kingfisher (one of the world’s most endangered species that has since been bred in captivity in US zoos), and snippets of the Department of Defense’s Environmental Impact Statement for the military buildup as well as the public’s responses to the 10,000 page document. In rejecting and critiquing the history and depiction of Guam as a strategic naval base, he has framed his poems as “providing a strategic position for ‘Guam’ to emerge” from colonial and military domination. In this section, I focus on *from unincorporated territory [guma’]* to suggest Perez’s strategic assemblage makes a compelling intervention in analyses that seek to theorize disposability and accumulation through a subject- and human-centric analytics of labor or exploitation. In particular, I focus on his poems on the Micronesian kingfisher as opening up possibilities for us to track how war secures, sets the stage for, and becomes a primary function of speculative capital through its production of waste and wasted populations (human and more-than-human) that then become new sites of monetization.

*On the Micronesian Kingfisher*

According to the “Revised Recovery Plan for the Sihek or Guam Micronesian Kingfisher,” a 130-page report from the US Fish & Wildlife Service, predation by the brown treesnake has been the “overriding factor in the extirpation of sihek” (iv). The continued high density of brown treesnakes is a direct result of US military occupation and presence on the island. The report states that “brown treesnakes probably arrived on Guam prior to 1950 as passive stowaways in material salvaged from Manus, an island near New Guinea, following World War II...Available evidence shows that brown treesnakes first colonized the Santa Rita/Ordnance Annex area, and then spread progressively across the island...Within 20 years, the snake population had reached a peak density of 100 to 120 snakes per hectare” (21). In other words, the snakes most likely appeared on the island after hitching a ride with US military equipment. The introduction of this invasive species was profoundly detrimental as the only native snake on Guam is a tiny blind snake that feeds exclusively on the eggs, larvae, and pupae of insects. The report attests that “Guam’s native birds were therefore particularly vulnerable to the exotic brown treesnake, as they had not evolved with any snake as a nest predator. By 1988, the brown treesnake had eliminated most of the native birds on the island (Savidge 1987), as well as many other native and exotic animal species” (21).

Other contributing factors to the near-extinction of the Micronesian kingfisher included the “progressive alteration of the island’s vegetation” post-World War II that “clearly began with human colonization” (i.e. US military occupation of Guam), such as the clearing and burning of large expanses of native forests during heavy fighting and the further fragmentation and degradation of habitat by development activities (“e.g., the Air Force’s proposed munitions storage igloo, northwest field beddown, and intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and strike capability projects and the Department of Defense’s proposal to move an Marine Expeditionary

Force to Guam” (17)). While habitat loss and degradation were not considered a major threat in 2008, the report acknowledges that “this threat is increasing and may limit recovery as the island of Guam becomes further developed and additional forested areas are cleared or modified” (v)—all of which would be greatly exacerbated by the latest proposed military buildup on Guam. In addition to the habitat loss and degradation, following World War II, DDT was liberally and regularly applied by the military on Guam while the insecticide malathion, an organophosphate, was used up to three times a week.

Above all, however, the biggest threat to Micronesian kingfishers’ survival was identified as “predation by the brown treesnake,” combined with “factors that continue to prevent the recovery of the sihek includ[ing] poor reproductive success and high mortality in the captive population” (iv). The captive breeding of sihek, initiated in 1984 as part of the Guam Bird Rescue Project, saw the forced removal of twenty-nine siheks from Guam which were then transferred to various zoos in the US. It has not been a largely successful effort, however: the report states that “Fewer than half of the pairs successfully produce offspring” and “poor egg viability and infanticide have also been identified as problems” (25). Indeed, “of the 778 eggs produced under captive conditions up to 1997, only 39 percent (301 eggs) were fertile; 20 percent (159 eggs) were broken, and 41 percent (318 eggs) were infertile. Sixty-nine percent of the embryos that died in the shell were artificially incubated (Bahner et al. 1998). Seventy-four percent of the parent-reared chicks lost prior to fledging disappeared from the nest, either due to cannibalism by the parents or other causes” (25). Factors that contributed to adult mortality included “stress, pair aggression, and nutritional deficiencies.”

At the time of the report, the captive propagation program was managed under the American Zoo and Aquarium Association’s Species Survival Plan and included a coordinator,

representatives from each captive breeding institution, two nutrition advisors, a veterinary advisor, a pathology advisor, an education advisor, two advisors from the population management committee, a Guam representative, and a liaison from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In addition to developing various planning and management efforts, research has been conducted to increase the captive population and maintain genetic diversity. However, the problems associated with the captive propagation efforts on the mainland resulted in part from “lack of appropriate nesting logs or natural foods” as well as the “different climatic conditions relative to the sihek’s native Guam” (28). Even as the report acknowledges that “Breeding sihek on Guam in their native climate, with natural nesting substrates and foods available at a facility dedicated to sihek propagation, may alleviate some of the factors that have hampered the captive breeding efforts” (28), it continues to call for significant funds to be devoted to captive population management efforts.

Overall, the total estimated cost and proposed budget for recovery was identified as around \$146 million over an estimated 50-year period. The report states that “approximately \$39,200,000 of this total cost will be needed during the first 5 years of recovery implementation” (vii). A detailed breakdown of this staggering budget includes cost of maintaining staffing across various facilities as well as developing artificial incubation techniques, researching stress hormone research, standardizing husbandry techniques, gathering data and potential risks, developing new snake control techniques, preventing the introduction of new avian predators to Guam, instituting curriculum programs for local teachers, supporting conservation outreach organizations to promote conservation at a ‘grassroots’ level, developing a mentor program, supporting the use of volunteers, developing partnerships, and more.

The devastation of the Micronesian kingfisher population which exists only on Guam, brought upon by US military occupation of the island, thus becomes an important site of profit. The capturing and detaining of kingfishers in tiny cages at US zoos to be closely monitored and studied echoes other forms of experimentation, data extraction, and research conducted on Pacific Islanders (which I discuss in chapter 4). The birds yield profit for the various institutions, agencies, and private interests involved: the numerous press releases on the kingfisher from zoos across the country garnered great publicity and drew crowds. According to the report, partnerships with “other conservation agencies, local interest groups and private landowners” (including the US military), as well as other unspecified “other groups and individuals,” were speculated to “benefit the sihek as well as, for example...the tourist industry” (69). Here, the add-on (“for example...the tourist industry”) is actually the point: this multi-million-dollar project is sponsored by a host of stakeholders who are invested in accumulating more profit and benefitting from the bird’s extinction.

In Appendix C, the report offers a summary of the agency and public comment on the draft. One such comment calls out the amount of funding allocated for education and outreach at the local level: “One commenter suggested that many of the outreach tasks are a waste of money and that the Guam public understands the brown treesnake and recovery situation” (114). While acknowledging that “much of the public on Guam is aware” of this situation, the report argues “this level of awareness was in large part due to previous public outreach efforts...In order to maintain and increase this level of awareness, we believe additional outreach is needed” (115). In claiming the locals’ understanding of the crisis as a measure of its own success, the agency thus effectively secures justification for ongoing US intervention as well as more funding. And yet,

the funds and profits generated did not go toward establishing good habitats for the birds in captivity, or on researching the proper foods they needed to sustain themselves and their young.

I have dealt on the Micronesian kingfishers at some length for a few reasons: it highlights the relationship I seek to track throughout this dissertation between war as producer of waste and wasted populations that then become new sites of profit (through containment, research, data mining, etc). The kingfishers, who are in some ways the displaced refugees of US military intervention in Guam, reiterate for us that these projects of waste management include the devastation of entire ecosystems and ecologies—of the broadest possible collective. This report also serves as crucial context for Perez’s “*ginen* the micronesian kingfisher [*i sihek*],” which includes quoted passages excerpted from press releases and articles on the Smithsonian National Zoo, San Diego Zoo, Philadelphia Zoo, and Saint Louis Zoo websites.<sup>12</sup> This poem, divided into four parts scattered throughout the collection [*guma*’], is surrounded (encaged) at each appearance by the poems “*ginen* fatal impact statements” and “*ginen* ta(la)ya.” Perez’s work includes many incorporations and juxtapositions of found texts to produce a documentary- or journalistic-type poetry. Engaging with his work thus requires a contextualization of this juxtaposition impulse, which I have sought to provide through my reading of the “Revised Recovery Plan for the Sihek or Guam Micronesian Kingfisher.”

Before diving into a close reading of “*ginen* the micronesian kingfisher [*i sihek*], it is worth pointing out that Perez’s discussion of the brown treesnakes predates [*guma*’]. In the previous collection [*hacha*], Perez writes in the footnotes that “During and after the war, the

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<sup>12</sup> In “Tales of Love and Loss,” Perez states that the first time he encountered the guam kingfisher was in a cage at San Diego Zoo. He adds that the bird’s fate echoed that of his people, given that San Diego is home to the largest diaspora of Chamorros outside of Guam: ““We migrate to survive and to have better opportunities, but at the same time, we’re far from home, we’re in a new situation, and it can be very traumatic – for the *sihek* as well as the people.””

Allies controlled the Marianas, a primary base in the Pacific. The US military shipped equipment and salvaged war material to permanent bases and scrap metal processors on Guam. The first brown tree snakes reached the war torn islands as cargo ship stowaways” (87). Here, he highlights the ways in which the US has both historically reduced the Pacific Islands to military “bases” and identified in these war-ravaged sites prime opportunities for plunder. As a direct result of US militarism in the Pacific that introduced brown treesnakes to the island, “Guam has lost all its breeding populations of seabirds, 10 of 13 endemic species of forest birds, 2 of 3 native mammals, and 6 of 10 native species of lizards. Also, there have been over a 100 infant deaths reported in the last 50 years...They say there were no snakes on Guam before World War II” (93, 95). Far from being irrelevant, superfluous, or redundant, these footnotes—operating as “small islands of text” themselves—recover obscured histories that set the stage for “*ginen* the micronesian kingfisher [*i sihek*]” and reiterate Perez’s refusal of Guam’s status as “footnote” within the field of American Studies. It also reminds us that the colonial violence that produced the kingfisher’s endangered status is not a neatly contained story or moment to be packaged up into a single poem; rather, it is a key, ongoing throughline that weaves through each of Perez’s collections.

The first section of “*ginen* the micronesian kingfisher [*i sihek*]” recalls “[our] nightmare : no / birdsong—”, a jungle emptied

of [*i sihek*] bright blue green turquoise red gold

feathers—everywhere : brown

tree snakes avian

silence— (24)

While the US Fish & Wildlife Service states that brown treesnakes arrived on Guam as “*passive* stowaways in material salvaged from Manus,” thus denying the culpability of the US military as well as the agency’s own complicity, Perez reframes the introduction of this invasive species on Guam as an intentional and integral part of the US’s empire-building project:

the snakes entered  
without words when [we] saw them it was too late—  
they were at [our] doors sliding along  
the passages of [*i sihek*]  
empire.... (24).

Here, Perez suggests the “avian silence” brought upon by the brown treesnakes cannot be separated from the Chamorros’ experience of colonization and military occupation.

Indeed, Perez uses the same language to describe the US military in the poem immediately preceding “the micronesian kingfisher.” In “*ginen ta(la)ya*,” Perez writes that his family “migrated *removed* from Guahan” so he could escape recruitment into the US military and “have a chance to grown and live” (22). He writes, “The US invaded *when snakes arrive* Afghanistan on October 7, 2001...The US *sliding along the passages* invaded Iraq on March 20, 2003. The first Chamorro soldier died in Iraq on December 8, 2003. *Christopher Rivera Wesley*. He was 26 years old” (23). It is significant that Perez uses the same language to describe both the brown treesnakes that eviscerated the avian population in Guam and the US military’s invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq: he reminds us that Chamorros’ struggle for liberation and freedom is not waged at the level of the proper rights-bearing subject but includes the widest possible collective: from the caged kingfishers to the refugees of the US wars on terror dumped on Guam to the Chamorro soldiers displaced from their homes.

A crucial message of the species recovery plan hatched by the US Fish & Wildlife Service is the notion that US intervention is not only necessary but the only way to ensure the survival of the species: “We cannot give up our efforts to recover the species” (115). Instead, Perez points out that zookeepers “captured [*i sihek*] and transferred / the last / twenty-nine micronesian kingfishers / to zoos for captive [*1988*] breeding”—a theft that ensured no wild kingfisher has been seen on the island since 1988. Much in the way that Chamorros removed from the island at “alarmingly high rates” to enlist in the US armed forces are promised “college,” “travel all around the world,” “free clothes, free food and housing” (22), Perez writes that the zookeepers repeated and repeated:

*if it weren't for us*

*your birds                      [*i sihek*]*

*would be gone*

*forever”* (24).

Fencing this poem in from the other side, the “*ginen* fatal impact statements” offers edited excerpts of the public’s comments on the US Department of Defense’s Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed military buildup on the island, as well as the responses Perez received when he shared those comments on Facebook. One stanza reads, “*Many comments address how full of \_\_\_\_\_ our colonizer is, but the real concern was where our colonizer was going to put all that \_\_\_\_\_, especially with 80,000 more \_\_\_\_\_ holes coming to Guam*” (25), highlighting the ways in which extraction on Guam includes the repurposing of the island into a useful dump site for the US. It is this context that cages Guam as closely as the tiny cages that hold the captive birds. Much as the treesnakes’ population has continued to grow exponentially since the moment of introduction, eluding many attempts to root them out and threatening all

local wildlife, the US military's proposed buildup will produce similar devastating effects for Chamorros that cannot be removed.

The second part of “micronesian kingfisher” describes the habitat requirements and setup for the captive breeding program:

interior ceiling : foam rubber or burlap stuffed  
 with straw—external minimum size :  
 nine inch by nine inch—internal height: minimum ten inch  
 clearance between floor and ceiling padding—  
 perching: [*i sihek*] half inch diameter— (31).

This tiny enclosed space is used despite the fact that kingfishers in the wild are “very territorial” and “use a variety of forested habitats, including extensive tracts of native forest, agroforest (including coconut groves), riparian, and strand vegetation.” The minimum enclosure size for breeding pairs is scarcely bigger:

ten feet by eight feet  
 with a height of ten feet containment—  
 this cage [*i sihek*]  
 can be either solid material wire mesh or glass—  
 on these displays [*i sihek*] (31).

Thus imprisoned, the birds experience high mortality rates and poor reproductive success. Yet, the excerpts of press releases from various zoos interspersed throughout—“a rare micronesian kingfisher chick...hatched at the national zoo's conservation and research center”; “our newest pair of micronesian kingfishers at the san diego zoo is currently raising a chick”—remind us that these captive birds bring more funding, publicity, visitors, and profit to participating institutions.

The targeted conservation efforts to “save” the kingfisher serve as a stark contrast to the ways in which Chamorros have been funneled into the US military to be killed. Immediately following the second sequence of “kingfisher” is a list of Pacific Islander soldiers killed in action: “[U.S. Army 1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Michael Aguon Vega, 42, a Guam native, died after he sustained injuries from a roadside blast in Iraq] / [U.S. Army Sgt. Yihjyh “Eddie” Lang Chen, 31, of Saipan was killed in Iraq when his unit was attacked] / [U.S. Marine Cpl. JayGee Meluat, 24, a native of Palau, was killed by enemy fire in Iraq]...” (32). This list continues throughout the whole book of poem. As Perez states in the unnamed appendix to the collection, the names of these soldiers were retrieved from a news feature titled “Remembering our Fallen,” as well as from the Office of Insular Affairs under “Fallen Insular Heroes.” In his recreation of the list, however, Perez crosses out each person’s official title as well as the circumstances of death. The use of strikethrough ensures that the names themselves receive added emphasis as they emerge out of the discarded words, flipping the script in which Pacific Islanders are considered disposable to the US military. The strikethrough also seems to operate as bars that cage each name from all sides to produce a feeling of claustrophobic entrapment. Here, Perez rejects media’s glorification of fallen Chamorro soldiers that seek to produce and affirm Chamorro identity only through patriotism and military service. He points out the ongoing tendency of Western conservationists to value and prioritize the environment and wildlife over that of Indigenous communities; at the same time, through his strategic assemblage of texts, he suggests such conservation acts are nothing more than an extension of military violence and occupation.

The so-called project of conservation has devastating effects on the captive birds themselves: Perez writes that

kingfishers have attacked

their images reflected  
 in glass cage fronts—these  
 are not legends—  
 the birds are  
 inside snake belly (62).

Stolen from their homelands and robbed of their freedom, the birds see their own reflections as hostile and unwanted intrusions in an already small cage. Though various participating institutions and zookeepers insist their intervention has single-handedly saved the birds from complete extinction, Perez suggests this new state of captivity is merely another version of being “inside snake belly” (62). The stress of displacement and confinement in a tiny space, coupled with a hostile habitat and lack of access to the right resources, continually impedes efforts at propagation: Perez writes in the appendix that “because zookeepers were not familiar with Micronesian kingfisher diets, they fed them newborn mice. Some birds confused their blind and naked hatchlings with food.” This cannibalization of future generations of kingfishers brings to mind the ongoing recruitment of Chamorro youth into the US army (staged in high schools and homes throughout the island) that have produced the highest enlistment and death rates across multiple wars.

The theft of the kingfishers, of Guam and the ecologies that sustained the birds, thus includes the hatchlings. This loss comes hand in hand with new initiatives by participating US institutions to cash in on the extinct status of the kingfishers: “the saint louis zoo has hatched 41 chicks since 1985. recent modifications to bird house habitats have now made it possible to house [*i sihek*] a pair of these rare birds for visitors” (63). It is precisely their extinct status that

secures funding, sponsorship, and visitors—the very fact that they are on the brink of disappearance make them imminently marketable.

For Perez, the caging of the kingfisher comes hand in hand with the proposed military buildup on Guam. According to the DEIS, US military intends to build a live firing range complex in Pagat, an ancestral Latte village sacred to Chamorros. Perez writes, “Many people *ricochet* travel to Pagat to fish, hike, and collect medicinal herbs; to learn about Chamorro culture and history cues *to navigate*; and to seek guidance from the ancestral spirits that dwell there to *sing future*. Pagat is also home to the Mariana eight-spot butterfly, an endangered native species *is born and fed and grows and*” (60). Here, Perez points out that extinction is not unique to the kingfisher but rather, a normalized status in the face of continued US militarism and occupation. Ultimately, the proposed encroachment would cordon off even more parts of the island and produce an ever-narrowing space for Chamorros to live. This suggestive quotation, paired with the kingfisher poem, begs us to ask: what is the minimum enclosure size for Chamorros? Indeed, Perez’s strategic quoting of the DEIS as well as the attached public comments (“and if they do take the lands that they want, then what will the meaning of Guam be?” (64)) reminds us that Guam’s kingfishers and butterflies, sacred grounds and waters, and Chamorro lives are attributed value only at the moment of their destruction or extinction. At the same time, attending to the ways in which extinction has become a normalized state in Guam makes a crucial intervention: it reformulates our understanding of necropower by moving us away from Mbembe’s original anthropocentric model and orienting us toward other forms of life.

In the last section of “the micronesian kingfisher,” Perez writes:

invasion is

a continuous chain of

immeasurably destructive  
 events in time—  
 .....  
 is the ending of  
 all nests this  
 choked thing [we] [*i sihek*] (71).

The “ending of all nests” refers in part to the zookeepers’ practice of snatching fertile eggs from their parents: “keepers promptly stole one of the eggs...hatched [a few days later] inside an incubation machine in a lab, where the chick now lives, fed by keepers from tweezers protruding beneath the beak of an oversized kingfisher hand puppet [2010]” (71). This continued theft (which reminds us of Perez’s own experience of displacement from his home island) is paired alongside “The War in the Pacific Memorial Wall was *a cage can be either solid material wire mesh or* completed in 1994. The wall panels include the names of civilians and soldiers who suffered and *is born and fed and grows and* died during the war” (75). Here, Perez cuts and pastes from earlier moments of the poem that describe the birds in a state of captivity (“*a cage can be either solid material wire mesh,*” “*is born and fed and grows and*”) as a connective tissue linking between two seemingly incommensurable threads. The inextricability of these different histories is highlighted by Perez’s strategic assemblage that brings together different modes of accumulation and extraction. Here, we see that the US invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan is inseparable from the ongoing militarized buildup on Guam, which cannot be disentangled from the extinction of the kingfisher and the profitability of conservation projects to zoos and pet-safe airlines, nor from the steady death of Chamorros through enlistment in the US military and exposure to toxic waste. Perez’s poems thus suggest that a crucial tenet of extraction is the

disruption of human-nonhuman relations through the systematic, military targeting of ecosystems:

—of trespass—[*i sihek*]

when land is

caged [we]

—of theft—[*i sihek*]

are caged within

[our] disappearance” (71).

Perez’s “from the micronesian kingfisher” thus makes clear that the response to a project of elimination resulting in a total devastation of environment and life through toxic chemicals, radioactivity, and plunder is further extraction narrated as “rescue.” Rather than investing resources to clean up the environment and restore what has been destroyed in order to make a livable place for both Chamorros and the kingfisher, the emphasis is on turning what has been extinguished into yet another site of profit. Perez thus reveals the absolutely perverse logic at play in this “rescue narrative” that refuses any kind of acknowledgment or reparations actually beneficial to the bird and the people of Guam.

As of September 2019, the Guam kingfisher is still listed “extinct in the wild” and there are just 140 birds left in the world. While Guam DAWR hosts 9 birds, there are twenty-six zoological institutions across the US hosting the birds for their breeding programs. Yet, though captive and declared “extinct,” they continue to persist and endure despite the hostile

environments in which they have been forced to live. This sense of resilience and endurance emerges as a throughline for the collection of poems. Perez writes, “Instead of the military buildup and the DEIS choking [our] voices, it ignited an underwater volcano *these passages my sourcing*. Chamorros on-island and off-island *[our] stories cast upon the intertidal zone* mobilized, protested, and spoke out against the buildup *[our] stories weave generations this raised house to sing*” (75). What falls out of the continued US militarization of Guam exceeds the radioactive waste and toxins that pollute the island and its waters.

### *Hydropolitics and Transoceanic Militarism*

Another critical intervention Perez makes in his poetry is to situate Guam in a larger context of transoceanic militarism. As Deloughrey has pointed out, within recent scholarly turns to the ocean, “the concepts of fluidity, flow, routes, and mobility have been emphasized over other, less poetic terms such as blue water navies, mobile offshore bases, high-seas exclusion zones, sea lanes of communication (SLOCs), and maritime ‘chokepoints’—yet, this “strategic military grammar” remains vital for conceptualizing a 21<sup>st</sup>-century critical ocean studies for the Anthropocene (22). In “Chanting the Waters,” a poem from his collection *Habitat Threshold*, Perez suggests that to think about questions of US militarism in Guam and the Pacific is to always think about both hydropolitics and the necropolitics of US militarism that cuts across species and undergirds Anthropocene extinctions. He writes,

Say: Water is \_\_\_\_!

because water is the next oil—

because 180,000 miles of U.S. oil pipelines leak everyday—

because we wage war over gods and water and oil (27).

Here, Perez highlights the centrality of water to securing US energy, oil supply, and military interests: US militarization of the oceans has been “foundational to maintaining the global energy supply that undergirds what some call the Capitalocene,” given that over 60 percent of the world’s oil supply is shipped by sea and over 20 percent of the Pentagon’s budget is used to secure it (Deloughrey 25). The US protects its energy interests through extensive maritime and overseas base networks (over seven thousand), which also secure its status as the world’s largest consumer of energy and the biggest contributor to global carbon emissions. The US has sought to solidify transnational energy and seabed mining interests over state environmental protections through naval forces that consider Guam one of its many “lily pads” and “refueling stations” as well as “the world’s largest gas station” (25). Water not only provides passage and access to key sites of strategic importance to the US; it also serves as a useful receptacle of toxic waste.

In the next stanza, Perez writes,

Say: Water is \_\_\_\_\_!

.....

because it takes two gallons of water

to refine one gallon of gasoline—

because it takes 22 gallons of water

to make a pound of plastic (28).

Water is crucial to the production of everything, including plastic—at the same time, it serves as a dumping site for all the trash yielded in the process of that production:

because pesticides, chemicals, lead, and waste

poison our waters

.....

because every year millions of children die  
from waterborne diseases— (28-29).

Tracking the poisoned waters full of contaminants such as peb's, radiation, and Agent Orange reminds us that waste is a product of two inseparable processes: capitalist production and warfare. The management of wasted water itself becomes an area of accumulation in its own right: "because corporations privatize, dam, and bottle our waters— / because plantations divert our waters" (28). Here, the purification of "dirty water," bottled into more plastic, becomes another site of monetization and profit that produces even more waste. According to businesswire, the bottled water industry was valued at \$185 billion in 2015 and is expected to reach \$334 billion by 2023—a compound annual growth rate of 8.5 percent.

Ultimately, Perez seeks to show the ways in which water serves to connect projects of private capital with that of war-making and militarized policing. He writes,

Say Water is \_\_\_\_!

because they bring their bulldozers and drills and drones

.....

because they bring their banks and politicians

and dogs and paychecks and pepper spray and bullets

.....

because they bring their police and private militia— (29).

Central to these interlocking projects is water/ocean that complicates attempts to theorize Indigenous peoples' relationship to settler colonizers purely through the analytic of land. Given that

...if you lose 5 percent of your body's water

you become feverish—

because if you lose 10 percent of your body's water

you become immobile—

because our bodies won't survive a week without water (28),

US militarization extends beyond land occupation and capture; it includes the harnessing and systematic poisoning of waters that devastates entire ecologies cut off from a vital resource.

At the same time, water serves to connect Chamorro resistance to other Indigenous struggles. The poem is dedicated to “the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and water protectors around the world” as “ocean-sky-rain-lake returns / to the Pacific and connects us / to our cousins at Standing Rock” (27, 30). Water, porous and mobile, fluid, cutting across borders and land territories, enables new networks of solidarity and a trans-Indigenous methodology that moves beyond the comparative to “invite specific studies into different kinds of conversations, and to acknowledge the mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and texts” while “augmenting and expanding broader, globally Indigenous fields of inquiry” (Allen xiv). In bringing together non-recognized non-subjects emerging from poisoned, wasted ecologies, water becomes not just a site of devastation but a horizon for bringing together a new kind of collective and future—no matter how uncertain: “because our daughter loves playing in the ocean...because we'll tell her ocean has no end...because I'll teach our daughter my people's word for water / ...so the sound of water / will always carry her home—” (29-30).

Ultimately, I want to suggest that the strategic assemblage Perez offers allows us to identify limits of (Asian) American studies and Asian American subjectivity that either focuses exclusively on labor exploitation and seeks to untangle such modes of extraction from other

forms of dispossession, or returns us again and again to the state as site of redress and rights-based recognition. Here, I suggest that thinking through different modes of accumulation than the ones to which we have been more attuned by bringing together histories of US militarism in the Pacific with that of ecological vulnerability and slow death—and seeking connections and relationalities across difference rather than insisting upon distinct, separate genealogies or struggles—opens up possibilities of advancing a different horizon grounded in the more-than-human. Taking Perez’s strategic assemblage as inspiration, the next chapters of this dissertation seek to bring together a collection of texts that do not obviously go together and defy easy categorization (as Asian American or African American or Pacific Islander literature, as dystopian or speculative fiction, as pop culture or its opposite).

For instance, while *Zone One* is an African American literary text, it usefully reframes key analytics, paradigms, and understandings in Asian American literary critique and studies. *from unincorporated territory* pushes us to consider new entanglements, histories, and exchanges that complicate our understanding of both Asian American and Pacific Islander studies. *Zone One* and *On Such a Full Sea* embody traits of speculative fiction by complicating our understanding of temporality, chronology, and futurity, and opening up space for us to rethink modes of analysis that present a linear structure of unfolding. Meanwhile, literary texts such as *Zone One* and *Dog eaters* confound our categories of popular and high-brow culture through their engagement with “trash culture” tropes. Ultimately, the juxtaposition of texts that follows is designed to invite us to rethink the relationship between these different racial formations and histories in non-schematic, non-analogous ways that cut across these categories rather than approaching each by way of homology.

## Chapter Two

## Economies of Precarity:

Rethinking Race and Resistance in Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* (2014)

“[M]ost recently with globalization, financialization, and the digital revolution, wage labor has been rendered increasingly anachronistic, increasingly irrelevant to the generation of wealth; to wit, stock markets typically rise as employees are laid off. And yet, on the other hand, that form of labor remains ontologically indispensable to capitalism, essential to its self-understanding, its endogenous sense of how value is created. Which, perhaps, is why, as wage work is visibly devalued and displaced, it tends to return, these days, in refigured, re-imagined, dehumanized forms... This paradox—that labor is integral to the ontology of human existence, yet is undone by the historical conditions under which it has evolved—is, it seems, critical for making sense of contemporary debates about the nature of work. And its futures.

Jean Comaroff, “After Labor”

This chapter is organized around two novels that bracket the writing career of Chang-rae Lee: *Native Speaker* (1995) and *On Such a Full Sea* (2014). Upon its publication, *Native Speaker*—narrated by a Korean-American spy who struggles to fully assimilate into US American society—won numerous awards and established Chang-rae Lee as a canonical Asian American author. The thematic of (un)belonging, exclusion, and hyperexploitation is prevalent in most of his works and reflects a long-standing understanding within Asian American Studies that theorizes race as always bounded within and determined by the nation-form. However, his latest novel confounded expectations that Lee would continue to explore issues specific to the “Asian-American experience”: set in a dystopian future in a world after nation-states, *On Such a Full Sea* challenges the paradigms of national incorporation and racialized (un)belonging that have historically shaped our understanding of who is rendered precarious.

As such, *Native Speaker* allows me to clarify the central preoccupations and analytics that have historically circulated within Asian American studies and literature while *On Such a Full Sea* enables us to ask what is opened up when we delink race from nation and attend to the uneven distribution of not exclusion and unbelonging, but new genres of disposability that are nevertheless made possible by ongoing histories of colonialism and imperialism. In a world where states are beholden and serviceable to capital and there is no longer the need for a cultivated national imaginary or people, what is the enduring political force of race and racial difference? What can resistance look like when populations are being mobilized by an administration that seems to operate entirely in service of capital such that labor exploitation actually becomes a condition of relative privilege?

### ***Native Speaker***

Chang-rae Lee's first novel, *Native Speaker* (1995), exemplifies a conventional and familiar understanding of the "Asian American novel" that requires the resolution of an Orientalized struggle between Asian traditionalism and American culture and modernity narrated largely through intergenerational conflict. Such novels rely on narratives of familial-splitting-because-of-split-belonging, engage in a kind of cultural pornography that capitalizes on its own foreignness and exoticness, call upon readily-available tropes of the American Dream and the US as a nation of immigrants, and identify the rift in the immigrant family as that which can open up and secure different familial relations and foundations through assimilation or multiculturalism. Likewise, *Native Speaker* constantly emphasizes the Korean American desire for belonging as well as the relentless demand of assimilation that is read as itself an expression of Asian American racialization. Central to this novel's theme is the Korean American's endless desire to

see difference dissolved and incorporated through seeking inclusion and a national subjectivity that can be readily claimed as his own. What *Native Speaker* highlights is the extent to which such (limited) inclusion is or isn't possible for those who are always already deemed inassimilable outsider and perpetual foreigner. The novel traces out the narrator Henry Park's relationship with two older first generation Korean immigrant men who play pivotal roles in his life: city councilman John Kwang, an "ethnic politician" (326) who astonishes Henry for the ways in which he ventures into the political and public realm instead of remaining satisfied with eking out a living for himself and his family; and his father, who embodies all the stereotypes of the hardworking Korean merchant and seems to buy into the conception of America as a land of opportunity despite the many obstacles and struggles he has faced in this land for the particular ways in which he has been racialized by others.

Unlike any other Korean character we encounter in *Native Speaker*, John Kwang seeks inclusion and incorporation into the national body politic through his active participation and involvement in electoral politics as an "ethnic challenger" (36) who is constantly made to field any questions about racial tensions between the Korean and African American community. His participation in politics is that which sets him apart in Henry's eyes (139, 328)—he is not just concerned with the inner workings of his own particular nuclear family or in securing upward mobility and financial success for himself (though he has both); rather, he actively works to occupy a public space that has generally been deemed inaccessible to Asians who have long been racialized as aliens ineligible for citizenship. Still more remarkable to Henry is the fact that John insists upon building cross-racial alliances that extend beyond the Korean (American) community. Even as he predictably attributes interracial conflict as that which arises from individual failing and lack of acceptance between people of color to offer moralistic assessments

of cross-racial dynamics and formation (152), he is also keenly aware and critical of existing structures of inequality that secure the uneven distribution of rights, wealth, resources, and power. For instance, he draws parallels between the long history of the exploitation, dehumanization, and criminalization of Black Americans in the US with Korea's experience of Japanese colonialism (153) in order to trace out the brutal indifference of inequality under global capitalism (even as he refrains from pointing out the history of US imperialism in Korea). Moments like these show that he clearly registers the contradictions and limitations of liberal subjectivity and the promise of citizenship.

Ultimately, the very differences that make him a person of interest in Henry's eyes are that which register John's failure to meet the relentless demand to assimilate into a particular kind of national subject, which results in catastrophic consequences. For instance, his attempts to form a kind of sprawling patriarchal family that exceeds the definitions set forth by Western discourses in extending beyond blood, heritage, and kinship to include campaign employees and the many participants of his *ggeh* (a rotating credit association and money club he establishes for legal and undocumented immigrants, Korean and otherwise) lead to his downfall. When Henry releases the long list of participants in his *ggeh*, John is arrested for engaging in illegal financial activities and condemned for being a "smuggler" who encourages undocumented immigrants into the US while every undocumented immigrant who was part of his "family" is deported. John's attachment to a romanticized understanding of family centered around loyalty and interdependence (146) ends up becoming that which secures the complete destruction of not only his political career but the lives of those whom he had sought to include in his "family," suggesting the impossibility of building and maintaining a familial network unsanctioned by the state. John himself eventually returns to Korea with his wife and sons, indicating that at the very

moment of inclusion (the height of his political career), difference can be seized upon and deployed in strategic ways to limit this incorporation into the nation: “deviant” particularities and difference cannot readily be dissolved into the universality of the nation and the Asian body still remains that which determines inside/outside, national belonging/exclusion.

Markedly different from John Kwang is Henry’s father, who moved to the US to become a grocery store owner despite the fact that he has a Master’s degree in engineering from Korea. He fulfills all the stereotypes of the hardworking and diligent Korean merchant who makes endless sacrifices, commits himself entirely to his family as a matter of “duty,” readily obliges in the reproduction of the “immigrant lore” (49) expected of him by Americans, and clings to the notion that there is something exceptional about America that can secure access to better opportunities and life chances. It is precisely this set of traits that renders him an endlessly exploitable unit of labor and earns him the continual scorn and contempt of his son. Interestingly, the eventual financial success that he attains, which allows him to move into a suburban neighborhood and accumulate private property and capital, results from his own exploitation of newer immigrant workers for his business: he intentionally hires those whose bodies are inscribed and marked with racial and linguistic difference because he believes these disenfranchised workers, cumbered with worries about money and their families, will be willing to do any kind of work for low wages (54). This ongoing cycle, in which immigrants are perpetually seen as an expendable, dehumanized labor force, suggests limited inclusion is actually predicated upon the ability to exploit others’ difference.

Adhering closely to the Asian American novel’s reliance on the deployment of intergenerational “cultural” conflict that situates any sort of tension at the individual level of the family, Lee indicates that the father’s relentless pursuit of upward mobility and the American

Dream alienates him from those around him, prevents him from building close relationships with his son or wife, and makes it impossible for him to actualize his full human potential. In Henry's depiction of his father, we see all the familiar tropes of Asian traditionalism set in opposition to American modernity: his father is described as "not modern," as "unencumbered by those needling questions of existence and self-consciousness" (58), as the Other to Henry who is the rational, self-conscious, modern subject. According to Henry, his father doesn't register emotion on his face and remains silent much of the time, rendering him less than human. The series of strokes he eventually suffers from render him literally mute: he becomes slowly immobilized and paralyzed, while his experiences become that which is always unspeakable, hidden, and unmovable. His death signals the ways in which a racialized immigrant's participation in racial capitalism must also necessitate his participation in his own destruction.

It is significant to note that all the "cultural" traits that Henry critiques in his father—his silence, his unreadable face and refusal to articulate emotions of any kind, his willingness to do whatever it takes to be successful at his work—are the same qualities he himself possesses and puts into continual use as a spy for an unspecified private agency. Indeed, his boss insists that it is his cultural background and the values and customs he inherited that make him such a successful and undetectable spy (172). Henry can infiltrate any space and pretend to belong while engaging in invisible surveillance and espionage but is in actuality always an impostor both foreign and external; his allegiance is always questionable and never secure, as can be seen by his ability (if not willingness) to betray even those with whom he feels the deepest sense of kinship (John Kwang being a primary example) for personal gain and profit; he claims and is claimed by no one. The implication is that Henry excels at this work precisely because he has had practice engaging in it his entire life: as the son of Korean immigrants, he has had to

constantly negotiate anxieties about assimilation, belonging, and claiming an American identity he can never truly inhabit.

Throughout the novel, Henry remains deeply preoccupied and fixated by his racial identity as that which is inscribed upon his body and his dialect; for him, the racial and cultural difference he perceives in himself and other immigrants becomes the predominant language of his life that is impossible to escape—it marks his every interaction and conversation no matter what space he occupies or to whom he is speaking. Regardless of whether he is at home speaking to his wife or in a public space pretending to be a volunteer for John Kwang’s political campaign or in his own private office with fellow spies, he is never allowed or able to forget that he is not white, not really American. To some degree, he seeks escape from his constant and acute awareness of the particular ways in which difference attaches to racialized bodies in this novel by seeking entry into the national body politic through his marriage with a white woman. Of course, what threatens this marriage is his distance and silence, predictably read by his wife as unresolvable cultural differences that affect his ability to form intimate attachments to others.

Ultimately, Chang-rae Lee offers in *Native Speaker* an understanding of race and racialization as that which prevents full inclusion to the national body. Race here determines one’s qualification for citizenship and personhood: the difference and specificity that attach to racialized bodies are simultaneously exploited by capital for cheap, expendable labor and rejected by the nation in its desire to preserve, maintain, and secure the interests of a white national citizenry and produce a particular kind of national subject. The state is thus conceived of as that which creates the body politic and those bodies deemed worthy of protection by distinguishing them conceptually and legally from non-white bodies—“bodies impolitic, whose problematic corporeality disincorporates them from the network of intercorporeal exchange” that

links the members of the body polity in a “continuous ‘contractual’ exchange of whiteness that both affirms their full citizenship and constantly recreates the polity as a white entity” (Mills 594-6). I read this novel as following the tradition of a materialist critical race theory that conceptualizes racialization as the process through which “a physical materiality with no intrinsic significance then acquires—the corporeal transmuted by intercorporeality—a social and political materiality that makes the physical signify in a way it did not before...[to] determine who is deemed worthy of admission to the polity and who is not, whose racial value is positive and whose negative” (Mills 601). Such an understanding of race affirms the constructed nature of the (white) national body politic as that which differentially incorporates marked bodies and thus relies on conceptual models of power, governance, and belonging that have been fundamentally underwritten by and are symptomatic of the historic operations of the liberal nation-state form.

This focus on race as difference (and disposability as exclusion) is not limited to discourses of immigration or to versions of (Asian) American Studies that remain attached to the nation-form and rely upon the assumption that the formal mechanics of globalization, neoliberal multiculturalism, etc. operate through the reproduction of national subjects. US empire studies that seek to emphasize transnational processes of race-making and racism across the metropole and periphery continue to have a “widely shared analytic focus on *race as difference* from a putative unmarked identitarian norm (of whiteness)” —such a “disciplinary focus on race as difference” understands ‘race’ primarily through the rubric of political representation...as a problem of lack or failure (or unevenness) of political recognition/rights on the juridical field stipulated on the liberal ideals of universal freedom and equality” (Tadiar 139-40). That is, even in attempts to think transnationally across borders, analyses of race continue to be routed through

inclusion/exclusion dynamics that reinforces an imperial culture. Theorizing about racialized disposability through the logics of racialized exclusion and unbelonging always returns us back to the nation and the social analytic of a liberal democratic politics concerned with the production of juridical, normative subjects and thus obscures what Tadiar calls the “racist violence of a new global political economy of life” crucial to the operation of new processes of value production that distinguish between expendable and valuable life (399).

Instead of tracking the discrete genealogies of specific racial groups that “reproduce the the juridical fictions of imperialism...[by] thinking and imagining from within the rule of law that is its buttress” (Tadiar 403), then, the relationship between race, racialization, and disposability needs to be rethought in ways that would allow us to interrogate how people and things are being expended in the service of value-production for others. Here, I return to the questions posed in the introduction—namely: What does it mean to attend to the uneven distribution of new genres of disposability that are layered over legacies of colonial world-making as the basis for a new world order? How might new modes of theorizing disposability also allow us to reorganize and rethink Asian American critique by delinking race from nation and refocusing our attentions on the role race plays in securing the uneven distributions of life chances and death, value and disposability through programs of surveillance, risk assessment, and securitization in our current moment?

### ***On Such a Full Sea***

Particularly useful for thinking through some of these questions is Chang-rae Lee’s *On Such a Full Sea* (2014), his most recent work that, in advancing a “dystopian” narrative of a world after nation-states, offers a dramatic and radical departure from his first book and its

reliance on familiar paradigms of the so-called Asian American novel.<sup>13</sup> *On Such a Full Sea* offers us a complete spatial remapping of the US in which national and juridical boundaries no longer align or even exist. Instead, the geographies of domination in this world are demarcated entirely by the flow of capital, population, and labor. The US (and other countries) are now comprised of Charter villages, facility settlements, and the open counties: within the gated Charter villages are the elite entrepreneurial professionals who have corralled most of the world's existing resources and secured (however temporary) an access to a host of privileges; then, there are the facility settlements, comprised primarily of New China descendants whose sole function and purpose are to produce food and goods for the Charters and who in exchange receive guarantees of (limited) stability and protection; and finally, the open counties where lives are utterly disposable, the state is completely absent, no pretense of law or security of any kind remains, and people cannibalize each other if they so choose. The condition of generalized vulnerability is further emphasized in the novel by the fact that almost everyone—regardless of one's status as a Charter, county person, or facility resident—will contract Crash, a degenerative condition for which there is no cure. The novel, narrated from the vantage point of one of the facility settlements, follows the journey of Fan, who leaves her settlement and travels across each of these geo-regions in search of the father of her child.

Since its publication, this bizarre novel has puzzled critics and been limitedly taken up in a few equally strange ways: Barrish argues, for instance, that the novel uses the genre of

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<sup>13</sup> Like Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*, Lee's novel does not fall neatly into the category or genre of "dystopian fiction." Indeed, Ursula K. Le Guin writes in her review of *On Such a Full Sea* that "A good many things in the novel were inexplicable to me...Lee uses essential elements of a serious genre irresponsibly, superficially. As a result, his imagined world carries little weight of reality. The whole system is too self-contradictory to serve as warning or satire." In this discussion, I hope to take up the "inexplicable" elements of this novel not as superficialities but as opening up space for us to pose new kinds of questions and speculations.

speculative fiction to reflect on longstanding healthcare debates in the US by reimagining the political economy of healthcare in a dystopian America that has been devastated by environmental illness. He argues Lee's novel is ultimately calling for universal government-funded care over a private system built on free-market principles. Ji Eun Lee has argued that the novel imagines a communal consciousness of diaspora identity through its use of a collective narrative voice ("we") that creates a sense of "split identity" by "shifting the referent from 'we' inside the narrative frame to 'we' outside the narrative frame and by dislocating the main figure Fan from society." She argues the sense of disjointedness created by this narrative frame offers a more "liberating" version of communal consciousness that can deviate from norms and explorations of new possibilities not bound by nation or ethnicity. Jung-hoon Jang writes that *On Such a Full Sea* creates a "translational space of hybridity" that provides readers with opportunities to explore various manifestations of intercultural, interethnic, and interclass dynamics to ponder the possibility of reconciliation and coexistence in terms of cultural hybridity. Gui Woo Lee argues that as an unwed mother, Fan succeeds in crossing the boundaries set by the panoptic bio-power by deliberately performing the role of docile Asian woman that is inscribed in the model minority myth. Curiously, most of the existing scholarship on Lee's novel has been penned by Korean (rather than American) scholars.

Taking a different approach, I want to read Lee's novel as the entry point into speculation on the question raised in the first chapter—that is, how do we theorize the relationship between disposability, race, and capital in ways that move beyond the interpretive limits of our established analytics and language that operate at the register of the nation and remain attached to the very imaginaries and institutions capitalism is outliving while also attending to capital's continued mobilizations of racial difference to its own ends? How does capital manage and

speculate on destruction to turn conditions of immiseration into sites of accumulation? How does it occupy itself with managing not only production but also forms of disposability and detritus itself? What happens to the paradigm of the Asian American novel at a historical moment where what we are arguably witnessing is a shift from the nation-state form to a state beholden to capital/serviceable to capital? I suggest that reading for surplus populations redundant to the operations of capital in Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* has profound implications for how we theorize race and challenges familiar national paradigms of racialized (un)belonging and incorporation/exclusion for understanding who is rendered precarious.

What is crucial to note here is that in the context of the radical spatial reorganization that has become normalized at the start of *On Such a Full Sea*, national borders have been largely rendered obsolete and irrelevant. While nations do continue to exist in name as residual territorializations, it is clear that nationalist actors, architecture, and capital no longer exist—nor is there a national sovereignty that operates through the promise of protection to those transformed into state subjects. What is necessary, then, is a new framework that can account for the ways in which the decentering and displacement of a national sovereignty shifts our existing rubrics for thinking through how power is exercised over subject populations. It is worth noting that this seeming absence of a nation-state has been replaced by, or perhaps evolved into, the “Directorates”: the facility settlements, for instance, are run by “federated companies, rather than the revolving cast of governmental bodies that overreached in their efforts or were disastrously neglectful, all of them downright clueless” (Lee 19). Within the facility settlements and the Charter villages, the directorates operate through techniques of surveillance and information management that seek to translate human conduct into measurable data, all of which can be mined, repackaged, risk-assessed, and reconstituted as predictive (speculative?) algorithms. Such

systems of risk assessment and information management can be seen even in the directorates' calculated decision to abandon the spaces of the open counties, which serve as the dumping ground for Charters who fail to successfully engage in a risk-averse model of behavior and thus have become wholly redundant to the operations of capital (by becoming bankrupt, by committing certain kinds of crimes, etc.). Readily visible across these different villages, settlements, and counties are proliferating the corporate state's complete disregard for the project of interpellating social subjects across the social field and the absence of any kind of popular sovereignty or representational politics. As such, Lee's treatment of race in his latest novel is significantly different from that in his first, in which he conceives of racial difference as something that needs to be incorporated and assimilated into the nation (no matter how limitedly) before even the possibility of racialized belonging can be attained. Such a conception seems to lose theoretical hold in a world where there is no longer even the pretense of a national imaginary or people.

Here, it is worth paying attention to the production settlements in some depth. Reversing the spatial logics of *Zone One* in which Black protagonist Mark Spitz lays claim to Chinatown (Chapter 3), Chang-rae Lee's B-Mor settlement is located in what was previously the historically Black city of Baltimore that has since been annexed by New China descendants. At first glance, the B-Mor settlement seems to offer us another theorization of Asian racialization understood primarily in terms of labor: its inhabitants are an imported labor force who have thoroughly internalized "those ever-optimizing metrics" (256) and "techniques of maximized production" (71) as well as a compulsion to work that they have been disciplined into from birth. What gives shape to the lives of these B-Mor inhabitants is the particular role they occupy as disposable laborers easily accessible to capital: these so-called "citizens" exist within and occupy the B-Mor

settlement as an imported labor force for the sole purpose of producing specific commodities that Charters will consume. While the various facilities and shops established within the settlement are maintained and used by the B-Mor residents, they are all “almost without exception owned, if never operated, by Charter investors” (50). In return, what the New China descendants receive is stability and “the unfailing turn of the hours and how they retrieve for us the known harbor of yesterday,” defined “in this difficult era [as] the most valuable commodity” (7). It is their participation in this exchange that secures their survival, minimizes their vulnerability to risk, and protects them from the complete uncertainty and utter disposability that characterize life in the open counties. As such, their labor becomes a critical function of their bodily and intellectual disposition, which is perhaps exemplified by the fact that what B-Mor resident Fan misses upon her departure from this settlement is “her own work of diving in the tanks just as much, if not more” than the family and community she left behind because “it was in the work that she came closest to finding herself” (171). Indeed, every B-Mor resident is “trained from an early age in the techniques of maximized production” (71).

Significantly, there is no identifiable normative culture, ideology, or *nationalist* ethos that undergirds the organization of life in the B-Mor settlement; as the inhabitants themselves relate, the only “doctrine” that holds relevance for them is that of optimization: “There is no overarching system we subscribe to anymore, no devotion to a deity or origin story, no antique Eastern or Western assertions of goodness and badness to guide us. We abide by directorate regulations, yes, but are mostly ruled by one another as to what is optimal, which is debatable but in fact no more so in B-Mor than anywhere else” (147). The unitary workings of this community are secured through its “citizens’” internalization of “those ever-optimizing metrics” (256) and a compulsion to work that they have been disciplined into from birth.

This internalization of “those ever-optimizing metrics” (256) may seem, upon first glance, to be a new ideological project of discipline that interpellates a different kind of subject and effectively supplants one form of (bourgeois) normative political culture with another. Indeed, this is the argument Wendy Brown makes of neoliberalism: in *Undoing the Demos* (2011), Brown argues that neoliberalism is “an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life” (30). As such, neoliberalism for Brown is a normative enterprise that operates through the cultivation of an economic rationality pervading the domain of the political: “(neoliberalism interpellates us as subjects who do) think and act like contemporary market subjects where monetary wealth generation is not the immediate issue...the point is that neoliberal rationality disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities—even where money is not at issue—and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as homo oeconomicus” (31). This “normative reign of homo oeconomicus in every sphere” thus produces abject citizens who have “no motivations, drives, or aspirations apart from economic ones”; whose humanity (“what we are said to be, what we should be, and what the rationality makes us into through its norms and construction of the environment”) is fully swallowed by neoliberalism; and who is governed by a new calculus of political reason that operates through processes of compulsory commodification and profit-driven expansion to establish its own forms of valuation. Within this formulation, neoliberalism thus remains invested in and committed to the production of subjects, a “conduct of conduct,” an ideology predicated on efficiency, optimization, competition, risk-assessment, and cost-benefit analysis. Such an understanding lends itself to reading the B-Mor residents as

internally self-disciplining neoliberal subjects who conform to the new norms and ideology of optimization and are thus sutured into a seemingly coherent, readable world.

Yet, the B-Mor residents' insistence on the lack of an "overarching system" to which they subscribe—as well as their claim that they are ruled mostly by one another rather than the Directorates as to what constitutes the "optimal"—reveal to us that the neoliberal values which Brown describe are ultimately a content-less, empty metric. The doctrine of optimization and efficiency are certainly everywhere in the facility settlements; yet, it is unclear what the exact meaning and effects of these values actually are. Self-optimization operates as a vacuous managerial directive that doesn't actually have any ideological content beyond requiring the B-Mors to think of themselves as laboring machines. As such, optimization becomes a mechanism for the constitution of laborers whose self-realization comes from labor but not an ideological project of national interpellation, as the residents are cut loose and left to their own devices to imagine whatever values they want. As Cherniavsky writes in *Neocitizenship*, the neoliberal values of optimization and maximization have "no normative social referent... 'costly or beneficial for whom? Accountable to what supervision? Efficient in relation to what parameters?'" (156). The answers to these crucial questions are left to be determined by the B-Mor residents themselves, whose definition of "best practices" (Lee 256) are never quite clarified. They are committed to no "beliefs" or "doctrine,...religious or philosophical" other than "an undying habit of pragmatic attention and action" (147).

Efficiency and optimization, then, operate as values by committing us to nothing—to "*no standards of self-government...to no general, organizing distinctions between legitimacy and illegitimacy, virtue and shame, productivity and waste, decency and perversity*" (Cherniavsky 157). Instead of consolidating the ethos of a social world, these programs of risk-assessment and

cost-benefit analysis advance what Cherniavsky calls the “proliferation of computational environments” (156), in which a *series* of self-optimizing entities devise their own frame of reference for maximizing their returns. Rather than producing a new form of normative culture and naturalizing the interpellation of individuals in the name of a particular kind of national collectivity, the Directorates have effectively supplanted the nation-state by dissolving the very concept of the norm and implementing control without disciplining the ensemble of social agents and institutions to adhere to the norms. What is normalized, instead, is the “fragmentation and multiplication of social and political (un)realities” (157). This argument has profound implications for the way the residents think about and formulate forms of resistance, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

While the B-Mors refer to themselves and each other as “citizens,” then, the meaning of this word has lost all political force as it becomes clear that B-Mor is being managed by an administration that has rejected the assimilative tactics of bourgeois nationalism to pursue instead policies of security, welfare, and the protection of populations through various technologies that remain unconcerned with the active participation by citizens in the sovereignty of the state. As the category of citizen, its social reproduction, and any notions of consent have thus become irrelevant and marginal to the governance of populations in these facility settlements, the B-Mor inhabitants’ self-description of themselves as “citizen” can be understood to refer merely to their status as the inhabitants of a city. As a transplanted labor force protected from utter prostration only as far as they continue to produce desirable commodities for the Charters, the B-Mor residents can be read as “giving human shape to the abstract circuits of capitalism” and “personif[ying] abstract processes of value formation anchored by labor” through the trope of “economic efficiency associated with Asian racialization” (Day 8). Yet, I

want to complicate such a reading by attending to the violent conditions of emergence of this imported labor force that resulted in the forced displacement and relocation of “descendants of nineteenth-century African slaves and twentieth-century laborers from Central America and even bands of twenty-first-century urban-nostalgics” (19) who previously inhabited Baltimore.

The novel opens from B-Mor with the declaration that “it is known where we come from, but no one much cares about things like that anymore. We think, Why bother? Except for a lucky few, everyone is from someplace, but that someplace, it turns out, is gone” (1)—this professed indifference to an “origin story” is actively cultivated because it ensures that they are guided only by the “doctrine” of optimization (147). However, attending to where they come from proves revealing: the inhabitants’ predecessors were forced to leave Xixu City, a small riverside town in New China, because it had been “made uninhabitable by the surrounding farms and factories and power plants and mining operations, the water fouled beyond all known methods of treatment” (17). In direct contrast to the comparatively “fresh and clear” air and “entranc[ing]” deep harbor waters of Baltimore that the originals find upon their landing, Xixu and “everything in it were slowly scorching, all the rotting food and garbage, the welling pools of human and animal wastes” (17). Here, the disposability of the residents of Xixu is highlighted by their close proximity to commercial hazardous waste facilities and industries that engage in a ceaseless extraction of natural resources through the most expedient means and take for granted the slow poisoning of local ecologies that produces a population at the brink of death: “it was as though the people themselves were burning, as if from the inside, exuding this rank, throttled breath that foretold of a tortuous, lingering demise” (17). It is this population living at the margins, destined for slow, painful death, that becomes mobilized, dispersed, and instrumentalized into a new

configuration of economic and social formation serviceable to capital. The relocation of Xixu residents to the US, then, and the labor they provide for the settlement, cannot be read outside of the context of histories of violent resource extraction and uneven development in Asia reorganized as the basis for a new world order.

Sitting uneasily alongside such histories is Uncle Kellen's reminders that "that there were, in fact, numerous existing businesses when the originals arrived, businesses run by the smattering of natives who had stayed on, whose deeds and leases to their properties were unilaterally voided and reassigned to the (then nascent) directorate" (70). While the "natives" city had been an "impoverished husk of a society...barely clinging to life," Kellen notes that they were "still stubbornly doing so, and might have improved itself if given the opportunity our originals had to retool and create" something of their own (70). Instead, the eviction and relocation of the Black and brown "native residents" took place both by force in operations that, in at least one case, resulted in the deaths of "dozens of people including children" (71) and through the cutting off of city services and public utilities rechanneled to the imported New China labor force. The remaining original residents were then forced into a large city park, where they sprouted a tent city and attempted to grow food without the help of the ideally engineered grow facilities accessed by the imported laborers, until they were completely pushed out to the open counties. Here, we see that economic exploitation and the production/extraction of surplus value through economic compulsion and labor management that characterize B-Mor inhabitants' relationship to capital cannot be structurally separated from direct domination and extraeconomic processes of violent and coercive intervention/appropriation leveraged against the "native citizens." The establishment of a hyper-efficient and disciplined New China labor force—which clearly signals familiar US narratives of the model minority myth and understandings of racial

difference that have consistently pitted Asian bodies against other populations of color—is thus achieved and enabled only through tactics of occupation, containment, internment, and displacement that array whole populations as disposable and render them fully susceptible to a violent death at the margins. Here, people redundant to capitalist production become quantities of waste matter to be either repurposed or discarded. It is also this calculated management of waste (corralling one declining population as an efficient and docile labor source while expediting the death of another) that brings the “then nascent” directorate (and its doctrine of optimization) to its full power. In taking up these processes together, then, we can begin to attend to multiple modes of disposability—to tactics of both exploitation and expropriation—that violently and flexibly distinguish between those with the capacity to yield value as exploitable living labor and those who yield value as expendable, eliminable existence.

While it seems all peace has been restored in the years since the “native citizens” removal, a chain reaction erupts when Fan, one of the B-Mor residents, voluntarily leaves the settlement to journey across open counties and Charter villages in search of Reg, the father of her unborn child, who has been removed from the settlement without explanation because somehow, miraculously, his annual blood panels never show any known markers of the degenerative Crash disease despite the fact that “eventually everyone will express it” (65). Crucially, the C-crash virus secures a generalized and inevitable precarity that affects everyone regardless of social status—though, of course, Charters have more access to resources and treatment that can extend their life. Above all else, Charters are preoccupied with and fixated on their health. Anything that threatens their futurity is immediately removed. When a small percentage of Charters becomes infected and dies from a sickness passed by their pets, for instance, all pets and animals in the affected villages were ordered destroyed while every Charter village in the country banned all

animals indefinitely. Throughout the novel, there is a ceaseless search on the part of the Charters and directorates to invest in their limited futurity by researching and gambling on new treatments that may or may not pay off. Such treatments are sold at hourly auctions to the highest bidder (274), while an anti-rejection drug that is just 60 percent efficacious in year-long trials sets off a “frenzied auction for [the] patent” by all three major pharmacorps (275). Upon discovering that Reg is C-free, the directorates immediately remove him from B-Mor and begin a series of tests and surveys to mine data from him that can be repackaged and reconstituted into a purchasable treatment package: “a troupe of physicians monitors him from behind a glassed booth, debating the interplay of his genetic panel, his blood and hormone levels, even his posture and demeanor, trying to unlock the secret of his constitution” (102). Their relentless study of Reg yields more data-gathering initiatives: “Almost immediately public health surveys were ordered...near countless other mandatory surveys were developed and distributed, testing hypotheses about various vegetables, grains, sweeteners, salts, et cetera, until there was almost nothing left to be examined” (103). Of note here is the fact that Reg is of mixed race—part New China descendant and part native. It is perhaps this racial makeup that has secured his C-free status and granted him exceptional health—a point to which I will return later in the chapter.

### **From Disposability to Resistance**

*On Such a Full Sea* thus stages a collision of historical moments in which regimes of racialized labor and discipline clash against different models of extraction and speculation. Given these multiple, sometimes contradictory modes of disposability that proliferate in this novel, what exactly does resistance look like? How much efficacy do tactics such as forging racial solidarity, resisting assimilation, demanding redress and recognition, and seeking

alternative subject-formations hold? In introducing these questions of resistance, this section seeks to ask what falls out of analyses that theorize racialization primarily through the lens of immigration, labor, and civic disqualification.

Fan's choice to leave B-Mor and the promise of security, constancy, and protection it supposedly offers disrupts the daily routine of its inhabitants and forces them to reckon with the fact that the settlement's constant cultivation, production, and consumption of so-called stability is only an illusory project that seeks to obfuscate their utter disposability and expendability as laborers who exist solely to fulfill the particular needs and demands of elite Charters. This disposability becomes all too clear when, during their interrogation of Reg, the Charters discover he has never consumed the fish produced in B-Mor—"their single most prized product...which not even every Charter could afford to have daily" (103). In the ensuing flurry to discover any correlation between levels of fish consumption and every form of the C-disease, the demand for B-Mor's fish suddenly plummets. This precipitous decline in sales becomes "the most serious challenge to B-Mor since the originals first landed. An existential threat" (104). Despite the fact that the B-Mor settlement (and the generations of inhabitants that have lived in them) exists purely to ensure that Charters can consume healthy, clean produce cultivated through pre-approved facilities owned by Charter investors, there is nothing preventing Charters from simply walking away from these facilities if they deem that the settlement and its products are a liability. As there is always a perpetual surfeit of disposable labor, there is no telling what might happen to the B-Mor residents in the face of complete abandonment: "We could perhaps feed ourselves but what of our housing, our power and water, our schools and training centers and most especially our clinics? How could we assure our communal well-being? The truth is that we could not" (104). As such, it becomes clear that the New China descents of B-Mor are nothing

more than “monetized aggregates of disposable life” (Tadiar 26) that serve as both a flexible, readily eliminable labor force and as securitized assets/risk-absorbing collateral for directorate and Charter enterprises that bears the brunt of the fallout of any and all speculative endeavors. (On a smaller scale, this dynamic is reproduced when Liwei, a Charter blood C-specialist, attempts to sell Fan and her potentially disease-free unborn child to the pharmacorp in exchange for their final purchase of his antirejection drugs, which would save him from bankruptcy.)

This existential threat to B-Mor, combined with the shock of Fan’s departure, becomes the catalyst for visible forms of resistance and opposition that take a variety of shapes and forms. First come the serial suicides: the narrator notes, “the fish were developing their own taste for ‘B-Mor prime,’ for the truth of the matter is that there has been a noticeable rise in the number of people choosing to do away with themselves, and then selecting the park ponds for the site of their demise” (187). These staged and public suicides are especially disturbing given that the facility settlement is meant to offer the B-Mors some measure of protection against the death and destruction they would face in the open counties. The suicides are followed by other spectacularized forms of resistance: outbreaks of vandalism, the trashing of public fountains and parks, impromptu public protest that occur suddenly and disperse just as quickly, and “the rash of the newest graffiti, spray-or-hand or hand-painted with what must be a widely distributed stencil. ‘FREE REG’...The sentiment is being duplicated, in most every hue, with both the faint smudge of haste and the meticulous intricacy of design, which unnerves. It’s gone wide” (240). At the center of it all is the ongoing heroification of Reg and Fan—they become the symbols of resistance in part because the B-Mors believe Reg’s C-free status, hopefully carried in Fan’s unborn child, can remove the threat of the Crash disease (thus eliminating the condition of generalized precarity and vulnerability and perhaps opening up the possibility of a fundamentally

different restructuring of the world) and, insodoing, carry “the one promise that could deliver us, the seed of all our futures, Charters’ and B-Mors’ and even of the shunned souls out in the counties” (104).

These public, visible, spectacularized forms of protest are, above all, a clear performance of dissent that respond to changing conditions of life in the facility settlement. In observing the “ongoing shift reductions at the facilities; of ever-increasingly class sizes at the schools; of a spate of postponed overseas retiree tours, with no further word of rescheduling,” the B-Mors give exhortations to one another “to bring about change” and feel hope in the “very practice of our talk that warms enough” (241) even as they begin to wonder “what happens when there are no more songs and postings about Reg or Fan, when all there is remaining are weather-faded portraits and scribbles on the walls?” (295). Yet, such acts fail to produce directionality because it is never quite clear who they should even be directing their protest toward, or what kind of political imaginary they could generate, given the impossibility of identifying a tangible organizing agent or addressing those administrative units that manage their population. Indeed, the B-Mor residents themselves note, “Yes, we are figuring out our conduct—the demonstrations, the speeches, the murals, even the improvisational work slowdowns by the more daring teams—but none of that retrofits or instructs us on how to think about what we believe in and why. For what are we aiming for, in the end? To be more like Charters?...The more we modify longstanding assumptions and practices of B-Mor, the more we can’t help but worry that rather than evolving our corpus we’re in fact undermining it” (309). This lack of directionality—and the ease and efficiency with which the directorates ultimately resolve such moments of unrest by making flexible tactical adjustments—suggests that these modes of resistance, which

have historically addressed and depended on a form of national sovereignty that is expected to fulfill or at least acknowledge the demands being made, are no longer operational.

Here, tactics of resistance that have historically performed dissent in an attempt to delegitimize a so-called representative state remain ineffective precisely because the directorates that manage the settlements have never claimed or even feigned an interest in acting in the collective interest of a national body politic. Instead of serving as the proxy of a sovereign national people, the directorates operate as a managerial power whose primary purpose is to secure the concentration of capital, resources, and health to a fraction of the elite Charters. In *On Such a Full Sea*, the B-Mor residents' participation in this existing system of production and exchange are synonymous with survival, especially given that these settlements are very restricted while there is always a surfeit of reserve labor force—meaning that populations actually have to compete for the relative privilege of their exploitation. Given that there are always more disposable workers than there is room in the facility settlements, the directorates do not need to devote themselves to the task of disciplining and appeasing a labor force. As such, there is no need for the ideological reproduction of a formally equal, inclusive reality that seeks to efface contradiction and console and compensate its subjects. The question of interpellation, representation, and ideological reproduction are completely irrelevant and unnecessary when the only alternative is to face complete banishment and almost certain death in the open counties.

Indeed, it is difficult for the B-Mors to pinpoint exactly what their program of resistance should look like or even what their end goal might be precisely because there is no clear ideological critique to be made: there has been no attempt or even desire on the part of the directorates to conscript them into a reigning world view and bind them into a narrative of collective self-realization by producing a comprehensible, common, abiding reality. There are no

grounds to be gained in undermining the metric of optimization because it is an empty, content-less, decontextualized, and ultimately meaningless phrase as opposed to the anchoring assumptions of a specific hegemonic political position. What, then, should the terrain of protest and resistance look like when the need for an incorporative political project that masks material inequalities by producing formally equal self-proprietors has all but disappeared? If political power “no longer presents as a capacity to norm public sentiment, to bind the popular masses both broadly and deeply to a certain vision of the world and to specific forms and spheres of self-expression that will—supposedly—secure their place within it” and instead operates “by decomposing the social body and permitting us to dwell in whatever (un)realities of our own devising” (Cherniavsky 153), what might practices of opposition and resistance look like? What happens to the agency of the citizen-protester in a world where a society of discipline that operates through the institutionalization of norms, as well as through projects of ideological production that seek to interpellate citizens into a shared and collective domain of civic reason, are seen as beside the point?

The directorates’ response to these protests (increasing the number of permitted health clinic visits and the qualification for Charter promotion to 2 percent; offering better pricing for the produce and fish that the B-Mor residents themselves produce so they can occasionally afford the fruits of their own labor; implementing programs like “Keep It Up” that employ small armies of retired and unemployed folks to clean up the settlement) quickly restore the residents’ spirits and their compliance is quickly restored. All of which begs us to ask: in the context of a corporate power, where organizing tactics such as building racial solidarity, resisting assimilation, seeking alternative subject-formations and collectivities, demanding redress from the state, collectively withholding labor, and imagining/designing projects for the self-

determination of the dispossessed no longer seem to yield political efficacy, what shape does resistance take?

Here, the novel raises an interesting question of how to think about racialized political subjectivity in a world where the nation-state is not the referent and struggles around inclusion/exclusion don't make sense as a framework. In *B-Mor*, racial solidarity as a mode of organizing is ineffective because of the fact that all its residents are of New Chinese blood. The cultivation of a racially homogenous labor force is very much an intentional decision: Lee notes that the New China laborers "were brought in en masse for a strict purpose but with their work- and family-centric culture intact, such that they would not only endure and eventually profit the seed investors but also prosper in a manner that would be perpetually regenerative" (19). While some facilities experimented with bringing in groups from Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines, this practice was quickly abandoned because there was trouble integrating them with the existing New China clans and neighborhoods. Here, racial/ethnic difference is mobilized specifically to enable a thorough-going exploitation of existing cultural structures and kinship networks. New China residents are particularly identified as the ideal labor force by reason of their race and culture—hence the expulsion of the natives. Capitalism, then, is still absolutely differentiating labor along racial lines. What isn't clear, however, is what this mobilization of racial difference does to possibilities of resistance. In this racially homogenous company town, there is no racial solidarity to forge and no national collectivity that the residents can assimilate into.

While the *B-Mors'* insistence on a "We" can be read as attempts to produce some kind of alternative collectivity, it is never entirely clear to whom the "we" refers. The novel, for instance, is narrated from the perspective of an unspecified "we" that leaves the reader to wonder who is

speaking: is it an individual speaking for a collective, an actual plural collective subject, an imagined narrator, or a something else? Interestingly, the “we” of B-Mor emerges through claiming Fan as “ours”: “And what of our Fan? She is one of the ranks, this perfectly ordinary, exquisitely tiny person in whom we will reside, via both living and dreaming” (198). Here, the use of “our” reminds us of Benedict Anderson’s argument that the novel “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation” (25). This imagined community of the nation is produced through a solitary figure moving through calendrical time in a familiar landscape who, in one of the examples Anderson cites, is “frequently referred to as ‘our young man’” (32). The “unselfconscious ‘sincerity’ of this pronominal adjective” creates no doubts: “Neither [the author] nor his readers have any doubts about the reference...Marco’s ‘our young man’...*means* a young man who belongs to the collective body of readers of *Indonesian*, and thus, implicitly, an embryonic Indonesian ‘imagined community’...Marco feels no need to specify this community by name: it is already there” (32). Here, the possessive pronoun used in relation to the novel’s main character is clearly a *national* “we.”

In the absence of a clearly identifiable nation-state and its modern political institutions, however, the “we” seems to serve an entirely different function. Throughout the novel, we have access not to Fan’s own voice but rather, to Fan’s imagined consciousness fabricated by an indeterminate, collective “we” that pieces together various stories, rumors, and speculations to “observ[e] more of her than she’ll ever know” (255). Here, the imagined alternative collective of the B-Mor is produced through the narration and heroification of “our” Fan that engenders various improvisations of resistance within the facility. It is clear that the “we” speaks for a social entity that has certain kinds of aspirations—even if the referent remains slippery and the subject unclear. The attempt to seek alternative subject formations remains de-referentialized and

opaque, just as the kind of protests the “we” undertake remain unclear: both the subject and the insurgency are difficult to identify and categorize. Yet, it is through the speculative fabrication of Fan’s consciousness that a “we” emerges to mobilize in ways previously unheard of in the facility town.

Where, then, do “we” locate resistance in a world where “to be inaccessible, or unattractive, to capital is to lack futurity, to await one’s own extinction” (Cherniavsky 41) and to whom can resistance be directed? What kind of political imaginary does it hope to generate? It is not readily apparent how we can address racialized populations mobilized by an administration that operates entirely in service of capital or what we should even hope to accomplish; thus, the question of resistance is by no means a simple one. While the B-Mors do not exactly engage in conventional modes of protest such as collectively withholding labor (given that a work stoppage will mean the facility will shut down and they will be disposed of in the counties), they constitute *a* form of uprising in a world where it’s unclear what an actual political insurgency can look like. Even though this collective and their modes of organizing are not legible as political subject and protest in the terms that we are used to, it is clear that they are nonetheless consciously producing something.

As such, the novel asks what self-determination would look like when it becomes the only terrain of struggle we have recourse to in the absence of political institutions. In B-Mor, it is only in the domain of the subject—through projects of self-fashioning and self-making that are clearly (if not conventionally) political—that any kind of protest can occur given that a distinct political terrain cannot be located. At the same time, such barely legible, improper political subjects come into view only when we look beyond the language of national belonging, ideology, and normative political culture. In order to attend to the contextual dynamics of new

configurations of power that exploits and legitimates the deaths of differentially valued and raced bodies, then, it becomes clear that we need to rethink any lingering assumptions that susceptibility to and protection from absolute exploitation, disposability, and vulnerability are determined by the extent to which our differences have been incorporated and assimilated into the national body politic and normative subjecthood through racialized belonging.

What is especially important to the discussion of resistance is the fact that, in the novel, the alternative to being so thoroughly instrumentalized by capital in the facility settlements is complete abandonment in the open counties. The open counties are a necropolitical space filled with corpses, bones, and death characterized by a total suspension of civility and state of constant precarity that reigns for all those who live there. Most are unable to survive their first night in this space. It is here that Fan first meets Quig, a former Charter vet who was banished for engaging in an illegal drug trade after his source of livelihood—pets—was banned from all Charter villages. Due to his medical training, he is better off than many of the other open counties residents and manages to scrape together both a living and the companionship of small knot of people who remain loyal to him. The lines to see Quig stretch endlessly and “sometimes people died before they could be seen by Quig, literally collapsing while waiting, and...if they had come alone it was Sewey’s job to go through their clothes for anything of value before summoning certain of Quig’s men to haul the body away” (60). The lack of resources or protection for those in the open counties is emphasized by the fact that even Quig, an ex-Charter who seems to have more options than the other abject residents due to his education and training, is constantly vulnerable to death. While traveling with Quig, whom she meets after he runs her over with a car, Fan encounters a seemingly pleasant family of acrobatic cannibals whose backyard is a literal graveyard overflowing with bones: “A smell that was faint but squarely

awful now rose...like something rotting and drying up rather than foaming and fetid. It was then she was drawn to something bright in the weeds. It was a bone, long and pitted and bleached white from the sun, scarred and gouged down its length by chew marks...she realized that she was standing in a veritable field of bones, most of them tiny and broken, like bits of branch or stone” (152). This near-death encounter (which would have certainly been the end of Quig if it hadn’t been for Fan’s quick thinking) reminds us again that the one form of stability we can find in the open counties is the close proximity to death for all.

Significantly, the open counties are the one space in the world of *On Such a Full Sea* that is characterized by a visible and complete lack of any sort of managerial regulations (no directorates, no surveillance cameras recording one’s every move). This abandonment is seen by some as potentially liberating: as the cannibal family tells Fan, “We choose to live as simply as we can, as sustainably as we can...We feel liberated but we’re not afraid because of our liberty, as most people out here are compelled to be. And we are as free as anyone in a charter or where you used to live. Maybe more” (153). Here, the desire to read the cannibal family, the few B-Mors who voluntarily choose to leave the facility settlement and are never heard from again (Uncle Keller being a notable example), and the open counties as an alternative space of possibility from which new kinds of political subjects and potentials for resistance can be carved out is very strong. Yet, I want to refrain from this kind of analysis and question instead the implications of our impulse to read “forms of bare life, at-risk populations, warehoused, disposable people, urban excess (planet of the slums)” for what value they might generate for the critic—to engage in what is ultimately another mode of extraction by viewing them as transparently knowable figures of abjection that can be converted to the “ruling political currencies of the day” (Tadiar 24).

Ultimately, Lee's speculative novel seems to offer us an exaggerated fiction of our current moment and a hyperbolic projection of our future. The open chapters can perhaps be read as a recognizable extension of our present current political moment in which economic precarity has been (albeit unevenly) generalized: the white middle and working classes are now also in crisis as deindustrialization has resulted in the disappearance of the high-paying manufacturing positions, increased job insecurity, and the loss of benefits and job protections (Harvey). The privatization of economic enterprises, state functions and social services (including health care, public education, and the penal system), and social costs—along with the dismantlement of the welfare state and a business activism that successfully attacked the politics of prosperity and downward redistribution with a counterpolitics of scarcity, personal responsibility, and competition for resources (Duggan)—have resulted in a reduction of the social safety net and the transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich to leave larger and larger segments of the population exposed to impoverishment (Harvey). Such a transference has restored power to a narrowly defined capitalist class and produced immense concentrations of corporate power managed by an increasingly minute fraction of the global population who hold most of the world's resources. The state's active facilitation of the removal of any restraints on capital accumulation by dispossession, as well as its growing indifference to satisfying most of its sectors, has left most of its citizenry resentful now that only the select few—the privileged economic elites rather than the nation as integrated whole—receive a major portion of benefits from the various functions it performs (Miyoshi). The ascendance of a fully predatory capitalism fully freed from the requirement to profit societies (Cherniavsky) has been accompanied by what Jackie Wang calls “the generalization of expropriability as a condition in the face of an accumulation crisis” or, in other words, “immiseration for all” in which “methods of accumulation that were once reserved

exclusively for racialized subjects bleed over and are used on those with privileged status markings” (125).

Crucially, this (uneven) generalization of precarity and vulnerability raises some important questions about the role race plays in contexts outside of popular sovereignty and the nation-state synthesis. What are the implications of the wages of whiteness failing to hold in the ways they once did? Given capital’s retraction of protections formerly extended to large segments of the white middle and working classes, how do we make sense of race and its relationship to disposability? How do we think about race and labor in a context where the nation-state has been supplanted by corporate capital? As previously discussed, Comaroff has argued that labor has historically been seen as “the primary constituter of the social world”: work becomes “the defining attribute of species being: of the capacity to transcend nature, acquire property, make history, reach for the gods...Liberal and Marxist thinkers too, even while seeing labor as utilitarian, remunerated activity, tend to also invest it with dignifying, emancipatory potential” (5). Much of the ways in which we think about personhood has historically been organized by our capacity for labor. And within Asian American studies, our understanding of race has tended to be routed through discussions of labor exploitation. What happens to those understandings when labor becomes undone by the historical conditions under which it has evolved?

In a world such as Lee’s where there is no longer the need for a cultivated national imaginary or people, what is the enduring political force of race and racial difference? Lee’s treatment of race in his latest novel is significantly different from that in his first, in which he conceives of racial difference as something that needs to be incorporated and assimilated into the nation (no matter how limitedly) before even the possibility of racialized belonging can be

attained. *On Such a Full Sea* clearly challenges this earlier iteration by questioning the efficacy of national paradigms of racialized (un)belonging and incorporation/exclusion for understanding who is rendered precarious in our present moment. If, historically, race has operated by differentiating the lives that matter from the lives that don't—if it has secured the distinction between those who are protected from exploitation and instrumentalization and those who are susceptible—what happens when dispossession becomes the generalized condition of existence such that employment that is exploitative and orchestrated around racial lines actually becomes a form of privilege? What happens when the distinction between the self-regulating possessive individual/subject and prostrate, abject (non)subject is no longer so clearly secured by racialized difference in the same ways? What is the alternative to imagining racialized social life as being constituted through processes of interpellation, belonging, and social exclusion that operate at the level of the (national) subject? These questions have profound implications for the ways we think about resistance in our present moment.

On the one hand, it is clear what the wrong kind of reading entails: to claim, for instance, that militarized corporate capital's lack of interest in creating national subjects has rendered the category of race irrelevant now that race no longer seems to determine one's qualifications for citizenship or the possibility of entry and inclusion into the national body. Such a reading would assume the displacement of the national imaginary has secured the displacement of the racial imaginary. Indeed, the lack of anxieties about miscegenation in this novel seems to lend itself to such an interpretation—no one at B-Mor seems to care that Reg, who is of mixed race, is the father of Fan's unborn baby—given Balibar's argument that the question of reproduction is always the question of how communities are drawn. Lee's treatment of miscegenation in this novel is in stark contrast to that in his first: in *Native Speaker*, Mitt—the product of Henry's

union with a white woman—dies when he is still a child and becomes one more reminder of the impossibility of Henry fully assimilating into a (white) national body. Also worth noting is the fact that the elite, managerial class of Charters is made up of “various races and ethnicities” (163). As such, the novel may seem to lend itself to a reading that argues race no longer matters as what was once the condition of raced embodiment has become the general and universal condition of all bodies under capital.

Yet, the novel makes abundantly clear the ongoing salience of race and racial difference. It is worth noting, for instance, that Reg’s mixed-race status (as half Asian and half Black) renders not just his labor but his body fully commodifiable—as something to poke, prod, monitor, and harvest that Big Pharma can cash in as profit. Reg is characterized by his abundant bioavailability: confined in laboratories under the careful supervision of the directorates, he remains completely susceptible to having his tissues and organs biopsied and seized (reminding us of the case of Henrietta Lacks). Here, then, race operates to signal the degree to which one’s organic body, cells, and tissues become available for the generation of surplus value and management of health. Similarly, it is Fan’s racialization as an Asian woman that renders her susceptible to being kidnapped, imprisoned, and sold: Quig barter her into sexual servitude to Mister Leo, a wealthy Charter man; his wife, after incapacitating him, holds Fan captive in her “very own little spot,” “our special place” (207); and Liwei, facing impending bankruptcy, attempts to sell her to the pharmacorp. Even the acrobatic cannibal family tries to keep Fan with them: “For you could easily imagine her integration into the group, an unlikely addition that would give their show a most memorable punctuation of shape and color” (148). It is hard to imagine that the other characters’ perception of Fan as a desirable commodity that can be

bartered, sold, manipulated, exploited, and fully instrumentalized is unconnected to her status as “*little new China bitch*” (as one open counties resident calls her (154)).

Indeed, the very existence of B-Mor depends absolutely on legacies of uneven development and the differential incorporation of so-called “underdeveloped” sectors into a globalized economy, as well as historically specific forms of spatial mapping and world-making that were predicated upon racial domination and absolute exploitation. The new China descendants’ close proximity to pollution, toxins, hazardous waste, and death in Xixu City, as well as their availability for reconfiguration by capital into a fully exploitable and disposable yet relatively privileged labor force confined to the facility settlements, is secured by longer histories of violent resource extraction and waste dumping in Asia (China having long served as the dumping ground and “wastebasket” for US trash). On the other hand, the forcible displacement of the original Black and brown residents of Baltimore and their complete abandonment to violent, premature death is made possible by a history of “racialized moral economy” that underlies the conception of risk to make an “a priori association of Blackness with risk” (Wang 149) and mark certain populations as suitable for expropriation. That is, the condition of possibility for a world in which susceptibility to being prostrated and discarded by capital are increasingly (and unevenly) generalized is found in histories of racial expropriation, terror, violence, and abandonment to the settler-colonial basis of western and post-western capitalisms. As such, it is clear that we cannot proclaim the irrelevance of race or imagine a new set of race relations simply replaces another.

The question remains, then—how do we read race? *On Such a Full Sea* is, ultimately, not a novel that is interested in offering narrative closure in any sense. We are left wondering what happened to Fan after she narrowly escapes being sold to the pharmacorps: “So perhaps you

went north, where people wouldn't think to look, or south for a winter's warmth, or maybe westward, that ready route, drawing you forth to reach another sea. But sometimes, we're sure, you're much closer than we know, waiting out word of Reg in some modest but nice place....Don't hurry, Fan. Stay put for now. We'll find a way. You need not come back for us" (352). This confounding and abrupt ending offers no solutions, no point of arrival, no end in sight. What remains are the questions it pushes us to consider: how do we theorize race in our present moment in a way that acknowledges and builds upon, but also interrupts, previous historical modes of reading race? How do we engage in a layering of histories that allows us to track the movement of racialized populations in and across different spaces and temporalities alongside shifts in the racial and spatial imaginary? How does race signal heightened or lowered visibility to risk, precarity, and susceptibility to the totalizing extent to which certain bodies remain accessible and disposable to capital? And what does the project of reconstructing race's specific relationship to the state and capital look like in such a world as this?

In our present political moment, it is abundantly clear that struggles around inclusion and exclusion continue to persist: escalating violence that occurs around the policing of borders as national boundaries, as well as the resurgence of nationalist rhetoric, make it impossible to claim that categories of belonging and unbelonging are eroding. However, the novel makes it possible for us to see that when we focus *exclusively* on race in the register of the nation, we miss other dimensions where race plays out in relation to disposability and precarity differently. Nor is it an either/or proposition—it is *not* that race no longer plays out in terms of modern struggles around belonging and unbelonging, but rather, that we are at a moment where different regimes of race are actually co-existing and colliding across different spaces and temporalities.

*On Such a Full Sea* imagines a system whereby capital absolutely continues to mobilize racial difference to its own ends through the importation of a New Chinese labor force that reproduces itself according to the specific set of cultural norms to which it is attached. As such, it is a *continuation* of a line of thinking that understands the relationship between race and capital through the analytic of racialized labor exploitation. What is different is that here, the position of being an exploited laborer has now become the position of a certain kind of precarious privilege. Similarly, the B-Mor residents' efforts to produce a structure of belonging—a nebulous, opaque “We” of some kind—in an attempt to secure an alternative collectivity and self-determination makes it clear questions of belonging are not irrelevant but remain central to projects of uprising in a context where it's unclear what an actual political insurgency would look like. An analysis that only inhabits one particular temporality rather than attending to the shifts across these different temporalities, then, is missing these other dimensions. Ultimately, *On Such a Full Sea* thus opens up space for us to speculate on new kinds of questions for thinking out our contemporary political life that complicate and push beyond the theoretical paradigms, analytics, and categories of critical analysis with which we are more familiar.

## Chapter Three

## Disposable Bachelors, Racialized Zombies:

Dispossession and Militarized Speculation in the Chinatown of *Bone* and *Zone One*

“Looking out, I thought, So this is what Chinatown looks like from inside those dark Greyhound buses; this slow view, these strange color combinations, these narrow streets, this is what tourists come to see. I felt a small lightening up inside, because I knew, no matter what people saw, no matter how close they looked, our inside story is something entirely different.”

Fae Myenne Ng, *Bone*

“It wasn’t the Chinatown of old, but in the corners of his perception the pixels resolved themselves and reduced to zero the distance between Old Chinatown and New Chinatown. The crooked streets had been cleared to give the military vehicles access and soldiers walked slowly on their rounds, making jokes, cracking wise over a shop sign’s mangled English...”

Colson Whitehead, *Zone One*

In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson argues that the interpretation of history in terms of the dialectical of capitalist class struggle is inadequate because it assigns slave labor to a pre-capitalist stage of history and fails to expose the racist order that contaminates its analytic/philosophic application. He shows us that slavery was systemic and central to modern systems of capitalism, profoundly shaping the social structures and political institutions of US society. He refutes the notion that the European proletariat constitutes the revolutionary subject of history and points to the generative possibilities of a Black radical tradition that offers critiques of the capitalist world system from the peripheries. For Robinson, then, racial capitalism as a concept is used to offer a specific historical argument grounded in an analysis of slavery.

Since its publication, Robinson’s arguments and use of “racial capitalism” have been taken up in many ways across the left humanities in the US, in part to designate the broader

argument that capitalism and racialization are historically inextricable processes, track the afterlives of slavery, and argue that racial violence has always been an ongoing, continuous project. While generative and productive, such accounts are sometimes migrated or universalized in ways that might perhaps foreclose the possibility of thinking about what specific, evolving forms of racial capitalism might look like. This dissertation asks what it means to theorize racial capitalism in the present moment when we are contending with new strategies of accumulation that build upon, but don't necessarily work in, historically recognizable ways.

Recent scholarship on finance and speculative capital has described the current stage of late capitalism as having the “epoch-making capability” to “securitize just about everything in an economy”—including the “debts and assets of firms, households, and governments regardless of geopolitics, sovereign authority, legal system, state-economy relation, or economic sector”—and, in doing so, subject economies and governments to its own criteria for measuring success” (Sassen 118-9). Tadiar has argued that a crucial phenomenal shift and condition of neoliberalist financialization is the violent “surplusing” of populations into “monetized aggregates of disposable life” that serve as both a flexible, readily eliminable labor force and as securitized assets/risk-absorbing collateral for state and state-allied enterprises that bears the brunt of the fallout of any and all speculative endeavors (26). In observing that “the great agglomerations of wealth seem to be increasingly related to finance rather than production,” Foster argues “the role of the capitalist state was transformed to meet the new imperatives of financialization” (6-7).

As many scholars of racial capitalism have successfully argued, capitalism always exploits race and race is always produced as a site of capitalist exploitation. However, what is not necessarily fixed is *how* exactly capital exploits race across different historical moments and contexts, and what implications this has for the way we theorize resistance. Arguably, a

dominant approach to parsing racial capitalism within Asian American studies has been to read race as the pretext and legitimating fiction for a nationalist project that produces distinctions between subjects protected by and from the state versus exploitable nonsubjects in need of some sort of intervention. Scholars such as Grace Cho (2008), Jodi Kim (2010), Eric Tang (2015), and Christine Hong (2013) have pushed this model further, emphasizing as well how the US sought to enact plunder in Asia through the extraction of natural resources, forcible acquisition and opening up of new markets, seizure of land through military occupation, and development of the US military-industrial complex. Here, war waged in service of nationalist capital secures imperial ambitions, eliminates competition through the systematic targeting and destruction of all means of subsistence and life-sustaining infrastructure, and produces massive refugee crises that create cheap labor pools—thus enabling a process of capital accumulation by cultivating a population of low-wage, non-rights-bearing Asian workers through a variety of exclusionary state practices and policies. Ultimately, I want to ask how our present moment might complicate this more familiar constellation of ways in which race, labor, capital, and war have been thought together. Rather than deploying racial capitalism as an endpoint and assuming the present can be explained by locating and referring to the origin, I want to take up this generative concept as a starting point to ask how we might think about multiple sites, modalities, and historical moments of accumulation.

Rather than seeking to offer a paradigm for racial capitalism everywhere, this dissertation is interested in producing a specific version that is rooted in my attempts to track the collusion of state/military/private capital and speculation. In this chapter, I read Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993) and Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011), two starkly different novels twenty years apart that both choose US Chinatowns as their setting. Within (Asian) American critique, Chinatowns

have long been read as the site for explicating the US's history of racialized labor exploitation. Indeed, the calculated indifference with which the US recruits and disposes of Asian immigrant labor is a central theme in *Bone*. In many ways, this novel exemplifies a central paradigm for thinking race and capital together in the context of Asian racialization that relies on analytics of labor extraction and (un)belonging. While this mode of extraction persists to the present moment, I want to suggest that it does not in and of itself tell us the whole story. In *Zone One*, Chinatown takes on an entirely different significance as the base for civilian militias seeking to reclaim a city that has been overrun by zombies. In pairing these two unlikely novels together, I am interested in how this historical space becomes transformed—and what new questions arise—when we read for different analytics than that of immigration, racial belonging, and labor extraction. Ultimately, I pair these two novels together to ask how we might make sense of shifting regimes of accumulation without suggesting one system simply replaces another.

As such, the structure of this chapter parallels the preceding one, which explores the arc of Chang-rae Lee's literary career through an analysis of his first (1995) and latest (2014) novel. This repeating structure was largely unplanned. While I didn't initially plan on organizing my arguments in this way, I find it noteworthy that this structure has repeated itself in my attempts to think about shifting forms of racial capitalism. This poses an interesting question about periodizing, as well as how an analysis of political economy maps onto literary history. Reading classic Asian American novels *Bone* and *Native Speaker* alongside the speculative texts *Zone One* and *On Such a Full Sea* suggests an interesting temporal distinction between how racial capitalism might have been pronounced and read in the 90s versus the present moment.

**Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone***

In *Inhuman Citizenship*, Juliana Chang writes that “Chinese American history is conventionally narrated in terms of domesticity, as trajectory from ‘bachelor’ to ‘family’ sociality” (39). The shift from Chinese bachelor societies—deemed deviant, pathological, and foreign—to heteronormativity and domesticity is commonly read as a progress narrative that secures Asian assimilation into US modernity and nationhood as a “good” subject. As scholars such as Bill Ong Hing, Mae Ngai, and Nayan Shah have shown, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century US migration laws (including the 1875 Page Law and 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act) established racial bars to citizenship and constructed Chinese bachelor societies by prohibiting the entry of Chinese women. In doing so, the US was able to produce a cheap, exploitable, and easily manageable labor force while allaying fears about any unwanted contamination of the white national body. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the US repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act and began allowing family reunification in a bid to secure political allies in World War II, win the ideological Cold War, and secure its status as global hegemon. The entry of Chinese women previously barred enabled the establishment of Chinese American families seen as key to achieving national belonging.

Yet, Fae Myenne Ng’s *Bone* seeks to unravel this narrative through the portrayal of a multiply fractured Chinese immigrant family reeling in grief after one of the three daughters commits suicide. Leon is a paper son with a suitcase full of rejection letters—rejection for housing, for employment, for military service—that testify to the impossibility of belonging and his status as failed immigrant. Despite marrying Leon to secure a green card and a better life for herself, Mah continues to struggle to make ends meet and works endlessly: “When she left Hong Kong, everyone called her lucky; to live in America was to have a fortune... Twenty-five years in the land of gold and good fortune, and then she returned to tell her story: the years spent in

sweatshops, the prince of the Gold Mountain turned into a toad, and three daughters: one unmarried, another who-cares-where, one dead” (22). The death of their daughter upends the first generation’s narrative of sacrifice and future investment, the fallout of Mah’s affair with Tommie Hom shatters any illusion of successful domesticity, and their inability to escape a life of toil weighs heavily on eldest daughter Leila, who must constantly work to manage and support her parents.

As such, this classic, Chinatown-centered Asian American novel is very much about racialized labor exploitation. Its central questions seem to include: How do the racialized forces of capital and nation (tracked in histories of labor exploitation, exclusionary immigration policies, and systemic racism) inform what kinds of domesticity Asian immigrants have access to or can live out in Chinatown? How do the gendered demands of proper domesticity enable the ongoing exploitation of racialized labor? How does capital seek to cultivate the failed immigrant family given its reliance on racialized domesticity as a mode of labor?

For Mah and Leon, their lives are lived in labor-time that profoundly impact and structure their family structure as well as their physical bodies. Mah’s many hours in the sweatshops “change her body. Her neck softened. Her shoulders grew heavy. Work was her whole life, and every forward stitch marked time passing” (160). Her body literally wears away to the bone as she sits repeating the same movements over and over. The space of the home, too, becomes restructured into a work station: “Mah sat down at her Singer with the dinner rice still in her mouth. When we pulled down the Murphy bed, she was still there, sewing. The hot lamp made all the stitches blur together; the street noises stopped long before she did. And in the morning, long before any of us woke, she was already there, at work” (32). The ways in which their home

becomes an extension of a public/work space allows us to think critically about the racial contours of domestic space.

Because Mah's wages are paid according to units delivered rather than hours worked, she is forced to recruit the children in order to make ends meet: Leila recalls "helping Mah turn linen pockets. Ironing the interfacing for the culottes. The time I sewed my finger. The awful exactness of the puncture point where the needle broke nail and skin. An exacting pain" (72). The recruitment of daughters Leila, Ona, and Nina into labor continues throughout their childhood and adolescence into adulthood with each new business endeavor the family undertakes. When Mah and Leon pull their money to start a laundry business that ultimately fails, the girls are "all on call for helping out at the laundry, which was almost all the time" (165). Leon teaches them how to work the press, twist the sheets, and operate the extractor: "We folded them by the hotel-loads, corner touching corner, until each package was as tight and perfect as a new deck of cards. It was hot down there. The humid air was chalky with starch and soap and bleach. The steam and chlorine odor clung to us" (165). While the family is operating L. L. Grocery, "We practically lived at the grocery. I remember after school and weekends there: dusting the shelves and stocking canned goods and taking trips to the wholesaler on Stockton for paper supplies" (158), their only guests the oldtimers who came by and read the newspapers for free.

In addition to manning the store and laundromat or helping to fulfill orders, the daughters are "always...on standby for them. Waiting and doing things their way" (31). Leila recalls spending her childhood "standing in the lines: social security, disability, immigration. What I hated most was the talking for Mah and Leon, the whole translation number. Every English word counted and I was responsible" (15). The crucial role the daughters play in supplanting unpaid

labor, as well as Ona's untimely death, complicates the typical immigrant narrative in which the sacrifice of the first generation enables the better life of the second. Rather than enabling the assimilation of the Chinese American family into modernity and national citizenship, then, the transition from the so-called "deviant and pathological" Chinese bachelor society to heteronormativity produces a readily available racialized domesticity that operates through what Cheng calls a "sacrificial economy marked by the exploitation of racial labor" (41).

Leon, too, works endless hours at whatever job he can find: in restaurants, grocery stores, laundromats, and ships: "He worked double shifts—one night slipped into another, tied together by a few hours' sleep. He told me it wasn't time he was spending, it was sweat" (178). Flipping the script of the American Dream, he tells Leila that "Life was work and death the dream" (178). Even though he works "as much as [he] could," it is always "not enough" (177). Despite having job skills in welding, construction, electrical work, etc., he is consistently rejected from more stable forms of employment and funneled into low-wage menial labor that takes him away from home for months at a time and renders him effectively a bachelor. This long history of racial exclusion and exploitation can be tracked in the rejection letters Leila sorts through: "The letters were stacked by year and rubberbanded into decades. I only had to open the first few to know the story: 'We Don't Want You.' A rejection from the army: unfit. A job rejection: unskilled. An apartment: unavailable... Why did he keep every single letter of rejection? Letters saying 'We don't want you' were flat worthless to me. What use was knowing the jobs he didn't get, the opportunities he lost?" (55). In addition to revealing a history disavowed by nationalist myths of exceptionalism and opportunity, the meticulously kept "worthless" letters signal Leon's understanding of the necessity of always having "proof" that he has "be in this country long time!" (53).

Leon, a paper son, discovers early on that “paper is more precious than blood” (7). He tells Leila that “buying the name Leong was like buying a black-market passport. How he memorized another man’s history to pass the interrogation on Angel Island. And how later the government offered a deal: the confession program...a confession of illegal entry bought you naturalization papers” (54). Here, Leon’s experiences of navigating the changes in immigration requirements—one minute necessitating extensive fabrications to pass interrogations and another, confessions of illegal entry—show how the US has deployed a wide range of tactics and rationales to selectively and flexibly ignore, rewrite, rediscover, reinterpret, and recycle laws, treaties, and agreements to respond to capital’s shifting needs on a moment’s notice. As other scholars in Asian American studies have argued, attending to this history of racial exclusion enables a fundamental rethinking and reordering of the role immigration law has played both in the construction of the US as a national community and in the management of racial labor. Leon’s suitcase full of rejections, as well as the fabricated documents that produce him as a paper son, remind us that this exclusion was not incidental to, but rather fundamental for, nation building.

The novel opens with Leila searching for Leon “at that old-man hotel on Clay Street” (2) in the same room he had when he was a bachelor, his life “a circle” despite his many years of toil. In the lobby, she encounters an old man who has gotten lost and is unable to offer any coherent, articulate response to the “old guys”’ questions: “‘How come you go there?’ ‘How long?’ ‘You’re home now, savvy?’ ‘How about we call your daughter?’” (2). The old man is lost to his family, his home, and his memories, and seems barely there himself: “‘Don’t know,’ he muttered in a low voice that hardly seemed a breath. ‘Don’t know. Don’t remember. Don’t know’” (4). His mumblings are unintelligible to the others, who eventually give up, put on their

coats, and shuffle out the door while “The old man watched, picking at a hole in the arm of the sofa. Behind him, the gray shapes on the linoleum wall looked like shadows of faces” (3). The old man, his body worn away and merging into the sea of gray, shadowy faces as he aimlessly wanders around the same few places, is a distinctly zombie-like presence.

This shadowy figure—anonymous, homeless, forgotten, and impossible to recover—occupies the margins of Chinatown alongside the “old guys” (2) and “time-wasters” (5) that “shuffle” about and “have nothing to do”: “Chinatown drifters-about. Spitters. Sitters. Flea men in the Square” (10). These men are the remnants of a non-reproductive and disposable bachelor society, whose aging, fading bodies are all that remains after decades of labor exploitation and extraction. They are the object of pity and scorn: Leila “hated looking for Leon at the Square, seeing him hanging around with those time-wasters” because she “didn’t want to see Leon end up like that, all alone and lost” (5). Their wasted bodies, incapable of being productive any longer, are unwanted and repellant; they are erased from and completely illegible to linear narratives of national history and development; they are rendered surplus and disposable in every sense, as even their bones are dumped like trash. They are the workers out of whom all the life has been sucked even as they continue to go through the motions and shuffle about in the margins of the text—they are what has fallen out of production and the true stragglers of this novel.

Even in death, these old bachelors are outcasts as their bones—the only remainders of their lives to which they attach great symbolic significance—remain just as anonymous and homeless. A central example in the novel is Grandpa Leong, who secured Leon’s immigration status by claiming him as a paper son and hoped his bones would be sent back to China after his death. Despite his wishes, his bones are eventually dumped into an unmarked grave with many

others, never to be reclaimed. Leon believes any and all misfortune that falls upon the family—the failed businesses, the constant poverty, the death of Ona, the disintegration of his marriage to Mah—emerge from his inability to meet Grandpa Leong’s last wishes. When Leon and Leila embark upon a quest to recover Grandpa Leong’s bones, they are told that “overcrowding had become a problem at the cemetery and most oldtimers had only leased their burial plots for three, five, or nine years, hoping to be sent back to China by relatives. ‘More often than not,...the dead are forgotten’...The unclaimed graves were disinterred and the bones grouped by family surnames and then reburied” (74). Even as they are barred from symbolic assimilation or belonging into a nation that sees them only as readily exploitable labor, their bones are literally incorporated into the US in mixed groupings that make it impossible to identify or make meaning from them (Chang 46). Despite their central contributions to projects of nation building, these stragglers disappear without a trace, forgetting and forgotten, unable to be recovered or grieved.

Ultimately, *Bone* makes an important intervention into nationalist myths of development, progress, and exceptionalism (as well as the familiar racialization of Asian Americans as efficient, upwardly mobile “model minorities”) by retrieving and insisting upon a history that has long been disavowed by the US. The narrative itself continually moves back in time to retrieve the past and reassert it in the present in order to attest to the ongoing continuity of state-sanctioned racial violence. The novel’s careful emphasis on racialized labor exploitation throughout perhaps clarifies and exemplifies Day’s argument that Asians’ primary relationship to settler colonizers is based on labor and a logic of exclusion that always constructs Asian labor as conditional to the demands of capital. In *Bone*, the old Chinese immigrant stragglers from whom nothing more can be extracted signify a familiar form of disposability that has everything to do

with labor and production management. However, this chapter is interested in thinking about what falls out in our understanding of the relays between race and labor when we narrate the history of Chinatown—and of Asian immigrants in the US more largely—as a story of labor extraction and exploitation. Here, I want to turn to Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*, which I suggest can be read as a radically different kind of Chinatown novel centered not around exploited Chinese immigrants but on zombies.

The decision to read *Bone* and *Zone One* together may seem like an odd one, given that the latter is not an Asian American novel. Yet, weirdly enough, Chinatown remains a very important space across the two novels. *Zone One* offers a very different mapping of Chinatown by turning this space into a war zone; as such, Whitehead's novel focuses on a very different regime of accumulation and extraction than that of Ng's. I want to argue that reading *Zone One* alongside *Bone* stages the convergence of the history of Asian immigration into the US with one of US militarism, waste management, and financial speculation. This is *not* a developmental argument—that is, by no means am I trying to suggest that one account simply preempts, replaces, or supplants the other. Rather, I am interested in what happens when we combine the logic of extraction *Bone* highlights—the ongoing exploitation of racialized labor through the use of precarious immigration status and exclusion from belonging—with that of *Zone One*'s, in which capital operates in the US as though it were in a foreign war zone.

### **Colson Whitehead, *Zone One***

*Zone One* is set in New York after a zombie apocalypse that has seemingly stabilized to allow reconstruction and the establishment of a new corporate-sponsored government called the American Phoenix. The reconstruction effort, fostered by a partnership between what's left of

the military and corporate class, has established a base of operations in Chinatown from which to organize the reclaiming of the city. Here, disposing of the remaining zombies through targeted sweeps remains a crucial part of the project to capitalize on the apocalypse by seizing Manhattan's prime real estate and reopening the city for future investments.

Over a three-day span, the protagonist "Mark Spitz" (nicknamed after an Olympic swimmer because he cannot swim, a trait that others claim can be attributed to his being a Black man) and his fellow "sweepers"—volunteers for a civilian militia that has been deployed to clear out and secure the city—patrol portions of New York City, engaging in a systematic elimination and incineration of the remaining zombies that continue to haunt the city. Significantly, these sweeper units' base is located in the city's Chinatown: "All the COs had annexed Chinatown turf for briefing and strategy sessions, spreading out from Wonton Main at Broadway and Canal according to their disparate appetites...The officers spread out, home stading. Manhattan was empty except for soldiers and legions of the damned, Mark Spitz noted, and already gentrification had resumed" (35). It is here that the soldiers are assigned which plot of the city to sweep, informed of new regulations from Buffalo HQ that they must follow, and equipped with supplies while they speculate on potential new business ventures—such as the "the cigarette-salvage possibilities of Manhattan" (44).

This claiming of Chinatown as the most strategic location in the city from which to organize military patrols seems especially important because of the multiple histories such a space evokes. On the one hand, Chinatown cannot be thought outside of the long history of exclusionary immigration policies deployed against Asian laborers that produced them as an economic threat and deviant Other for failing to conform to accepted Western norms of hygiene, housing, and nuclear domesticity. The historical deployment of public health in Chinatowns as

an expansive surveillance and regulatory mechanism that granted officials the authority to survey and monitor Chinese immigrants' living conditions, social conducts, and health risk and remove any threats to the population's wellbeing is alluded to when Mark Spitz notes "the signage was in Chinese save for the Health Department regulations hectoring beneath the pictograms" (35).

As Shah has argued in *Contagious Divides*, nineteenth-century health officials generated and perpetuated "knowledge" about the Chinese immigrants' living conditions, social conducts, and cultural and social differences (17). Echoing the eugenics of the time period, they categorized the Chinese as a "filthy and diseased 'race'" (2) preordained to certain types of illnesses due to "hereditary traits that were naturalized in their very bodies" (19). The government-sponsored investigations that produced scientific knowledge of both Chinatown and the Chinese body called for both the elimination of the threat of disease as well as the containment of the perverse sexualities of the Chinese. Significantly, the (paradoxically) biopolitical project of surveilling the dead in *Zone One*—visible in the Incident Reports the soldiers are required to fill out in which they detail the behavior, density, and distribution of zombies in the spaces they clear—uncannily recalls the management of Chinatown's former residents. The Chinese immigrant laborers, then, and their bachelor enclaves, were racialized in such a way that gender and sexual transgressions were not seen to be "incidental to the production of nonwhite labor, but constitutive of it" (Ferguson 13). In resisting such projects of racialization, Chinese activists striving for citizenship rights pushed for assimilation and highlighted those who embraced Western hygienic customs and its nuclear family—a familiar pattern also central to Black uplift narratives that sought to claim normative gender as the vehicle to claiming humanity. In doing so, they effectively excluded and erased forms of queer domesticity while reproducing dominant discourses of heterosexuality.

As such, the space of Chinatown here at once historicizes and points us to a lingering critical trend within (Asian) American Studies that assumes race is a construct that organizes and determines one's access to and qualification for citizenship, personhood, and national belonging. This assumption undergirds the argument and understanding that the difference and specificity that attach to racialized bodies are simultaneously exploited by capital for cheap, expendable labor and rejected by the nation in its desire to preserve, maintain, and secure the interests of a white national citizenry and produce a particular kind of national subject. The U.S. nation-state is thus conceived of as that which creates the body politic and those bodies deemed worthy of protection by distinguishing them conceptually and legally from non-white bodies. Such an understanding of race affirms the constructed nature of the (white) national body politic as that which differentially incorporates marked bodies and thus relies on conceptual models of power, governance, and belonging that have been fundamentally underwritten by and are symptomatic of the historic operations of the liberal nation-state form. Yet, this understanding becomes destabilized when we also consider the crucial ways in which *war* mediates the relationship between race and labor in this fraught space.

The presence of the civilian militia units dispersed throughout New York City's Chinatown highlights the history of Chinatown as a site of militarized policing and state violence. Arguing that "contemporary capitalism has made a point of disguising state violence against Asian immigrant communities," Eric Tang emphasizes "police raids of Asian immigrant economies, the literal removal of immigrants from particular areas of the city, and the brutalization and imprisonment of those who transgress the boundaries of the immigrant enclave" (233). In his investigation of New York City's Chinatown, Tang finds that "the majority of reported racist attacks against Asians involved the police as primary

perpetrators...Virtually every Chinatown vendor or small shop owner is routinely ticketed for false violations...these tickets generate hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual city revenue” (235). In addition to the extraction of profit through false ticketing, many vendors are also victims of police raids and the illegal confiscation of goods and cash, which are meant to “encourage vendors to vacate areas marked for future development and tourism” (235)—in short, to render Chinatown marketable for capital, much as the sweeper units seek to clear out the city of undesirable zombies to encourage investment and development.

Particularly insightful is Tang’s observation that the tactics used against these working-class Asian immigrant communities that target Asian youths racialized as gang members are “a replica of the so-called counterinsurgency tactics that were carried out against the Black Panther Party...[that were] adaptations of the counterinsurgency programs used by the US military in the Third World, particularly Vietnam” (243). In returning the wars “over there” in Asia to the US through his tracking of military and counterinsurgency tactics deployed within and outside of Chinatown, Tang invites us to attend to the intersection of economic regulation and racist police violence in the larger context of US’s “militarized agenda for Third World communities abroad” (243). Such an approach informs my own reading of *Zone One’s* Chinatown, which stages a complex collusion and layering of histories of racialized exclusion, labor regulation, and militarized intervention in both the US and Asia.

Rather than reading the space of Chinatown as that which purely evokes the history of Asian immigration to the US as the production of a hyperexploitable, transplanted labor force regulated through exclusionary state practices that constructed racial bars to citizenship, then, I want to ask what is eclipsed when we theorize the racialization of Asian immigrants primarily through the analytics of civil rights, belonging, and recognition from the state. The fact that an

area historically inhabited by Asians before the zombie apocalypse becomes annexed and appropriated by civilian militia units that have been deployed to secure the interests of the newly emerging “American Phoenix” also evokes ongoing histories of US military invasion and occupation of key geographic territories in Asia, the territorial acquisition of which has been instrumental in furthering the economic and geopolitical expansion of the US security state.

Interestingly, there are numerous references to US wars staged in Asia throughout the novel: In the Lieutenant’s office (located in a Chinese restaurant he “staked out for his briefings”) are “maps of different segments of the Zone hung on the walls, covered in incomprehensible marks, tinted different hues, and the old, varnished desks [that] made Mark Spitz think he’d wandered into a World War II campaign, on another island in the Pacific” (114). The soldiers who land “near the Korean War memorial” (93) are in charge of tackling and subduing large waves of violent and aggressive skels (as opposed to the more passive “stragglers” faced by the civilian militia units that echo formal distinctions between refugee/civilian and enemy combatant rarely observed during warfare). The citing of the Korean War seems especially significant here given that it is often read as the launching point for the intensification of US military dominance in Asia: it justified the quadrupling of US military spending and the dispatching of US troops to Korea, Philippines, and French-Indo China that inaugurated big defense budgets and the national security state, secured the move from World War II disarmament to rearmament, enabled the bilateral linking of Asian client states to the US, established an empire of bases in the Pacific, and served as the impetus and testing ground for Vietnam and Iraq. Yet, unlike the so-called good and just war waged against the evils of totalitarianism and fascism that narrated itself as “liberating” populations, “this generation of marines” who understand themselves to be “the arrowhead of a global campaign” (95) seek to

engage in a systematic elimination of racialized populations treated as surplus (rather than as non-sovereign subjects in need of rescue).

While watching Disposal burn down the bodies of dead zombies, Mark Spitz muses on his preoccupation with and disgust for ash—the “dust of the dead” (233)—that he sees everywhere and despises; ash triggers for him memories of taking a history requirement about the cold war, “the pervasive, inexorable gray” of the ash produced by “split atoms” (147). Here, the repeated references to US wars in the Pacific alongside the description of the ash reminds us of the “poison-and-burn pathology” of napalm (codenamed “flaming death”)—a weapon of extensive, indiscriminating, mass destruction liberally used by the US in Korea and Vietnam that changes the chemistry of the air through its combustion to produce “lethal levels of carbon monoxide, deoxygenating the air so everyone dies of asphyxiation immediately” and even those outside of the strike zone experience burns inside of the mouth, throat, and lungs; the substance also burns its victims “through the skin to the muscle and through the muscle to the bones” (Cho 78).

Mark Spitz’s obsessive anxieties about the “dust of the dead...in his lungs becoming assimilated to his body” (233), mediated through his knowledge about the use of both atomic and incendiary bombs during the Cold War and their destructive, poisonous effects on human bodies and ecologies, reminds us that the militarized violence used to contain zombies in the post-apocalyptic US is not new; rather, it draws from multiple tactics and strategies that have historically guaranteed the disposability of surplus populations through capitalist processes of valorization, coercion, and devaluation. It is from the ashes of those disposable bodies (“human” and zombie alike) that the American Phoenix arises renewed. Lastly, in one of his flashbacks, Mark Spitz recalls seeking refuge in a toy store where he encounters “atomic-age ray guns and

scale-model fighter jets, intricate military play sets of quaint lethality,” and meticulously positioned action figures. When he proclaims excitedly that ““this stuff is really valuable,”” his companion responds ““Where? To whom? For what? That’s the old war”” (244). Yet, mapping the zombie apocalypse onto histories of race-making through the conjunction of labor and war helps us read both the pre- and post-apocalyptic US nation as a topography of negation, violence, and elimination (as opposed to reading only the latter as the site of an exceptional state of emergency). As such, *Zone One* points us to spatializing practices by which the forces of race, labor, and war are created, preserved, lived, and recreated.

Crucially, it becomes clear that the primary aim of this reconstruction effort—carefully organized and managed by a partnership between the military and the remnants of the corporate class—is to cash in on the disaster with little regard for those who are killed in the pursuit of this project. The sweepers, by clearing out and evicting the undesirable dead, make the city attractive to corporate sponsors and to capital. As such, these militia units—as well as the “professional” military forces they supplement—are vitally necessary to the American Phoenix. The American Phoenix, then, is a corporate and military project in which a site of destitution and destruction becomes recast as the prime opportunity to grab land and seize valuable real estate, accumulate discounted assets, and reinvest in the post-apocalyptic world. As such, in *Zone One*, it is war that secures, sets the state for, and becomes a primary function of speculative capital through its management of waste (stragglers are literal “trash” picked up by “sweepers” that get incinerated by the “disposal” unit) by ushering in projects of reconstruction and capital investment. In establishing the American Phoenix as a marriage of corporate actors to military institutions, *Zone One* refocuses our attention not to the relationship between labor, capital, and the nation-state

that we are perhaps more used to theorizing but rather, to the relays between militarization, finance, and the corporation—between war and disaster capitalism.

As such, the authority of the American Phoenix rests on its ability to manage not production but detritus and waste. Crucially, the project of systemic elimination is a carefully regulated and managed one: the sweepers are required to “record demographic data: the ages of the targets, the density of the specific location, structure type, number of floors” in “candy-colored” and “palm-size” plastic-covered notebooks produced by one of reconstruction’s “first official sponsors” that Buffalo had previously found little use for (38). This task of assembling data is meant to secure Buffalo’s ability to map out the whole city so it can “start projecting how many of the dead they’d find in your typical twenty-two-story corporate flagship, five-floor tenement, fifteen-story apartment complex, what have you” (40). In an attempt to ensure that the city will be inhabitable for its new tenants, Buffalo also outlaws the sweepers’ practice of shooting out the windows to toss out the skels’ bodies: “The new era of reconstruction was forward-looking, prudent, attentive to the small details that will dividend in the years to come” (75). Here, it becomes clear that the management of detritus through practices of war-making is part of a larger project that seeks to secure and transform conditions of immiseration into sites of accumulation and investment in its pursuit of the purely speculative existence of a future profit.

*Zone One* thus offers us a hyperbolic version of our present in which the American Phoenix operates as a version of the state completely beholden to and given over to market actors that functions on a model of managing and optimizing investments. This resurgent, reconstituted sort-of state operates absolutely like a corporation, complete with a marketing department. Crucially, Buffalo “created an entire division dedicated to pursuing official sponsors whenever a representative turned up, in exchange for tax breaks once the reaper laid down his scythe and

things were up and running again” (48). To secure those tax breaks (as well as “additional goodies the public would never find out about”), the representatives offer a price cap on their goods or pledge a particular product in their brand family—“one not too dear” (49)—to the American Phoenix.

One such example can be found in a senior board member of a juggernaut clothing empire with four product lines who pledges his company’s goods to the cause—“an upscale boutique providing sophisticated apparel fit for a day at the office or an evening out on the town; a mass-market suite of sensible, everyday basics; moderately priced designs for the cost-conscious consumer; and a recently acquired purveyor of plus-size lingerie that had fallen on hard times but had been turned around by the smart management of their new parent company” (46). Acquiring, managing, and marketing new product lines clearly continues to be a thriving business amidst a world-ending level of global apocalypse. Yet, this work of branding and forging partnerships occurs in the complete absence of production and productive labor. After all, the only productive labor in the novel is farming that remains precarious and inadequate, given that survivors subsist largely on stores of old MREs.

In order to preserve the interests of its stakeholders, the American Phoenix launches the “anti-looting regs” that prohibits “soldier and civilian and sweeper alike...from foraging goods and materials belonging to anyone other than an official sponsor” (47). It is this renewal of systems of surveillance and policing, specifically in the interest of encouraging and securing more sponsors, that characterizes the reconstruction (“There had been laws once; to abide by their faint murmuring...was to believe in their return. To believe in reconstruction” (48)). Here, we can witness the “temporality of finance” (Tadiar 22)—defined by its imperative to colonize the future as a means of present realization—in which the practice of speculation, as an

investment of capital, involves an anticipatory time of realization of value in excess of the present value for which it is exchanged. The American Phoenix, then, seems to assert a kind of sovereignty that does not operate through the promise of protection to those transformed into state subjects but rather, through the promise of protection to corporate actors, corporate architecture, and corporate capital.

Here, I am reminded of Masao Miyoshi's argument that transnational corporations have displaced nations as sites for employee identification—he suggests workers' primary allegiance is increasingly to the logo rather than the flag. In examining General Electric's expressions of entrepreneurial individualism and corporate responsibility that are linked to the legal and representational trope of corporate personhood, Purnima Bose writes that the management manuals of the 1950s "makes it difficult to ascertain whether corporate or national allegiances are being signified" (42). Citing its graphics on managerial style, she writes that GE "draws an analogy between the corporation and the state, on the one hand, and the corporate executive and the political leader, on the other" (42). While she reads these figures for the purposes of tracking changes in corporate ideology in response to the shifts in the global economy, I find it significant that for the American Phoenix, such a conflation or analogy between corporate and state interests no longer seems to exist. There is no distinction to be made between the two any longer; they are one and the same. Indeed, throughout the novel, the American Phoenix consistently operates as a kind of corporation, with its elaborate marketing schemes, endless quest to "think up better ways to hone the future" (98), and ongoing attempts to "rebran[d] survival" (resulting in slogans such as "We Make Tomorrow," "The mighty Phoenix shall spread its wings," and "the American Phoenix Rising"—which are emblazoned on the T-shirts, hoodies, and sun visors sent fresh from Buffalo).

In *Zone One*, then, the targeted elimination of zombies is a state project aimed toward rendering the city a safe and attractive space for capital. On Day Two, Ms. Macy, Buffalo's PR recon sent to the Zone to determine its fitness for hosting the next summit, tells Mark Spitz, "New York is the greatest city in the world. Imagine what all those heads of state and ambassadors will feel when they see what we've accomplished. You've accomplished. We brought this place back from the dead" (208). The lobbying to host the next Summit in the Zone and Buffalo's constant courting of capital through its pursuit of official sponsors reminds us of Naomi Klein's argument that "where there is destruction there is reconstruction, a chance to grab hold of 'the most terrible barrenness,...and fill it with the most perfect, beautiful plans.'" Crucially, it is only by clearing out the zombies that "the most terrible barrenness" can be remade into a desirable space ("an oasis," in Ms. Macy's words) for capital investment and reconstruction (208): once the wall separating the zombies from the so-called survivors falls on Day 3, Ms. Macy looks out upon the "black tide" that "had rolled in everywhere...spared [no place] this deluge" (312) and tells Spitz, "You don't know Buffalo. They're not going to send out a gunship to clean up a public relations stunt when they got camps failing right and left...If I had a goddamned sub, I wouldn't be coming back to this dump. Look at it out there. Those pricks are probably trying to figure out which island in the Bahamas to settle on" (311).

A zone teeming with zombies is deemed high risk, a "dump" that is not marketable or desirable for finance capital. This project of elimination conjures up the policing of US Chinatowns that seeks to vacate areas for future development and gentrification by bringing militarized tactics of imperial control back to the metropolitan center, as well as New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (an association encouraged by the language Whitehead uses to describe the zombies: "the damned bubbled and frothed" (302), "the dead sloshed through the

gap...impelled one another forward in a current, spread in hungry rivulets” (306), “the dead streamed past” (306), etc.) and the no-bid, multimillion dollar contracts for reconstruction awarded to private companies for reconstruction, employment of private mercenaries to secure the city ground against the predation of its mostly Black homeless populations, and designing of plans that rezoned the city to make it “safer, smaller, and whiter” (Singh 21).

Here, it is worth attending to the zombies in some depth. Within *Zone One*, zombies are seen as literal trash by Buffalo: the civilian militias who are tasked with eliminating them are called “sweepers,” while the “Disposal” unit is in charge of burning the bodies. There is no desire or attempt to recuperate or “heal” the skels, to reincorporate them into the American Phoenix, or to transform them into anything other than detritus in need of disposing: “No one still believed they could be restored...No. The only thing to do with a lassoed skel was to put it down. As soon as possible” (78). Yet, the zombies are not merely abject, subjugated, ruined, stagnant surplus populations—they have the ability to produce more disposable nonsubjects even under conditions of duress in which they are being systematically hunted and extinguished; as such, they themselves wield a necropower that renders them an exceptional terrorist threat. It is their presence (collectively marking anticivilizational chaos and excess) that produces New York City as a zone of violence and insecurity warranting active state augmentation and militarized intervention.

Ultimately, the zombies serve as the embodiment of a racialized disposable population whose susceptibility to processes of prostration, disposition, and absolute exploitation is as much the consequence of colonial world-making and the legacies of uneven development as it is the hallmark of a new post-apocalyptic world order. In *Zone One*, “the rich tended to escape...The rich fled during the convulsions of the great evacuation, dragging their distilled possessions in

wheeled luggage of European manufacture” while “a larger percentage of the poor” without any kind of easy access to mobility “tended to stay, shoving layaway bureaus and media consoles up against the doors” (163). Their decision to stay, hoard scanty resources, and wait out the storm ends up being largely “fatal”—Spitz states that “he’d never met anyone in the camps or the great out there who had made it out of the city after the first couple days” (165). As such, the bulk of the zombies are the remainder of the working population of New York City—those without the wherewithal to flee. At the same time, they now inhabit a state of being in which surplus is accumulated *not* from their labor, but from speculation on their bodies: since their presence has tanked Manhattan’s prime real estate, the project now is to contain them in just the right way and at just the right pace to restart a real estate boom. That is, their wasted bodies become a source of profit only as they are permanently eliminated and contained.

Notably, Whitehead insists that the mass of zombies swarming through the city are not just comprised of poor people of color:

Every race, color, and creed was represented in this congregation that funneled down the avenue. As it had been before, per the myth of this melting-pot city. The city did not care for your story, the particular narrative of your reinvention; it took them all in, every immigrant in their strivings, regardless of bloodline, the identity of their homeland, the number of coins in their pocket. Nor did this plague discriminate; your blood fell instantly or your blood held out longer, but your blood always failed in the end...No matter the hue of their skins, dark or light,...they had all strived, struggled, and loved in their small, human fashion. Now they were mostly mouths and fingers, fingers for extracting entrails from soft cavities and mouths to rend and devour in pieces the distinct

human faces they captured, that these faces might become less distinct, de-individuated flaps of masticated flesh, rendered anonymous like them, the dead (303-4).

In a world where all zombies are racialized as anonymous, inhuman trash meant to be put down and burned away (the long-touted myth of the melting pot finally achieved), the particularities of racialized human labor no longer seem to register in the same ways. As such, the zombies of *Zone One* foreground our shift into another world where disposable populations become sites of accumulation not through the exploitation of their labor but through something else entirely. Here, it is the management of waste and surplus populations that enables and secures speculative capital, rather than the extraction and cultivation of productive labor. The living dead—non-distinct and de-individuated—thus complicate any attempts to define and articulate separate logics of extraction and disposability that can be attributed to discrete genealogies of particular groups, particularly in contexts where the condition of (racialized) abjection is becoming increasingly generalized under neoliberalism.

As previously mentioned, the zombies of *Zone One* belong to one of two categories: skels or stragglers. Here, I am especially interested in the particular kind of disposability that Whitehead's stragglers signify—one that, unlike *Bone*, cannot be fully legible to us through analytics of racialized labor exploitation. The stragglers of *Zone One* are the last piece of a reclamation project—the last bit of garbage to take out—as disposing of them will finally secure the area for reinvestment. They are this world's version of refugees/civilians that remain once soldiers have cleared out the fast-moving, aggressive enemy skels. The disposing of these passive stragglers, seen as crucial to building up the American Phoenix and ushering in reinvestments, reminds us of the US's historic practice of mowing down refugees/civilians when needed. During the Korean War, for instance, US bombers committed a saturation bombing of

targeted cities that killed and displaced thousands of civilians, while army units made calculated decisions to destroy bridges in an attempt to block the movements of refugees and followed advance directives to “shoot all refugees coming across the river.” Such practices were sanctioned by the US Department of the Navy, which officially stated that “warring against civilians” was “wholly abhorrent” but also “wholly defensible.” Indeed, Cho writes that 70 percent of the still unresolved Korean War’s death toll was comprised of civilian casualties.

Whitehead’s civilian militias, operating out of Chinatown and tasked with the project of clearing out the stragglers, thus returns these tactics of destruction, elimination, and war-making associated with foreign war zones to the US. In retrieving the history of US wars in Asia to a corporate-sponsored “American Phoenix” that has been unshackled from the burdensome need to legitimate its violent waste management practices, *Zone One* also encourages us to revisit earlier historical formations not already read for this conjuncture of speculative capital, war, and waste management. As discussed in Chapter 1, the US military’s historical and ongoing practice of dumping waste, refugees, and military personnel in Guam—as well as its collusion with private capital to profit off of this dumping—exceeds and defies attempts to read for a conventional imperialist project organized around nationalist actors, nationalist architecture, and national capital.

Ultimately, this turning of Chinatown into a war zone asks us to focus on different regimes of accumulation and extraction in ways that confound and transform our existing analytics of labor exploitation. In *Zone One*, racialized disposability can no longer be understood as the cultivation, distribution, and extraction of labor power through population management. Here, there is something more to be said about these curious stragglers that “did not move, and that’s what made them a suitable objective for civilian units” (60)—instead, they choose places

to “haunt” throughout the Zone and beyond: “In the desolate consumer-electronics showroom, the up-selling floor salesman halted mid-pitch, as if psychoanalyzing a skeptical rube who was simply, ever and always, not in the room...A man lifted the hood of a copy machine. They did not move when you happened on them. They didn’t know you were there. They kept watching their movies” (61). They are found in stores, offices, casinos, homes, malls, food stands, anywhere to which they previously had emotional attachment—and there they remain until they are cleared away by the civilian militia units. They compulsively reenact an activity—“waiting for the patient who was late, ever late...crouch[ing] before the foot-measuring instrument...dipping a finger into the soil of a pot earmarked for a city plant” (60)—and, in doing so, transforms labor into a site of nostalgic attachment.

Unlike the homeless, anonymous, irretrievable stragglers of *Bone* whose lives has been sucked away through an endless extraction of labor and who shuffle among the margins until they disappear without a trace, these zombies remain emotionally tethered to sites of work. They are far from lost: “Bring ‘em home into ‘familiar surroundings’ and they’d probably just get up and walk back to where you found them. You leave them there, it seems to me. Wherever they chose. Let them sit in the cubicles, let them ride the bus all day and night and in the depot after hours. Chillin’ on the beach catching some rays” (195). As Spitz fantasizes about “what kind of straggler...he [would] make,” he thinks, “What did he love, what place had been important to him? Job or home, bull’s eye of cathected energy” (192). The act of straggling as Spitz envisions is a new form of pleasure, satisfaction, and happiness in this post-apocalyptic moment. The zombies’ act of reenacting the repetitive structure of labor, then, pushes us to think about forms of disposability that are not dependent upon *work*.

This sentiment is shared by Spitz's Lieutenant, who tells him, "Personally, I like them. Not supposed to say it out loud, but I think they've got it right and we're the ninety-nine percent that have it all wrong... They know what they're doing. Verve and a sense of purpose. What do we have? Fear and danger. The memories of all the ones you've lost. The regular skels, they're all messed up. But your straggler, your straggler doesn't have any of that. It's always inhabiting its perfect moment. They've found it—where they belong" (196). Rather than signaling their exclusion from a national community, the stragglers of *Zone One* forge their own belonging entirely separate from and indifferent to the American Phoenix's rebranding efforts. The stragglers also remain unhindered by the memories of all that has been lost—as such, "Relieved of care and worry, the stragglers lived eternally and undying in their personal heavens. Where the goblin world and its assaults were banished there was nothing but possibility" (197). While the Chinatown bachelors of *Bone* serve as the remainders of the violences of labor economics, the stragglers of *Zone One* demonstrate a nostalgia for that very regime of exploitation (as opposed to being rendered literally detritus). In showing labor as a site of nostalgic attachment, then, Whitehead's stragglers reveal what's hidden from analyses of labor exploitation: the capacity for labor to be sentimentalized and romanticized that exists precisely at moment of its demise. In this post-apocalyptic moment, labor exploitation is actually preferable to other forms of disposability secured by old and new flexible strategies of waste management, speculation, and war-making.

Unlike the disaster capitalists who speculate on opportunities for corporate reengineering following the apocalypse, the zombies have a vastly different relationship to space. When the Zone falls on Day 3, Mark Spitz notes that "the majority of the abominations did not stop to feed,

as if being loosed upon the emptied streets was meal enough, as if right now it sufficed for them to walk, to persist beyond death...Close to the ground, almost at their level, he read their inhuman scroll as an argument: I was here, I am here now, I have existed, I exist still. This is our town” (206-7). For the zombies, their move through the barricaded Chinatown from which they’d been expelled is not about owning, consuming (“did not stop to feed”), building, appropriating, or reconstructing land to accumulate capital. Rather, it is enough for them to stage a return to a site that is haunted by fractured and multiply layered histories of extraction, violence, social reproduction, and survival.

This return ultimately ends up having a kind of political efficacy (it heralds the collapse of the American Phoenix and dismantlement of the military base in Chinatown) that refuses any claims for injury or calls for recognition from sovereignty. Interestingly, the rolling in of the black tide makes Spitz smile “because he hadn’t felt this alive in months...Of course he was smiling. This was where he belonged” (312). He feels a sense of belonging and kinship with the zombies that are flagged throughout the novel in various moments, such as in his desire to let some straggler stay because ““he’s not hurting anyone”” (102) and his experiencing of post-apocalyptic stress disorder only once he joins the civilian militia. This ultimately leads him to “open the door and walk into the sea of the dead” (322). This structure of belonging is not routed through or mediated by the state and carries with it a shared understanding of the ways in which the conjunction of race, labor, and war produces surplus populations who carry on the informal reproductive work of subsisting (without the possibility of attaining the exchange value of their labor power) to make and remake “social life” under conditions of disposability.

In an interview, Whitehead states, “My idea of the world in *Zone One* is that it’s pretty much exactly the same as it is today, except 95 percent of the population is dead, and people are

bummed out. So Gary is very much like Gary was before the disaster. Kaitlyn is very much still the grade-grubbing student council member. What makes them tragic or sad in my mind is that they haven't changed, and that they're stuck trying to bring their past selves or past lives into this new place where it can't exist." In this ending, Spitz finds a kind of pleasure in yielding to this new world order ushered in by the mass of zombies, letting go, and becoming something other than what he has been. As such, his likely death (for we can't really imagine that he survives the sea of dead) is anything but tragic. This ending, uncertain, vague, and borderline unthinkable as it is, seems intended to mark both the limits of a civil rights imaginary as well as the abdication of the will to fashion oneself as subjects deserving of recognition. I want to suggest, then, that this ending opens up the possibility of imagining something other than a resistance politics that moves towards recognition, rights, and redress from the state and creates a binary of instrumentalized, abject, ruined, violated non-subjects vs. the nostalgic, rights-bearing subject who seeks received forms of proper political/historical subjectivity through claiming an emancipatory counterhegemonic agency and recognition from the state.

Ultimately, Whitehead's treatment of Chinatown makes an important intervention in a space that is normally defined by the history of Asian immigration to the US. While *Bone* clarifies and explicates this complex history—as well as its ongoing relevance despite US exceptionalist narratives of progress and development—Whitehead calls forth this history of immigration to converge with the story of US militarism, waste management, and speculation. Crucially, Whitehead's depiction of Chinatown as a literal military staging ground doesn't simply replace or preempt the Chinatown in *Bone*. It is not that *Bone* simply disappears and the continued exploitation of racialized immigrant labor is no longer happening. Rather, by bringing

together the ongoing histories of the importation of racialized labor with the administration of violence and capitalization of death, *Zone One* opens up the space for us to think about multiple regimes of accumulation, extraction, and racialization that play out simultaneously and in contradictory ways across different historical moments without positing one or the other as complete on its own.

## Chapter 4

## Wasted Bodies, Human Trash:

## Rethinking the Racialized Subject in Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature

“Plastic is wholly swallowed up in the fact of being used: ultimately, objects will be invented for the sole pleasure of using them. The hierarchy of substances is abolished: a single one replaces them all: the whole world *can* be plasticized, and even life itself...”

Roland Barthes, “Plastic”

“The production of ‘human waste,’ or more correctly wasted humans (the ‘excessive’ and ‘redundant,’ that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay), is an inevitable outcome of modernization, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity...[As] practically the totality of human production and consumption has become money and market mediated, and the processes of the commodification, commercialization and monetarization of human livelihoods have penetrated every nook and cranny of the globe,...all localities have to bear the consequences of modernity’s global triumph.”

Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*

In thinking through relays between race, labor, and war, waste emerges as a major thematic. Indeed, waste is abundant in each of the preceding chapters—it can be found in the dumping of toxins, trash, refugees, and military personnel in Guam; in the wasted bodies of zombies that haunt New York City and need to be disposed of; in the burnt and rotting city of Xixu from which the B-Mor facility workers were imported; and so on. This chapter seeks to introduce waste as a key analytic in the relays between race, labor, and war that I have been tracking. I want to suggest that attending to waste enables us to toggle between these terms in a different way.

In this chapter, I track the ways in which the analytics of waste and trash emerge from seemingly incommensurate historical conditions such as US militarism in the Pacific and Asia,

Fordism and the pervasive emergence of plastic, and the growth of the waste management industry. Here, waste becomes the site from which we can actually make legible such apparently disconnected but actually co-constitutive histories. In following the thematic of waste—modes of waste, relationships to waste—through Asian American and Pacific Islander literature, I ask, what does tracking this continual preoccupation with waste and wastedness yield? What does it make visible?

In looking at waste, we are attending to the excess of capitalist extraction—to that which exceeds and falls out of circulation, rather than to capital's management of production. Waste is an outcome of labor extraction and warfare; at the same time, the management and disposition of waste itself becomes an arena of accumulation in its own right. I suggest that a focus on waste moves us away from modes of theorizing on coerced labor and the making of laboring subjects that ask us to think about the project of labor discipline and the regulation of conditions of labor that produces compliant subjects. Indeed, there is no way to theorize labor without the subjects of labor. Yet, as I have sought to show in Chapter 2, labor exploitation actually becomes a position of relative privilege in different sites and historical moments. Rather than pointing us to analyses of labor exploitation that operate at the level of the subject, then, waste serves as a kind of flashpoint for thinking about the relays between militarism and finance; between information/data and materiality; and between sovereign subjects and abject life.

This chapter thus turns our attention to waste—produced by projects of labor exploitation—that become the sites from which we can trace out the collusion of militarism, settler colonialism, and finance capitalism. Investigating the precise manner through which particular bodies, populations, and ecosystems are consigned as waste adds further complexity to our understanding of racialization and disposability. In these waste zones, disposability is not

defined by lack of access to citizenship, disqualification from legal personhood, or the experience of labor exploitation that pits different racial groups against one another. Rather, in the contexts I have been reading throughout this dissertation, disposability is defined by close proximity to toxic wastes that continue to poison communities over generations; the ease with which radiated bodies become recast as objects of scientific knowledge to be mined for data; the totalizing degree to which one's body and home are seen as empty staging grounds for military expansion and reconstruction; and the transformation of entire populations into literal trash to be cleaned up and disposed of to make space for profitable, speculative investment.

Through my reading of Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rainforest*, Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jāltok*, and Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*, I seek to show that waste is always both the excess and the immensely profitable site of extraction. In this chapter, I seek to attend to regimes of extraction that are not staked on reproducing racial subjects, but on the management of surplus bodies and sacrifice zones that have been permanently impacted by severe environmental degradation, economic disinvestment, and military intrusion. I am also interested in asking what emerges from these wasted ecologies and contaminated bodies that we have not yet been trained to see—something unrecognizable that exists beyond the categories of politically failed subject or object, ruined, violated nonsubject. Ultimately, I am interested in waste because it doesn't compel us to think about racialization at the level of the subject but also opens up possibilities for thinking about disposable bodies, environments, and ecologies.

### **Plastics and the waste management industry**

In examining how the analytics of waste and trash can allow us to rethink various ways that disposability has been theorized in relation to race and racialization, I turn to Karen Tei

Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* (1990) to attend not to disposable life but to material waste—that which has fallen out of capitalist systems of circulation. Here, I'm interested in engaging in a reading of material waste—discarded, forgotten, decayed objects that have exhausted their use value—to think about what might be opened up when we theorize racialization through material objects rather than through the production of subjects and excluded communities. Narrated from the perspective of a floating sentient ball that was once attached to the forehead of one of the main protagonists, the novel follows a tight cast of characters across Japan, the United States, and Brazil whose seemingly disparate storylines converge explosively following the discovery of the Matacão in the Brazilian rainforest.

Rather than centering my analysis around one of the protagonists, I want to focus my reading around the Matacão, a “solid piece of plastic” that is found to be “virtually indestructible, a substance harder than stainless steel—or diamonds” with “magnetic properties” (85-86). This Matacão plastic turns out to have the “incredible ability to imitate anything...[it] managed to re-create the natural glow, moisture, freshness—the very sensation of life” (126). Indeed, researchers find that the imitations made from the Matacão plastic are infinitely more durable, useful, resilient, breathable, edible, and safe than the originals (126). Once methods for penetrating and cutting through the plastic are discovered, Matacão plastic rapidly “infiltrate[s] every crevice of modern life—plants, facial and physical remakes and appendages, shoes, clothing, jewelry, toys, cars, every sort of machine from electro-domestic to high-tech, buildings, furniture—in short, the myriad of commercial products with which the civilized world adorns itself. Matacão plastic would even be used to create artificial food” (127). As a highly mutable object that can be shaped, reworked, and “molded into everything imaginable, both lifesize and lifelike” (147) once harvested, this plastic brims with use value to such an extent that it is

projected to replace and render all other (inferior) commodity forms obsolete. Because of its seemingly endless capacity to satisfy all human wants, the Matacão is fetishized, glorified, voraciously sought after; transformed into the site of all sorts of financial speculation and entrepreneurial opportunity; and attributed all sorts of metaphysical, theological, and magical properties.

Strikingly, this plastic is revealed to have been formed within the last century when “enormous landfills of nonbiodegradable material buried under virtually every populated part of the Earth had undergone tremendous pressure, pushed ever farther into the lower layers of the Earth’s mantle” (177). The magical material from which “an entire world could be created” (147) turns out to be the byproduct of accumulated industrial waste. The Matacão plastic thus embodies the ultimate capitalist fantasy, in which even the refuse and excess of capital accumulation and production becomes commodifiable and is reentered into circulation and capitalist systems of exchange.

As such, Yamashita anticipates the development and growth of the immensely profitable waste management industry. The recasting of waste and trash into a site of profit is, of course, an ongoing practice at the heart of the waste management industry. According to the “US Waste Management Market (Hazardous & Non-Hazardous): Insights, Trends, & Forecast (2019-2023),” the market value of the US waste management industry is forecasted to reach more than \$80 billion by 2023. Factors such as rises in oil production, municipal solid waste per capita, construction activity, and economic growth are expected to drive the market growth. Meanwhile, the plastic waste management market size is projected to grow from \$32.6 billion in 2019 to nearly \$38 billion by 2024. Factors driving growth include “urbanization, industrialization, and

changing lifestyles of people [that] have raised the levels of plastic waste generation, which has resulted in an increasing threat to the environment.”

The “mismanagement of waste” resulting from inadequate numbers of recycling plants and incinerators contributes to the rise in plastic waste disposals and is itself a site of opportunity: “in terms of volume, the landfills segment is projected to lead the plastic waste management market.” At the same time, various benefits of recycled plastics (such as the reduction of pollution and dependence on fossil fuels) and its wide application in “sustainable” packaging solutions are projected to drive the packaging segment in the recycled plastic waste market. Finally, the conversion of food waste into bio-based products and organic fertilizers “will lead to the expansion of the global food waste management market at a CAGR [compounded annual growth rate] of around 4 percent during the forecast period.”

What this means is that increasingly, trash becomes cast as the “perfect place to scan for opportunities as volatility persists.” Stifel analyst Michael Hoffman writes that waste management is capital intensive and highly regulated; provides an essential service that will never go out of demand; generates ample cash flow; and has good potential for tuck-in acquisitions. Because 90 percent of sales are service-based, the industry’s reduced dependence on the economy’s overall health is seen as offering a level of protection against a possible recession. According to Allied Market Research, the global waste management market will register a 6 percent CAGR between 2018 and 2025 to reach \$530 billion. In other words, even as man-made apocalypse looms ever closer, devastating ecosystems and consigning the world’s most marginalized populations to early death, the waste management industry emerges as a reliable, stable, fail-safe site of investment either way—projects of sustainability, conservation,

and environmentalism and projects of extraction, consumption, and waste production become one and the same: opportunities.

At the same time, it is worth noting that the growth and development of the plastics industry was directly and intimately tied to US militarism. According to *Plastics and the Environment*, “World War II meant a boost for the production and further development of plastics, which took on a key role in the military supply chain. Plastics were used to make almost everything: for example, nylon could be found in parachutes, ropes, body armour and helmet liners, while Plexiglass replaced glass in aircraft windows” (4). A laundry list of items of government issue for which plastic had been approved in 1943 included combs and razors, molded bayonet handles, binocular cases, mortar shell fuses, resinous linings for jerry cans, and stiffeners for fabric skins of carrier-based airplanes. *24 Case Histories: How Plastics Solved War Problems*, a study published in 1946 by the General Electric Plastics Division, states that plastic’s military role spanned the material spectrum from the most seemingly insignificant (nameplates and instruction plates of phenolic laminate; bugles injection-molded from a cellulosic plastic) to the most essential (lightweight rocket launcher tubes of rolled paper filled with phenolic resin).

A wide variety of “pioneering materials” still in use today, such as polyethylene, polystyrene, polyester, polyethylene terephthalate, silicones, and others, were originally invented during the wartime period. Indeed, according to the Society of the Plastics Industry (founded in 1937), it was plastics that won the war: the “young, virile industry unhampered by ancient ideas and stodgy procedures...[offered] new and revolutionary productive methods, great productive capacity, and above all, ingenuity,” thus preparing the US “to ward off a military catastrophe”

(Meikle 161). The growth of the plastics industry, then, played a crucial role in the US military invasion and occupation of key geographic territories in Asia post-World War II. As Huang argues, “Plastic is made possible and makes possible through its ecologies of entanglement, which emerge from and reverberate across several spatiotemporal scales and histories of the transpacific—military, economic, environmental” (107). The needs of the US military set the stage for the expansion of plastics (including research and information gathering), which in turn enabled the economic and geopolitical expansion of the US and secured the transition from the use of plastic in military and industrial applications to consumer products.

For instance, resin-bonded plywood, used in the fuselage and wings of training planes and gliders as well as form-fitting seats for fighter pilots, was repurposed after WWII to make casual furniture and prefabricated housing systems. Fiberglass (or glass-reinforced polyester), previously used for enclosing airborne radar in durable and lightweight aerodynamic housings that would minimize interference with transmissions, was molded into small boats. Polyethylene, a thermoplastic used in wartime for insulating electric wiring, became a key component of injection molding. Meikle notes that plastics “radiated an aura...the business appeared easy to get into and impossible to fail at” as “wartime innovations could be exploited with minimal investment” (159). Interestingly, promotion of plastics relied not only on “the cornucopia of wonders ordinary citizens could enjoy but also the industry’s openness to pioneering mavericks” (157). As such, plastics “saved the world” not only from the threat of totalitarianism and fascism but from the specter of technocratic control.

This material history of plastic and its imbrication in US militarism is interesting to track in relation to the Matacão, which emerged unplanned from an accumulation of “nonbiodegradable garbage” rather than from careful research, investment, and cultivation.

Here, the transformation of general trash into this newly commodifiable, shiny form obscures and renders irrelevant the material histories of the diverse waste forms that constitute the plastic—where exactly these came from, what they were used for, whose lives they materially affected, and other details of their original circulation. It is only in its transmuted form of commodifiable object that nonbiodegradable waste is considered relevant or worthy of attention in the novel. Rather than following a familiar logic of capitalism that attributes value and significance to only those commodities that can realize capital through their circulation and exchange, then, I want to ask what possibilities are opened up when we attend to what is seemingly extinguished, forsaken, or rendered irrelevant in the process of capitalist circulation.

Against the commodifiable waste teeming with value in the novel are the ruins and refuse that have been thoroughly abandoned and cannot be reintroduced into circulation. Significantly, near the Matacão is discovered “an area that resembled an enormous parking lot, filled with aircraft and vehicles of every sort of description” (87). The planes and cars that fill this vacant lot had been “abandoned for several decades” and “on one end of the field, a number of the vehicles seemed to be slipping into a large pit of gray, sticky goop, a major component of which was discovered to be napalm” (87). The presence of napalm here immediately conjures up histories of US military intervention in Asia. The “poison-and-burn pathology” of napalm (codenamed “flaming death”)—a weapon of extensive, indiscriminating, mass destruction liberally used by the US in Korea, Vietnam, and Japan—changes the chemistry of the air through its combustion to produce “lethal levels of carbon monoxide, deoxygenating the air so everyone dies of asphyxiation immediately” and even those outside of the strike zone experience burns inside of the mouth, throat, and lungs; the substance also burns its victims “through the skin to the muscle and through the muscle to the bones” (Cho 78).

Abandoned and discarded after the United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons banned the use of air-delivered incendiary weapons against civilian populations or military targets within a concentration of civilians, the residues of “gray, sticky goop” deposited here serve as evidence of exhausted value that nonetheless continues to register the ongoing aftereffects of disavowed chemical processes no longer part of how the US builds bombs. At the same time, taking up the material presence of napalm in the Brazilian rainforest recalls Brazil’s participation in US-led initiatives to relocate and intern people of Japanese descent during World War II by either deporting them to the US or confining them to their areas of settlement and curtailing their already limited rights to land ownership (Bahng 138). Here, tracking the circulation of what has been rendered irrelevant to capital enables us to attend to the messy and complex circulations of racialized power across national borders that produce disposable populations managed through strategies of dispersal and containment.

Meanwhile, slipping into the pit of napalm are machines that “all dated back to the late fifties and early sixties—F86 Sabres, F-4 Phantoms, Huey Cobras, Lear Jets and Piper Cubs, Cadillacs, Volkswagens, Dodges and an assorted mixture of gas-guzzlers, as well as military jeeps and Red Cross ambulances” (87-88). The F86 Sabre is an American transonic jet fighter aircraft used in the Korean War; the F4 Phantom is a two-seat, two-engine, long-range supersonic jet interceptor and fighter-bomber used to drop napalm and missiles in Southeast Asia; and the Huey Cobra is a two-blade, single-engine attack helicopter used during the Tet offensive and throughout the end of the Vietnam War; the Lear Jet is a private, luxury aircraft whose preliminary design was based upon an experimental American military aircraft known as the Marvel, and the Piper Cub refers to an American light aircraft used by both the military

(WWII, Korean War) and civilians that has commonly invoked comparisons to the Ford Model T automobile through its simplicity, affordability, and popularity.

Interestingly, Yamashita situates this material history of military violence and accumulation through the prostration of Asian peoples (as relayed through its disposable remainders) alongside one of Fordlândia (conjured through the presence of abandoned cars), an early-20<sup>th</sup> century US rubber plantation established by Henry Ford in a bid to produce his own source of the rubber needed for making tires, valves, hoses, and gaskets and break British domination of the world rubber market. The resulting competition “gave rise to an often overlooked material connection between British and Dutch imperialism in Asia and US neo-colonial investments in Latin America (Bahng 131).

Fordlândia’s logic of extractivism was routed through its civilizing mission that sought to impose US social institutions, cultural practices, and labor administration onto local indigenous laborers. The company argued for a need to modernize the “unskilled methods of natives” to restore Brazil’s pre-eminence in the rubber industry given the “increased demand and more rigorous scientific development of rubber cultivation technologies in Asia” (Bahng 132). It sought to do so by forcing local laborers to work during the most exhausting midday hours, wear ID badges and uniforms, eat hamburgers and hotdogs in a cafeteria, attend US schools, churches, and hospitals, give up drinking and smoking, and watch Hollywood films in their leisure time. While Fordlândia has been mostly forgotten as an unsuccessful capitalist venture, its refuse remains to show us that the neocolonial presence of US in the Amazon is by no means a new phenomenon. The ongoing nature of such extractivist projects is further highlighted by the fact that the discovery of the Matacão results in new Fordlândia-style corporations eager to cash in on the fantasy of waste magically transformed into endless resource. When this fantasy collapses

and the Matacão abruptly reverts back to waste, the corporations abandon ship just as suddenly as they came, leaving behind new heaps of garbage and trash that pollute the ecosystem and displace Native populations from their lands. The remaindered vehicles found in the rainforest, “slowly crumbling, piece by piece, bit by bit, into a fine rusty dust” (88), thus point to ongoing histories of colonial violence that engages in a ceaseless extraction of natural resources and labor, appropriation of land, and elimination of Indigenous populations through coercion and assimilation.

This graveyard of cars not far from the Matacão also reminds us of the automotive industry’s historic fixation on plastic. The typical Ford car of 1936 contained “ten to fifteen pounds of this soybean plastic in window frames, steering wheel, gearshift knob, horn button, accelerator pedal, and electrical parts.” Ford, too, saw plastic as an immensely rich site of entrepreneurial opportunity and hired Robert A. Boyer to develop “experimental plastic autos.” In 1940, Ford invited a group of reporters to witness a demonstration of the plastic automobile’s unique potential: after being struck by an ax, the custom-built car rebounded into shape “good as new” because it was made of a tough phenolic plastic (Meikle 156). Following this experiment, Ford declared that he would soon be “mass producing plastic-bodied automobiles” and unveiled in 1941 a two-thousand-pound car made from fourteen plastic panels attached to a tube steel frame (Meikle 156). While it was never put to the test, Ford’s plastic car reveals his larger fixation with transforming automotive plastic transportation—either through new innovative methods of extraction and labor exploitation (cultural imperialism) or with a new plastic technology.

It is worth noting here that this “metal graveyard” of decaying aircraft, vehicles, and napalm was mistakenly discovered by a safari “made of entomologists...chasing after only one

of several thousand rare forms of butterfly” (87). Their presence and role in uncovering this dump site is significant because entomological data has been instrumental to and mobilized in service of conservation efforts whose concern for the creation of protected areas that delegitimize Indigenous land claims cannot be thought outside of settler colonial logics of extinction, land appropriation, and “primitive accumulation.” Here, I draw from Megan Ybarra’s scholarship that investigates conservation efforts in the Maya Forest through an engagement with postcolonial studies, feminist political ecology, and indigenous studies to argue that the effacing of indigenous sovereignty occurs through a settler state logic of elimination that “privilege[s] global conservation imaginaries over indigenous survival” (26). She states that “the logics of green security rationalize increasing militarization...and structural violence that limits life chances for people who are seen as dangerous to protected areas;” thus, conservation efforts “makes it not only easy for the Guatemalan state to ignore Indigenous land claims but also further facilitates the criminalization of Maya peoples and the act of farming” (27-8). The fact that the dump site in Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* would not have come into view without the presence of the entomologists suggests the impossibility of making legible the violences of global capitalism and what is extinguished in the circulation of capital without a careful consideration of settler colonial logics that undergird capitalist systems of exchange.

Significantly, this dump site teeming with napalm, discarded plastics, and cars is home to new species of mutated animals:

There was also discovered a new species of mouse, with prehensile tails, that burrowed in the exhaust pipes of all the vehicles. These mice had developed suction cups on their feet that allowed them to crawl up the slippery sides and bottoms of the aircraft and cars...The mice were found to have extremely high levels of lead and arsenic in their blood and fat

from feeding on chipped paint, yet they seemed to be immune to these poisons. Most animals who happened to feed on these mice were instantly killed, except for a new breed of bird, a cross between a vulture and a condor, that nested on propellers and pounced on the mice as they scurried out of exhaust pipes (88).

Alongside these new forms of life are a myriad of traditional varieties of flora and fauna that adopt to somehow find a home, food source, and way of life in the junkyard. For these creatures, trash and filth actually become the condition of survival. Their genetic mutations are, of course, meticulously studied: “All this was naturally being documented in the authoritative and measured tones of NHK, PBS, and BBC.” The mice are poked and prodded (“extremely high levels of lead and arsenic in their blood and fat”) and subjected to experimentation (“yet they seemed to be immune to these poisons”), recalling long histories of intentional radiation exposure and medical experimentation conducted on the non-consenting bodies of Asians and Pacific Islanders that will be discussed in the next section. It is not far-fetched to assume that these animals would be used to both investigate the molecular causes of various human diseases and develop new medical drugs and therapeutic procedures for the treatment of such diseases—all of which would become the source of immense financial speculation.

Ultimately, these leftovers that I have been tracking show that military violence and the production of Fordlândia are not separate, discrete, divorced processes; they’re entangled with each other in messy ways—the cars are literally slipping into the goop of napalm and consigned to the same space of abandonment as the military aircraft. In tracking the original circulation of these discarded objects, we are able to move across borders beyond national modes of apprehending history to see that ongoing logics of extractivism and instrumentalization of populations in Brazil are conjoined with military projects in Asia that continue to accrue capital

through administration of violence. Attending to the materiality of what is remaindered and exhausted of value in the process of circulation thus helps us attend to disavowed histories and circulations of racialized power exercised to the mutual constitution of settler colonialism, US militarism, and imperialism.

I want to suggest, then, that in reading discounted objects no longer in circulation that cannot be reducible to the commodity-form or thought merely as the receptacle of congealed labor, we open up the possibilities of engaging in Manu Vimalassery's call for "relational modes of analysis" (2) that can "consider the produced incomprehensibility between different forms of colonialism, such as the comparative and connective nature of settler colonialisms and franchise colonialisms, as well as differential and contingent racializations and racialized violences" (3). It seems to me, then, that taking up the material world of waste, refuse, and detritus can clarify complex circulations of racialized power and help us track the messy triangulation of race, labor, and war as a way to understand "settler colonial histories, conditions, practices, and logics of dispossession and power...as relationally constituted to other modes of imperialism, racial capitalism, and historical formations of social difference" (Vimalassery 4).

One of my interventions is to also insist on the theoretical possibilities of a reading practice that engages with material objects in literary texts to move beyond the narrative that is always attended to a human protagonist. Tracing the thematic of waste through *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* also clarifies what is sometimes missed when we theorize racialization at the level of the subject only—the disposability of environment and ecologies, of social beings that are more than just human. My analysis of select scenes from *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* thus suggests that reading for waste and trash—for what is discarded and remaindered in the

process of value-production—can offer us new possibilities for engaging the concept of disposability in relation to race and racialization.

### **Wasted Bodies & *Iep Jāltok***

The previous section sought to investigate the ways in which waste emerges as a site of speculation through a careful layering of seemingly disconnected histories. *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* sets us up to interrogate how race operates not only at the level of the subject, but in relation to the disposition of bodies and things—an orientation that is replicated in Marshallese poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's work. The genetically mutated fauna that dwell in the toxic, radiated dumpsite in the Brazilian rainforest of Karen Tei Yamashita's novel—only to become objects of scientific study to be researched, vivisected, and mined for data—foreshadow the focus of this section. Here, I explore how wasted, radiated bodies become transformed into sites of further extraction through practices of war-making that exceed projects of labor exploitation operating at the level of the subject. This section tracks toxins and radioactive waste that produce mutated, deformed bodies and disposable flesh from which a wealth of genetic information can be extracted. A close reading of Project 4.1 alongside the genealogy of the Human Genome Project and Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner's *Iep Jāltok* shows us that the process through which the body becomes information—usually read as a deracializing move—depends from the beginning on the calculated vulnerability of specific bodies.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands—previously under the administrative control of the US from 1947 to 1986—was the principal site of the US nuclear testing program in the Pacific Islands. To this day, the US holds exclusive military use of the islands and control of 2 million square miles of ocean and land. It maintains a military installation on Kwajalein Atoll and the

Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site, and leases 11 of the 97 islands for military activity. Between 1946 and 1958, the US military tested nuclear weapons on a number of the Marshall Islands that were equivalent to 7,200 Hiroshima-size bombs. The largest of the tests, a thermonuclear hydrogen bomb called Castle Bravo, was carried out on March 1, 1954, and had a yield of 15 megatons—more than 1,000 times the yield of the Hiroshima bomb. Despite the fact that it produced significant levels of radiation, the Marshallese residents living on nearby atolls were not relocated and exposed to the fallout. They subsequently consumed contaminated water, plants, seafood, and reef resources.

After the Islanders were exposed to the fallout, the US government established Project 4.1 to investigate the effects of radioactive exposure on humans and exposed Marshall Islanders were relocated to Kwajalein Atoll to be studied. According to the *Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments*, “it appears to have been almost immediately apparent to the AEC [Atomic Energy Commission] and the Joint Task Force running the Castle series that research on radiation effects could be done in conjunction with the medical treatment of the exposed populations.” Indeed, the previously classified 1954 “Study of Response of Human Beings Accidentally Exposed to Significant Fallout Radiation” states that the objections of Project 4.1 were to “(1) evaluate the severity of radiation injury to the human beings exposed, (2) provide for all necessary medical care, and (3) conduct a scientific study of radiation injuries to human beings.” Organizations involved in the project included the Naval Medical Research Institute, the Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory, the Naval Air Station, Los Alamos National Laboratory, and the Applied Fisheries Laboratory at the University of Washington.

The 100-page report documented skin lesions, epilation, nail pigmentation, upper respiratory infection, changes in weight, effect on pregnancy, etc. on the exposed populations

living in “primitive conditions” (15) and contain captioned photos such as “Extensive lesions in boy, age 13, case 26”; “Scalp lesions in man.” While the American military personnel stationed there were “aware of the significance of fallout” and were evacuated or made to take precautions, “in contrast, most of the native Marshallese remained out of doors and thus were more heavily contaminated by the material falling on the atolls” (15). The report states that “some indication of severity of exposure can be gleaned from a comparison of minimum individual counts in Japanese groups exposed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in which fatalities occurred. In general, a significant number of deaths was encountered only in individuals whose neutrophile count fell below 100. In the Rongelap group 42 or approximately 50 per cent had neutrophile counts below 2000 at some time during the observation period, and 10 per cent had counts below 1000. By this criterion, then, the effective dose received by the Rongelap people approached the lethal range” (86-87). It also contained studies conducted on food, water, and soil samples from the islands as well as the local animal life to conclude that “The fallout material probably entered the exposed people through both the inhalation and ingestion routes” (96). I quote from this report in some length to show the meticulous tracking and documentation this “scientific study” necessitated.

This study of the “biomedical effects” of beta and gamma radiation was conducted without the informed consent of Marshall Islanders. Indeed, evidence suggests the fallout exposure was purposeful. In 1972, Micronesian Representative Ataji Balos argued that the AEC sought to expose Marshallese to radiation because of their marginal status, arguing that “The US chose to make guinea pigs out of our people because they are not white but some brown natives in some remote Pacific Islands.” Significantly, the instrumentalization of the Marshallese survivors on behalf of genetic science “contributed to the corpus of medical knowledge on the

treatment of radiation exposure, cancer, and thyroid disease and provided new information on child growth” (McElfish et al, 194).

The material impact of this fallout carries across and continues to haunt generations of Marshallese survivors. In *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter*, activist and poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner dedicates her poem “Fishbone Hair” to her niece, Bianca Lanki, who passed away from leukemia at just eight years old. She writes in her blog that the poem is a “reflection of the many Marshallese who’ve passed away from cancer, and other radiation related illnesses, and the legacy of the US nuclear testing program on our islands.” Refusing attempts to narrate Castle Bravo as an isolated incident contained in an already concluded and resolved historical past, Jetñil-Kijiner launches a “call to remember, to honor, to never forget” that asks “who have you lost to radiation related illnesses?”

“Fishbone Hair” begins with the narrator finding in her niece’s old room

two ziplocks

stuffed

with rolls and rolls of hair

.....

rootless hair

that hair without a home (24).

They are the only remnants and remainders of a war waged on her niece’s body: “white cells had staked their flag / they conquered the territory of her tiny body” (25). The language of colonization used here converts the little girl’s body into a war zone that effectively reduces the human to the body. Jetñil-Kijiner connects Bianca’s prognosis (“They said she had six months to live”) to those offered to the Marshallese fishermen who were exposed to the fallout (“That’s

what the doctors told the fishermen / over 50 years ago / when they were out at sea just miles away from the Bikini”). The calculated refusal to inform the Marshallese residents about the testing both during and immediately after the bombs were dropped ensured that there would be no shortage of test subjects. The fishermen

were quiet

they were neat

they dusted the ash

out of their hair

reeled in their fish

and turned around their motorboat to speed home (29), bringing their contaminated fish and clothes home to their families—to their children and grandchildren. The data mined from exposed Marshallese (treated as scientific “objects” of study) that were instrumentalized to treat cancer and generate new insights about child growth thus cannot benefit Bianca.

In weaving Bianca’s fallen hair with the ash-covered ones of the fishermen, Jetñil-Kijiner reminds us that exposure and proximity to toxins and body-decaying illnesses is an ongoing and continuous project in the Marshall Islands because the fallout impacted not only the islanders but also poisoned entire ecologies. Jetñil-Kijiner writes that before Bianca’s death, before all her hair fell out, she

loved

to eat fish

she ate it raw ate it fried ate it whole

.....

leaving only

tiny

neat

bones (27).

Here, we can speculate that her eager consumption of contaminated fish—caught by generations of fishermen exposed to the lingering radiation—has everything to do with her early and untimely passing.

In the end, the only thing left of Bianca is the pile of hair locked up in little plastic bags. Citing an old Chamorro legend, Jetñil-Kijiner states

that the women of Guåhan saved their island

from a giant coral eating fish

by hacking off their

long and black as the night sky hair

They wove their locks

into a massive magical net

They caught the monster fish

and they saved their islands (30).

Situating Bianca's bag of hair next to this legend shows us the significance and import of what has been taken away. What was once the source of such strength, with the capacity to save entire

islands, is now “rootless” and “without a home,” a testament to a wasted body. Additionally, rather than positioning the Marshall Islands as *the* center of indigenous injury, she builds relationality to other sites in the Pacific Islands through her citation of Guåhan. In doing so, she situates the Marshall Islands as being a part of, and existing in dynamic relationality with, a larger archipelago and ocean—thus refuting the colonial logics that produced Marshall Islands as an ideal testing site in the first place (as isolated, small, and insignificant).

At the same time, the carefully stored and preserved locks of hair seem to contain within them the hopes of one day producing a different kind of net that can catch the destructive, coral-eating force devastating their island. Bearing renewed life through Jetñil-Kijiner’s invocation in this poem, the pile of hair seems to offer a speculative invocation of subaltern (other-than-sovereign) agency that actually emerges from loss and bodily decomposition. These strands bore witness to and survived the war waged on Bianca’s body: they remain even upon her death, carrying within them some possibility of futurity not yet realized.

The devastating impact of nuclear weapons testing haunts Jetñil-Kijiner’s first collection of poems. In “History Project,” she recalls firsthand accounts of

jelly babies  
 tiny beings with no bones  
 skin—red as tomatoes  
 the miscarriages gone unspoken (20).

She holds and remembers

a photograph  
 of a boy, peeled skin  
 arms legs suspended

a puppet  
 next to a lab coat lost  
 in his clipboard (20).

Here, she points out the ways in which scientific knowledge production has reduced Marshallese to decayed, unnamed bodies that are an object of study (“puppet”) to be manipulated and arranged. The “lab coat lost / in his clipboard” shows us that this process of dehumanization and data-ification is not just incidental but central to projects of war-making, as well as to projects of biopolitics/public health that seek to generate intellectual property related to cancer treatments. The transformation of wasted bodies into sites of further extraction, then, is secured and perpetuated by war in ways that exceed projects of labor exploitation operating at the level of the subject.

The particular disposability of the Marshallese is highlighted by the fact that “*Goats and pigs were left on naval ships as test subjects*” because

*Thousands  
 of letters flew in from America  
 protesting*

*animal abuse (22).*

Unlike the imported goats and pigs, the Marshallese’ disposability is signaled by the fact that their bodies, communities, and the entire ecosystem/ecologies of which they are a part are considered abundantly available for testing. This production of wasted bodies continues endlessly:

three generations later

...they watch their grandfather/aunty/cousin's life drip  
 across that same  
 black  
 screen (22).

Unsurprisingly, this practice of conducting immensely profitable medical studies on the war-torn bodies of those racialized as disposable is by no means a unique phenomenon. Jodi Kim, for instance, has written about the US government's refusal to let the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission treat the Japanese subjects it was studying and the ways in which wartime targets become objects of state knowledge. It is this process of turning wasted bodies into quantities of data that enables the "emergence of genomics research into a confluence of financial and military securitization" (Bhang "Specters" 672). Tracking the genealogy of the National Human Genome Research Institute and Human Genome Project and their strategic forgetting of Hiroshima, Bhang argues that a reorientation of scientific research toward the financial sector has secured "speculations on the HGP's potential to predict and preempt disease and genetic 'defects' [that] would ultimately become the source of prolific speculation wherein venture capitalists could bet on scientific research and its conversion into private-sector enterprises like individualized genetic sequencing services such as those offered by 23andme.com" (671). The HGP, relying on data generated through war's production of nuclear waste and wasted bodies, presents itself as "securitization against the onslaught of an uncertain mutagenic future, wherein investment in genetic engineering hedges against potential risk" (672). Here, the HGP's emphasis on studying genetic populations rather than individual bodies, as well as its informatics-based approach to encoding mapping and databasing the genome, "dovetailed perfectly with the logic of financial data-ification" (675).

Citing Cooper, Bahng notes that the informationalization of biomatter and articulation of genomics research through the logics of speculative financing “constitute ‘markets and technologies specializing in biological promise [that] can in turn be understood as part of a larger trend toward the intensification of futures trading in both the US and world capital markets’” (674). Venture capitalists habitually fund scientific research long before there is an actual product that can be sold to the public: in a single year between July 1991 and 1992, 46 initial public offerings in biotechnology companies were filed, worth \$1.4 billion. Such practices continue today as investors seeking to speculate on regenerative medicine and precision-targeted designer drugs “extrapolate the endowed value of an experimental life form’s ‘generative promise’ based at least in part on how scientists narrate near-future projections of their research’s impact” (674).

Crucially, the future projections of such research are secured through the data-ification of those least likely to benefit from the biological promise it supposedly generates. Here, within the realm of biopolitical social relations enacted in the management and financialization of health, race signals the degree to which one’s body and bodily parts remain available to be reduced into quantities of biological material that generate surplus value and fuel new speculative efforts. In the context of the Marshall Islands, Guam, and other sites in Asia that have historically been the site of medical experimentation, racialization plays out as the slow vivisection and recruitment of biopsied tissues and organs (Lee 28) that are made abundantly available through war’s production of waste.

That “the US chose to make guinea pigs out of...some brown natives in some remote Pacific Islands” also reminds us of the persistence of older categories of race (that asserts the salience of gross anatomical markers and reads race as synecdoche for exploited, expendable

laboring bodies that don't belong). Scholars such as Paul Gilroy have argued that the development of new technologies through which to look at race have made this category irrelevant: at the level of the cellular, technologies that reduce bodies to quantities of information detached from flesh have rendered race meaningless. However, it becomes clear that data-ification and quantification continue to rely upon regimes of race that remain attached to earlier historical temporalities and spaces. After all, the data that the HGP relies on to present itself as securitization against risk (of disease, disaster, or accident) and produce any number of biogenetical engineered products geared for the biomedical health-pharmaceutical industry would not have existed without war's production of nuclear waste and wasted bodies. This very process of destruction and slow poisoning, then, as well as the search to find a cure and immunity against such attacks, become one and the same as a supremely profitable site of investment. Here, the colonization of the future as a means of present realization (where capital speculates on its own future realization and the speculation of a future yield/return gives birth to the past of production) depends first and foremost on the violent legacies of colonialism.

Thus far, I have sought to show that reconstruction and waste management are both projects of opportunity: the process of slow poisoning and the search to find a cure becomes a site of immense profitability. Significantly, attending to the decimation of human bodies around nuclear testing in the Pacific Islands and the ongoing extraction of value from such wasted bodies through carefully documented and staged medical experimentation shows that these projects of accumulation do not leave intact the status of the subject. The complete reduction of the human to the body that is then numbered and studied shows us capital's management of waste operates along very different lines than one of production. The analytic of waste, then,

asks us to rethink the category of “subject” as the site from which to build our conversations about racialized disposability.

### ***Dogeaters: Insisting on Trash***

In the context of our contemporary moment of neoliberal capitalism, those selected for life through their capacity to yield value as living labor and inhabit a “risk-capable investor model of subjectivity” (Tadiar “Life-Times” 21) are imagined to be a distinct, discrete, and thus static and fixed population that can be set clearly apart from those at-risk non-subjects consigned for death who have the capacity to yield value only as disposable, expendable existence. Such analyses of power view swathes of life that fall into the latter category as merely abject, expended, surplus populations that are transparently knowable as “forms of bare life, at-risk populations, warehoused, disposable people, urban excess (planet of the slums), out of which is to be gleaned new political subjects and potentials for resistance already convertible to the ruling political currencies of the day” (24).

Foreclosed in such modes of analyses is the possibility of attending to the creative life-making capacities of those deemed disposable who serve as the means of reproduction of others and are much more complexly situated in relation to valorizable life than is often imagined. After all, these objectified, dominated, and abject figures meant for death challenge easy distinctions between life worth cultivating and life worth expending through their work of living as they navigate the conditions of their own disposability on a daily basis by engaging in, drawing upon, improvising, and inventing “a diverse array of acts, capacities, associations, aspirations in practice, experiential modes, and sensibilities” (Tadiar “Life-Times” 23) in their struggle to sustain, make, and remake social life.

In this section, I want to think about how engaging with what Tadiar calls “modes of life lived and practices of living that are remaindered in the process of production of biopolitical life, that is, both the waste of life and wasted life” (“Life-Times” 25) might help us rethink the various ways that disposability has been theorized in relation to race, racialization, and racial power. How might we attend to the nuances of racialized disposability by taking into account both the processes through which surpluses are produced, extracted, appropriated, and destroyed and the creative modes and means through which the work of living is engaged by those remaindered in the process of value-production? What is opened up when we read Asian diasporic literary formation for waste and trash—for the racialized bodies and objects discarded and remaindered in the process of production who eke out a living from trash—instead of engaging in a mode of literary inquiry that interprets such literatures through US exceptionalist norms to transform such literatures into objects of state redress and reconciliation?

Here, I turn to Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dog eaters* which, since its publication in 1990, has been the subject of numerous pieces of literary criticisms that have variously categorized it as a “canonical text in the making—for the floating multiculturati” and “the next season’s pick for the Establishment celebration of its multicultural canon” (San Juan 129); as a sellout that merely reproduces an imperialist sensibility in offering an American orientalist portrait of the Philippines; and as a “tour-de-force debut novel...[that] implicitly challenges not only the civilizing missions of the Philippine colonial past, but also the somewhat predictable and emotive nationalist response of the Filipino community itself” to present “a vital portrait of resistance” (Zamora 167, 171). I open this section with a brief consideration of the existing criticism in an effort to track and think through the set of questions that get privileged in each of these modes of literary engagement.

In “From Discos to Jungles: Circuitous Queer Patronage and Sex Tourism in Jessica Hagedorn’s *Dog eaters*,” Stephen Hong Sohn reads Joey as one of the inhabitants of the postcolonial nation-state’s service sector “who, desiring agency, fall all too readily into the limited roles that have been prescribed for them” (319). According to Sohn, Joey is “lost in the commodity-driven urban space” (330), “trapped within the roles prescribed to him” (336), and “insidiously subsumed” under the nation-state’s political project to refashion Manila and the Philippines into an “irresistible sexual playground” (336). Sohn argues that “*Dog eaters* suggests that to fully engage queer sexuality, the subject must be willing to lose himself in a commodified landscape, even at the expense of political progressivism” (330). In reading Joey as facing a “problematic, queer embodiment wherein his queerness seems to emerge only through the attractive pull of capital,” Sohn argues that this character’s transformation into a “forceful and radical guerilla” (339) is incomplete because he is unable to actualize and achieve “the progressive potential of queer sexualities” (320). Thus, he reads *Dog eaters* as “elucidat[ing] how the queer subject must undergo a tactical dissolution in order to emerge as a forceful and radical guerrilla...the novel suggests that queer sexualities and revolutionary struggles are potentially and ultimately mutually exclusive” (339).

Strikingly, Sohn suggests that “even as Joey is able to navigate and comment on the facades put up by the postcolonial nation-state through its various projects and commodified spaces” and “see through the First Lady’s superficial projects” at renovating the slum districts of Manila, he cannot see the ways in which sex work operates as an extension of the postcolonial nation-state’s patronage (336). Joey “doesn’t realize how this movement into sex tourism is made possible by the high traffic of bodies moving to Manila in search of all forms of diversions” and it is this inability to read “his own more pedestrian position within the

postcolonial nation-state” (337)—the ways in which his body and subjectivity is situated in relation to postcolonial state power and transnational capital—that supposedly renders him fixed and trapped as a fully subsumed and objectified appendage in the city.

Meanwhile, Caroline S. Hau, categorizing Hagedorn as a privileged “bourgeois intellectual-artist” from the metropolis (124), criticizes *Dogeaters* for its lack of a “theory of positive action on the social level” (118) and for the ways in which the novel has been marketed as American literature even as publishers capitalize on the authenticity gained in advertising Hagedorn as Philippine-born. Kirsten Twelbeck investigates “the concepts of personal and political resistance introduced by *Dogeaters*” to read Joey as standing for a “decentered strategy and parallel projects of political resistance that are based on a plurality of historical experiences and potentially on camouflage”—a form of resistance that she reads as being akin to “what Gramsci has called a ‘counter-hegemony’” (435). In contrast, Victor Mendoza explores “the extent to which the sexual-political agent of resistance in *Dogeaters* is the nomad or bandit” whose “deterritorialized resistance” cannot be read as “bound in binary opposition to the progressivist ideologies and forms of domination that postcolonial nationalisms often inherit from old colonial systems” (815).

E. San Juan Jr. reads the novel as “less a resolution of conflicts and ambivalences than a symptom of aestheticist resignation to them. Less feminist than feminine, its oppositional impulse dissolves in exhibitionist and stylized gestures of self-transcendence” (128). Tellingly, much of San Juan’s frustrations with and criticisms of the novel emerge in relation to his reading of “the neocolonial (not postcolonial) impasse of Filipino society” as that which “has not suffered attenuation. On the contrary: The whole country has been refeudalized as a Western enclave in the cartography of global, transnational capitalism” (130). He argues that “this change

demands a new historically grounded analysis, properly a collective and open-ended enterprise, one that would ideally be informed by an emancipatory and counterhegemonic praxis” (130): it is this urgency that seems to motivate and undergird his dissatisfied reading of *Dog eaters*.

Tangled up in the idiom of these texts are each of these scholars’ attempts to identify and respond to a similar problem and question—that is, how exactly is the novel tracking particular kinds of competing figures, experiences, and subjectivities and situating them in relation to the postcolonial nation-state and its institutions operating in the larger context of global, transnational capitalism? How are we to make sense of the ways in which each character interacts with a system of power and what do we make of those tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities proliferating in the novel that cannot be easily resolved or read for a clear endprogram of oppositional resistance? In engaging with Hagedorn’s *Dog eaters*, however, I find myself interested in a different set of questions: What is there beyond the institutionalized ways of thinking, reading, and critiquing that depend on the language of hegemonic/counterhegemonic agency, complicity/resistance, progressive transgression/conformity, etc.? What might be gained by reading for what is irrelevant, insignificant, and marginal—for that which falls out of and cannot quite be captured by the existing theoretical framework and paradigms that are in place? What is not put into language under such frameworks?

My thinking here is inspired by Tadiar’s opening remarks in her *Things Fall Away: Philippine Historical Experience and the Making of Globalization*:

Refurbished as well as unreconstructed nationalisms and transnationalisms, battles for state power and civil liberties, identity-based claims to political and economic enfranchisement, liberal-democratic ideals of civil society—such are the familiar trajectories of world-historical agency in these times, trajectories from which all other

manner of human and parahuman lives, pasts, presents, and futures, cultural imaginations, and virtual realities are jettisoned. These things fall away, and their barely apprehended importance to our worlds is lost to us, who seek different holds on our immanent futures (3).

What falls away from those theoretical paradigms, frameworks, and systems of thought that privilege a particular kind of subject? What is there beyond the institutionalized ways of thinking, reading, and critiquing that depend on the language of hegemonic/counterhegemonic agency, complicity/resistance, progressive transgression/conformity, etc.? What is not put into language under such frameworks? What eludes the categories of social and political agency to which we have historically been more attuned?

The first two sections of this chapter have sought to think through racialization outside the terrain of the subject. This section's attention to *Dog eaters* and its central characters Joey and Boy-Boy might be construed as reinstating the centrality of subjects. However, while I may seem to be (re)turning to the subject, I am ultimately interested in seeing what kinds of not-quite-recognizable subjects might emerge from wasted ecologies and contaminated bodies. These characters have been misread as politically failed subjects precisely because they are unfamiliar, not-quite recognizable, subaltern subjects that insist upon waste as a condition of their emergence.

In thinking through these questions, I want to begin my reading of Hagedorn's *Dog eaters* by turning to one of its sections, "Insect Bounty," that offers a full transcript of a 1988 AP article reporting on the latest statist project to recruit the residents of the "slum district of Tondo" into the task of capturing the flies that live off of the enormous piles of garbage deposited there (187).

The residents are to be paid “\$5 for every 1,000 flies they capture” in the interest of preventing “an outbreak of insect-born diseases” (187). It is worth noting that the emphasis is not on eliminating the “300 tons of garbage...dumped daily” or the conditions that lead to its ceaseless production as the excess of development, which are taken to be inevitable *and necessary* (“‘If we cannot do away with this garbage...’”). Thus, the stated objective (“to eliminate these creatures that bring sickness”) is clearly impossible and unproductive, especially as the endless dumping of trash that draws the flies is not going to be stopped.

The attempt to recruit a community of thousands living in the “trash-filled district of Manila” into this labor-intensive and implausible task, then, seems to be for the purposes of securing not better living conditions for the inhabitants but rather, the means to control and constrain the movements of those living at the “site of Manila’s dump” (187). This “offer to pay residents \$5 for every 1,000 flies they capture” can thus be read as a project that seeks to instrumentalize and pacify a disposable population not participating in market exchange and ultimately resign them to a slow death, or life at the very margins, while also producing them as distinct from the captive inmates in the police commander’s jail who have categorically been “assigned to count the flies before they are burned” and will not be compensated for their labor (187). “Insect Bounty” thus lends itself to a reading of the space of slums as the space of an accomplished form of necropower that organizes and orders disposable human populations through its capacity to track, intern, control, impel, and arrest their movements and render them fully susceptible to the imposition of a slow violence/death.

Yet, such a reading does not rule out the possibility of strategies of subaltern improvisation that occur at the margins. From the trash-filled district of Manila, then, I want to move to Studio 54, “a gold mine, a kinky haven” where “hungry young boys crowd the stage,

lathering their bodies with soap while an audience watches” (141). We first learn about this place when Joey, one of the novel’s main protagonists, picks up a German filmmaker visiting the Philippines for the Manila International Film Festival. “The German,” as Joey calls him, eagerly questions him about the ‘shower dancers’: “They all want to know. Then they want to see it for themselves” (141). As Joey answers question after question about the shower dancers that the European tourist clearly finds intriguing, appealing, and desirable (““Is that all they do? Rub soap on their bodies?...Do they do it slowly?...Are they hard? Do they come on stage?...Does he like it?...Tell me what it’s like...They touch themselves?...How long does it take?”” (142)), he becomes impatient and thinks, “When you get right down to it, the German’s turning out to be just like the rest of them, with their stupid questions” (142). The “they” here clearly references American and European sex tourists: Joey tells the German that ““lots of foreigners go” to watch the shower dancers as they “rinse themselves off with sponges dipped in buckets of water, taking their sweet time” (142). The performed removal of dirt, waste, and filth here, then, is seen as deeply erotic and desirable by those foreign tourists “greedy to watch” (141).

The eroticization of cleanliness and purity displayed by these foreigners recalls US colonial preoccupations with hygiene and obsessive desire for control over excrement/waste that were staged in the Philippines. According to Warwick Anderson’s “Excremental Colonialism: Public Health and the Poetics of Pollution,” the staff of the Manila Bureau of Science examined over 7,000 fecal specimens from the local residents in 1909 alone, and by 1914, had over 126,000 jars of feces (647). As a result of health regulations established by the US, hotels, restaurants, and servants could not handle food without a health certificate; new sanitary markets were constructed in Manila and checked regularly by inspectors; each *tienda* had to provide a teakettle for rendering water sterile in order to obtain a license (657); sanitary commissions

visited towns to instruct local inhabitants in personal hygiene, home cleanliness, and the care of the sick; the health service maintained permanent exhibits of model sanitary houses, sanitary methods of sewage disposal, and sanitary and unsanitary barrios and sent out a health-mobile to fairs and fiestas (660); disinfecting squads comprised of over 600 men were dispatched to lime and spraying carbolic acid over dwellings, using 150,000 pounds of lime and 700 gallons of carbolic acid in just the span of a year (663); and Clean-Up Week was instituted as an alternative to the traditional fiesta (666).

Anderson argues that such health officers sought to use the body and waste practices to mark racial and social boundaries in the Philippines by remapping the bodies of Filipinos. This spatializing project “required not only a ‘confession of putrescence’ from Filipinos but also constant self-discipline among American residents in the tropics, transcendence of the ‘natural’ body, a territorial possessing predicated on self-possession” (645). U.S. American bodily control thus sought to both legitimate and symbolize social and political control through the act of distinguishing U.S. American bodies/subjectivities from the putrescent, abject one of the Filipino colonial (non)subject by claiming a different embodiment and corporeal experience of hygiene and excrement.

Yet, even as these “grotesque, defecating Filipino bodies” were constructed by the production and circulation of medical and public health discourse as “uncivil,” “bestial,” and “promiscuous defecators,” they were also actively constructing this bodily knowledge as the “chief, and most generous, sources of contaminating matter” (668) whose continued production of feces and its eruption onto the surface of the metropolis remained both necessary and in excess of the U.S. colonial project of territorial possessing predicated on self-possession. The fantasy of imperial subject constitution over and against the putrescent, abject subaltern

population whose bodies are in need of constant surveillance and management, medical reformation, and ceaseless disinfection is thus secured through a targeted obsession over waste and refuse.

Crucially, it is this colonial fantasy that the “shower boys” and Studio 54 capitalize on. Rather than reading the sex workers as “one of the beautiful, but nonetheless numerous and replaceable, appendages of the Filipino service sector in the city” who are “trapped” and “insidiously subsumed” under the “postcolonial” nation-state’s political project to refashion Manila and the Philippines into an “irresistible sexual playground” (Sohn 336), I want to suggest that these service workers creatively cash in on the colonial fantasies of cleanliness and hygiene to sustain life in defiance of forces that seek to drain and destroy it. These human actors thus participate in their own export and exchange by offering up their bodies and selves as “mediatory apparatuses (as object and site) for the transaction and transmission of quantities and qualities of power and value across realms of social interaction...that are to some extent congruent but also importantly imperfectly aligned with the social field of exchange under capitalist democracy” (Tadiar “Decolonization” 410). Significantly, it is Boy-Boy, one of the shower dancers, to whom Joey turns when he finds himself in a situation of the utmost precarity—penniless, homeless, and hunted by authorities after he witnesses the assassination of Senator Avila. After Joey shows up at Studio 54, Boy-Boy secures Joey’s survival by hiding him in his apartment, providing sustenance, and arranging his safe departure from the city without any expectation of compensation. In the intimate caring bodily mediatic performances of Boy-Boy’s shower dances, then, is his real, practical function as what Tadiar calls “vital platforms of social reproducibility” that secure the transmissibility of potency and life across persons (“Decolonization” 411).

Crucially, Boy-Boy and the “shower boys” are not repudiating filth so much as insisting on it: the dirt and waste is a crucial part of what makes their performance erotic, enjoyable, and commodifiable. Their insistence on filth, trash, and garbage is in stark contrast to the First Lady’s project of cleaning up the slums for the Manila International Film Festival: “She orders the city and slums rejuvenated with fresh coats of paint, windows and doorways lined with pots of plastic flowers, the streets swept and respect by women in red and yellow sweatshirts with ‘Metro Manila Are’ printed in big black letters on the back and front. Even Uncle’s shack gets the treatment” (130). All the cleanup and reconstruction work is done as rapidly as possible, resulting in a partial collapse of the cultural center that buries workers in rubble. The workers’ bodies are quickly covered over with new layers of concrete and “they finish exactly three hours before the first foreign film is scheduled to be shown” (130). Here, the prospect of impressing “honored guests of the government” (131) and inviting future investment depends upon being able to present a scrubbed city with all its squalor neatly contained and “rejuvenated.” The rush to clean up the city operates on a logic that assumes a binary opposition between waste and value: to recruit the latter, the former cannot be made visible.

In direct contrast, the slum-dwelling performers mobilize their own disposability by using their proximity to waste to link sexuality and hygiene in ways that enable them to secure their livelihood. The emphasis is not on producing a finished, polished, cleaned body but on showing the actual dirt and filth, which is then slowly and erotically removed. Crucially, Boy-Boy’s job as a shower boy secures not only his livelihood but his anonymity: no one, least of all Joey, suspects that he is part of an organized insurgency. Through this insistence on filth, Boy-Boy exposes the very distinction between waste and value as a field of maneuver, amounting to a

form of insurgency that seeks to reclaim what falls away from “familiar trajectories of world-historical agency” (Tadiar 3) rather than simply reproducing normative political postures.

At the same time, the fact that Boy-Boy cashes in on the colonial fantasy of subaltern filth and cleanliness to organize in neocolonial Philippines also complicates zero-sum understandings of complicity vs. resistance. What is useful is not the extent to which one sits outside of sites of contamination but rather within them. This reading thus seeks to refuse a reductive account of political agency that establishes a zero-sum game between abjection and sovereignty. Here, I want to ask what possibilities open up when we attend to practices of subaltern improvisation that actively produce (rather than merely being the effect of) capitalist processes and relations instead of reading characters like Joey as instrumentalized objects/abject, ruined, violated remainders/non-sovereign (and therefore) non-subjects or, conversely, as hypostasized agents of state oppression, whose only and ultimate mode of possibility is to seek received forms of proper political/historical subjectivity and social experience through claiming some sort of an emancipatory counterhegemonic agency.

*Dogeaters* thus usefully complicates attempts to theorize waste and trash from the totalizing agency of capital and enables us to summon the instrumentalized life under subjugation—the seemingly captured and totalized life-in-crisis—as a potential scene of creative political self-elaboration that moves away from an emancipatory political subjectivity (predicated on liberal conceptions of self-possession, sovereignty and autonomy, rational self-governance, etc.) that it helped constitute. Of course, it is unclear what exactly this new not-quite-recognizable subject would look like. But perhaps, a willingness to sit with, read with, and labor with the grappling of this uncertainty can enable the coming-of-being of another kind of

political embodiment and subjectivity that emerges over and against the ideal of the progressive, agential, inviolate and fully autonomous subject.

Thus far, I have been arguing that reading for waste can orient us toward something other than a subject-centered narrative. This chapter opened with a discussion of what it means to think about racialization in relation to spaces and objects, rather than subjects. By the end of this chapter, however, it may appear as though we have returned to the domain of the subject once more. After all, thinking about toxic dump sites eventually brings us back to the subject because it produces not just mutated mice with suction-cupped feet, but also human populations who live in close proximity to radioactive material and garbage. However, I want to suggest that this discussion opens up space for us to encounter not the sovereign subject—or attempts to reconstitute this subject—but to something else entirely. My reading of *Dogeaters* is centered around people who have been consigned to situations of non-subjecthood—or, in other words, to those without the capacity to represent themselves as “Subject.” I want to suggest that attending to this figure opens up the possibility of disrupting a telos in which the only alternative to racial subjection is seen as an emergence into sovereignty.

Here, it is worth spending some time to unpack what I mean by “subject.” My understanding of the subject is informed by Mbembe’s essay, “Necropolitics.” Mbembe writes that although modernity was at the origin of multiple concepts of sovereignty, late-modern political criticism has disregarded this multiplicity and privileged normative theories of democracy to make reason one of the most important elements of the project of modernity and the topos of sovereignty (3). According to this perspective, “the ultimate expression of sovereignty is the production of general norms by a body (the demos) made up of free and equal

men and women...posited as full subjects capable of self-understanding, self-consciousness, and self-representation” (13). Politics is thus defined as a twofold project of autonomy and the achieving of agreement among a collectivity through community and recognition. Here, “the romance of sovereignty, in this case, rests on the belief that the subject is the master and the controlling author of his or her own meaning. Sovereignty is therefore defined as a twofold process of self-institution and self-limitation (fixing one’s own limits for oneself)” (13). Through the exercise of reason (“tantamount to the exercise of freedom, a key element for individual autonomy,”) the subject of this sovereignty seemingly achieves self-realization and the power to produce and define itself (13). As such, this sovereignty “wears the mantle of an emancipatory power”<sup>14</sup> that liberates by making the imposition of power on its subjects appear as an exercise in self-limitation and self-governance.

This “romance” or fiction of emancipatory sovereignty has also historically defined the grounds on which disqualified political actors could stage their resistance: by exposing and critiquing the exclusionary, normative nature of this power and asserting their own status as sovereigns to claim full recognition/participation (following the “familiar trajectories of world-historical agency” that Tadiar describes). Within this normative account of modernity, then, the alternative to colonization, racial subjection, and political disqualification is seen as emergence into sovereignty. The struggle against the “bad faith” of this version of modern sovereignty thus has the effect of “*reproduc[ing] the political ethos of self-governance as the legitimating ground of the struggle*” (Cherniavsky 3). This framework of resistance operates by producing clear distinctions between the subject of emancipation who can achieve self-realization versus non-

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<sup>14</sup> See Eva Cherniavsky’s reading of necropower in *Neocitizenship*.

subjects; it also makes it difficult to register other political moves that are not interested in reproducing this ethos of self-governance and self-determination.

Ultimately, Mbembe's concern is to attend to those figures of sovereignty whose central project is not the struggle for autonomy but "*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*" (14). In offering a theorization of necropower as that which renders human populations disposable, Mbembe seeks to develop "a reading of politics, sovereignty, and the subject different from the one we inherited from the political discourse of modernity" (14). My reading of *Dogeaters* likewise seeks to read for a different kind of subject than the one we are accustomed to thinking. This wasted subject is neither the absolutely dominated, objectified, abject figure in need of redemption out of which can be gleaned "new political subjects and potentials for resistance already convertible to the ruling political currencies of the day" (Tadiar 24), nor the subject of modern sovereignty whose emancipation is imagined to be secured through claims to enfranchisement, recognition, and self-definition.

As I have tried to show, the slum-dwelling sex workers of *Dogeaters* disrupt a resistance telos in which the claiming of and arrival into emancipatory sovereignty is offered as antidote to exploitation and disqualification. The shower boys' act of capitalizing on racist colonial fantasies by insisting on and instrumentalizing filth while living at the margins has nothing to do with the project of summoning or reconstituting a sovereign subject whose agency aligns with proper forms of political progressivism. Joey and Boy-Boy's performances as shower boy/sex worker exceed and defy any reading of their tactics as attempts to claim subjectivity and enter into hegemonic forms of subject-constitution. As such, I have sought to show that the creative strategies of survival employed by Boy-Boy and the shower boys cannot be reduced to that of

just accommodation or complicity. Indeed, the binary opposition of complicity or resistance remains woefully incapable of thinking about agency for people who are consigned or declared to be waste and treated or managed accordingly. It thus forecloses the possibility of encountering vital yet overlooked forms of agency proliferating in the context of violations that continually produce certain populations as waste and reduce them to the status of mere abjectness/expendable flesh.

Attending to Joey, Boy-Boy, and the shower boys as more than just failed political subjects opens up space for us to think about what it means to inhabit the spaces of subalternity to produce a different field of agency that is uninterested in claiming sovereign subjecthood or participating in already recognizable modes of political resistance. A reading that refuses the binary opposition of objectified, dominated, abject figure vs. the subject of emancipation also disrupts a telos in which the figure of the subaltern is either consigned to subalternity and disappearance, or made to emerge into hegemony through entering normative forms of subject-constitution. Here, I am thinking of Guha's point that radical historiography, like its colonialist counterpart, has engaged in "an act of appropriation which excludes the rebel as the conscious subject of his own history and incorporates the latter as only a contingent element in another history with another subject" (77). Thus "trapped in the paradigm which inspired the ideologically contrary, because colonialist, discourse," this form of discourse reproduces a "refusal to acknowledge the insurgent as the subject of his own history" (83). Building upon Guha's analysis of the counter-insurgent text, Spivak identifies a "symptomatic blank in contemporary Western anti-humanism" which ensures that "the radical intellectual in the West is either caught in a deliberate choice of subalternity, granting to the oppressed either that very expressive subjectivity which s/he criticizes or, instead, a total unrepresentability" (209). That is,

the subjectivity (individual and collective) of subalterns is erased but the condition of claiming the means of self-representation is emergence into hegemonic discourses of personhood and agency.

My reading of *Dog eaters*—focused around Joey and Boy-Boy’s creative modes of living out the particular condition of being consigned to human waste—also challenges a clear-cut distinction between the subject and object that suggests one can only be either an autonomous, self-defining, sovereign subject or an object fully instrumentalized by the colonial/neocolonial regime. Rather than insisting upon a zero-sum game between being subjected and claiming subjectivity, the waste of *Dog eaters* enables us to envision and articulate a version of subaltern agency that refuses, and isn’t predicated on, this binary distinction between subject and object. At the same time, I have tried to show that any move that simply tries to array and summon the sovereign subject does not seem to be capable of responding to the complex contexts of violence and unmaking (in which bodies are reduced to trash and datasets) that these texts have been describing. In disrupting the more familiar paradigms of complicity/resistance and opposition, then, I am seeking to open up space for us to attune to responses that aren’t always about affirming the subject.

Ultimately, I am interested in what happens when we resist the impulse to create binary distinctions between trashed non-subjects on the one hand, and the autonomous, self-determining, self-governing subject of emancipation on the other. A zero-sum game of subjection-or-sovereignty misses other domains of improvised political practice and agency that are not necessarily attuned to the project of resisting imposition and reaching for individual or communal self-determination according to the logic of normative theories of democracy. As shown by the criticism around the character of Joey in *Dog eaters*, such frameworks misread the

creative, life-sustaining practices and acts as acquiescence into domination or accommodation/complicity. These other domains of improvisations seem particularly urgent to explore in our current moment when the instrumentalization of life and the sites/arenas of necropower are not just persistent/residual but proliferating while the institutions and subjects of an emancipatory sovereignty appear to be in decline.

In conclusion, I want to suggest that the analytic of waste opens up the possibility for us to theorize a different kind of subjectivity than that of emancipatory sovereignty that refuses the dichotomy of subject versus object. Attending to the status of trashed non-sovereign populations who have literally been reduced to trash (whether they are living among the trash or engaging in forms of labor that are completely unproductive) illuminates the need for new ways of thinking about alternative modes of subjectivity and improper subjects that cannot be contained by our existing analytics. I suggest that waste clarifies and allows us to think about alternate forms of wasted subjects that fall outside of normative political discourses of modernity. Reading for the excess of capitalist extraction thus turns us away from the disciplined subject of labor exploitation and intervenes in a familiar telos that seeks to elevate and reclaim such exploited, racialized subjects to the status of resistance. Instead, reading for waste that emerges from the entanglement of race, labor, war, and speculative capital pushes us to ask what happens when such a telos is interrupted—when Mark Spitz walks out into the throng of zombies that are generating their own necropolitical kind of belonging, when the B-Mors claim the intrepid Fan as their own, when Joey and Boy-Boy forge creative modes of living as human trash.

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