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Settler Modernity's Spatial Exceptions: The US POW Camp, Metapolitical Authority, and Ha Jin's *War Trash*

Jodi Kim

In October 2011 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton revealed in a policy plan titled “America’s Pacific Century” that the United States would “pivot” from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific. In this plan, the Asia-Pacific is identified as the most crucial sphere of US influence in the twenty-first century and the region where US military resources will be concentrated. Yet even in the previous century, “The American Century,” even in the absence of such an explicit pivot, we witnessed a brutal concentration of military resources and violence. US imperial violence in Asia, previously rationalized under the sign of the Cold War, gets reanimated under the sign of “new global realities.” “America’s Pacific Century” posits that “in the last decade, our foreign policy has transitioned from dealing with the post–Cold War peace dividend to demanding commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. As those wars wind down, we will need to accelerate efforts to pivot to new global realities.” An “emerging China” is named as a new global reality, and the Asia-Pacific is identified as the United States’ “real 21st century opportunity,” an investment that will yield the greatest returns. In this global remapping of US strategic interests, Africa is also identified as holding “enormous untapped potential for economic and political development in the years ahead.”¹ The economic arm of this military pivot, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, has been called NAFTA for the Pacific, or “NAFTA on steroids.”² If the Cold War between the United States and the USSR was a Western interimperialist rivalry, one that was already triangulated in Asia, the more recent emergence of China and its state capitalism reanimate US Cold War logics in Asia. The militarized pivot to the Asia-Pacific, in other words, is the latest containment policy, a “new Cold War”³ impelled by US apprehension of an emergent China that is aggressively investing in Africa’s infrastructure and becoming its number one trading partner.⁴

In this essay, I consider a longer genealogy of the United States’ militarized relation with China through an analysis of Ha Jin’s novel *War Trash*.⁵ This vexed relation takes form in the novel as a self-described “documentary style” memoir

of a Chinese POW who survives the brutality of a UN/US camp during the Korean War and decades later travels to the United States immediately after 9/11. I argue that *War Trash* gestures to the significance of China in the consolidation of the United States as an increasingly militarized national security and permanent warfare state from World War II and into the contemporary context of the twenty-first century. Focusing on how the novel renders the POW camp as a particular kind of spatial exception, I demonstrate how the nexus of US militarism, imperialism, and settler colonialism—a conjunction I call settler modernity—in Asia and the Pacific is largely structured through such exceptions.⁶ Settler modernity is an ensemble of relations significantly structured and continually reproduced through spatial exceptions taking shape in such forms as POW camps, refugee camps, military bases and camp towns, unincorporated territories, and incorporated territories admitted as US states. As *War Trash* makes visible, the POW camp of the Korean War generates broader questions about settler colonial and imperial projections of power that attempt to buttress US metapolitical authority in an era when the settler state also becomes a military empire.

A post-Cold War and post-Tiananmen apprehension of the putative disjuncture between China's arrival at economic modernity and failure to achieve a corresponding political modernity points to important differences in Cold War and post-Cold War world orders.⁷ Yet *War Trash* also calls for an interrogation of and reckoning with the perdurance and continuing escalation of US militarism in Asia and the Pacific. Whether Cold War enemy or post-Cold War economic and military rival (and now the largest US creditor), China in the US geopolitical imaginary is an ever-emergent threat and thus object of containment.

Jin, a post-Tiananmen exilic Chinese writer, fashions *War Trash*, winner of the Pen/Faulkner Award and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, as a realist historical novel told from the perspective of a soldier in the Chinese People's Volunteer Army aiding North Korea in the Korean War. The narrator, Yu Yuan, is captured and becomes a POW in the UN-US controlled camp on South Korea's Koje Island. Based on extensive research on actual camp practices at Koje Island during the war, especially the newly emergent US "voluntary repatriation" program, the bulk of the novel takes place at the POW camp and details the internecine violence among the prisoners.⁸ *War Trash* renders how the prisoners, both Communist mainland Chinese and Nationalist Chinese, as well as communist North Korean and anticommunist South Korean soldiers, play out on a micro-scale the ideological divisions of the Cold War. The novel

reveals how the new voluntary repatriation program generates escalating levels of violence either ignored or instigated by the UN–US Command.

War Trash opens with Yu speaking in the present-day context of an extended trip to the United States immediately after 9/11. The purpose of his trip is to write a memoir of his experience as a Chinese POW during the Korean War and to visit his son and grandchildren, who reside in Atlanta. He writes of the nervousness he felt upon arrival to the United States: “When I was clearing customs in Atlanta two weeks ago, my heart fluttered like a trapped pigeon, afraid that the husky, cheerful-voiced officer might suspect something—that he might lead me into a room and order me to undress. The tattoo could have caused me to be refused entry to the States” (3). The narrator’s trepidatious encounter with the Transportation Security Administration, a US federal agency created as part of the new Department of Homeland Security (part and parcel of the increased securitization and militarization measures taken in the wake of 9/11), draws attention to a post–Cold War context that mediates the interpretation of the account of the Korean War POW camp that will follow.

Framed by this more recent context, which is not only post–Cold War but also post-9/11, *War Trash*, as Joseph Darda compellingly argues, “interrogates the war on terror through the historical lens of the Korean War” and could thus be read as an exemplar of “literature of the long War on Terror.”¹⁰ In another compelling analysis, Sunny Xiang contends that “Yu’s neutral Chinese voice denotes a shift in narrative tone that is symptomatic of the post-Cold War erosion of American economic clout and the contemporaneous emergence of Chinese capitalist modernity as a hegemonic threat.”¹¹ Building on such work, I analyze how *War Trash* also gives specific contours to China’s significance in shaping US settler modernity in Asia and the Pacific since China’s 1949 Communist Revolution and the Korean War (1950–53). The novel’s setting, coupled with the narrator’s near-fetishistic avowal of neutrality, indexes a logic of the spatial exception through which US settler modernity functions and continually reproduces itself.

Yu chooses repatriation to mainland China (People’s Republic of China, PRC), but not for any transparently ideological reasons that one might presume. *War Trash* takes as a central motif the malleability of language despite the narrator’s claim of telling his “story in a documentary manner so as to preserve historical accuracy” (5). Depicting the forced tattooing, a kind of branding, of Chinese POWs by anticommunist forces in US POW camps, the novel amplifies the ambivalent and strategic circuits of affiliation and alliance that Cold War Manichaeic binaries refuse to recognize. A soldier of the Chinese

People's Volunteer Army aiding North Korea, Yu wishes to return home to communist mainland China for personal, familial reasons rather than ideological ones. Yet those compatriots in the camp who have decided to align themselves with the anticommunist Nationalist government-in-exile in Taiwan attempt to compel Yu to refuse repatriation by tattooing "FUCK COMMUNISM" on his stomach. Despite this, Yu is able to return home to China after all, and has a doctor alter his tattoo to read "FUCK . . . U . . . S . . ." This simple procedure transforms an explicit and expletory anticommunist slogan into its opposite, and it explains his nervousness about clearing customs upon arrival in the United States. Yet if we were to read "U.S." as "us" rather than "United States," we are led to reckon with slippages and ambiguities of meaning—and more broadly of alliance and ideological affiliation—that Cold War bipolar logics elide. Indeed, we see on a micro-scale the Chinese civil war played out in the Chinese compound in the Koje prison camp, within the context of yet another civil and decolonial war erupting on the Korean peninsula linked to the ongoing legacies of Japanese colonialism, within the even broader global context of the civil war *within* the West that came to be called the Cold War. These layered spatialities of the Cold War, and the US military empire forged under the sign of the Cold War against global movements of decolonization, are revealed in *War Trash*.

Yu's refusal to pick sides, indeed his desire for a "third choice so that [he] could disentangle [himself] from the fracas between the Communists and Nationalists" (313), is, as has been observed, a symptom of how *War Trash* is mediated by post-Cold War developments. As I see it, this insistence on the neutral voice, repeated throughout the novel, is as much an amplification of the contemporary economic threat posed by China as it is a symptom of the Cold War's failure to resolve militarized, ideological, and geopolitical tensions between the United States and China. This is not to suggest that these two things are not related; the former can be seen as a manifestation of the latter. Nor is it to suggest that there have not been significant changes and ruptures brought about by the end of the Cold War. The rapid economic growth of China would itself suggest perhaps a world-historical shift from Europe to Asia. Rather, I am interested in how a twenty-first-century novel like *War Trash*, both through its formal and thematic elements, diagnoses what we might consider the *longue durée* of US militarism in particular and settler modernity more broadly in Asia and the Pacific. Indeed, the Cold War failure is also indexed when shifting the focus from Europe to Asia. While the US Cold War might have ended in Europe with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 or the failed Soviet coup in 1991, it is unclear when, if at all, it ended in Asia. Hence we

witness references to a “new Cold War” with China, and as much as the War on Terror in the Middle East has been observed to be the unfinished business of the Cold War,¹² the “pivot” from the Middle East to Asia as articulated in Clinton’s “America’s Pacific Century” plan in 2011 also symptomizes the unfinished business of the Cold War in Asia. This military pivot attempts to contain what we might see as Cold War remainders, tensions with China and North Korea. The ongoing division of the Korean Peninsula, as the Korean War is not formally ended, is also a Cold War remainder.¹³

War Trash inspires a transpacific critique of how, under the sign of the Cold War, US settler modernity as an ensemble of relations requiring continual reproduction witnessed a growing symbiosis between ongoing settler colonialism and a rapidly expanding military empire. The novel generates a conceptualization of the significance of the spatial exception in the reproduction of settler modernity. In this instance, it is the US POW camp, but spatial exceptions are also constituted at multiple scales and in various ways, including not only POW camps but also internment camps, refugee camps, military bases, military camptowns, colonies, and territories that make possible, as Paul Kramer writes, “extraordinary power exercised at and through the interstices of sovereignty, often underwritten by essentialisms of race, gender, and civilization.” In effect, they are all multiscale “strategic hamlets” set off not only physically and legally but also conceptually and morally.¹⁴ US settler modernity has functioned through a proliferation and combination of such spatial exceptions and territorial control.

War Trash refracts the militarized relation between China and the United States through the POW camp. The camp emerges not simply as a setting for the novel but more crucially as an organizing logic governed by a proliferation of violence enabled and instigated by its constitution as a spatial exception. A. Naomi Paik contends, “Camps are embedded in a much longer history of spatial exceptions. Like the coexistence and codependence of rights and rightlessness, the use of spatial exceptions stretches back to the origins of the United States, to both imperial spaces like the frontier and the colony, and to internal zones of exclusion. These spaces have existed alongside—and have in fact enabled—the country to claim its complete commitment to rights.” Building on Kramer’s insight that spatial exceptions are not exceptional at all despite US proclamations that they are, Paik continues: “Thus, although camps, particularly those located outside formal U.S. territory, are understood as extreme and external to the United States, such ideological divides between the normal and the exceptional, or the foreign and the domestic, obscure their co-constitution and connection to each other.”¹⁵

Before I turn to *War Trash's* rendering of the POW camp as a particular kind of spatial exception, it bears noting that it is a *Korean War* POW camp on an island off the southern coast of South Korea. Indeed, the entire island is the camp. The “short” length of the Korean War and its fuzziness in US popular memory belie its singular significance in inaugurating a national security and militarist state waging permanent warfare that outlasts the historical life of the Cold War itself. During the US military occupation of the Korean peninsula after World War II, the US military transformed itself organizationally and rhetorically. The National Security Amendments of 1949 have rhetorical significance in transforming the former Department of War into the Department of Defense (DoD). As such, “The United States would no longer make war. . . . Rather, in forming the DoD, the United States was beginning to articulate itself as the defender of a normatively defined global humanity. . . . According to this logic, World War II was the last ‘true’ war, and the wars that came after could only be ‘conflicts,’ ‘hostilities,’ or ‘operations.’”¹⁶ Alongside the creation and violent manipulation of spatial exceptions, we see here how US settler modernity functions by exceptionalizing (and thus ultimately normalizing) war itself as precisely *not* that through rhetorical sleights of hand constituting a host of obfuscating euphemisms. In terms of the actual military budget, NSC-68 (regarded as the blueprint of Cold War containment policy) attempted to raise it significantly by hyperbolizing the Soviet threat. President Harry Truman initially refused the budget request when he received the document in April 1950, but the Korean War that June effected a reversal, quadrupling the defense budget and opening a floodgate of military appropriations that has not closed since. The Korean War also crucially stimulated Japan’s economy, the US’s important Cold War junior partner in Asia. Finally, Chinese participation in the war unprecedentedly militarized US–China relations through the proxy of Korea.

In highlighting questions of sovereignty and law(lessness) in the POW camp, *War Trash* also amplifies linked, still-unresolved, concerns in the wake of questions arising out of World War II and amid the era of the decolonization of territories and subjects formerly constituting European and Japanese empires. These questions concerned such issues as norms of warfare, sovereignty, and treatment of POWs. In *War Trash*, such questions condense around two related issues: voluntary repatriation and the 1949 Geneva Conventions governing the prompt release of POWs upon the cessation of military hostilities. The Korean War inaugurated “voluntary repatriation” to increase the number of POWs refusing repatriation to mainland China or North Korea by using psychological warfare. The war also saw an attempt to apply the Geneva Conventions soon

after their ratification. As such, these issues amplify yet further the ongoing yet obscured significance of the Korean War. Indeed, while the contemporary War on Terror has brought to public consciousness the problem of “indefinite detention,” we find in the Korean War an earlier genealogy of US implication in this practice. Caught between the Nationalists and Communists and shuffled instrumentally by the two sides because of his superior knowledge of English, Yu bears witness not only to his own violent experience but also to that of his fellow POWs. Indeed, the novel renders Koje Island as an incubator or laboratory of violence, both physical and psychological, perpetrated by all sides.

Compelled ideological indoctrination via “education” sessions, forced branding via tattooing, compelled repatriation or nonrepatriation, coerced anticommunist vows made in public, petition drives for nonrepatriation, the creation of secret societies, reprisals against the United Nations (effectively the US) Command, the crushing of counterreprisals by the Command, uneven camp conditions, malnourishment, and medical care based on ideological affiliation, and brutal beatings, starvation, or fatally difficult labor—these all graphically demonstrate what *War Trash* reveals to be the banality of violence in the exceptional space of the POW camp. Such violence, transforming the camp itself into a war zone, or a war within the Korean War, was largely due to the application of new concepts of psychological warfare that the Americans deployed to maximize the number of nonrepatriates.¹⁷ Though formally run by the UN Command, the POW camp was effectively subjected to “local rule” in the compounds often by agents trained by the US Civil Information and Education (CIE) section of the Far Eastern Command in collaboration with the governments of Taiwan and South Korea (Republic of Korea, ROK). These agents posed as POWs.¹⁸

Yu relates such an instance:

Liu had once been a sergeant in the Nationalist Army, but the Communists had captured him in a battle and put him into a logistic unit after a month's reindoctrination. Because he could drive, they gave him a truck. After his division crossed the Yalu River, at the first opportunity he drove three tons of salt fish to the American position and surrendered. Rumor had it that he was sent to Guam for two months' training and then returned to Korea. That was why he was appointed to a battalion commander as well as the vice chief of the regiment—to help Han Shu keep order in the compound, since Han was a man of mild disposition and seemed indecisive. Liu Tai-an hated the Communists so much that he often publicly flogged men who wanted to return to Red China. The Americans had adopted a let-alone policy and didn't care what happened in the compounds as long as the POWs remained behind the barbed wire, so Liu ruled this regiment like a police state. Even some GIs called him Little Caesar. (68–69)

Here we see the ways in which the space of exception that is the POW camp coconstitutes the norm. On the one hand, the camp's exceptional status and internecine violence seem a departure from the juridical and social formation of the sovereign space of the home front of the US nation-state. On the other hand, this passage's detailed description of the itinerary (including the unincorporated US territory of Guam) that led Liu to the camp reveals a projection or extension (rather than disruption or aberration) of US settler colonial power. Racialized and colonized subjects, both at home and abroad, are rendered vulnerable to the brutal biopolitics of settler modernity. They are the disposable and unexceptional "war trash" of the novel's title, even Liu.

During the war, the US ambassador to South Korea, John Muccio, referred to barracks bosses as "Gestapos," while another State Department functionary observed that the Chinese compounds holding would-be defectors were "violently totalitarian" and run by "thugs."¹⁹ The irony of such assessments, of course, is that such "totalitarian" conditions were at once instigated and condoned by the United States in its effort to win the ideological Cold War. Within this scheme, the repatriation interrogation room in the camp also becomes an exceptional space, where the POW presumably exercises the free choice to repatriate or defect. Yet, as Monica Kim compellingly demonstrates, this assumption about the liberal bureaucratic interrogation room, coupled with contemporary debates about torture as a symptom of the horrors of war, is problematic. She writes, "Such a characterization of war holds profound limitations as it elides and denies a deeper violent legacy enacted and facilitated by war—the fact that war is supposed to produce new subjects through its crucible of mass violence. . . . the discursive demands for an abstracted, universal subject fit for a US liberal, humanitarian project wrought its own material history through violence and displacement—all conducted in the name of the liberal interrogation room." As such, she contends, "The primary concern of the US military interrogation room . . . has historically not been the production of information, but rather the production of subjects."²⁰

Moreover, in her stunning multiscale analysis of the global significance of the UN–US POW camps of the Korean War, Kim compellingly demonstrates how the camps and in particular the POW repatriation issue became an important testing ground for a new world order inaugurated by the end of World War II. First, the discursive grounds for waging war shifted. Whereas in previous eras nation-states could wage self-interested wars without having to justify them as "just wars," the end of World War II witnessed the rise of a moral universalism that, following Carl Schmitt, only allowed "wars on behalf of humanity." He predicted that the United States would be at the

forefront of such wars, fought along lines of “intervention.” This, as I relayed above, ushered in a host of euphemisms for war, and the one used in Korea was “police action.” This new moral universalism went hand in hand with the growth of an international nation-state system, as newly decolonized territories, or emergent nation-states, sought recognition within the system even as they attempted to challenge the terms of that recognition. In other words, rather than simply enter into a Eurocentric Westphalian system that long preceded them and was founded on their very exclusion and nonrecognition, newly independent nation-states attempted to revise the limits of sovereignty. Third, for liminal states such as Korea (colonized by Japan, then divided at the thirty-eighth parallel and occupied by the United States and the Soviet Union), the war amplified the unfinished project of decolonization and attendant conundrums of recognition and authority. How, for example, could the United States wage formal war (and subsequently negotiate POW repatriation) with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea, DPRK) if it did not recognize that entity as politically legitimate? Fourth, the Korean War became a test case of evolving notions of sovereignty not only in the making of nation-states but also in the making of subjects. As Kim writes, “The Korean War, seen from the vantage point of the POW, reveals how ‘war’ itself was a central site on which the rise of the nation-state system occurred, where ‘war’ was not simply about sovereignty in terms of territory and terrain, but rather fundamentally about sovereign power over making a subject for the new global order and decolonized nation-state.”²¹ The question of how POWs were to be treated, and whether they were to be repatriated, not only presented contradictions between national sovereignty and the new regime of international humanitarian law, but also generated competition for who could lay legitimate claim to the correct interpretation and application of the 1949 Geneva Conventions on the Treatment of Prisoners of War.²² This, as I show, became a crucial issue because Korean War POWs in US camps were made up of Koreans from both sides of the thirty-eighth parallel and Chinese, thus involving an entity the United States did not recognize (the DPRK), what amounted essentially to a US puppet regime (the ROK), and what came to be the United States’ principal Cold War enemy (the PRC).

In an incident that amplifies competing interpretations of the Geneva Convention and of how the suspension of law or the state/space of exception becomes the rule, *War Trash* reveals how the POWs stage a kidnapping of a general (based on the real-life kidnapping of General Francis Dodd at the Kojé Island camp in May 1952) to gain leverage and an audience for their grievance about camp conditions and the charge that the Geneva Convention had been violated:

To the Americans' credit, I should mention that they had posted the relevant clauses of the international law in every compound, in both Chinese and Korean, and that they issued to every platoon a booklet containing the text. Before seeing the booklet, we had only heard of the Geneva Convention but hadn't known its contents. Having studied the document thoroughly, our leaders concluded that the Americans had contravened Article 118, which stated: "Prisoners of war shall be released and repatriated without delay after the cessation of hostilities." However, when the regulation had been drafted three years before, the world had been less complicated and none of the participating countries had been able to imagine our situation—in which more than two-thirds of the Chinese POWs wouldn't be going home. Still, whenever possible, we would confront our captors with their violation of Article 118, and most of the time we could get the upper hand. (157)

Although the "cessation of hostilities" came in July 1951, the armistice agreement was not signed until July 1953 because of protracted negotiations precisely over the issue of exchanging POWs. Truman's "voluntary repatriation" program, though ostensibly made available in order to give would-be defectors the option of evading harsh treatment by their communist governments should they choose repatriation, was a strategic move to try to win a Cold War propaganda war. It was a competition for credibility and the capturing of "hearts and minds" toward a "substitute victory" in the absence of a military one. Indeed, "in early 1951 the National Security Council resolved to 'encourage and induce' as many defections as possible."²³ In addition to the violation of Article 118 governing repatriation without delay, the Convention's stipulation against the use of force or violence in extracting decisions as well as Article 7 specifying that prisoners could not renounce their right to return (thus calling for mandatory repatriation) were also violated.

These violations, and the US ambassador to South Korea's observation that the Koje Island camp was run using Gestapo tactics, generate a consideration of Giorgio Agamben's important work on the camp and its relationship to modernity. He writes, "Here we will deliberately follow an inverse line of inquiry. Instead of deducing the definition of the camp from the events that took place there, we will ask: What is a camp, what is its juridical political structure, that such events could take place there?"²⁴ For Agamben, the most important issue is not the debate among historians about whether the first camps to emerge were the *campos de concentraciones* in the Spanish colony of Cuba in 1896 used to suppress popular insurrection or the "concentration camps" the English used for captured Boers at the beginning of the 1900s. Rather, what is significant is that in both cases, "a state of emergency linked to a colonial war is extended to an entire civil population. The camps are thus born not out of ordinary law (even less, as one might have supposed, from a

transformation and development of criminal law) but out of a state of exception and martial law."²⁵

As *War Trash* reveals, the Koje Island camp, then, is a spatial materialization of the state of exception and martial law in a time of imperial war. The Korean War, while not a colonial war in the classic sense (since the Korean peninsula was not a formal colony of the United States), was an imperialist one in the Western inter-imperialist rivalry between the United States and USSR that came to be called the Cold War. Moreover, when the United States divided the peninsula and militarily occupied the southern part, this formal cessation of Japanese colonialism in Korea transmogrified into a US imperial succession that exploited and built on Japanese colonial formations rather than radically disrupting or eradicating them. On the other hand, the Koje Island camp complicates Agamben's formulation, for the application of martial law by the UN-US Command also had to contend with the international law for the humanitarian treatment of POWs as ratified in the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Agamben's central concern, the Nazi concentration camp and how "its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life,"²⁶ thus predates and was one of the main impetuses for the 1949 Conventions and the post-World War II consolidation of an international juridical regime governing rules of warfare and crimes against humanity.

As *War Trash* makes visible, the inhabitants of Koje Island presumably possessed internationally recognized political rights as POWs as well as the rights of national citizen-subjects, in this case split between Chinese and Korean, and each respectively split even further into the PRC, the ROC (Nationalist Taiwan), the DPRK, and the ROK.²⁷ As such, the Koje Island camp is a space of multiple, proliferating legal structures rather than an absence or suspension of them. Yet in *War Trash*, we see in graphic detail how the prisoners' rights were violated through a brutal political economy of violence instigated by the United States yet disavowable through "localization" or "delegation" to prisoners themselves. To be sure, POWs who identified as communist also perpetrated violence, yet such violence, unlike that perpetrated by anticommunists, was not under the auspices of the Command. This contradiction, or ability to act effectively in "extralegal" ways within a seemingly hyperlegal context, is an enabling and defining feature of modern power rather than an aberration. Agamben argues that "the correct question to pose concerning the horrors committed in the camps is, therefore, not the hypocritical one of how crimes of such atrocity could be committed against human beings. It would be more honest and, above all, more useful to investigate carefully the juridical procedures and deployments of power by which human beings could be

so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime."²⁸

War Trash's rendering of the proliferation of violence within a seemingly hyperlegal context generates an important question about the relationship between the law and the camp, between cause and effect. Whether human beings can be put into camps as a consequence or effect of their loss of rights, or whether they are stripped of such rights as an effect of being put in a camp, or even whether they are entitled to a new set of specific rights by virtue of being put in a camp (as in the case of POWs), violent atrocities against them can be committed in ways that are not rendered criminal. This is because the space of the camp itself constitutes "a new and stable spatial arrangement" in which the state of exception, previously a temporary suspension of the juridico-political order, becomes permanent.²⁹ The camp is thus the "materialization of the state of exception," and "in this light, the birth of the camp in our time appears as an event that decisively signals the political space of modernity itself."³⁰ As the political paradigm of the West, the camp for Agamben constitutes the "nomos of the modern" rather than a breach or violent rupture.³¹ Given this insight, it could be argued that the POW camp and the other spatial exceptions I have noted constitute the "nomos of US settler modernity" in Asia and the Pacific.

Yet Agamben's work must be extended in this context of US settler modernity to highlight how the camp is not only a biopolitical space but also coconstituted by geopolitical territoriality. As Mark Rifkin brilliantly demonstrates, Agamben's insights on the camp and sovereignty must necessarily be revised when analyzing the United States by "gesturing toward the ways taking the camp as paradigmatic of modern statehood can efface the geopolitics of statehood and thus the dynamics of settler-state imperialism."³² The focus on the camp as a *biopolitical space*, in other words, effaces questions generated by *geopolitical territoriality*. By focusing on the POW camp of an imperial war, and amplifying competing claims to legal authority, *War Trash* helps us grapple with how the biopolitical space and the geopolitical territory coconstitute each other.

Although the United States did not formally colonize South Korea, its imperial projection of power in the POW camp negated both local competing national sovereignties as well as the authority of a newly emergent international regime of human rights. The proliferation of law functioned ultimately to negate POW rights rather than to guarantee them. As such, what was at stake in the immediate post–World War II and rapidly intensifying Cold War context was less a matter of application of or control over particular laws than a question of what Rifkin calls metapolitical authority, "the ability to define the content and scope of 'law' and 'politics.'"³³ The settler state's aspiration

for metapolitical authority, of course, finds a longer genealogy in US relations with Native American nations. *War Trash's* rendering of the Korean War POW camp thus generates broader questions about US settler modernity's attempt to seize metapolitical authority through spatial exceptions extending beyond what became the fifty states, or incorporated territories, constituting the United States in an era when the settler state also becomes a military empire in Asia and the Pacific. We thus see how settler colonialism is at once military empire's proving ground, obscured condition of possibility, and imbricated partner in violence. The role of China in this conjunction, as I have been observing, is significant.

Since the latter half of the nineteenth century, US settler modernity's creation of spatial exceptions and militarist intervention in Asia and the Pacific have been overdetermined by a desire for the Chinese market. The "loss" of that market in 1949 to the Communist Revolution in China, the ways in which China comes to displace the Soviet Union as the United States' principal Cold War enemy, the ascendance of Chinese economic and military power in the more recent "post"-Cold War conjuncture—these developments have shaped the very constitution and contours of US settler modernity. Indeed, it can be argued that the Cold War itself, to the extent that it was, following Oswaldo de Rivero, a struggle over who, the United States or USSR, would be the rightful inheritor of territories and bearer of Western political philosophical traditions in the context of the breakup of the classical European empires in the aftermath of World War II, was a contestation over metapolitical authority.³⁴

Indeed, the long-standing desire for the Chinese market witnesses the convergence of biopolitical space and geopolitical territory long before the Korean War. An early instance of the US creation of a spatial exception in Asia and the Pacific, the seizure of the Philippines as a colony, was a "stepping-stone" to China. During the genocidal war of conquest leading to formal colonization, a policy of reconcentration was deployed from 1901 to 1902. A strategy to crush remaining resistance in hostile areas by waging war against the entire rural population, "it aimed at the isolation and starvation of guerillas through the deliberate annihilation of the rural economy: peasants in resistant areas were ordered to relocate to garrisoned towns by a given date, leaving behind all but the most basic provisions. Outside of the policed, fenced-in perimeters of these 'reconcentration camps,' troops would then undertake a scorched-earth policy."³⁵ Although the use of such "reconcentration camps" by the Spanish in Cuba during the final Cuban war of independence had generated US outrage (enough to be a putative factor in the US decision to intervene against Spain in 1898), by 1900 the United States found instructive their effective and supposedly humane use by the British in South Africa.

Yet what these seemingly antonymous reactions to the use of concentration camps—outrage in the case of the Spanish and emulation in the case of the British—have in common is a profound disavowal of how the United States itself had already been using concentration camps long before the turn-of-the-century debate. The US federal Indian policy of removal in the decades leading up to the Spanish American War effected the seizure of Native American land through the reservation system. Indeed, Native American reservations, many of which functioned initially like concentration camps, constitute the spatial exception within what became the fifty states (or incorporated territories) constituting the United States. They are thus the very ground that makes possible the formation of the United States as a settler state. A particularly infamous instance is the “reconcentration” of Navajos in the Bosque Redondo Camp. The 1848 acquisition of territory (what became the US Southwest) from Mexico in the US–Mexican War witnessed a US scorched-earth policy to crush Navajo resistance. Driven in 1864 to the New Mexico Bosque Redondo reservation, essentially a prison or concentration camp, the Navajo were subjected to a harsh and ultimately failed experiment of reeducation to compel them to become Christian yeoman farmers under what amounted to four years of captivity. Over eleven thousand were incarcerated, and over twenty-five hundred died as a result of the unrelentingly brutal conditions at the camp and the 350-plus-mile forced march there.³⁶

This history demonstrates Scott Morgensen’s important observation that the biopolitics of settler colonialism and the displacement of Native peoples and nations “form a transnational proving ground *within* settler societies to produce a white settler state for imperial projection abroad.”³⁷ The United States as the literal testing ground for biopolitical tactics and technologies that are geopolitically and militarily projected abroad has produced and continues to produce native displacement and dispossession, and that geopolitical and military projection abroad in Asia and the Pacific in turn produces Asian and Pacific Islander migration. This necessitates a relational analysis of distinct yet related forms of colonial domination—settler colonialism and military empire in particular—rather than a focus on one form that tends to elide the other. The territoriality of US settler colonial and imperial projections of power include not only the territory comprising the fifty states but also a variety of discontinuous territories. In the Pacific, these are the unincorporated territories of Guam and American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the three Compact of Free Association nations of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau. Moreover, a dizzying proliferation of military bases (and attendant camptowns) checkerboard Asia

and the Pacific, especially in South Korea, Japan, Okinawa, Guam, Hawai'i, and historically the former US colony of the Philippines. In invoking Asia and the Pacific as a site, it is not my intent to flatten the vast and complex heterogeneities and hierarchies within it, nor is it my intent to reproduce limitations in the frameworks of American studies, Asian American studies, Asian Pacific American studies, and Asian studies that are not sufficiently attentive to work in Native Pacific and Indigenous studies. Rather, my intent and hope are to interrogate *the very production* of the Asia-Pacific by the United States as a site of strategic interest.

The United States' earlier settler colonial and imperial projections of power and aspirations for metapolitical authority through the creation of camps as spatial exceptions constitute the strategically forgotten political unconscious of the camp's "reemergence" during the Korean War. This is not to argue, however, that all camps are the same. Rather, it is to observe that the camp as an exceptional spatial form is intimately linked to a logic of domination and/or extermination. The Korean War and Cold War POW camp is connected to this longer genealogy, yet its specificity lies precisely in how it is deployed by the US settler state as it increasingly makes and remakes itself as also a military empire in the post-World War II conjuncture. And the Korean War POW camp is in turn also connected to the camps of the more recent War on Terror.

This longer genealogy of the camp is suggested in *War Trash* through the post-9/11 framing device, which returns at the end of the novel. Before that very end, however, Yu Yuan critiques a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist for having approached the war as a "publicity stunt, a game. She should have been given a rifle and made to fight like an infantryman so that she could undergo the physical suffering and take the bitterness of betrayal, loss, and madness. One article even concluded: 'Korea is her war.' Who can bear the weight of a war? To witness is to make the truth known, but we must remember that most victims have no voice of their own, and that in bearing witness to their stories we must not appropriate them" (299). This narrative and ethical injunction is precisely what Ha Jin the author has putatively respected, yet it is complicated by a Chinese journalist's charge of plagiarism leveled against Jin soon after the publication of *War Trash*.³⁸

While questions of appropriation and the ethical, not to mention legal, issues raised by any such charge of plagiarism are certainly important, I would like to close this essay by pivoting to a related register: the idea of "bearing witness." Precisely what is Jin bearing witness to? Certainly, it would be the victims of war, ideological division, and what Yu as a self-described detached observer assesses to be political "fanaticism."

The very end of the novel, however, complicates the temporality of war. Here, Yu is inspired by an episode of *The Simpsons*, in which Bart gets a tattoo removed, to get his own “FUCK . . . U . . . S . . .” one removed as well. Yu makes an appointment with a doctor at Atlanta’s Emory Hospital, and the procedure is set to take place “next Thursday” (349). This presents a kind of exceptional temporality of its own within the novel. Jin begins his narrative by having his narrator inform his readers that he will write a memoir and ends by noting that he has done exactly that. Yu’s experience in Korea is told entirely in the past tense. Yet the tattoo removal procedure does not actually take place within the time frame of the novel; it is left to a future date of “next Thursday.” Will Yu actually keep his appointment? We are led to presume so. But this future temporality leaves still untouched or unerased the trace of the brutal biopolitical violence of Koje Island. This trace, the tattoo, challenges us to regard *War Trash*’s “bearing witness” to the violence of the spatial exception, what I suggested is the “nomos of US settler modernity,” not simply as a bygone history but, following Foucault, as a “history of the present.”³⁹

In a short 2008 piece “No to Biopolitical Tattooing,” Agamben explains his refusal to submit to a new regulation requiring those entering the United States on a visa to have their fingerprints and photograph filed by the Department of Homeland Security. The imposition of this “biopolitical tattooing,” he writes, “concerns the [increasingly] routine inscription and registration of the most private and most incommunicable element of subjectivity—the biopolitical life of the body,” and therefore must be opposed.⁴⁰ Seen in this light, the six remaining letters on Yu’s belly inscribe a “history of the present” of biopolitical tattooing as a technology of state surveillance and terror that is no longer exceptional but increasingly normal under the guise of security. What has also been rendered normal and necessary, again under the guise of security, is a steroidal militarism. In bearing witness to the experiences of Chinese POWs under UN–US Command in the Korea War, *War Trash* diagnoses these conjoined histories of biopolitical violence and militarism that animate our present. Moreover, the novel gives narrative form to how US–China relations have shaped the formation and consolidation of a US settler modernity in Asia and the Pacific that relies on spatial exceptions. How, in other words, have we arrived at a military pivot whose name goes by “America’s Pacific Century?”

Notes

- I would like to thank special issue coeditors Yu-Fang Cho and Chih-ming Wang for their vision, commitment, and critical insights, the two anonymous reviewers for their tremendously helpful and generous feedback, and Grace Hong and Erica Edwards for offering vital support, encouragement, and brilliant comments on an earlier version of this essay.
1. This policy plan was published in the November 2011 issue of *Foreign Policy*.
 2. The twelve participating nations thus far are Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam. The United States withdrew from the agreement on January 23, 2017.
 3. Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2007), 285. Arrighi cites Robert D. Kaplan, who writes, "Given the stakes, and given what history teaches us about the conflicts that emerge when great powers all pursue legitimate interests, the result is likely to be the defining military conflict of the twenty-first century: if not a big war with China, then a series of Cold War–style standoffs that stretch out over years and decades" ("How We Would Fight China," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 2005, 50–51).
 4. Chinese investments in Africa and the United States' militarized apprehensions about China's emergence compel us to ask this: If the Bandung moment in 1955 aspired to an Asian-African anti-imperialist solidarity of nonalignment against the Manichaean bipolarity of the Cold War, what constitutes the contemporary Asian–African relation? Is China's presence in Africa in the form of investments, infrastructural building projects, extractive industries, migrants, and peacekeeping missions and the US militarized pivot against China's growing power a new kind of scramble for Africa? Arrighi has a more optimistic interpretation of China's emergence. He writes: "For a new Bandung can do what the old could not: it can mobilize and use the global market as an instrument of equalization of South-North power relations. The foundations of the old Bandung were strictly political-ideological and, as such, were easily destroyed by the monetarist counterrevolution. The foundations of the Bandung that may be emerging now, in contrast, are primarily economic and, as such, far more solid" (*Adam Smith in Beijing*, 384–85).
 5. Ha Jin, *War Trash: A Novel* (New York: Vintage International, 2005). Hereafter cited in the text.
 6. While I focus on settler modernity's spatial exceptions in this essay, it is part of a larger project in which I also analyze how settler modernity functions through an attendant temporal exception in the form of debt imperialism, a multiscale process through which the United States is able to roll over its significant national debt indefinitely and not conform to the homogeneous time of repayment that it imposes on others. Given the central role of US global finance in the world economy, a US default on its massive debt would radically destabilize the architecture of racial capitalism. The specter of such a destabilization and attendant fears of apocalyptic risk are in effect exploited as a form of US imperial domination. I argue that US debt imperialism is the economic logic and form of US military empire. Debt imperialism is at once the literal cost and effect of military empire. That is, as Melinda Cooper puts it, "The irony here is that the exorbitant military expenditure of the United States has been financed through the very debt imperialism it is designed to enforce" (*Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008], 164). Thus, as the United States' biggest creditor, China is paying for a US militarism whose primary threat is perceived to be China itself. The economist Michael Hudson calls debt imperialism "super imperialism" (*Super Imperialism: The Origin and Fundamentals of U.S. World Dominance* [London: Pluto, 2003]). Settler modernity, moreover, is a debt relation linking statecraft and capital; it has been made possible through literal and figurative debt relations. It is a debt regime that functions in multiple ways. On the one hand, it is the debt to Indigenous communities that is unacknowledged. On the other hand, it provides the collateral for various debtor–creditor schemes. Yet, still, it continues to produce debt for various populations who are vulnerable to crushing indebtedness.
 7. In their introduction to a two-part special issue of *Social Text*, "China and the Human," David L. Eng, Teemu Ruskola, and Shuang Shen write that Western media depictions of China are almost entirely either about its "astounding economic development" or about "its equally astounding human rights abuses" ("Introduction: China and the Human," *Social Text* 29.4 [2012]: 1).
 8. By 1952 the number of POWs peaked at 170,000, mostly on Koje Island. Of these, 21,000 were Chinese, about two-thirds of whom were actually former members of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army who had been reeducated in Maoism, absorbed into the People's Liberation Army, and sent to

- fight in Korea; 100,000 were North Korean; and 49,000, South Korean (most of whom had been captured by the North Koreans earlier in the war). See Charles S. Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number: Exploiting Korean War POWs at Home and Abroad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 33, 35, 68.
9. Joseph Darda, "The Literary Afterlife of the Cold War," *American Literature* 87.1 (2015): 88. He argues, "*War Trash* conveys an alternative narrative arc of the Korean War, one that invites complexity and neither begins nor ends in the early 1950s. Framed by the present-day homeland security state, Jin foregrounds the biopolitical logic of postwar warfare in which all are, though differentially, constituted in relation to a normative and politicized global population, the 'war trash' of a permanent war that began long before September 11, 2001."
 10. Joseph Darda, "Introduction: Narratives of Exception in the Warfare State," in "Literary Counter-histories of US Exceptionalism," ed. Joseph Darda, special issue, *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 25.2 (2014): 82.
 11. Xiang continues, "More simply put, our New World Order is 'post-Cold War' to the extent that capitalism has become unprecedentedly globalized and to the extent that Chinese economic modernity has come to embody the vicissitudes of globalization, from political infractions against the individual to economic inequalities wrought by development. China, in this respect, embodies the antinomial yet mutually reinforcing relation between economic globalization and human rights as diagnosed by Pheng Cheah. I argue that we register these (sic) codependence in Yu's neutral voice, given that neutral signifies both a putatively more universal human rights that has transcended the Cold War's ideological schisms and an insidious, indiscriminate variant of globalization discourse that finds its most controversial expression in Chinese economic development" (Sunny Yang Xiang, "Voicing Asia: Post-Cold War Novels, Geopolitics, and Human Rights" [PhD diss., UC Berkeley, 2014], 55).
 12. Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004).
 13. An armistice, and not a peace treaty, was signed in 1953. The United States maintained complete wartime and peacetime operational command of the South Korean military until 1978, and under the Combined Forces Command (CFC) a majority command after 1978. Peacetime command was returned in 1994, while an agreement to return wartime command in 2012 has been postponed. See Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon, "The Politics of Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Class in the U.S. Military Empire," in *Over There: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War Two to the Present*, ed. Maria Höhn and Seungsook Moon (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 16.
 14. Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *American Historical Review* 116.5 (2011): 1357.
 15. A. Naomi Paik, *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps since World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 6. See also Kramer, "Power and Connection," 1357.
 16. Darda, "Literary Afterlife of the Korean War," 83.
 17. See Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number*. He writes: "Psychological warfare was nurtured by the National Security Council, which in early 1949 recommended expanding 'foreign information programs and overt psychological operations.' Thus was born 'Project Troy,' whose very name reflected the ambitions of psywar—a weapon that might collapse an enemy from within. Troy research led to the suggestion of creating a 'single authority for political warfare,' since any government department from Agriculture to the CIA might impact psychological postures. . . . Troy helped prompt the formation of the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB) in April 1951, and the PSB became the NSC's largest department and a nerve center for POW matters" (17). He continues: "The violence stemmed largely from a UNC psychological warfare operation. Like the GIs being fed Marxism with their millet, the Chinese and North Korean prisoners were subjects of the Cold War competition for minds. Some of the POWs were alienated from their communist governments to begin with, and they were used to coerce others to denounce their home regimes. When the psychological operation evolved into a demand that prisoners defect and not return to their families, the compounds burst into civil war. The wider war was also affected. The defection campaign led to an 18-month impasse at peace negotiations, prolonging the trial of American prisoners as well" (33). In the end, 21,820 Communist POWs (out of 132,000) in UN camps opted not to repatriate, while 22 (out of 12,000 UN POWs) opted not to repatriate. See Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 196–97.

18. Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number*, 35.
19. *Ibid.*, 44.
20. Monica Kim, "Empire's Babel: US Military Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War," *History of the Present* 3.1 (2013): 4, 2.
21. Monica Kim, "Humanity Interrogated: Empire, Nation, and the Political Subject in U.S. and UN-controlled POW Camps of the Korean War, 1942–1960" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2011), 5.
22. *Ibid.*, 6.
23. Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number*, 35.
24. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 166.
25. *Ibid.*, 166–67.
26. *Ibid.*, 171.
27. Monica Kim writes, "I do depart from Agamben's 'state of exception' theoretical frame in that I insist that the interrogation room—or 'state of exception'—was not an 'extralegal' situation, but rather a 'hyperlegal' one, where an extraordinary amount of labor was needed to maintain such a site" (*Humanity Interrogated*, 16).
28. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 171.
29. *Ibid.*, 175.
30. *Ibid.*, 174. Agamben writes, "If this is true, if the essence of the camp consists in the materialization of the state of exception and in the subsequent creation of a space in which bare life and the juridical rule enter into a threshold of indistinction, then we must admit that we find ourselves virtually in the presence of a camp every time such a structure is created, independent of the kinds of crime that are committed there and whatever its denomination and specific topography."
31. *Ibid.*, 166.
32. Mark Rifkin, "Indigenizing Agamben: Rethinking Sovereignty in Light of the 'Peculiar' Status of Native Peoples," *Cultural Critique* 73 (2009): 117.
33. *Ibid.*, 90.
34. Oswaldo de Rivero, *The Myth of Development: Non-Viable Economies of the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Claudia Encinas and Janet Herrick Encinas (London: Zed Books, 2001).
35. Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 152.
36. Jennifer Denetdale, "History, Diné/Navajo Memory, and the Bosque Redondo Memorial," *New Mexico Historical Review* 82.3 (2007): 297, 298.
37. Scott Lauria Morgensen, *Spaces between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 161.
38. This plagiarism charge was made in July 2005 by Zhang Ze-shi, chief editor of *Meijun Jizhongying (Personal Records in the American Prison Camps)*, particularly in terms of the account of the abduction of General Dodd, fictionalized as General Bell in the novel. Ha Jin includes at the end of his novel this Author's Note with a bibliography that includes Zhang's work: "This is a work of fiction and all the main characters are fictional. Most of the events and details, however, are factual. For information on them I am indebted to the following authors and works." Rather than getting entangled in the legal and ethical issues generated by this case, Xie Xinqiu concludes that *War Trash* is a work of what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographical metafiction" (quoted in Xinqiu, "War Memoir as False Document," *Amerasia Journal* 38.2 [2012]: 36).
39. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 31.
40. Giorgio Agamben, "No to Biopolitical Tattooing," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 5.2 (2008): 202.