

## A Not-yet-postcolonial Peninsula: Rewriting Spaces of Violence, Division and Diaspora\*

Jini Kim Watson  
 New York University

*In his controversial 2001 novel, The Guest (Sonnim), Hwang Sok-yong tells the story of elderly Korean American Ryu Yosöp, who embarks on a journey back to his childhood home in Hwanghae province, now North Korea. At once a spatial, temporal, and psychological return, the novel revisits the early years of the Korean War to unveil the truth behind one of the war's most horrific crimes: the slaughter of 35,000 Korean civilians in the Shinch'on massacre of 1950. In particular, Hwang examines the arrival of the two "guests" of the title—Christianity and Marxism—during the colonial period and their subsequent role in the violence of Shinch'on. By making visible forms of political agency achieved through the assimilation of these two guests, the novel complicates the ideological binaries that appear to have arrested decolonization of the Korean peninsula. Watson's article reveals how Hwang's experimental, multivocal narrative structure rewrites usual historical accounts of the Korean War and division by attending to the spatialized production of regions, nation, state, and diaspora. It offers a rethinking of the congealed ideologies, stories, desires, and topologies of this not-yet-postcolonial peninsula.*

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Despite the obvious temporal designation of the term *postcolonial*, the field has necessarily trafficked in an abundance of spatial concepts such as metropole and colony, center and periphery, global and local, diaspora and homeland. As Ato Quayson notes, "It is the entire domain of colonial space making and its aftereffects in the contemporary world that gives *postcolonialism* its significance today."<sup>1</sup> Since the 1990s we have seen a particular flourishing of studies predicated on the implicitly

Jini Kim Watson is associate professor of English and comparative literature at New York University. She has published work on cities, space, modernity and postcolonial East and Southeast Asian literature, and is the author of *The New Asian City: Three-dimensional Fictions of Space and Urban Form* (Minnesota, 2011).

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1 Ato Quayson, "Periods versus Concepts: Space Making and the Question of Postcolonial Literary History," *PMLA* 127.2 (2012): 344.

spatial processes of diaspora, transnationalism, and globalization, works that often seek to “explain ... forms of social and cultural organization whose ambition is to transcend the boundaries of the nation-state.”<sup>2</sup> Other recent works, in turn, have returned to the very question of the postcolonial nation under conditions of globalization.<sup>3</sup> In this paper, I am not interested in defending the nation-state against cosmopolitan transnationalism, or vice versa. Rather I am interested in interrogating the *spatial production* of these necessarily linked concepts in the context of a particularly fraught site: the Korean peninsula. One of the most enigmatic and intransigent political formations of the postcolonial world, it requires us to think through a new constellation of spatial figures: division and partition, peninsular and island (given the South has effectively been rendered an island), the demilitarized zone as border, and two incomplete nation-states frozen in a sixty-year cease-fire at the very moment of decolonization. To understand how these configurations bear on current notions of the (trans)national, diasporic, and global, I read the groundbreaking 2001 novel on North and South Korean relations, *The Guest (Sonnim)* by South Korea’s preeminent political novelist, Hwang Sok-yong.<sup>4</sup>

*The Guest* tells the story of Reverend Ryu Yosöp who, after a life in exile in South Korea and the United States, embarks on a journey of return from his residence in Brooklyn, New York, to his childhood home in the province of Hwanghae, North Korea. He is able to travel on one of the recently established “homeland visitors” family reunion trips.<sup>5</sup> Structured by this central diasporic homecoming, the novel charts a temporal and psychological return to the early years of the Korean War to unveil the truth behind one of the war’s most horrific and gruesome events: the slaughter of approximately 35,000 Korean civilians near the town of Shinch’ön, Hwanghae Province, in the fall of 1950 as UN forces pushed the North Korean army back up the peninsula. Using an experimental, multivocal narrative form modeled loosely after a traditional shamanist exorcism of Hwanghae province, the novel relates Yosöp’s return in both time and space to the scene of the massacre to present a startlingly revisionist literary historiography. For North Koreans, the Shinch’ön massacre—and the entire Korean War—was a result of American imperialist aggression, while in the South, such violence had always been blamed on the Communists. Rejecting both of these accounts in the novel, Hwang was roundly attacked “by Korean nationalists of both left and right persuasions” after its publication in 2001.<sup>6</sup>

2 Simon Gikandi, “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100.3 (2001): 628.

3 See for example, Pheng Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions: On Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006); and Gautam Premnath, “The Weak Sovereignty of the Postcolonial Nation-State,” in *World Bank Literature*, ed. Amitava Kumar (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003), 253–264.

4 In general, I use the McCune–Reischauer Romanization system for Korean words, except when proper names are more commonly known by other Romanization forms, for example Hwang Sok-yong, not Hwang Sögyöng, and Shinch’ön, not Sinch’ön.

5 The homeland visitor trips became a central part of South Korean president Kim Dae Jung’s “sunshine policy” toward the North, a warming of relations and communications between the two states during the late 1990s. Relations soured in the early 2000s with the United States’s war on terror and U.S. president Bush’s more hard-line approach to the North over questions of nuclear weaponry.

6 Owen Miller, “The Haunted Battlefield,” *International Socialism* 110, April 6, 2006. Accessed September 3, 2013, at <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=191&issue=110>.

In what follows, I examine how the narrative trope of “return” works with other formal devices of the novel to constitute Hwang’s powerful critique of the ideologies, stories, spaces, and desires that have congealed around the massacre and, more broadly, the division of this paradoxical and, as many have argued, not-yet-postcolonial peninsula. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have argued that the abstract use of spatial vocabulary often “occludes what should be the primary focus: *the processes of production of difference* in a world of culturally, socially, and economically interconnected spaces.”<sup>7</sup> In this paper, I examine the “processes of production” of the ongoing division between North and South Korea as a spatial formation that has produced a specific concatenation of nation, state, and diaspora.

Before moving on, we should note Hwang’s reputation as something of an exemplary dissident voice in South Korea. Born in 1943 in Manchuria (then part of the Japanese empire), he came to prominence with his worker’s literature in the 1970s, and is perhaps best known in his home country for his serialized novel allegorizing the Park Chung Hee dictatorship, *Chang Kilsan* (1974–1984). In 1985 he published *Shadow of Arms*, a scathing critique on the Korean military role in Vietnam based on his own experiences there. In 1989 he took an unauthorized visit to North Korea contravening South Korean national security laws and subsequently spent time in the United States and Germany to avoid imprisonment. He was nevertheless arrested on his return to Seoul in 1993 and served five years until pardoned by the then newly elected president and former democracy activist Kim Dae-jung. In Jin-kyung Lee’s words, “Hwang has continued to produce works that engage the most urgent and vital issues confronting South Korea and the Korean peninsula in the global context.”<sup>8</sup> Cho Kuho concurs that for more than half a century Hwang has tirelessly attempted “imagining solutions for overcoming division [*pundan kūkbok*] and bringing forth reunification,”<sup>9</sup> making him a novelist of division *par excellence*.

Despite Hwang’s clear engagement with problems of empire, decolonization, and neocolonialism, his name is little known among postcolonial scholars. Because the peninsula was colonized not by a European power but by the Japanese (who occupied it from 1905–1945), the dominant construction of Anglo- and Francophone postcolonial literary studies typically does not include Korea (or Taiwan, Japan’s other long-term colonial territory); its literature and culture are usually the sole purview of East Asian studies departments. On the other hand, the now substantial body of literature in English resulting from Korean migration to the United States (and to a lesser extent, other Western countries) has usually been incorporated into the field of Asian American studies. What makes *The Guest* so unusual is that it is a Korean-language novel narrated from the perspective of a Korean American—elderly protagonist

7 Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, “Beyond ‘Culture’: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference,” in *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, eds. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Durham NC: Duke UP, 1997), 43. As I have argued elsewhere, in certain contexts postcolonialism may better “be understood as the struggle over space rather than over culture or identity.” See Jini Kim Watson, *The New Asian City: Three-dimensional Fictions of Space and Urban Form* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011), 6.

8 Jin-Kyung Lee, “The Guest,” *Journal of Korean Studies* 11.1 (2006): 195.

9 Cho Guho, “Hwang Sök-yöng ūi Pundan Sosöl Yöng’gu” [“Research in the Novel of Division by Hwang Sok-yong”], *Hanguk munhak önö hakhwe* [Society for Korean literature and language] 49 (2008): 454.

Reverend Ryu Yosöp—who has lived in New York most of his life. In my reading, I show how *The Guest* traverses not only the spatial boundaries between North and South Korea, but those disciplinary formations that segregate postcolonial, East Asian and Asian American studies from each other.<sup>10</sup>

The article is organized into three sections. In the first, I examine *The Guest*'s rewriting of nationalist historical narratives and its attention to the matrix of colonial spatial origins of the massacre. In particular, Hwang returns to the two “guests” of the title—Christianity and Marxism—during the colonial period and their role in the ensuing violence of Shinch'on. By positing other forms of political agency through the localized assimilation of these two foreigners, the novel challenges the subsequent overinvestment in and deployment of the form of the nation-state on the peninsula. In the second section, I explore how the narrative form itself interrogates spatial hierarchies as well as the self-construction of its protagonist, Yosöp, as a Korean diasporic subject in the United States. The novel also forcefully rewrites the unidirectionality and logic of Korean-to-U.S. migration by attending to other patterns and causes of dispersal beyond the dominant motive of economic migration. Finally, I suggest in a brief third section how *The Guest* offers a new staging of nation space that moves beyond articulations of either nativism or liberatory transnationalism. If we understand the novel as a parable of the postcolonial nation arrested at the moment of decolonization—one extreme example of the “aftereffects” of colonial space making—its most profound offering is, I suggest, a theorization of the multiple spatial formations that comprise and sustain division. In its complex narrativization of the return to the divided Korean peninsula, *The Guest* may be thought of as a useful limit case for working through the assumed topologies of the postcolonial, the diasporic, and the global.

### 1. The Shrimp and the Whale

The narrative of the division of the Korean peninsula has largely taken the form of a well-known Korean proverb: *korae ssaum e saeudüng t'öjinda*—in a fight between whales, it's the shrimp who gets his back broken. In other words, after the liberation of Korea with the defeat of the Japanese Empire in 1945, the victorious world powers

10 The novel's reception in Korea has paid little attention to the diasporic dimensions of the narrator's position for a focus on national division and reunification, for example, Yi Chaeyöng, “Chinsil kwa hwahae: *Sonnim ron*” [“Truth and reconciliation: On *The Guest*”], in *Hwang Sögyöng üi munhak segye* [*The world of Hwang Sögyöng*], eds. Ch'oe Wonsik and Im Hongbae (P'aju: Ch'angbi, 2003), 100–166. Since its inception with seminal works by Elaine H. Kim, Lisa Lowe, and others, Korean American literary studies have paid careful attention to the “hybridity and heterogeneity of Korean and Asian American identities” (Kim 170) and “the material contradictions of lived political life” (Lowe 152). Nevertheless, as Shirley Geok-lin Lim notes, diasporic works are “usually excluded from a U.S.-based grouping for extraliterary, ideological and political reasons” (290) that include forging solidarity between different Asian immigrant groups in the United States. See Elaine H. Kim, “Korean American Literature,” and Shirley Geok-lin Lim, “Immigration and Diaspora,” in *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*, ed. King-kok Cheung (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 156–191, 289–311. Also see Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: Asian American Cultural Politics*, (Durham: Duke UP, 1996). More recent works in Asian American studies, following exemplary scholarship by Jodi Kim, Ji-yeon Yuh (both cited in this essay), and others, have successfully brought the material production of the diaspora together with questions of Asian American cultural politics.

simply sliced up the nation at the 38th parallel.<sup>11</sup> The Soviets and the Americans assumed divided caretaking responsibilities while the Koreans, with no representatives in the decision-making, were the ones to suffer the consequences. Within a few years, so the story goes, the Soviets in the North and the Americans in the South had imparted their respective ideologies, installed puppet leaders—Kim Il-sung and Syngman Rhee respectively—and set the stage for civil war. Encouraged by the Soviet Union, North Korea invaded the South in 1950 in an attempt to reunify the country; three years of war drew in numerous U.S. allies as well as the Chinese People's Liberation Army in the first “hot” conflict of the Cold War. As one of the North Korean officers in *The Guest* unequivocally tells Yosöp on his homeland visit, “For the sake of the solidarity of our people, there is one thing you must be sure to keep in mind.... The fundamental reason we're divided is the influence of foreign powers. Imperialist Japan and Imperialist America have made us this way [*ilje wa mije küröke mandüröttio*].”<sup>12</sup>

Such a narrative, of course, gives agency only to the political form of the nation-state, and only to the most powerful of these: it is Japan, the United States, Great Britain, China, and the Soviet Union who are the real historical actors, and North and South Korea their arbitrary creations. This has given impetus, I would argue, for Korea's distinct brand of anti-imperialist nationalism on *both* sides of the border,<sup>13</sup> emphasizing the not-yet-completed liberation from colonial status that would result in a unified nation-state of its own. As popularly imagined, the homeland visits that comprise the background to the novel have tended to reaffirm the oneness of the Korean nation, or *minjok*, sundered by outside forces.<sup>14</sup> Following this logic, and regarding the massacre of approximately one-quarter of the population of Hwanghae province that lies at the heart of *The Guest*, only *foreign* powers have been deemed capable of such an atrocity.

During his stay in North Korea, Yosöp repeatedly hears the official story that the Imperialist Americans along with Japanese collaborators and deserters were the perpetrators of the massacre as they pushed northward following General MacArthur's famous UN-backed Incheon landing. At a museum memorializing the victims, tour guides reveal the grisly details of how “the fiendish American Imperialist murderers enacted the mass slaughter that they had been planning for so long”;<sup>15</sup> they locked up

11 At the 1943 Cairo Conference, Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-shek made plans for Asian nations after the defeat of the Japanese empire. Roosevelt notoriously spoke of a delayed Korean independence occurring “in due course”.

12 Hwang Sok-yong, *The Guest*, trans. Kyung-ja Chun and Maya West (New York: Seven Stories: 2005), 88–89; Hwang Sögyöng, *Sonnim [The Guest]* (P'aju: Ch'angbi, 2001), 96.

13 See Jini Kim Watson, “Imperial Mimicry, Modernisation Theory and the Contradictions of Post-colonial South Korea,” *Postcolonial Studies* 10.2 (2007): 171–190.

14 The widely watched (and highly orchestrated) family reunion visits of August 2000 in Pyongyang seemed to confirm the irreducible unity of the Korean national body on a spectacular new level: the televised reunions featured immense and prolonged close-ups of weeping and embracing mothers and sons, daughters and fathers, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives, who had been separated since the war. Officials and participants from both the North and South emphasized their shared 5,000 years of history and culture, even as their differing political, social, and economic formations were never more evident. The term *minjok*, often translated as nation or people, may also be understood as race or ethnicity. It does not necessarily imply the nation-state as its horizon of meaning.

15 Hwang, *The Guest*, 93.

hundreds of people in an air-raid shelter in Shinch'on, doused it with gasoline, and set it alight. It takes the length of the novel for the fragments of ghostly witness accounts to build into the horrifying truth that Yosöp had already suspected: it was, in fact, Koreans themselves and not the American invaders who committed the slaughter. Hwang introduces his novel with a short author's note in which he recounts that, years after he had actually visited the "American Imperialist Massacre Remembrance Museum" in Shinch'on on his trip to North Korea, he met several Korean Americans who told him eyewitness accounts from their childhood. "As it turns out," he writes, "the atrocities we suffered were committed by none other than ourselves, and the inner sense of guilt and fear sparked by this incident helped form the roots of the frantic hatred that thrives to this day."<sup>16</sup>

The novel powerfully suggests that there is a kind of redemption and ground-clearing in claiming such violence as one's own, to acknowledge the "inner sense of guilt and fear sparked by this incident." In Cho's words, "The truth of the massacre and its confessions are the most important requirements to heal [the massacre's] wounds,"<sup>17</sup> confirming the paired logic of truth and reconciliation that has now become commonplace in many postconflict sites. Beyond the logic of catharsis and healing, however, I read Hwang's novel as a deeper critique about *possible forms of political agency* and not merely about the shift in responsibility from the Soviets or Americans to the Koreans. In conventional understandings of the massacre, such incredible violence can issue only from the singular nation-state—the very political form put under erasure on the divided peninsula. I suggest the reason Hwang's novel earned so much ire is precisely its assertion of *other* kinds of modes of political agency and responsibility. Most significantly, *The Guest* explores the way imported ideologies—the arrival of Christianity and Marxism—have been indigenized and *spatialized* during and since the Japanese colonial period.<sup>18</sup> Hwang explains in his preface:

When smallpox was first identified as a Western disease that needed to be warded off, the Korean people referred to it as "mama" or "sonnim," the second which translates to "guest." With this in mind, I settled upon *The Guest* as a fitting title for a novel that explores the arrival and effects of Christianity and Marxism in a country where both were initially as foreign as smallpox.<sup>19</sup>

Hwang is most interested, then, in how the two foreign "guests" are assimilated to the local conditions of colonial Korea, a society that has already been substantially reorganized by the Japanese, those most obvious and prior foreign "guests."

At the beginning of the novel, Yosöp's older brother Ryu Yohan, a Christian presbyter, passes away in his home in New Jersey, precipitating Yosöp's trip back to

16 Ibid., 9.

17 Cho, "Novel of Division," 449.

18 As Paik Nak-chung has elegantly argued, the English translation should more correctly be rendered *Guests*. "The Search for Reconciliation and Peace on the Korean Peninsula: The Case of Hwang Suk-Young's *Guests*," (paper presented at Second International Forum for Literature, Seoul, Korea, May 24–26, 2005), *Ch'angbi Publishers*, June 30, 2005, accessed November 11, 2013, <http://en.changbi.com/archives/635>.

19 Hwang, *The Guest*, 7.



his homeland.<sup>20</sup> As mentioned previously, Yosöp's return is related in a nonlinear style that blends voices of the dead with the narrative of his contemporary journey back to North Korea. From the ghostly testimonies of a number of Yosöp's childhood friends and neighbors, we learn that landowners—including the Ryu family themselves—were able to amass property under the Japanese agricultural system and had generally converted to Christianity, while the peasants and laborers in Japanese mines found Marxist theories then in circulation from Japan and China readily applicable to their own conditions of oppression. Lee explains the confluence of historical factors that linked Christianity to landownership and right-wing politics in this region:

The marginal literati class and middle strata of the north were more receptive to Christianity, or "Western learning." The combination of new knowledge and economic opportunities made available by the collapse of the old regime and by the transition into colonial capitalism resulted in this group's ascendance. By the end of the colonial period they commanded significant economic, political and cultural influence in the country.<sup>21</sup>

Significant here is the production of a regionalization of northern Korea that predates division and war. Marxism and a Christianized version of nationalism were thus competing ideologies well before liberation and, most importantly, were grounded in distinct relationships to land and property. Byung-ho Chung notes the normalization of this ideological binary such that during the Korean War and its aftermath, "the term 'War Refugee Crossers to the South' became synonymous with 'Christians' and 'anticommunists'."<sup>22</sup>

Yosöp gradually learns that his own brother Yohan was one of the most brutal perpetrators of violence during the massacre. Such acts were rationalized—in Yohan's own ghostly account—because the landless peasants "tried to take away our land, the land that's been handed down to us from generation to generation. It was the beginning of what they called the 'land reform.'"<sup>23</sup> Yohan's ghost goes on to detail the particular humiliations that this incurs. Note that here, as elsewhere in the novel, the voices of the dead are told from the present and addressed to Yosöp:

And you know, even then, if it had been total strangers or some foreign bastards who showed up and tried to rob us of our land at gunpoint, well, then we might have just cried our hearts out, been mortified at our own helplessness, and given in—but that wasn't how it happened. It was our friends, the kids we grew up with, the ones we'd known from babyhood until we got old enough to grow pubic hair ... people we'd shared broth with ... these very same sons of bitches started showing up, completely poker-faced, telling us to just hand over our land.<sup>24</sup>

20 The Korean name Yosöp is a transliteration of the biblical "Joseph"; his brother Yohan is John.

21 Lee, "The Guest," 196.

22 Byung-ho Chung, "Between Defector and Migrant: Identities and Strategies of North Koreans in South Korea," *Korean Studies* 32 (2008): 6.

23 Hwang, *The Guest*, 114.

24 *Ibid.*, 114; Hwang, *Sonnim*, 124.

As Yohan relates, it is precisely the intimacy involved in proposed land reforms that is perceived as most threatening: the thought of the “kids we grew up with” demanding land is, in fact, more outrageous than theft by “some foreign bastards [*t’aji esō on nomdūri*].” The novel goes on to reveal how the outbreak of violence leading to the massacre is precipitated when the Christians, emboldened by hearing about General MacArthur’s Incheon landing, retaliate for the redistribution of land that they had suffered after the People’s Committee came to power.<sup>25</sup>

From the peasants’ side, the account of injustice is quite different. This perspective is most clearly articulated by the ghost of Uncle Sunnam, an impoverished farm hand who is killed in the violence by Yohan and his fellow Christians.

To tell the plain truth, your father, Presbyter Ryu Indök, and your grandfather Reverend Ryu Samsöng—they came into their land by working as agents for the Japanese Oriental Development Company, managing the contracts of tenant farmers. Practically everyone who attended Kwangmyöng Church, in fact, lived quite comfortably, and most of them had at least a plot of land to their name, small or large.... You see, even under the Japanese occupation, everyone argued about these exact same issues. You know what I say? Show me a Christian leader who didn’t come from a family of landowners.<sup>26</sup>

Hwang presents neither side as the correct moral account of the violence. Rather, what the novel stages is the way colonial space—or more concretely, land—has been produced as fundamentally contradictory, overwritten with competing desires, histories, class interests, and affective resonances. The Shinch’on massacre is thus a complex event involving religion, local class struggles, and land reform *as well as* foreign involvement. Those unresolved conflicts, carried into the struggle of decolonization, are then precipitated and preserved in the rigid spatial formations of the two Korean states that remain to the present. This is what Paik Nak-chung has described as the “solidifying” of the event of partition in 1945 into the *division system* [*pundan ch’eche*] of today.<sup>27</sup>

Concrete historical evidence on the perpetrators of the Shinch’on massacre remains murky. Jodi Kim draws on the work of historian Walter Lafeber to note that before 1950, “a bloody civil conflict had already ensued, with heavy fighting along the 38th parallel and guerilla war on both sides claiming a hundred thousand lives.”<sup>28</sup> In this account, the main ideological conflict was between right-wing and left-wing Koreans, and not pro- or anti-Soviets or Americans.<sup>29</sup> Bruce Cumings, the preeminent U.S. historian of modern Korea, is initially circumspect about the responsibility for the Shinch’on atrocities. His 2010 book, *The Korean War*, devotes two pages to the event in which he describes a visit he made in 1987 to the massacre site: “I visited the

25 Yi Chaeyöng notes simply that land distribution is at the heart of the Shinch’on conflict. “Truth and Reconciliation,” 109.

26 Hwang, *The Guest*, 115–116.

27 Paik Nak-chung, “The Search for Reconciliation,” 5.

28 Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 146.

29 *Ibid.*, 275, n. 12.



chapel house and the tombs, examined original photos and newspaper stories, and spent the day with a survivor; we came away convinced that a terrible atrocity had taken place, although the evidence on its authorship was impossible to document.”<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the lack in the historical archive is supplanted by none other than Hwang Sok-yong himself:

Then the South Korean dissident writer Hwang Sok-yong published his novel *The Guest*, which, based on his own investigations and interviews with survivors and witnesses, related that refugee Christians from the South had returned to Sinchon during the UN occupation and presided over this appalling massacre. They and assorted right-wing youth groups murdered upward of 35,000 people in the county, about a quarter of the total population, including real or alleged Communists and others suspected of ties to the North Korean enemy.<sup>31</sup>

Cummings proceeds to cite *The Guest* for several details on the murders. Hwang’s novel, therefore, does not merely challenge dominant historical narratives from the realm of the literary, but is actively providing an alternative historiography of the event. In theorizing forms of rooted political agency beyond that of the nation-state, it is a work that convincingly undoes the usual binaries of North and South, foreign intervention and native innocence, whales and shrimps, to present the spatial and psychic complexity behind these preliberation struggles.

Moreover, Hwang’s novel effectively introduces internal dissent and heterogeneity into the one myth that both North and South have long agreed upon: the indisputable unity of the Korean people [*minjok*] forged out of a collective history of suffering caused by external invasions.<sup>32</sup> As *The Guest* rewrites the “great powers” narrative of the Korean division and War, the abstract Cold War notion of two competing nation-states, each the container of an overlaid, foreign ideology that stops at its border, is replaced by deeper, older, granular, and everyday struggles over land and labor. The violence of Hwanghae Province and the war is therefore partly predicated on tensions *already* formed by and through colonial capitalism, and not merely the result of foreign intervention after 1945. Despite Hwang’s title, the novel is in fact less concerned with the content of imported Marxism and Christianity than with their incorporation into local spatial practices by the “host.”<sup>33</sup> If the most fundamental processes of capitalism and colonialism include struggles over land, the novel’s two guest ideologies of Christianity and Marxism might best be thought of as ways that

30 Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2010), 198.

31 *Ibid.*, 198.

32 Paik Nak-chung notes, “There is a very strong feeling throughout Korea demanding reunification; I am sure I can speak for most Koreans, North *and* South, that we do have this feeling. But of course to have the feeling is not the same thing as to see the way to the thing or to have a theory for realizing it.” Fredric Jameson interviewed by Paik Nak-chung, “South Korea as Social Space,” in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham: Duke UP, 1996), 362. See note 14 on the term *minjok*.

33 Hwang’s work clearly resonates with Derrida’s well-known deconstructive analysis of the terms *guest*, *ghost*, and *host* in the French language. Note, however, there is not the same linguistic ambiguity in the Korean words for “guest” (*sonnim*) and “host” (*chuin*). See Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000).

Koreans *made sense of* the contradictions in spatial reorganization that occurred under the Japanese colonial regime.

## 2. The Return

Avtar Brah has written that “at the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of a journey.”<sup>34</sup> The journey, however, may be bidirectional: it includes both the one that produces the dispersal of peoples from a homeland, and a return or orientation toward that homeland. Khachig Tölölyan writes that a

salient characteristic of diasporas, especially those dispersed by a catastrophic destruction in the homeland, is a rhetoric of restoration and return that, in practice, takes the form of a sustained and organized commitment to maintaining relations with kin communities elsewhere, and with the homeland, to which diasporans either return literally or, more commonly, “re-turn” without actual repatriation.<sup>35</sup>

For diasporic Koreans who left the north during the war, such notions of return and restoration are deeply problematic.<sup>36</sup> “Commitment” to the homeland takes the impossible form of a loyalty to a nonexistent ideal: a unified Korea, the realization of which would (most likely) involve the implosive demise and painful incorporation of the North Korean state into the South.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, simply “maintaining relations” with the homeland in the North is an illegality for many in the diaspora. In this section, I examine the way *The Guest* posits “the return” neither as a project of restoration nor of maintaining relations with the homeland, but of providing the occasion for a diasporic self-accounting, that is, a way for diasporic subjects to “give an account of the pasts that produced them.”<sup>38</sup> What are the sedimented spatial formations and ideologies that underpin certain constructions of the diasporic subject? And what regimes of power, to borrow from Brah, might “inform and inscribe the formation of a specific diaspora?”<sup>39</sup>

At one level, Yosöp’s return to North Korea is revelatory for the very fact that it has happened at all. A facet of the narrative that no commentators, to my knowledge, have discussed is the descriptive realism of North Korean contemporary life, which is sharply contrasted to the much discussed nonrealist ghostly appearances. For a place

34 Avtar Brah, “Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities,” in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 616.

35 Khachig Tölölyan, “The Contemporary Discourse of Diaspora Studies,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27.3 (2007): 649.

36 In Korean, the term *kuihyang*—literally, return to homeland—is a powerful concept invoking the spatial rootedness of *kohyang* (homeland or hometown). Its conceptual opposite is *t’ahyang* (foreign or other land).

37 The Korean case is often compared to divided Germany, yet reunification on the peninsula is reckoned to be a much more disruptive (and expensive) project than the reunification of Germany given the now staggering differences in development between the two Koreas. Paik notes that the country has been divided for longer, “and much more violently and rigidly, too, than the two Germanies.” “South Korea as Social Space,” 362.

38 Ato Quayson, “Space and the Education of Desire: Postcolonialism and Diaspora,” Panel description, ACLA Conference, Toronto, April 2013.

39 Brah, “Diaspora,” 616.

closed off from much of the world for sixty years and usually associated with cultish leaders, famines, and nuclear standoffs, Hwang's depiction of North Korea in the 1990s—and Pyongyang in particular—is stunning for its very normality. I quote at length from the novel:

Reverend Ryu much preferred to simply sit by the window and watch the passersby. An old grandmother walked by carrying a bag and in a great hurry to get who-knows-where; young people in twos and threes crossed the street chattering back and forth; groups of students marched by all lined up with a gait that spoke of having places to be and things to do. It was a weekday, and most people wore working clothes, their collars buttoned up at the neck. Every now and again a man in a suit would come into view. High school and junior high school students' uniforms were the color of persimmons, complete with hats that resembled Lenin caps [*leninmo bisūthan haksæng moja*]. The elementary students walked by in orderly lines wearing jumpers, overly colorful shirts with huge red ribbons, or red Boy Scout kerchiefs tied around their necks.... Every now and then you might spot a young woman with a stylish hairdo wearing a short skirt or a Western-style dress [*yangjang*] and holding a parasol, but then there were also some women still in their work clothes, wearing sports caps with long visors.... A housewife, carrying one child on her back and holding another by the hand, hurried towards a streetcar stop.<sup>40</sup>

The passage is full of typical details of modern street life: movement, colors, clothing, and character types populate Pyongyang's spaces on an ordinary workday. Familiar, urban everyday life goes on here. Such a scene of modern street life would not be out of place in a number of twentieth-century urban novels and, at first, this passage seems peripheral to the central drama unfolding in the novel. Yet the urban realism of a place invariably cast as backward and oppressive strikes the reader, as it does Yosöp, as distinctly *unreal*. For a novel that abounds with ghosts, it is perhaps these details of North Korean life that appear most spectral.<sup>41</sup>

A page later we get: "The buildings, the monuments, the milky light of the streetlamps and all those passersby—they were still all too vivid. He felt as if he had walked into some sort of surrealistic painting."<sup>42</sup> The very unforeign everydayness of this scene—with the exception perhaps of the students' Leninesque caps—can only be registered by Yosöp as a simulacrum. Pyongyang is no hellish city of goose-stepping soldiers and famine-starved children. This city scene thus far exceeds its apparent generic function as realist background or setting; it offers an uncanny rendering of the *normal* that works to undo our usual spatial conceptions of North Korea as aberrant and extraordinary. A similar effect is produced in the representation of North Korean guides. Neither friendly nor unfriendly, they operate in the manner of bureaucrats everywhere and are all too familiar to the reader. Yosöp gives them unflattering nicknames that are used throughout—"Fatty," "All Back" (named for his hairstyle), and "Soprano"—and although they are clearly functionaries of the North Korean state,

40 Hwang, *The Guest*, 70; Hwang, *Sonnim*, 73.

41 The modernity and banality of urban life—the streets, squares, and transport systems of Pyongyang—were indeed showcased by the North Korean state in the televised 2000 North-South family reunions.

42 Hwang, *The Guest*, 71.

significantly, they are given a minimum of individual subjectivities. In a different analytic mode, we may argue that the novel provides a rare, alternative ethnographic account of North Korean life.

Yosöp's return thus makes visible a new social terrain. A familiar, everyday reality exists in a state assumed to be wholly and radically other. Further, the very *shape* of the return—the particular and plodding topography of Yosöp's journey back to North Korea—forces us to recalibrate our usual geographic imaginaries. As the narrative follows Yosöp back to his home village Ch'ansaemgol, near the site of the massacre, it takes the reader from present-day global city to the remote colonial village of his past. Beginning in Brooklyn, he traverses a number of urban and rural landscapes in the United States, China, and North Korea. The even-toned third-person descriptions of his packing, departures, arrivals, sightseeing, and stays in hotels maintain a realism of time and space into which the ghostly voices and dreamlike imagery of his childhood intrude.

What we note at the formal level of the narrative, however, is that the closer the protagonist gets to his home village, the more the memories and voices of ghosts take up narrative space. Although necessary for the narrative drama to build to its climax, this progression upends our usual idea of spatial hierarchies. That is, as we move through locations from more to less powerful—from New York and New Jersey, to Los Angeles, to northern China, to Pyongyang, to Shinch'on and then finally, to the tiny village of Ch'ansaemgol—the voices and images that will deliver the novel's final devastating truth expand and dilate, occupying more and more textual space. Toward the end of the novel, Yosöp's third-person narrative in the present gives way completely to a full chapter of ghostly testimonials of the actual massacre. The inverse proportions of geographical and narrative space effectively remap the scales and hierarchies within which we normally operate. Thus, New York and Los Angeles—usually understood as the most important diasporic centers for Koreans—are mere stopovers; China is a brief meal and conversation at a restaurant, while the narrative drags and slows the closer we get to Yosöp's hometown. Yosöp's protracted trip back to the site of the Shinch'on massacre forces us to consider a world-historical event—the violence of the Korean War and its long drawn out aftermath—from a location (Ch'ansaemgol) one actually *cannot* find on GoogleMaps. Thus, rather than presenting a local event as overdetermined by global forces in the vein of Korean nationalist historiography, the novel very carefully reveals an event of global history from a radically localized epistemology. Simultaneously, it asks us to question how some places—Shinch'on, Hwanghae province—have been written out of the time of both the nation and the diaspora while other places—New York, China, Pyongyang, Seoul—are assumed to be the primary sites from which these collective histories and identities issue. We discover, then, that Yosöp's return has little to do with the diasporic subject's maintaining or restoring relations with the homeland. Rather, for Hwang, the return is spatially and psychically anchored by the deliberate desire to revisit the very violence that accompanied national division and *provoked* migration in the first place.

At this point we must pause to note that the Korean diaspora has had a different trajectory from other migrations motivated by Tölölyan's archetypal "catastrophic destruction of the homeland." First, we must speak of the Korean diaspora

simultaneously as *intranational* and transnational: Ji-Yeon Yuh notes how “internal migration ... became an international migration with the closing of the border at the DMZ.”<sup>43</sup> In turn, the “social alienation in the South” experienced by many refugees from the North often precipitated further migration to the United States or other destinations.<sup>44</sup> Not surprisingly, because of the virulently anti-Communist regimes in the South and the persecution of families whose members defected to the North, almost no mention has been made of the substantial numbers of intellectuals and students who chose to *return* to the North after witnessing the corruption and repression of the U.S.-occupied South.<sup>45</sup> Regarding the overseas diaspora, we must recall too that unlike many postcolonial populations that gravitate toward the former colonial metropole, for Koreans (like the Taiwanese) the main diasporic destination is not Japan<sup>46</sup> but the United States, where some 1.7 million ethnic Koreans currently reside. Outside of neighboring China, overseas Koreans are vastly concentrated in this one host country in a unilinear rather than the more traditional radial pattern of dispersal to which Tölölyan’s model refers. This configuration has also reinforced the disciplinary boundaries I mentioned earlier between East Asian studies (studies of the territorial Korean nation), Asian American studies (Koreans in the United States) and postcolonial studies (European imperialism and the decolonization of its territories).

To understand these intersections in the Korean context, we must pay attention to the way the inaccurately named Cold War has obscured the material reasons for many of these migrations. In the novel, Yosöp shares a hotel room with another elderly diasporic Korean, a professor, returning to North Korea on the homeland visit to find the mother he had been separated from more than forty years prior. The professor’s own account of the war and his leaving is oddly doubled: at one point he blames the Communist takeover for their forced exit south: “From the very beginning they refused to believe in anything other than the so-called fundamental class.”<sup>47</sup> Yet, just a page earlier he remembers, “People kept saying they were going to drop an atomic bomb on us, so we left, left without having any idea how we were going to make a living—we barely knew which was south—we just dragged the entire family out on the road.”<sup>48</sup> The “they” refers, of course, to the Americans, just a few years after their nuclear victory over Japan in World War II and elevation to world power. Jodi Kim writes that “though atomic weapons were ultimately not used [in Korea], relentless aerial bombing and the dropping of a new weapon called napalm almost completely

43 Ji-Yeon Yuh, “Moved by War: Migration, Diaspora, and the Korean War,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 8.3 (2005): 286.

44 *Ibid.*, 284. Yuh estimates that as much as 40 percent of Korean migrants to the United States were originally from the North.

45 Correspondingly, the work of *wölbuk* (“gone to the north”) writers were virtually unheard of in South Korea for decades due to anti-Communist censorship. See Bruce Fulton, “The Wölbuk Writers,” in *Columbia Companion to Modern East Asian Literature*, eds. Joshua Mostow et al. (New York: Columbia UP, 2003), 681–683.

46 Similarly, France is not the primary destination for Vietnamese migrants, for parallel reasons. There are, of course, significant numbers of ethnic Koreans in Japans, many of them descendants of Koreans who emigrated there (or were forced to) during the colonial period. In this sense Japan is also a postcolonial society, though it has been reluctant to see itself as one. See Leo Ching, *Becoming “Japanese”: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley Calif.: U of California P, 2001).

47 Hwang, *The Guest*, 61.

48 *Ibid.*, 60.

leveled northern and central Korea, resulting in a staggering *civilian* death toll throughout the peninsula of 3 million and forcing those who survived underground into caves.”<sup>49</sup> There is, therefore, confusion over how to understand the multiple origins of Koreans in the diaspora: on the one hand there is resentment and blame toward the present North Korean state as oppressive and totalitarian; on the other, the embodied memory of imminent military violence from a newly imperial United States. Thus,

while the master narratives of Asian migration to the United States chart a putatively desirable and desired teleology troped as the American Dream—an escape from an unstable, economically devastated, and politically repressive homeland to safe haven in an America full of freedom and opportunity—the home that one leaves often *needs to be left* precisely because of the havoc wreaked by U.S. imperialist intervention there.<sup>50</sup>

Borrowing from the Black British slogan, “We are here because you were there,” Kim argues that the motivations for Korean migrants like Yosöp and the professor (along with other Asian migrations from Vietnam, Japan, and China) must be profoundly rethought. Migration to the United States is less an escape from atheistic, repressive, or Communist regimes and more the result of U.S. imperialist wars in Asia. In the novel, Yosöp responds to the professor’s ambiguous personal story with a “vague nod. Even among the North Koreans who ended up in America, there was a distinct trend: the more successful one was, the stronger his or her resentment towards the North.”<sup>51</sup> He implicitly registers how a late capitalist logic of liberal market freedoms is retroactively used as an alibi for U.S. Cold War intervention.

Yosöp’s older brother Yohan, however, leaves home for yet another reason: he cannot face the descent into violence that he himself has helped precipitate. Toward the end of the novel, Yohan’s ghost gives a full confession of his brutality toward “anyone we decided was our enemy,” as well as the unprovoked slaughter of the mother and sisters of a Christian ally who had betrayed him. Leaving home thus becomes a way to escape his *own* horrific actions:

People who are leaving their hometowns usually have to try and hold back their tears; it’s only natural. We, on the other hand—well, it’s not that we spat on the ground and said good riddance, it’s just that we all knew we would never return. The place was doomed to become a hell on earth, a place where only devils would be able to thrive.<sup>52</sup>

In this case, the relationship between violence and diasporic subject is reversed: one’s home “needs to be left” because of one’s own complicity in its destruction.<sup>53</sup> Yuh’s concept of *refuge* (as opposed to *refugee*) migration is here entirely applicable. Rather

49 Kim, “Ends of Empire,” 148.

50 Ibid., 12; emphasis added.

51 Hwang, *The Guest*, 61.

52 Ibid., 224.

53 Yi Chaeyöng similarly notes that “Yosöp’s [hitherto] inability to return home is not due to any event in the foreign land [*t’ahyang esö sakkön*] but he and his family came to leave their home because of the crime his own family members participated in.” “Truth and Reconciliation,” 103.



than motivated by clear threats to personal safety or human rights, refugee migrants are motivated by “a deep psychological need to leave behind chaos, insecurity, and trauma” and seek “peace of mind.”<sup>54</sup> Yohan’s “hell on earth” is precisely the insecurity and trauma that follow his own acts of violence.

Yet, as I’ve stressed, *The Guest* does not merely replace foreign imperial aggressors with fratricidal Koreans. It works to proffer an account of migration “that centres on the configurations of power which *differentiate* diasporas internally.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, if diaspora studies have often “privilege[d] a logic of mobility that has become oddly attached to denunciations of nationalism” (Tölölyan 653), *The Guest* uses the arrested national desires of Korea to critique the transnational construction of the diaspora. Yosöp’s return occasions an account of “the past that produced him” only to find such pasts multiple and contested: he must revisit the internal antagonisms of colonial capitalism, decolonization, and war rather than use the ideological shorthand of anti-Communism or the American Dream. The return, finally, has been less about reconfirming Yosöp’s belonging to his homeland and is more a literary device for making visible new ethical accounts and political imaginaries beyond the congealed binaries of nation and diaspora.

### 3. One-and-a-Half Nationalisms

Despite sixty years of stalemate between two states still technically at war, and the consolidation of radically different political, economic, and social formations, the nationalist imaginary of both North and South Korea has relied on the notion of eventual reunification and restored wholeness. Paik explains that despite a shared longing for reunification, it is a struggle that “cannot succeed in the old-fashioned nationalist way ... because we have more than one nationalism (perhaps it isn’t even a case of *two* nationalisms but something like one-and-a-half).”<sup>56</sup> As we have seen, the “division system” is something that is “certainly a legacy of colonial rule and even more a direct product of neocolonial intervention, yet that has taken on a systematic nature of its own with self-reproducing anti-democratic structures on both sides of the dividing line.”<sup>57</sup> Consequently, the Korean nationalist agenda on both sides of the DMZ seeks to suture the currently severed national body with the *appropriate state form*.

Given the competing security states and “one-and-a-halfness” of Korean nationalism, we might consider Hwang’s formal choice to model *The Guest* on the twelve-part Chinogwi exorcism as an invocation of a single, authentic Koreanness that would transcend both the devastating influences from the outside and variations in local nationalist agendas within. Hwang explains his choice:

As smallpox reached epidemic proportions and began sweeping across the nation, shamanic rituals called “guest exorcisms” [*sonnimgut*] were often performed to fight

54 Yuh, “Moved by War,” 281.

55 Brah, “Diaspora,” 617.

56 Paik, “South Korea as Social Space,” 364.

57 Paik Nak-chung, “Nations and Literatures in the Age of Globalization,” in *The Cultures of Globalization*, eds. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke, UP, 1998), 218–229.

against the foreign intruder. *The Guest* is essentially a shamanistic exorcism designed to relieve the agony of those who survived and appease the spirits of those who were sacrificed on the altar of cultural imperialism half a century ago.<sup>58</sup>

Bruce Fulton writes that the exorcism is “a ritual conducted by a practitioner of native Korean spirituality to hasten the journey of wandering and potentially disruptive spirits to the next world.”<sup>59</sup> Here, the shamanist practice as pre-Christian “native genre” would constitute a method of reconciliation and healing that both the North and the South can participate in to rid themselves of foreign contamination. Yet, despite resembling the earlier practice of the *sonnimgut* against smallpox, the ritual here is not so much designed to expel the foreign agent as to “relieve the agony of those who survived and appease the spirits of those who were sacrificed.” Just as his use of the return worked to revise dominant accounts of diasporic formation, Hwang uses the “native” genre of the exorcism not to shore up an uncorrupted notion of the Korean ethnos or *minjok*, but as a further critique of the peninsula’s statist instrumentalizations of the nation. Let me explain my argument by way of a closer analysis of the novel’s formal framing.

In *The Guest*, the exorcism functions foremost as a specific structuring device that enables the novel to cross generic time and space: it is at once a ghost story, testimonial, and realist (and at times surrealist) ethnographic travel account. Hwang’s author’s note explains: “The ritual consists of twelve separate rounds. As is the case during an actual exorcism, the dead and the living simultaneously cross and recross the boundaries between past and present, appearing at what seem like random intervals to share each of their stories and memories.”<sup>60</sup> The majority of the chapters have little to do with the specific content of the ritual, as would be indicated by chapter titles such as “Parting of the Cloth,” “Clarification before Reconciliation,” and “Separation.” What Hwang is most interested in is the “crossing and recrossing” of boundaries, beyond past and present, living and dead, subjective and objective, via a literary form that can assimilate a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. In the Korean version of the author’s note, he writes of the indivisible nature of subjectivity and objectivity, and the “entanglement” of the “individual’s dreamlike everyday life” with history.<sup>61</sup> Hwang’s imagined form of reconciliation is “not a rational solution,”<sup>62</sup> but an explicitly creative one: Yosöp’s consciousness is offered as the “stage” for different subjects to “tell their own stories and positions.”<sup>63</sup> The novel figures Yosöp’s mental space as the imagined terrain for the multiple “stories and positions” that can accommodate the heterogeneity of the nation, a space that cannot take place within either North or South Korean territories. The shamanistic genre thus allows Hwang to make a claim for a concept of nation space that emphatically cannot be instrumentalized by any state.

58 Hwang, *The Guest*, 7; Hwang, *Sonnim*, 262.

59 Bruce Fulton, “The Modern Korean Novel in English Translation,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70.3 (2011): 778–784.

60 Hwang, *The Guest*, 7.

61 Hwang, *Sonnim*, 260.

62 Cho, “Novel of Division,” 451.

63 *Ibid.*, 451.

At the same time, the last four chapters, each only a few pages in length, more deliberately mimic the ceremonial climax of the shamanistic recitation. The final chapter titled “Farewell Guests: Eat your fill and be gone!” introduces the novel’s only section in verse; this striking generic shift imitates the shaman’s concluding lament asking the spirits to finally and firmly depart the world of the living. Beginning with appeals to traditional kinds of troublesome ghosts reluctant to move on to the afterlife—the widower’s ghosts and the bachelor’s ghosts, the ghosts of the drowned and those who died in childbirth—the lament finishes with distinctly modern forms of ghosthood.

Ghosts of those shot, pierced, even battered,  
ghosts of those bombed by planes overhead,  
ghosts of those burnt to ashes by flames,  
ghosts hit by wagons, tanks, trucks, or trains,  
ghosts made by smallpox, ghosts made by plague,  
those made by typhus, consumption, or cholera,  
ghosts still resentful, ghosts far from home,  
all those who linger, each with its own tale,  
today eat your fill, ’til your heart is content,  
gorge yourselves—be on your way!<sup>64</sup>

The verse can be construed as a melancholy account of modern Korean history from the perspective of those who perished and survived alike: the violence of the civil war wrought both from without—“those bombed by planes overhead”—and from within—“those burnt to ashes by flames.” At one level, we may surmise that this unattributed shaman’s voice is the formal manifestation of the novel’s goal of reconciliation and unity. Yet, on closer inspection, we see that the destruction specifically invokes the domains in which the modern state operates: through the administration of security via militarized violence (“wagons, tanks, trucks, or trains”) as well as the biopolitical concerns of health and disease (“typhus, consumption, or cholera”).<sup>65</sup> While seeming at first a resurrection of a traditional, autochthonous Korean ritual wielded against the foreign guest, the final lament of the novel is, rather, a profound reminder of precisely those technologies of the state (both North and South) that have continually tried to capture the nation.

Brah writes that the very “concept of diaspora offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins,”<sup>66</sup> with the totalizing tendencies of the nation-state the main offender. Yet the concluding verse also points to the very complicity between the “division system” and diasporic subject formations: those “ghosts still resentful, ghosts far from home” are a product of the *same* spatial alibis as the division of the peninsula. Thus, rather than an example of literary nationalism that would invoke a transcendent (or transnational) Korean body to overcome historical division, the exorcism functions foremost to critique the dual statist projects and supporting diasporic formations of

64 Hwang, *The Guest*, 233–234.

65 I thank Crystal Parikh for this insightful observation.

66 Brah, “Diaspora,” 614.

the peninsula that have sought to control internal differentiation and dissent.<sup>67</sup> *The Guest*'s ethical ideal of reconciliation thus necessarily posits an alternative spatial figuration of nation space and, in turn, of agency, responsibility, and belonging. Only then can the project of creating future political imaginaries begin.

The last decade has witnessed a burgeoning of South Korean transnational culture, known in Korean as “hallyu,” or the “Korean wave.”<sup>68</sup> During the same years, the numbers of Korean migrants—now often educational migrants of a wealthier demographic—to Western countries has continued to increase, making Korean food, *noraebangs* (“singing rooms”) and youth culture one of the cosmopolitan flavors of any urban center from Auckland to Toronto.<sup>69</sup> In an age when South Korean pop culture and TV dramas circulate to such an extent that the country’s material prosperity can now be mocked by a global hit dance song,<sup>70</sup> Hwang’s narrative soberly reminds us of the violent (post)colonial origins of some of these migrations and flows in the first place. It also reminds us of the one place from which a globalized Korean culture does *not* flow: that stubbornly present remainder and reminder of Korea’s arrested decolonization on the northern half of the peninsula.<sup>71</sup> Thus, even as “Hwang Sok-yong” himself may circulate transnationally in the market place of “world literature” offering a redemptive vision for “all humanity and for all time,”<sup>72</sup> his work indexes the partial *blockages and lacunae* in our imaginary of the global flow of culture, challenging any easy celebration of the transnational against the nation. Hwang’s novel marks a more radical boundary crossing than that of either the DMZ or national mass culture markets: one that is at once spatial, temporal, and ethical.

I have been arguing that the unremitting desire for a singular nation coterminous with a state is a product of the unique configuration of Korea’s postcoloniality. The longing for state-form has obscured the lived, spatial formations of other histories, subjects, and collectivities. My reading also suggests that Hwang’s formal literary techniques in *The Guest* are useful for rethinking some of the spatial concepts indispensable to postcolonial studies, whether by dilating and reinscribing certain spaces, or fracturing and interrogating the assumed productions of others. Through such

67 We may recall here Pheng Cheah’s useful historicization of the concept of cosmopolitanism in his essay “The Cosmopolitical—Today.” There, he shows that Kant’s founding idea of cosmopolitanism was not formulated in opposition to the nation (because the age of the modern nation-state had not yet arrived), but to the unfreedoms of the *state*. Similarly, for Hwang, it is a reformulated and nonunitary nationalism (rather than the cosmopolitan diaspora) that opposes statism. See Pheng Cheah, “The Cosmopolitical—Today,” in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, eds. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998), 20–41.

68 See, for example, Kyung Hyun Kim’s *Virtual Hallyu: Korean Cinema of the Global Era* (Durham, N. C. Duke University Press, 2011).

69 A case in point would be the transformation of city like Melbourne, Australia, which in the space of twenty years went from having a handful of Korean restaurants and a few hundred Koreans to a large population of Korean immigrants, students, and youths on working holiday visas, and a thriving Korean consumer culture to go with it.

70 I am, of course, referring the 2012 hit “Gangnam Style” by Korean pop singer Psy.

71 This is not to discount, of course, the surfeit of representations of North Korea in the popular American imaginary.

72 Ronald Suleski, “Review of *The Guest*,” *Azalea: Journal of Korean Literature and Culture* 1 (2007): 289–293.

strategies, the novel articulates the desire for a proper ethical stocktaking of war, division, and violence, one that takes a more complex view of the colonial and postcolonial; inside and outside; aggressors and victims; homeland and diaspora.

At the end of the novel, Yosöp returns to his village and buries the remains of his brother in the soil of his hometown—an act that may seem a sentimental plot line to restore wholeness and identity for the fractured diasporic subject. Yet *The Guest's* whole narrative has demonstrated how little it follows the expected contours of division and reunification. Yosöp's return, rather, is the act of one whose home space had never been unified or intact, and who has been found partly guilty for the unspeakable atrocities that have acted as alibis for its further ruptures. The hope that remains is for an ethical understanding of the complexity of forces that created division and migration, rather than an impossible return to wholeness.