

Fiction as Counter-Memory and Resistance: Submerged Histories of Gender-Based Violence and  
Generational Haunting in the Korean and Armenian American Diasporas

Nafina Raha

Lee Yong Soo Comfort Women and Human Rights Fellowship

Comfort Women Action for Redress and Education (CARE)

November 29, 2024

Dr. Jinah Kim; Dr. Tina Beyene

## Introduction

Much research and literature has been dedicated to the lives and afterlives of the “comfort women,” a euphemism for girls and women taken as sexual slaves by the Japanese Imperial Army in every country they occupied from 1932 to 1945, including Korea, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Thailand, Burma, and East Timor. Much of this work has come from survivors, their families, and activists working towards acknowledgement and remembrance. These women and girls were forced into “comfort stations”—a more accurate term for which would be rape camps, where Japanese soldiers would line up outside of each of their stalls to rape them every day. Many of these women and girls were tricked and coerced into entering these camps. The term “comfort woman” in and of itself functions to obscure the gravity and depth of the horror that these women and girls experienced. This history has since been actively silenced, suppressed, and ignored by the Japanese government.

There is also a wealth of research and literature dedicated to remembering the Armenian Genocide, which took place from 1915-1918 and was perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire, now modern-day Turkey. The Armenian experience of this genocide was hugely shaped by gender, as the Ottoman army targeted Armenian men in masses for execution before later forcing the elderly, women, children, and any remaining men onto death marches through the desert to modern-day Syria under the guise of deportation. Ottoman soldiers also deployed rape and other forms of sexual violence against Armenian women and children on these death marches; Armenian women also suffered violence at the hands of local men who attacked their camps at night and regularly kidnapped girls and women. Pregnant women were forced to give birth on the death marches, often having to leave their newborn children to die and dying themselves due to the complete lack of medical care or rest after giving birth (Bjornlund 2009). Other gendered dimensions of the genocide included rape, sexual slavery, forced marriages, forced Turkification and Islamization, and assimilation. While the horror of the genocide is widely talked about, the specific way that rape and gendered violence was leveraged as a key part of domination is not addressed within Armenian communities, owing to the patriarchal structure of these communities and the national shame resulting from the sexual violation of Armenian and children.

In this research, I put the experiences of the Korean “comfort women” and of women who survived the Armenian Genocide in conversation with one another, with a specific focus on collective historical memory as related to intergenerational trauma and haunting within the diaspora. My main focus of research is literature, as fiction has functioned as a key site in the creation of countermemory and counternarratives that resist hegemonic revisionist histories. Within this research, I find it important to make a note on the language I choose to use in recounting these histories: I am in accordance with Elizabeth Son’s assessment to use the term “comfort women,” “because it is the most legible to an international audience as a historical term, but it is always in quotation marks to convey my unease about using the euphemism” (Son 2018, 17). I also make a point to deviate from the language of “comfort stations,” simply because the title of “comfort” obfuscates the reality of the violence within these camps and reduces the victimized women to objects to be used for the “comfort” of Japanese soldiers. This research

uses the term “rape camps” to highlight the systematic rape that occurred within them. Researching and centering the histories and afterlives of women victimized by state-sanctioned mass sexual violence is incredibly important in creating a collective historical memory that acknowledges and centers those who are often marginalized and forgotten in mainstream histories. This is particularly important given that the perpetrators of both of these atrocities, the Japanese and Turkish governments, refuse to acknowledge their active and systemic participation and actively silence these histories. This is symbolic annihilation, a tool used by the state to suppress, silence, and erase marginalized communities, and is key in how history is written by choosing who/what to leave out (Solis 2018, 2) This revisionist and denialist conservative push in the creation of mainstream histories makes it even more important and urgent to remember to center the lived experiences of those impacted by these systems, especially in remembering the gendered aspects that are silenced at multiple levels.

My purpose in putting these two histories in conversation with each other is as follows: while the history of the “comfort women” and broader histories of Japanese imperialism and colonialism has been understood and studied through a distinctly gendered lens with an understanding of the ways in which the war crimes committed by Japan were deliberately targeted towards colonized women, the history of the Armenian Genocide is very rarely narrated and understood through a gendered lens, even more rarely through the lens and experience of women. There is often little to no acknowledgement or interrogation of these gendered dimensions. In putting the Armenian Genocide in conversation with the “comfort women,” I hope to highlight the gendered dimensions of both of these horrors and confront the patriarchal nationalist ways in which our diasporas choose to narrate our histories. While it might not be evident to most readers why I would put Armenian and “comfort women” histories together, I do so because in Los Angeles (in particular in Glendale) “comfort women” activists and Armenian communities have worked together to uphold both of their histories and fight for acknowledgement and remembrance. These communities see in each other’s histories of violence and survival in the diaspora something that is akin, and this research paper follows in this activist and on-the-ground alliance-building that has been so meaningful.

Los Angeles is the grounding site of my research. I myself have grown up and lived my entire life thus far in the greater Los Angeles area; as have many other Armenian diasporic subjects. Southern California has one of the largest Armenian diaspora communities, with cities like Glendale boasting large Armenian populations. L.A. County has also been the location of a huge swath of the Korean diaspora, with diasporic Koreans located in large numbers throughout the San Fernando Valley and Los Angeles. Los Angeles has also served as the site of much organizing for remembrance for both of these communities; every year on April 24th, the Armenian community protests outside of the Turkish embassy located in L.A., demanding acknowledgement and responsibility for the genocide. The first ever “comfort women” statue in the U.S., commemorating the experiences of young girls and women stolen and enslaved by the Japanese military (Korean and of different ethnicities such as Chinese and Filipino) was installed in Glendale, and now there is another one in San Francisco. For many reasons, Los Angeles, and

the progressive diasporic Korean and Armenian communities that are alive here, have influenced my research.

### **Methodology**

The work of remembering the “comfort women” and the Armenian Genocide is alive in each the Korean American and Armenian American diasporas. One space that is rife with remembrance is literature, where writers have turned to fiction as a means of remembering and preserving these silenced histories. In this research, I conducted an intertextual comparative literary analysis of two novels, *Comfort Woman* by Nora Okja Keller and *Orhan’s Inheritance* by Aline Ohanesian. *Comfort Woman* was published in 1997, only 6 years after Kim Hak Sun became the first survivor of Japan’s system of mass sexual slavery to publicly testify against Japan and share her story with the world. *Orhan’s Inheritance* was published in 2015, inspired by Ohanesian’s great grandmother, who survived the death marches. In what follows, I will first summarize both the texts, then offer an analysis of the main themes that I see emerging in the texts. I focus on themes that center on survivor memory and state denials.

*Comfort Woman* is about a Korean girl named Soon Hyo who was taken as a sex slave by the Japanese Imperial Army and tells her story across multiple timelines, including her time in the rape camps and her later life in Hawai’i with her daughter Beccah. She is living a life where she straddles the line between the living and dead realms. In the novel, Soon Hyo, like the real “comfort women,” was forced to take on the Japanese name Akiko. Upon the death of the previous girl who’d been forced to take on the name Akiko, and who’d resisted until the very end, Soon Hyo was forced to become Akiko #41, a name she would carry with her until her death. (Despite the fact that she is known as Akiko throughout the entire novel, I have decided to use her true given name as a sort of restoration of her identity). During her time in the camps, she endured endless rape at the hands of the Japanese soldiers, as well as a forced abortion by the camp doctor, before finally escaping while bleeding profusely after the doctor left her unattended. The trauma of her time in the camps sticks with her for the rest of her life, and she feels like a ghost of herself. She later ends up being rescued by missionaries, where she still feels unending discomfort; when World War II ends and Japan loses, she makes the difficult decision of leaving Korea by marrying the minister of the church, a white man named Richard Bradley. Bradley is far older than her, and knows that she is far younger than she claims; Soon Hyo comes to see men as destructive and violent due to her time in the rape camps, and all sexual experiences with Bradley remind her of this time.

She goes on to have a daughter named Beccah; after Bradley dies, she raises Beccah alone in Hawai’i, having been unable to make it back to Korea. She is perpetually haunted by her past, including by the ghost of the girl who was Akiko before her, who appears to her as the Birth Grandmother Induk. With the help of their neighbor and family friend Auntie Reno, she is able to make a career out of her hauntings, speaking to ghosts for clients. She has a difficult and complex relationship with her daughter Beccah, who doesn’t know about her mother’s past and her experiences as a “comfort woman” in the Japanese rape camps until after Soon Hyo’s

passing. Beccah, unaware of her mother's trauma, sees her as an eccentric, difficult person, often feeling that she has to parent her mother rather than the other way around. Soon Hyo's endless attempts to protect Beccah spiritually, conducting rituals to protect her from evil, result in Beccah feeling more and more ostracized from her mother. Her frustrations with her mother as well as the stories told by her manifest materially in Beccah's life, such as in her attempts to hold off her sexual development and beginning of menstruation, as well as her growing distaste and disgust with the men she has relationships with as she goes through life. It is only after Soon Hyo's death that Beccah learns anything about her mother's life. Beccah refers to her mothers as a *yongsan*, the ghost of a person who traveled far from home and died a stranger (Keller 1997, 140). Beccah finds documents and missing persons reports after her mother's death, as well as a cassette tape Soon Hyo left behind for her; it is through this that she finally realizes all that her mother endured. It is during this that she has some flashbacks and recovers some memories of her father's silencing of her mother's past.

*Orhan's Inheritance* tells the experience of a young Armenian girl, Lucine Melkonian, during the Armenian Genocide, simultaneously with her experience as Seda (a name she must take on during the genocide to hide her Armenian identity) years later when she is living in a retirement home in Los Angeles. Prior to the genocide, the Melkonians are well off, and lives in community with Turkish people. Their family, in particular Lucine, is close to that of Kemal, a young Turkish boy. After the onset of the genocide and Lucine's father (Hairig) is slaughtered along with almost all the other men in their village by Turkish soldiers, the rest of her family and community is forced onto the death marches through the desert. Along the way, Lucine loses each of her siblings and mother in different horrifying ways: her sister Anush is kidnapped during an attack on their caravan, her mother (Mairig), deeply traumatized by this event, simply stops marching and sits down to die, her brother Bedros disappears (to be reunited with Lucine far later), and Lucine, after seeing her baby brother's suffering under the conditions of the marches, is forced to drop Aram to his death into a river. Lucine witnesses extreme sexual and physical violence against her people during these marches, and is targeted for rape, stopped only when her brother Bedros stops the attack by beating the rapist with a rock.

After escaping the caravan and being separated from Bedros, she takes cover in an abandoned shed, where she is helped by a Kurdish innkeeper named Fatma, who is forced to become a prostitute as her only means of survival. During this time, Lucine is haunted by the ghosts of her dead family members. Fatma cuts Lucine's hair off, burns her dress, and gives her the Turkish name Seda, which means "echo," to protect her from detection by the Turkish soldiers who frequent the inn. She has Seda start working at the inn, during which time Seda feels as though she is herself a ghost, "existing only in the in-between spaces" (Ohanesian 2015, 242). She refuses to speak during this time, asserting that her silence is her one act of agency (269). During her time at the inn, Nabi Bey, the lieutenant governor of the region of Malatya and the man who appointed Fatma to innkeeper, as well as who turned her towards prostitution, rapes Seda with impunity. Years into her work at this inn, she is reunited with Kemal, only to find out that he was a soldier in the Ottoman Army. They end up having a romantic/sexual relationship

during this time, and later on, a baby (born of Fatma) is brought to Kemal under the guise that he was born of Seda and Kemal's brief relationship; Fatma convinces Seda that deceiving Kemal about the baby is the only way to ensure that the child can have a good life. Kemal spends the rest of his life assuming that the child, Mustafa, is his and Seda's son, and dies by bequeathing his estate to her.

The novel jumps back and forth between this timeline starting in 1915 and the present in 1990 when Lucine/Seda is in a nursing home in Los Angeles. In the present, she is compelled by a visitor from her past to tell her story—the true story she has never told before. This visitor, Orhan, who believes he is the grandson of Kemal (until finding out at the end of the novel that he is in fact Fatma's grandson), has come to find out why Kemal bequeathed his home to Seda, a seemingly irrelevant Armenian woman living on the other side of the world. This tale is told through these two separate timelines, where astonishing truths are revealed across the diaspora and through multiple voices: Armenian, Turkish, and Kurdish. Orhan finds himself questioning much about his family, as well as the stories told by the nationalist Turkish government about the Armenian Genocide (particularly in their denial that it happened). His interactions with Ani, Lucine/Seda's niece, who is an activist for Armenian Genocide remembrance, force him to confront truths that overturn his understandings of his country's history. The novel complicates dominant binary narrations of the genocide (particularly in resisting representations of all Turkish people as victimizers/villains) and addresses the experiences of different ethnic groups under the Turkish-supremacist Ottoman regime.

Both of these novels present the memories of the survivors of the Armenian genocide and the “comfort women” system as hidden, for different reasons. The revelations of their memories hold the potential to build true justice and reparative realities for both the survivors and the next generation. My focus on memory also emerges from an effort to center counternarratives and survivor/victim-centered approaches. Refuting hegemonic state versions of history—which are often built up around patriarchal, nationalist narratives—allows us to look more closely at the stories that are silenced and denied. Women's experiences in particular are often left out of the archive, especially in colonized nations, due to a sense of national shame and the patriarchal undergirding of how a nation's history is told. In particular, the archives of perpetrators are centered around a version of history rooted in denialism and revisionism. Given that both Turkey and Japan refuse to take responsibility for their actions, centering not only Armenian and Korean histories but Armenian and Korean *women's* histories is key to recovering and understanding a version of history that centers survivors and tells their true stories. Fiction is central here because it allows us to supersede the “real” history written in state textbooks and spoon fed to the public as “the truth” and instead look at a counternarrative. I chose to look at fiction in particular because the literature I study incorporates the histories and voices of survivors, particularly through the use of oral histories and testimonies in the writing of these novels. These novels center survivors as protagonists as a means of telling these difficult histories, and reassert the power of a victim/survivor-centered telling of histories of mass state-sanctioned sexual violence. The telling of these histories through fiction reflects a resistance against the ways in which state

archives aren't victim-centered and in fact may erase the experiences of victims. Literature also functions to draw in a broader audience and make these histories accessible to more people. In the diaspora, this fiction is often written by survivors' descendants who are haunted by their ancestors' experiences and feel compelled to tell their stories and recover those lost experiences, as is the case for Ohanesian.

Contextualizing the publication of these novels within the particular social, historical, and cultural moment from which they emerge is also important. Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* was originally published in 1997; in an interview with *Asianweek* in 2002, Keller described how her initial inspiration for this novel arose after hearing the testimony of Keum Ja Hwang, who survived the rape camps, at a symposium on Human Rights at the University of Hawai'i in 1993 (Madsen 2007, 85). This was also a significant decade for international courts' prosecution of wartime sexual violence, seen especially in the International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia (established in 1993) and Rwanda (established in 1994) in response to the weaponization of sexual violence in both of these regions during the Bosnian Genocide and the Rwandan Genocide (Askin 2003). The trials were the first time that rape was prosecuted as an instrument in genocide (the *Akayesu* Judgement in the ICTR), that sexual violence was recognized as torture (the *Čelebići* Judgement in the ICTY), that the rape of a single victim was prosecuted as a serious violation of international humanitarian law (the *Furundžija* Judgement), and more (Askin 2003). The world was witnessing the public prosecution of wartime rape and sexual violence for the first time, and *Comfort Woman* emerged from this particular political moment.

The modern timeline within Ohanesian's *Orhan's Inheritance* of 1990 (when Lucine/Seda is in the nursing home in L.A.) is significant to Armenian national history. 1991 was the year that Armenia became an independent nation following the dissolution of the USSR; this time was also during the first Nagorno-Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the contested region, also known as Artsakh. This war (as well as the current state of affairs in the region, with ethnic Armenians being expelled from Artsakh) reflects the feeling that Armenians are constantly fighting for their survival and futurity, an idea that undergirds much of the activism in the diaspora. In each of these pieces of literature, Keller and Ohanesian are agents in the recovery and reconstruction of histories of their peoples that have been deliberately silenced—and continue to be to this day.

### **Theoretical Framework**

One of the central concepts through which I study the role of memory and state denialism is “haunting” and “ghosts.” For example, I pull from Avery Gordon's theorization of ghosts. Gordon herself works with fiction, including Toni Morrison and Luisa Valenzuela to draw on legacies of African slavery and Latin American disappearances to develop the concepts of unspeakability and rememory. Mark Fisher's development of “hauntology” is particularly useful to understanding generational haunting within diasporas. Finally, I work with Elyse Semerdjian's development of prosthetic memory which highlights the embodied aspects of trauma.

In her analysis of haunting and the manifestation of ghosts, Avery Gordon breaks down how the ghost is a means of depicting that which is unspeakable (Gordon 2008, 150). The ghost functions as a social phenomena of the unspeakable, in which that which is silenced returns to haunt later generations. The massive violence that the “comfort women” and survivors of the Armenian Genocide endured is made unspeakable, and is silenced at multiple levels. These silences may be embodied in the inability to speak about one’s traumatizing experiences, the disjointed and fragmented recollections of memories that piece together incoherently, the active silencing of one’s voice in speaking these experiences aloud (either by state denialism or one’s own community), or in the feelings of shame that permeate through survivors of sexual violence, which are particularly strong within patriarchal communities. However, these horrors are not disappeared, but silenced, and these silences come back to haunt later generations. Some, as in the case of Beccah in the novel *Comfort Woman*, are willing to recognize that they are being haunted, and the novel shows us that a willingness to engage with ghosts is central to true justice and healing.

*Comfort Woman* shows that social memory of these atrocities linger well beyond the moment of violence. Gordon uses the example of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* to demonstrate this, referring to Morrison’s idea of rememory: even when certain things are physically gone, the idea or image of them may continue to live on afterwards (184). Gordon points out how the image of a place “*is still out there* because social relations as such are not ours for the owning...they linger well beyond our individual time, creating that shadowy basis for the production of material life” (166). The social memory of the “comfort women” and of the sexual violence perpetrated upon Armenian women during the genocide still linger well beyond 1932-1945 and 1915-1917, respectively. These memories haunt subsequent generations both in the homeland and the diaspora, and shape their lives. Descendants of survivors of mass violence may find themselves “bumping into” the rememories of their ancestors, which manifests as a form of generational haunting. Repressed, traumatizing moments reemerge years later to haunt survivors and their descendants. Haunting is always situated in a particular set of present dynamics; it doesn’t occur in a vacuum, but it instead is distinctly situated within a given historical context. The motivations, desires, and interventions of ghosts are all intertwined with the present existence of the person they are haunting (169).

Mark Fisher develops the idea of hauntology, in which time is broken, anachronistic, and ever-repeating (Fisher 2012, 21). Hauntology can be simplified into the ways that the past uses the present to repeat itself; time becomes cyclical and ever-repeating when the past isn’t contended with (20). In the case of both the Armenian Genocide and the “comfort women,” the past is actively denied by the perpetrators, and these women’s experiences are continually silenced. This forces time to continue on repeating. Cyclical time is key in how generational trauma and haunting manifest, and are centrally applicable to both the Armenian and Korean American diasporas. A cyclical and broken sense of time is also key in how these diasporic communities recover and reinvent these silenced histories. Hauntology insists on a disruption of thinking of temporality as linear, thus defying a traditional sense of history as linear.



In *Remnants*, scholar Elyse Semerdjian makes a deliberate point to use the framework of prosthetic memory rather than postmemory. Prosthetic memory captures how “memory is an embodied practice. Memory is stored within the body and genocide is remembered as body horror in which victims are forced to witness extreme violations of the body and desecration of the corpse” (Semerdjian 2023, 9). She argues that prosthetic memory links the past and the present, and that, in the case of the Armenian Genocide, it resists the erasure of this history by the Ottoman archive. Prosthetic memory calls into question the “official” memories created by the nation’s archive and highlights its acts of erasure and silencing (10). She also highlights how the archive functions as a tool of nation building, centering how state archives have “largely obliterated the voices of victims” in their effort to fit a particular official version of history, erasing any evidence of an alternative past (10). This ongoing attack on Armenian historical memory and Turkish denial is powerfully upturned by the embodied memories and trauma of Armenian survivors and their descendants. This is why I turn to literature; much of literature, as with the two novels I look at, incorporates the oral histories and interviews with survivors into their narratives. They do not take state archives as the arbiter of truth.

### **Significance of Diaspora – Diasporic Memory Regimes**

The authors of each of these novels stand as diasporic agents attempting to retell the histories of their communities, particularly the histories that have been silenced or ignored. I understand them as diasporic authors in particular because their narration of these histories are shaped by their position within their respective diaspora communities, and they come to represent their protagonists in diaspora as well. The way in which a diaspora comes to define itself and tell its history is shaped by its movement of an entire people across a continent or ocean and by the factors pushing that movement. Diasporas typically center particular key events in defining their community as a whole, which becomes key in how members of those diasporas come to define themselves. However, any given diaspora is not a singular monolith; there are multiplicities and differences within all diaspora communities, shaped by geographic location, race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, religion, etc. There may be a dominant historical narration that much of a given diaspora adheres to, reflecting a memory regime, but individuals within the diaspora may narrate their history differently.

In their study of diaspora identity in Armenian communities (in the context of the Armenian Genocide and the Karabakh conflict of 1990) researchers Dmitry Chernobrov and Leila Wilmers point out how memory, fiction, and story are key in the creation of diaspora identities. A diaspora’s approach to the history from which they are displaced may differ from the approach by the dominant nation-state’s narration of the same history. Diasporic narrations of history upset the binary assumption of a true/not true, real/not real, accurate/inaccurate binary approach to history. Memories, experiences, and traumas are embodied and move with the bodies that they are attached to, following people across entire continents and oceans. These then get passed on to the next generation, keeping a particular frame of history and lived experience alive

throughout a community. These memories move through time and space, defying linear time and living within the diaspora even decades after an event has occurred.

Younger generations in diaspora may rely on the transgenerational transmission of memories and mediated representations in order to make sense of a past that they never lived through (Chernobrov & Wilmers 2020, 915). For some in the diaspora, remaining connected to a sense of a past home requires a constant renegotiation and construction of identity in relation to the host nation and the imagined homeland; cultural events and commemorations enable diasporic engagement in a kind of “solidarity through remembering,” identifying with historical events as if they are personal experiences (916-17). This, for example, can be seen in the ways that some members of the Armenian diaspora narrates the genocide. Members of a given diaspora may draw on different homeland memories to define themselves, resulting in different conceptualizations of a diaspora’s origin and identity. Trauma and loss are often central in the narratives passed about the genocide to younger generations who haven’t experienced it firsthand. However, as I have been arguing, and as *Orhan’s Inheritance* demonstrates, not all memories are passed down evenly. The story of the genocide is so potent within this diaspora identity due to the denial of it by Turkey. The ongoing “political and cultural amnesia about the Armenian genocide” is what influences today’s continuous struggle for recognition in Armenian communities (Heckner 2010, 143). The maintenance of cultural and linguistic identity functions as resistance to the erasure inflicted by the genocide; fear of being wiped out and erased sits at the core of efforts to keep Armenianness alive through the generations. Importantly, however, *Orhan’s Inheritance* reveals how girls and women are disproportionately policed within some variations of survival instincts. This is apparent in *Orhan’s Inheritance*, in which Ani’s father, Bedros (who survived the death marches) refuses to allow her to marry a Ukrainian boy she’d fallen in love with in her twenties. Bedros told her, “Marry him and you finish what the Turks started” (Ohanesian 2015, 141). A fear of the erasure and destruction of one’s entire people, as well as an effort to ensure cultural survival, sits at the root of this kind of sentiment; however, it also functions as a form of gendered policing. It is in the ways that gender and sexuality become a center of control and silencing that we see the diaspora participate in producing its own ghosts that haunt.

This turns me to my analysis of diasporic literature. Within diasporic literature, no story stands on its own, and is instead always entrenched and embedded within historical and cultural contexts and thus racialized, gendered, classed, shaped by its geographic origin, etc. These stories are told by women within their respective diasporas, and represent what scholar Samina Najmi calls decolonizing the bildungsroman. The bildungsroman is a story of one’s formative years, something of a coming-of-age story; Najmi highlights how bildungsroman written by women of color (Asian women specifically) are rooted in a collective effort to fight the political amnesia around histories that America would rather forget, particularly in the context of U.S. involvement in wars in Asia in the 20th century. Asian and Asian American women carry wartime trauma into the diaspora, which then carries on into later generations (Kim-Prieto et. al. 2018). Asian American women’s writing “intervenes not only in mainstream feminist discourse

but also in nationalist discourses” and constitute decolonial writing as they go beyond just the nationalist group’s gain of control over the nation from their colonizer, and instead involve a process of thorough social transformation (Najmi 2011, 217). Najmi argues that Keller’s *Comfort Woman* in particular works to redefine nationalism in a woman-centered way, and shows the centrality of mother-daughter relationships to Asian American women’s literature.

In the case of the Korean diaspora, the efforts to keep the memories of the girls and “grandmas”/*halmeonis* who were victims of sexual slavery are led primarily by Korean American women in efforts of grassroots activism. In their study of transnational identity, scholars Linda Hasunama and Mary McCarthy demonstrate how these efforts “symbolize the diaspora’s shared collective history and identity as Koreans and colonial subjects of the former Japanese empire” (2018, 146). Women stand at the forefront of this push in the diaspora for memorialization and creating this collective memory. The trauma of Japanese colonialism lives within family memories, and these activists are explicit in connecting this history to present rape and sexual atrocities during wartime. By “contextualizing the comfort women in a broader discourse of human rights, sexual violence during war, trafficking, and justice” these activists have built a broad base of support and created a more inclusive transnational memory that goes beyond the Korean diasporic community (159).

Central in the activism for remembrance and embodied within each of the novels I analyze here, is a confrontation between the dominant, patriarchal narrations that are presented as the central histories within the diaspora and the gendered dimensions of these histories that are left out/marginalized. The nation of Korea feels national shame at having been emasculated by Japanese colonization and having “its” women serve as sex slaves, and so these very women become the symbols of that shame, which both stems from and contributes to a cycle of silencing. Even within families, many women did not feel that they were allowed to talk about their “comfort women” histories because of patriarchal assumptions that put blame on women, even within atrocious conditions as in the “comfort” camps. The dominant narration of history in Korea and Armenia (as well as their respective diasporas) both center on the experience of the men, painting the violation of the women as an affront to the patriarchal nation and family rather than a violation of the woman’s personhood and wellbeing. For these now independent states (Armenia and Korea) to acknowledge the experiences of women, they would need to acknowledge the violation of the nation by the “enemy,” which would require them to confront the shame and emasculation they experienced during the time of these atrocities. These processes of blaming and silencing are a key thing that activists—and these authors—are fighting against.

Within these processes of collective memory and a disruption of the true/not true binary, literature, then, is a uniquely important site of understanding the generational haunting in diasporic communities. Literature and art reflect the ways that these individual diasporic agents come to understand their group’s history, as well as their own history within the particular context they are embedded within. Literature also actively embodies the diaspora’s redefinition(s) of history and the past. Fiction and poetry are spaces where members of the diaspora weave together memories (their own and those passed down to them from their

collective community as well as their family), historical facts, and their own hauntings. The urge to write these histories down, which functions as a kind of resistance to denialism and erasure, reflects Daniel Solis's idea of "forced trajectory," in which families of victims of state violence feel compelled to become activists (2018, 5). This is true in diasporic contexts where later generations are haunted by the things their parents and grandparents cannot or refuse to speak about, as well as by the things that the perpetrators refuse to acknowledge and take responsibility for. It is also particularly present for members of the diaspora who face a crossroads of identity in confronting the revisionist histories put forth by the perpetrators, the dominant stories told by their diaspora, and the histories marginalized within diaspora communities. Some members in the diaspora are willing to recognize their hauntings—these are the people who recognize that there is something wrong or missing in dominant memory. Others aren't willing to recognize being haunted and try to silence the ghosts. It requires an active recognition of one's hauntings (of the individual or of the collective community) to be willing to hear and listen to these haunting and the testimonies being told about these histories. A willingness to listen characterizes some of the protagonists in each of these novels; it isn't until the end of each novel that Beccah and Orhan are willing to listen to these hauntings and testimonies.

### **Comparative Analysis of Generational Haunting in the Novels: The Connection Between Woman, Diaspora, and Nation**

Intergenerational haunting emerges as a key theme within each of these novels, spurred on by the widespread and multilayered silencing of women's experiences of state-sanctioned mass sexual violence. The primary origin of this silencing occurs at the state level, in which the state actors that committed these atrocities (the Ottoman Empire (now Turkey) and Japan) refuse to acknowledge their actions and deny their active participation and orchestration of these mass atrocities. While this silencing may occur on the state level, it has deep personal and familial implications. Families reinforce these silences, whether because patriarchal leaders of the family, often fathers, are shamed by the gender-based violence or because families are afraid of repercussions if this history is spoken of. This silencing does not disappear when people migrate, as the initial trauma and haunting from these events themselves are carried with them on this migration. Once they resettle, a diaspora community may either center counternarratives in their approach to history, resisting the perpetrator state's dominant telling of history, or they may align with the dominant groups. Diasporic memories about state violence that took place in the homeland may deviate from that of those who did not disperse for several reasons. First, diasporic communities occupy a different temporality from the people who stayed back. While the conditions in the place of birth or ancestry naturally changes over time, diasporic communities may hold onto memories of the place *as it was*, creating disjunctures within the way the past is remembered by different communities. Secondly, sometimes diasporic communities may find that the conditions in the country into which they migrated may enable countermemories to emerge. At the same time, however, scholarship has demonstrated that diaspora communities, fearing that they will lose connections to the homeland, also hold onto

conservative values. Often women bear the brunt of the responsibilities for maintaining cultural and symbolic connections to homeland culture.

Here stands a key interplay between the state, the diaspora, and the individual woman within both the Korean and Armenian diasporic communities in the U.S., exemplified through the instances of generational haunting in each of these novels. First, women impacted by this violence (and their descendants who are haunted by their experiences) must contend with the fact that the perpetrators refuse to acknowledge the systemic sexual violence they inflicted upon them. After that, they must then contend with the shame and silencing inflicted by their own communities upon them; women's experiences go unspoken, marginalized, and silenced by their own. Shame follows these women everywhere they go, and they cannot mourn or grow in peace. They are re-victimized over and over as their suffering bodies are expected to implement the rules of the state and the diaspora. In the Armenian context, women must remember the genocide, never forget, keep the memory alive at all times. However, that dominant form of remembrance completely silences the gendered realities of women's experiences. In the Korean context, remembering Japanese colonialism is expected of all, but heteropatriarchal norms inflict shame upon former "comfort women" when they speak up about their experiences.

Agency comes into play here: in order to avoid being made into a victim over and over (by both the perpetrator state and one's own community), survivors may decide to simply not talk about their experiences. This comes through in Seda's character in *Orhan's Inheritance*. She doesn't speak about her experience during the genocide until the very end of the book, despite her niece Ani's attempts to learn her story for her entire life. Seda is exercising agency in choosing not to talk about these experiences, but in staying silent, she also is becoming more trapped in her trauma and disconnected from the next generation. This silence engenders more and more haunting, which transfers to the diaspora, as Ani is forced to imagine and fill in the blanks regarding her questions about the genocide. She must imagine based on the things that haunt her and what she knows from other survivors in the diaspora. Those gaps must be filled, reflecting the ways that diasporas blend memory, imagination, and stories in approaching history.

In *Comfort Women*, Soon Hyo's silence isn't her choice. After she dies, Beccah recalls a long-buried memory of an interaction between Soon Hyo and her father; in response to Soon Hyo speaking her experiences in the rape camps aloud, Bradley actively silences her, stating, "What if Beccah hears you? Think of how she could feel, knowing her mother was a prostitute...I ask you to protect our daughter, with your silence, from that shame" (Keller 1997, 196). Bradley forces her silence by inflicting shame within Soon Hyo, shame to even tell her own daughter about her experiences. This silencing highlights the potency of sexual violence as a means of destroying communities and family connections. Keller's framing of this process of silencing through Bradley, a white American man, is also significant in that it highlights how not only Japan but also the U.S. were victimizers of Korea. Bradley, and then subsequently Beccah, symbolize the U.S.'s victimization. The allyship between the U.S. and Japan following the end of World War II resulted in the U.S.'s active silencing of Japan's wartime crimes and absolving them of culpability, as this was profitable in their need for allies during the Cold War. The U.S.

has also been involved in the continuation of “militarized sexual labor and violence in Japan and South Korea (1945 to the present)” (Son 2018, 16). For Soon Hyo, the missionaries and Bradley specifically hold parallels to the Japanese soldiers in the camps; they both want to possess her and inflict pain upon her.

Influenced by the silencing forced upon Soon Hyo by Bradley, Beccah becomes the mouthpiece of the violence of that silencing; since she knows nothing of her mother’s true past, Beccah writes her off as eccentric and crazy in the same way that Bradley does. She occupies a complicated position both as the person who Soon Hyo loves the most and sees as a miracle (due to the fact that she never thought she would be able to conceive again after the trauma inflicted upon her body) and as someone who seems to revictimize and resilience her throughout her life, stemming from Bradley’s actions. Bradley’s immediate write-off of Soon Hyo’s experiences of wartime rape as prostitution represents the U.S.’s complicity in what Ueno Chizuko calls “the prostitution paradigm,” which is “an evasive ideology that obliterates the Japanese government’s criminality by foregrounding the victims’ supposed volition in choosing prostitution as their professional occupation to earn a living” (Abe 2020, 129). The myth of consent obfuscates any understanding of victimhood or violence; if someone is a prostitute, they are therefore seen as impossible to victimize, since they make their profession off of commodifying their bodies and their sexuality. Bradley’s continuous lack of acknowledgement of Soon Hyo’s trauma and representation of her as a “sinner” and “fallen woman” show how he actively continues the denial of not only what Soon Hyo survived, but the entire state-sanctioned system of sexual slavery as a whole. It is only after her mother is dead that Beccah comes to know her past and realize what scholar Kodai Abe calls her “response-ability” to her mother and to the “comfort women” issue; this isn’t responsibility in the sense of legal duty, but instead as an ethical capacity or “ethical ability, ability to respond, response-ability” (2020, 127). Keller’s decision to have Auntie Reno, a non-Korean, criticize Beccah and call on her response-ability shows how she is resisting the notion that only Koreans can redress this history. It is at this point in which Beccah works to remember and reinterpret the way that her mother moved through life. Soon Hyo’s decision to leave behind compiled documents, missing persons reports, and a cassette for Beccah to discover after her death signifies her reclamation of control and agency that had been stripped of her for so long.

### **The Defiance of Linear Time and Space**

Each of these novels defy linear time and space, moving between different timelines, points of view, and geographic locations. *Comfort Woman* jumps back and forth between Soon Hyo’s point of view throughout her childhood, during her time in the rape camps, into her adulthood married to Bradley, and her time raising Beccah in Hawai’i after Bradley’s death. Throughout the novel, it switches over to Beccah’s perspective, who grows up in Hawai’i as a mixed race Korean diasporic subject. Much of what we see of Soon Hyo after Beccah’s young childhood is filtered through Beccah’s point of view, which is shaped by the deliberate silencing of Soon Hyo’s experiences and life. Soon Hyo’s entire life is refracted through her continuous

and endless haunting; she makes her whole livelihood off communing with ghosts, and functions as an intermediary and messenger between the living and the dead. She acts as a kind of in-between being, constantly between the realm of the living and the dead, making her something of a ghost. The Soon Hyo we know in her sections of the book is so different from the Soon Hyo we know through Beccah's perspective; the immense love and care Soon Hyo has for Beccah contrasts strongly with how Beccah understood their relationship.

*Orhan's Inheritance* also jumps between different timelines and points of view, refusing to follow linear temporality. The novel moves through Lucine/Seda's life, beginning in 1990 when she is in a retirement home in Los Angeles and backtracking to her adolescence during the Armenian Genocide. We also see her story through the point of view of Kemal (her lover), Fatma (the woman who took her in), and Orhan (the man who came from Turkey to investigate why Kemal left their family home to Seda). This is especially significant since we see narration of the genocide not through state actors, but instead through everyday people—from different ethnic backgrounds, at that. The narration of the text through Armenian, Turkish, and Kurdish voices emphasizes the ways that people defied the state in their actions during this time period and how different groups were impacted in different ways by the genocide. The roles and treatment of Kurdish people as a whole within the Ottoman Empire (and now Turkey) in relation to the Armenian Genocide vary. Some Kurds were organized by the leaders of the Ottoman state to target Armenians, while others were central in protecting groups of Armenians from massacre. Ohanesian embodies this complex history within the character Fatma, who protects Lucine/Seda from discovery and massacre. This novel not only defies linear time, but defies singular means of telling history. Lucine/Seda's agency in deciding to stay silent about her past shapes her entire life, particularly in her interactions with the next generation through Ani. This silencing, a choice she made due to the immensity of her trauma, contributes to the past never becoming resolved. Even when her niece begs her to tell her about her past, she holds it all in; the unspeakable things that she witnessed and did on the death marches stay locked inside of her and continue to haunt her throughout her life. She is forced to relive the worst parts of her past especially when she is near running water, which reminds her of when she dropped Aram into the river. Ani feels lost without knowing her aunt's stories, and is forced to guess and imagine how to put the pieces together, trapped in a cycle of repeating time.

The past sticks with the protagonist of each novel. For Soon Hyo, her own daughter is a manifestation and representation of all the things she fears. She becomes terrified when Beccah begins puberty, particularly with menstruation, as this to Soon Hyo signifies that she is now unsafe and vulnerable. For her, female sexual development leads to violence and the theft of one's agency over one's body; this is clear in the ways that she teaches Beccah to see her own body as well as her relationships with men. Beccah, knowing how her mother sees menstruation, forces it away, slowing her body's natural development for as long as she can. Soon Hyo's influence ends up blocking Beccah from being in any long term relationships with men, starting with her high school boyfriend Max and up to Sanford, the man she is having an affair with as an adult. Her mother's view of men as repulsive and violent rubs off on her.

The silencing of these events by their perpetrators also forces the past to continue repeating itself; Fisher's understanding of time as broken and ever-repeating when the past is not dealt with is particularly useful here (Fisher 2012). The silencing these women face at multiple levels forces them to relive their trauma over and over. Both Japan and Turkey refuse to take responsibility for their actions in each of these instances of state-sanctioned sexual violence. As the documentary *Shusenjo* demonstrates, many denialists claim that the "comfort women" system wasn't coercive and worry about how the telling of this history worldwide will put Japan in a negative light, leaning heavily into the claim of prostitution (Dezaki 2018). For example, former prime minister Shinzo Abe desired to "...strengthen the role of the prime minister, restore Japan's national pride, and reclaim a central position on the global stage" (Jentsch 2023, 142). This effort was rooted in a desire to restore Japan to its "former glory" pre-1945 (Park 2022). Apologies made by Japanese officials over the years, as well as the 2015 Agreement on the Comfort Women made by the South Korean and Japanese governments, have neither truly taken responsibility nor recognized the systematic institution of sexual slavery by Imperial Japan; state-led efforts to have textbook companies delete sections that addressed the "comfort women" reflect an ongoing refusal to take responsibility (Dezaki 2018).

Turkey refuses to acknowledge the Armenian Genocide, and actively blocks external access to Ottoman documents (Semerdjian 2023). In his study of Turkish school textbooks and their representation of the Armenian Genocide, Ekim Diren Safak contends that Turkish denial of the Armenian Genocide is clear in the biased discursive choices of these textbooks, focusing particularly on how they portray nation and identity (Safak 2024). The defense of the national identity of Turkey is central in the ways that Turkey both defines its origin story and narrates the genocide (as not-genocide); the Turkish Republic came to define itself as a nation by systematically expropriating and removing minority groups from its population (677). Semerdjian argues that we should approach the Turkish state archives as "a space of violent erasure and a subject in its own right" (2023, 11). The ongoing attack on Armenian historical memory reflects the centrality of the archive in Turkey's nation-building process.

In both the homeland and the diaspora, Korean and Armenian communities also perpetuate silencing of aspects of their own histories. Central here are the ways that colonized women's bodies come to represent the nation; the individual woman's body is meant to stand in for the nation, so the violation of that body is read as also being the violation of the land/nation. This leads to a sense of national shame, carried by the bodies of women as the embodied experience of sexual violence is superimposed over the nation. The bodies of the "comfort women" come to represent "nation, objectified and defiled and then killed by the dominant (male) Japan, represented by its Japanese soldiers, as imperialistic colonizers over the dominated, conquered (female) Korea, represented by women and their bodies" (Gilbert 2012, 493). We cannot talk about violence without talking about the body, as well as the ways in which it is gendered (Gilbert 2012, 487). Patriarchy has marked women's bodies as other and forever vulnerable to violation. Rape and sexual violence are such potent weapons of war within heteropatriarchal societies due to the ways in which women's worth within patriarchy (and a



patrilineal property structure) comes from their ability to reproduce; thus, women's value or "honor" is placed within her "sexual accessibility—in her virginity while single and, once wed, in the fidelity of her sexual services to the husband to ensure a legitimate heir" (Castaneda 2011, 53). Women have historically been considered the property of a man (such as the father or the husband), and so rape has been seen as a violation of a man's property rather than a human being. This means that the violation of women's bodies during wartime impacts not only the victim's personhood and wellbeing, but inflicts shame by attacking their sexuality. This infliction of shame leads to a continuous silencing of these women's experiences, both by the perpetrators and by their own communities.

Haunting, resulting from this endless silencing at multiple levels, follows the diaspora across entire oceans and continents, transcending both linear time and space by jumping back and forth between the past and the present; between homeland and diaspora; and between narration of the survivors (Soon Hyo and Lucine/Seda) and later generations (Beccah and Ani). These novels engage in a kind of temporal and spatial boundary crossing. In *Comfort Woman*, Soon Hyo crosses the "invisible-visible and the dead-living boundary...crossing over the boundary between two oppositional worlds (spiritual and material), two temporalities (past and present), and two spatialities (there and here)" (Yook 2011, 140). This boundary crossing is very evident in Soon Hyo's shamanism and her communication with spirits, as she lives in "temporal blurring where the past and the present coexist" (Yook 2011, 140). It also manifests in *Orhan's Inheritance* in the way that images of Seda/Lucine's past remain with her, such as her aversion to running water due to her memories of Aram. Those memories follow her from homeland to diaspora and across space and time. The temporal and spatial boundary between past and present, between homeland and diaspora, and between the bodies and personhood of different people (particularly women) are all blurred and crossed over in each of these novels.

### **Death: An End That is Not the End**

Death figures as a key idea, event, and image in both of these novels, particularly in the ways that it served as a form of liberation and freedom when under the violent and dangerous conditions of the rape camps and the death marches. Death signals a harsh cutoff of linear time, and when put in context with the manifestation of ghosts and haunting, it leads to a cycle of the past endlessly coming back and repeating itself. It seems to signal an ending, but within the context of haunting, that isn't necessarily true; things that seem to be in the past arise, even after their death seemed to provide a kind of freedom. Death's functionality as a kind of liberation and freedom further puts into context the link between woman and state. When the violence instituted by the state is so grave, death becomes a better option. These novels suggest that death isn't an end, challenging liberal humanist notions of linear time as forward-moving and a marker of progress.

Suicide functioned as a form of resistance for both Armenian women on the death marches as well as Korean women forced into sexual slavery. "Akiko 40," who we know throughout the novel as Induk, exemplifies how suicide—or taunting and enraging one's

oppressors into killing them, in this case—functions as a means of achieving freedom. For Induk, freedom lies in death; she forces the Japanese soldiers into killing her. Even as the Japanese soldiers rape her, she resists, shouting, “‘I am Korea, I am a woman, I am alive, I am seventeen, I had a family just like you do, I am a daughter, I am a sister.’ All through the night she talked, reclaiming her Korean name, reciting her family genealogy, even chanting the recipes her mother had passed on to her” (Keller 1997, 20). Induk’s centering and reclamation of her Korean identity, her genealogy, her language, and her personhood signifies Korean women’s resistance. She fights to remain human and possess her own self and body, and thus by extension her ethnicity, culture, land, and home in the face of the colonization of both the land and the body (individual and collective) of Korean women. She uses the Japanese soldiers as a tool to ensure her own death, which brings her release and liberation, the only liberation possible within the context of the rape camps. In death, she achieves freedom from the camps and the Japanese soldiers, who represent the penetration and violation of her individual body, through which they colonize, penetrate and violate her homeland of Korea.

Induk’s liberation in death, however, ensures Soon Hyo’s subjugation as “Akiko 41;” for her, she is spiritually and emotionally dead from the moment she is forced to become “Akiko,” stating that “...I know Induk didn’t go crazy. She was going sane. She was planning her escape. The corpse the soldiers brought back from the woods wasn’t Induk. It was Akiko 41; it was me” (Keller 1997, 21). This forced name will follow her until she dies, and will be the only name her daughter knows her as until her passing. Her memories of the past are always graphic descriptions of the violations upon her body, representing the embodied trauma she carries with her. Despite this, Induk’s spirit, which begins appearing to Soon Hyo following her escape from the camps, offers her a kind of salvation through their deep connection. She becomes, for both Soon Hyo and later Beccah, “...a source of strength, resilience, selfhood, survival, hope—and sanity” (Gilbert 2012, 500). Induk’s ability to free herself from sexual slavery comes through “conjuring her dignity and agency out of her national, familial, and sisterly relations,” demonstrating a woman-centric view of liberation as well as a redefinition of a kind of woman-centered nationalism (Yook 2011, 132).

In the climate of the death marches that displaced Armenians were forced onto, death also functioned as a mercy and a means of gaining freedom. This is particularly visible in Lucine/Seda’s decision to drop her baby brother Aram into a river, knowing that this will ensure a swift death. Witnessing the immense toll that these marches took upon her brother, she was forced to make this difficult decision, seeing her brother’s death as his only opportunity to be free. This action would go on to haunt her for the rest of her life, as even in her old age in the nursing home, she is appalled and terrified at the sound of rushing water. Beyond the novel, research on the death marches demonstrates how many Armenian women and girls chose death over continuing on under the Ottoman soldiers (Bjornlund 2009, 27). Death as preferable to living is also a theme in Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* on which Avery Gordon bases her theory of rememory.

### The Blurring of Real/Not Real

These novels also involve a blurring between that which is real and not real. This blurring highlights the importance of approaching the history/archive of the state with a critical lens, particularly because the archive functions as a tool of state-building; this means that any histories that don't fall in line with the state's dominant means of defining its past are silenced/erased to serve the nation's aims (Semerdjian 2023). The conception of "history" within the official state archive of Japan and Turkey effectively erase and negate the entirety of the lived experiences of victims and survivors of the "comfort woman" system and the Armenian Genocide, as this would contradict their carefully curated vision of their nation. They tell fiction with the disguise of supposed "correct" "factual" history; state archives have "largely obliterated the voices of victims" as any evidence of a past alternative from the state's official version of history is erased (Semerdjian 2023, 10). Semerdjian argues that the Turkish archives act as a "sarcophagus of 'paper cadavers'" (2023, 12). These novels are a manifestation of the ways in which women in the diaspora actively resist and problematize this supposedly "factual" history put forth by the state and work to retell their histories. The prominence of naming practices, the consistent manifestation of ghosts, and the image of the umbilical cord within each novel each represent examples of the blurring of the boundary between that which is real and not real in these novels. Here I will focus my analysis on the umbilical cord.

The image of the umbilical cord emerges in both novels and upsets the real/not real binary. These novels and their authors (and arguably the diasporic communities they are entrenched in) refuse to abide by a simplistic definition of what is real and not real. In *Comfort Woman*, Soon Hyo sees the umbilical cord as something that forever connects mother and child, thinking, "I cupped my hand over my daughter's birth cord and vowed to keep it safe...so that as she grows into the person she will become...we will both be reminded that we share one body, one flesh" (Keller 1997, 97). The umbilical cord here is a symbol of resistance in connecting mother and daughter through whatever circumstances. As a former "comfort woman," Soon Hyo had been denied the right to her own body as well as to her capacity to reproduce. The fact that she survived the endless rape and the forced abortion in the camps, and still was able to conceive is a miracle to her. The umbilical cord that figuratively connects her to Beccah, even though their relationship is strained as Beccah grows older, resists that trauma and shows the powerful connections between women's bodies. The umbilical cord physically connects mother and child, and thus blurs the boundary between them; motherhood, the connections between women, and the connections between women and earth supersede the ways in which both the state and patriarchal overtones of the diaspora and the family create male-centric narratives of history.

In *Orhan's Inheritance*, the umbilical cord, referred to as the *göbek bağı* (umbilical cord in Turkish), is seen as something that can determine a child's fate and future. Mairig, Lucine's mother, states, "'The umbilical cord has the power to influence a child's future'... 'If you bury it in the courtyard of a mosque or church, the child becomes devout. If it's buried in a school garden, the child becomes educated'" (Ohanesian 2015, 95). Lucine asks her, "'And if you throw it in the river?'" to which Mairig responds, "'Then the child is forced to search for his or her

destiny elsewhere, far away from here” (Ohanesian 2015, 95). This determining factor, however, has a negative consequence in the novel. The umbilical cord of Lucine’s youngest brother, Aram, who was just a baby when the genocide started, was lost after he was born, which was told to mean that he would be lost in life. For Aram, his umbilical cord sealed his fate before he was even conscious, reflecting the centrality of the symbol of the umbilical cord in upsetting the binary between that which is real/not real.

### **Conclusion**

The temporal and spatial boundary crossing, as well as the blurring of the line between that which is real/not real in each of these novels, comes through in the ways that these authors reconstruct the stories of those who are marginalized in traditional tellings of history. They step away first from the mainstream revisionist histories told by the perpetrators that refuse to acknowledge and take responsibility for these instances of mass state-sanctioned sexual violence. They then cross over hegemonic, patriarchal, nationalist narratives that are chosen as the pinnacle ones defining the diaspora, which leave the experiences of women out (especially experiences relating to gender-based violence due to a sense of national shame or embarrassment). They instead cross into a conception of history that not only acknowledges but centers the experiences of women and their relationships with later generations of women in the diaspora, both through tangible relationships and haunting. They defy what counts as “real” and “not real” with the presence of ghosts, memories that may belong to someone else, dreams, and stories that engage folklore and are presented as true/real/historical fact.

These novels work as counternarratives that create a reckoning with dominant “accurate” histories, both those told by the perpetrators and by the patriarchal diaspora. They position the survivor and listening to her story as central to true justice and healing. In this case, these literatures function as a form of archive of countermemory, signifying a victim-centered approach that emphasizes the importance of memory and imagination in resisting the erasure and silencing of women’s experiences from history books. The authors use memories, flashbacks, symbols, dreams, ghosts, and folklore to tell these stories, presenting all of these as real. The novels cross the boundaries between different conceptions of these histories, and in fact problematize the false binary between history and fiction. Perhaps the most significant aspect tying these novels together is the fact that they represent women-centered genealogies and approaches to history. At the core of these novels is a victim-centered, woman-centered approach to these histories and an indictment of the revisionism and denialism of these histories by the perpetrators. This indictment is powerfully captured in the character Ani’s declaration that “Silence is the enemy of justice...It’s about getting Turkey to admit to the genocide. You can’t get over a thing when the perpetrator denies it even happened (Ohanesian 2015, 311). She points out that the lives of all Armenians are shaped by the history of the genocide and its imprint on their lives. This character exemplifies diasporic resistance and activism, which has many expressions in both the Armenian and Korean American communities.

I turn to scholar Simmy Makhijani's consideration of "the study of history as a solidarity practice with contemporary liberatory struggles" and her notion that "reading backwards (from the present) should function as an excavation practice of critical thinking" (Makhijani 2020, 63). Studying these pasts, particularly these pasts that are silenced and marginalized at so many levels, should be applied to our present moment and the ongoing use of sexual violence as a tool of war worldwide. The realities that women and children face during wartime are steeped in the constant threat or reality of sexual violence, and our study of these pasts of the "comfort women" and the Armenian Genocide should function as an act of solidarity with current struggles worldwide. In a climate and a country such as the U.S. where we are taught that to progress towards the future means to forget the past, and a global climate rife with revisionist tendencies, it becomes even more important to remember the gendered dimensions of our pasts. Turning to the cultural output of the diaspora as a potential archive of counter-memory, we can fight the silencing and erasure of these gendered histories and ensure that the lives and experiences of those marginalized in our history books are centered and remembered. For to remember is to resist.

## References

- Abe, Kodai. 2020. "‘I Would Cry for You, Mommy’: A Korean American Daughter’s Response-Ability in Nora Okja Keller’s *Comfort Woman*." *Journal of Asian American Studies* 23 (1): 125–47. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2020.0000>.
- Altıntaş, Toygun. 2022. "Violence, Armenian Women, and the ‘Armenian Question’ in the Late Ottoman Empire." *Journal of Women’s History* 34 (3): 12–33. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2022.0023>.
- Askin, Kelly. 2003. "Prosecuting Wartime Rape and Other Gender-Related Crimes Under International Law: Extraordinary Advances, Enduring Obstacles." *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 21 (2): 288-349. <https://lawcat.berkeley.edu/record/1118667?ln=en&v=pdf>
- Avakian, Arlene, and Hourig Attarian. 2015. "Imagining Our Foremothers: Memory and Evidence of Women Victims and Survivors of the Armenian Genocide: A Dialogue." *The European Journal of Women’s Studies* 22 (4): 476–83. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506815608327>.
- Bjornlund, Matthias. "‘A Fate Worse Than Dying’: Sexual Violence during the Armenian Genocide." In *Brutality and Desire*, edited by D. Herzog. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230234291\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230234291_2).
- Castañeda, Antonia I. 2011. "Sexual Violence in the Politics and Policies of Conquest: Amerindian Women and the Spanish Conquest of Alta California." In *Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones*, edited by Elizabeth D. Heineman. 39-55. University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812204346.39>.
- Chernobov, Dmitry, and Leila Wilmers. 2020. "Diaspora Identity and a New Generation: Armenian Diaspora Youth on the Genocide and the Karabakh War." *Nationalities Papers* 48 (5): 915–30. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2019.74>.
- Chizuko, Ueno. 1998. *Nationalism and Gender*. Translated by Beverly Yamamoto. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press.
- Cho, Grace M. 2008. *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dezaki, Miki, dir.. 2018. *Shusenjo*. Norman Productions.

- Fischer, Nina, and Kate Mitchell. 2021. "Fiction as Counter Memory: Writing Armenia and Palestine in Aline Ohanesian's *Orhan's Inheritance* and Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*." *College Literature* 48 (4): 738–67. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2021.0044>.
- Fisher, Mark. 2012. "What Is Hauntology?" *Film Quarterly* 66 (1): 16–24. <https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2012.66.1.16>.
- Fujiwara, Lynn, and Shireen Roshanravan, eds. 2018. *Asian American Feminisms and Women of Color Politics*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Gendry-Kim, Keum Suk. 2019. *Grass*. Translated by Janet Hong. Montréal, Québec: Drawn & Quarterly.
- Gilbert, Paula Ruth. 2012. "The Violated Female Body as Nation: Cultural, Familial, and Spiritual Identity in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*." *Journal of Human Rights* 11 (4): 486–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2012.730915>.
- Gordon, Avery F, and Janice Radway. 2008. "Not Only the Footprints but the Water Too and What Is down There." In *Ghostly Matters*, NED-New edition, Second., 137-190. United States: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hasunuma, Linda, and Mary M. McCarthy. 2019. "Creating a Collective Memory of the Comfort Women in the USA." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 32 (2): 145–62. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-018-9302-1>.
- Heckner, Elke. 2010. "Screening the Armenian Genocide: Atom Egoyan's *Ararat* between Erasure and Suture." *Shofar (West Lafayette, Ind.)* 28 (4): 133–45. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2010.0068>.
- Jentzsch, Hanno. 2023. "The Iconoclast: Shinzō Abe and the New Japan by Tobias S. Harris (Review)." *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 49 (1): 141–45. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jjs.2023.0006>.
- Keller, Nora Okja. 1997. *Comfort Woman*. New York: Viking.
- Kim, Keong-il. 2005. "Nationalism and Colonialism in Japan's 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere' in World War II." *The Review of Korean Studies* 8 (2): 65-90.

- Kim-Prieto, Chu, Grace S. Kim, Leilani Salvo Crane, Susana Ming Lowe, Phi Loan Le, and Khanh T. Dinh. 2018. "Legacies of War: Asian American Women and War Trauma." *Women & Therapy* 41 (3-4): 203–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02703149.2018.1425023>.
- Madsen, Deborah L. 2007. "Nora Okja Keller's Comfort Woman and the Ethics of Literary Trauma." *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 33 (2): 81-97.
- Makhijani, Simmy. 2020. "South Asians on the Pacific West Coast (the Early Years): A Brief History of the Present." In *Asian Pacific American Experiences: Past, Present, and Future*, edited by Eunai Shrake, Teresa Williams León, and Edith Chen. Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.
- Manoogian, Margaret M, Alexis J Walker, and Leslie N Richards. 2007. "Gender, Genocide, and Ethnicity: The Legacies of Older Armenian American Mothers." *Journal of Family Issues* 28 (4): 567–89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X06297605>.
- Morrison, Toni. 1987. *Beloved: A Novel*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Najmi, Samina. 2011. "Decolonizing the Bildungsroman: Narratives of War and Womanhood in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*." In *Form and Transformation in Asian American Literature*, 209-230. University of Washington Press.
- Ohanesian, Aline. 2015. *Orhan's Inheritance: A Novel*. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.
- Park, S. Nathan. 2022. "Abe's Nationalism is His Most Toxic Legacy." *Foreign Policy*. July 14. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/07/14/shinzo-abe-nationalism-japan-korea/>
- Schultermandl, Silvia. 2007. "Writing Rape, Trauma, and Transnationality onto the Female Body: Matrilineal Em-Body-Ment in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*." *Meridians (Middletown, Conn.)* 7 (2): 71–100. <https://doi.org/10.2979/MER.2007.7.2.71>.
- Seifert, Ruth. 1993. "Rape In Wars: Analytical Approaches." *Minerva (Arlington, Va.)* XI (2): 17-. <https://libproxy.csun.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/rapewar-s-analytical-approaches/docview/222837105/se-2?accountid=7285>.
- Semerdjian, Elyse. (2023) *Remnants: Embodied Archives of the Armenian Genocide*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2023.



- Solis, Gabriel Daniel. 2018. "Documenting State Violence: (Symbolic) Annihilation & Archives of Survival." *KULA (London)* 2 (1): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.5334/kula.28>.
- Son, Elizabeth W. 2018. *Embodied Reckonings: "Comfort Women," Performance, and Transpacific Redress*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.8773540>.
- Yook, Sung Hee. 2011. "Mourning Unmourned Deaths: Shamanic Rituals in Nora Okja Keller's Comfort Woman." *Feminist Studies in English Literature* 19 (3): 127-153.  
[https://oak.go.kr/repository/journal/19392/NRF017\\_2011\\_v19n3\\_127.pdf](https://oak.go.kr/repository/journal/19392/NRF017_2011_v19n3_127.pdf)