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Washington University in St. Louis  
Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures

Towards the Borderlands: An Investigation into the works of Yi Yang-ji  
Michael Toole

A thesis presented to the  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
of Washington University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts

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## Introduction

*Zainichi*. The word in Japanese literally means, “residing in Japan,” but has come to apply specifically to ethnic Koreans living in Japan and their descendants. For some Japanese, *Zainichi* are a constant challenge to the myth of Japanese homogeneity as well as a bitter reminder of the militarism of the Japanese Empire (Wender, 5). As a minority group within Japan, *Zainichi* are second in size only to Okinawans, and number around 700,000. While the vast majority of these *Zainichi* Koreans were born in Japan and speak Japanese, relatively few possess Japanese citizenship (Weiner 1). Discriminatory policies on the part of the Japanese government account for this lack of citizenship. The problem of citizenship can be traced back to the end of Japanese colonial rule in the period of 1945-1952. At the end of the Pacific War in 1945, there were 2.4 million Koreans in Japan. However, this number would soon shrink to roughly 700,000. This repatriation of many to Korea was triggered by the large number of unemployed that increased rapidly with the return of Japanese troops and by US bombings of many industrial areas (Ryang, xiv). To further complicate the situation of Koreans in Japan, the Japanese government had granted citizenship to Koreans during the colonial era, only to revoke it again after the end of World War II. While citizenship is now attainable for *Zainichi* Koreans, it requires them to create a new Japanese name and hold only Japanese citizenship, giving up all affiliations with the Korean peninsula. Some have chosen this option, and now “pass” as Japanese.

Those Koreans who remained in Japan were unable to return to Korea once the Korean War started in 1950. They were then rendered as stateless people through the San Francisco Treaty in 1952 and forced to register as aliens with the Japanese government. Japan would eventually open diplomatic relations with South Korea in the 1960s, allowing *Zainichi* to claim South Korean citizenship as permanent residents of Japan. However, within the *Zainichi* community, the majority who supported the North Korean regime chose to remain stateless, rather than be affiliated with South Korea. Since the complexities of the political affiliations of the *Zainichi* Koreans is outside the scope of my inquiry, for my purposes it is sufficient to say that now *Zainichis* have the choice of claiming a South Korean citizenship, naturalizing as Japanese, or claiming ambiguous “Korean” nationality and remaining stateless.

The investigation that unfolds in the following pages is primarily concerned with the work of one writer – Yi Yang-ji (1955-1992), and does not attempt to discuss *Zainichi* literature in general, that is, the range of writings produced by the diasporic population of ethnic Koreans in Japan. While there are a few monographs that seek to document the development of *Zainichi* literature, there is not yet one volume in English that offers an exhaustive study. Furthermore, for the English reader there is an astonishing dearth of translated works of these authors available. Despite this fact, there has been no lack of accomplished *Zainichi* writers and playwrights who have earned the accolades of both the Japanese literary establishment and the reading public.

Western-based scholars have written significant studies of *Zainichi*, mostly in the social sciences. Sociologists such as John Lie have theorized that the *Zainichi* population in Japan can be defined in western terms. Indeed, he counts them as another diasporic population (4). Furthermore, Japanese scholars have sought to bring attention to the *Zainichi* Korean population both inside Japan and outside. The political scientist Kang Sang-jung, who currently teaches at the prestigious Tokyo University, has written several books regarding *Zainichi* Koreans and their status. Embracing Western theorists such as Michel Foucault and Edward Said, his written works have exposed his belief that the goal of *Zainichi* Koreans should be “to live in Northeast Asia..” Kang espouses an overt association with neither North Korea, South Korea nor Japan, but rather that *Zainichi* Koreans should live with other diasporic Korean populations and expand ties across North-East Asia (172). There has been a lively discussion of the question of the *Zainichi* Korean population in Japan. Just looking at the myriad names that people have used to describe this population is indicative of the contentious place that they hold in the Japanese imagination.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this, there exists a lacuna in the body of critical writings on literature concerning *Zainichi* Koreans. Filling part of this gap is certainly one of the aims of this study, but this study also in part responds to Edward Said’s mission “to illustrate the formidable structure of cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Terms such as 在日韓国人、在日、朝鮮系日本人、在日朝鮮人、コリアンジャパニーズ、and even オルドウカマー(referring to 1<sup>st</sup> generation *Zainichi* Koreans) are used. This is not an exhaustive list.

domination and, specifically for formerly colonized peoples, the dangers and temptations of employing this structure upon themselves or upon others”(25). However, as opposed to the now well-established power structure of Occident-Orient that Said investigates, this study will shed light on the power structures *within* the Orient. While Japan has never been colonized, Japan does sit firmly in the “Orient” in European thought, especially of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Investigating the Korea-Japan power structure within Asia will offer a deeper understanding of the ways in which “cultural domination,” to use Said’s term, manifests itself outside of and within the Occident-Orient power structure dichotomy.

My hope in writing this study is to unlock new commonalities between other diasporic communities worldwide. While I hope to expose commonalities in diasporic communities, I also recognize the diversity of voices within the *Zainichi* community. For this reason, rather than being reductive or essentialistic in a study that attempts to encapsulate the entirety of a literary community, I have decided to focus on the writings of one author and interpretations of her works. Moving away from a more general introduction to the landscape of *Zainichi* identity and literature, I would like to move on to the specifics of this study.

While reading Yi’s works, I was struck with the questioning and muddying of a monoethnic Japan that I perceived. Much like minority writers in the United States of America that seek to expose the many “Americas” that exist, Yi also calls into question the idea of a homogeneous

Japan. As seen from the statistics above, not everyone in Japan is ethnically Japanese and there are many more stories of the other Japans that have yet to be told. I hope that this study introduces the readers to another facet of Japan through Yi Yang-ji's work. I also hope that the reader will question their own presuppositions about what it means to be Japanese, the boundaries of the Japanese language, and the borders of Japanese literature

This study consists of three chapters. Each chapter highlights one of the concepts that Yi deconstructs through her writing and onto which other discourses have been placed. Perhaps the most salient of these concepts I investigate in the first chapter. Drawing on the critical writing of Gloria Anzaldua that investigates the idea of a transracial, transethnic, and translinguistic consciousness, I show how the use of language in Yi's *Yuhi* confuses notions of a monolithic Japanese language. In the second chapter, I take a look at the bodies that populate some of Yi's fictions. In what ways are *Zainichi* bodies represented? How does Yi describe these bodies against the national polity of Japan as defined in the modern era? Do Yi's bodies subvert notions of a monoethnic Japanese body? I address these questions in the second chapter.

In the third and final chapter, I move from the bodies in Yi's works to the lands and places of Yi's works. People, nations, and states throughout history have appropriated lands and places. Looking to one of Yi's essays and the places that appear in her fiction, I show how place is just as much a contested idea as language or bodies. The lands of Japan and Korea have been claimed and

defined by various authorities who impose meaning on them. Yi points out this discourse on the land, deconstructing and blurring once again. Indeed, the commonality that runs throughout the chapters that I present to the reader is this constant blurring of defined concepts and a deconstruction of rhetoric that surrounds language, bodies, and lands. More than anything, Yi calls into questions those concepts which may appear concrete and static. She distorts the defined and renders meaningless the fixed. She invites the reader to the borderlands in which she writes.

## Section 1: Borderlands and Gaps: Zainichi Fictions

Japan has often been described as a homogeneous society free of the complex racial and ethnic issues that arise in those with populations that are more diverse. However, John Lie and others have pointed out the fallacy of this claim., Lie contends that, “the ethnic minorities in Japan suffer twice; although teased mercilessly in schools and barred from jobs, their existence is not recognized by the government (except as foreigners), most Japanese people, or, for that matter, by many Western Japanologists or Japanese social scientists”(Multi-Ethnic Japan 5).

Within the literary world, Zainichi authors such as Yi Yang-ji (1955-1992), Yu Miri (1968-), Ri Kaisei (1935-), and Gen Getsu (1965-) are a reminder of the overlooked ethnic Korean minority within Japan, as is the *burakumin*<sup>2</sup> writer Nakagami Kenji. What I would like to address in these pages is the specific way that minority languages in texts can be used as a tool to draw attention to and transcend dichotomies that divide societies where minorities are under or misrepresented. Specifically, I will investigate the use of the Korean and Japanese languages in Yi Yang-ji’s award-winning novella *Yuhi*, as this use relates to the negotiation of linguistic identity. Furthermore, I also will investigate the use of narrative voice, and the type of rhetorical techniques that draw attention to minority experiences; here I will be concerned with both the lack of minority

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<sup>2</sup> This term literally means “village people” but is a euphemistic term for an outcaste group that is ethnically Japanese having a long history of discrimination that mostly retain menial labor jobs.

voices within the telling of their own stories, and the role that the majority population can play in telling these stories.

## **From Two Lands to the Borderland**

While other Zainichi authors, such as Ri Kaisei, have explored what happens to Zainichi Koreans who feel alienated in Japan, Yi Yang-ji tells the story of what happens when her Zainichi characters return to the homeland. Much like other diasporic subjects who return to their homelands after a generation or more of separation, Yi's characters find that the land they longed for and idealized is not what they imagined. Instead, the Zainichi Korean characters of Yi's stories feel as estranged from the people of South Korea as they do from the people of Japan. One of the questions I seek to address in this section is: what happens when one has no homeland to go home to – what happens when one exists between countries, between languages, between lands? I postulate that in *Yuhi*, Yi exposes the type of dichotomies that exist within Japanese society, and far from transcending the dichotomy of Japan/Korea, Japanese language/Korean language in which her characters are stuck, Yi exposes these dichotomies and laments their adverse affect on her characters.

The titular character in Yi's novella, *Yuhi*, is a Zainichi Korean studying abroad in South Korea. While the focus of the narrative is Yuhi, the story is related by her South Korean landlady who reveals all through her recollections of Yuhi. The narrative recounts Yuhi's struggle with

living in South Korea, but mostly focuses on the struggles that Yuhi has in trying to relate to Korean people in the Korean language. While one may expect Yuhi to be almost fluent in Korean since she studies Korean linguistics at the prestigious S University,<sup>3</sup> her linguistic ability is only notable in that she strives to pronounce all the sounds of Korean correctly and makes basic grammatical mistakes. As her landlady notes, “[f]or majoring in linguistics, Yuhi’s pronunciation was much too unclear, elementary grammatical mistakes stood out, but even though it bothered me it was not to be helped” (“Yuhi” *Yi Yang-ji zenshū* 413). However, what certainly draws the attention of the reader in this text is the frequent use of Korean words and script amidst the Japanese language. Upon encountering the type of code switching that occurs within this text, it brings to mind the question: has Yi Yang-ji forged a new linguistic identity in these writings, has she gone beyond the duality of Japanese and Korean to a borderland? For an answer to these questions, I will first look at one definition of a linguistic and literary borderland that the feminist scholar Gloria Anzaldúa maps in her book, *Borderlands=La Frontera*.

## **Gloria Anzaldúa and Borderlands = La Frontera**

When opening the covers of Gloria Anzaldúa’s book, the reader enters a borderland of shifting languages, changing genres, and uncertain identities. Poems lead into prose, literary theory

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<sup>3</sup> This is almost certainly a thinly veiled reference to Seoul University, the most prestigious University in South Korea.

mixes with creative writing, English blends into Spanish giving way to Spanglish, and this very slipperiness that characterizes the writing extends itself to the new consciousness that Anzaldúa espouses. While all these aspects of her prose are quite relevant to the language that Yi Yang-ji utilizes in *Yuhi*, perhaps the most salient idea in Anzaldúa's book is the idea of the borderland.

What I will discuss is specifically how Anzaldúa describes this borderland, while also focusing on the type of language that she speaks and how this measures up to the space within Yi's text and whether or not Yi's stories can truly be called a borderland using Anzaldúa's definition.

Before applying any of the theories that Anzaldúa creates to Yi's work, a bit of an explanation of Anzaldúa's theorizing is necessary. The specific land that she refers to as "el otro México" (*Borderlands=La Frontera* 1) is the area north of the border of the United States with Mexico between the Nueces and Rio Grande Rivers (90). She describes this place as,

*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country – a border culture. Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the motional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of

transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead: in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal.' (3)

It is important to note that this borderland extends well beyond the Americas and that within this borderland a new consciousness comes about. Instead of stagnating in the constant struggle of subject-object, English-Spanish, black-white, male-female and other binaries that separate and divide, the *mestiza* consciousness, the consciousness of the borderlands, is inclusive. Moreover, it is a place where the disparate meet and join to create a fifth race, the cosmic race that transcends the races of this world (78). The word that Anzaldúa uses, *mestiza*, is of particular interest in that it was a term first used to describe the people of mixed Native American and European ancestry living in the New World. Furthermore, *mestiza* comes from the verb *mestizar* meaning "Mixing the castes of the council or the copulation of individuals that do not belong to the same caste"(*Diccionario de la lengua español*).

Much like Yi and other minority writers, Anzaldúa is also confronted with the question of where she belongs. As a *chicana*, she was raised in the United States of America close to the border of Mexico in a Mexican-American family. As she explains in her essay, as a *mestiza* she

crosses borders, straddles lands. Her prose reflects this, as she code switches frequently without giving her readers the benefit of a translation of her Spanish prose.

“*Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente.* We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestisaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically *somos huérfanos* – we speak an orphan tongue”(58).

Anzaldúa also declares that, “Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate”(59).

Given this overview of Anzaldúa’s ideas then, is it possible to apply them to Zainichi writing, and if so, does the writing of Yi Yang-ji fulfill the description of a borderland as Anzaldúa imagines a borderland to be?

## **Linguistic Duality in *Yuhi***

There was no one on the street in front of the house, and there was no indication that a car or person would come around the corner of the road. I could no longer hear the roar of the taxi that had disappeared just now. The voice of the *Yuhi* within my

memory pierced my back. The voice itself that permeated the movement of my gaze manifested itself. Invited by that glance by a voice, I turned around. Yuhi was standing next to me. Looking up at the top of the steep road, I clearly recalled her profile. Just like that day 6 months ago, I stood lined up with Yuhi and looked up at the range of rocky mountains behind us...My gaze, just like that day from the past, was pulled to the surface of the rock situated at the highest place. <sup>P a u i</sup> -바위 (Rock) - I whispered, recalling Yuhi's voice and trying to mimic it. Yuhi stressed the *ui* sound trying to correctly pronounce it, but it just sounded all the more awkward. ("Yuhi" *Yuhi Nabi Taryon* 247-8)

In the passage above, the reader is exposed to the first indication of what will continue throughout this text (and in some of Yi's other works) – the sudden jarring sensation of tripping not only over a word not Japanese, but also over an entirely different writing system. Within *Yuhi* there are three distinct uses of Korean.

The first type is the use of the Japanese script *katakana* to replicate the sounds of the Korean words. Appropriately, *katakana* is used in typical Japanese writing mostly for foreign loan words. Perhaps most interesting of this type of use of Korean is that Yi effectively introduces these words into the Japanese lexicon. While the first time these common words appear they are

accompanied in parentheses by the Japanese translation, subsequent appearances have no translation.

Examples of this class of Korean words are *onni* (older sister)<sup>4</sup> *tonne* (town) *ajumoni* (aunt).

The second type of words that Yi inserts into her texts are those that are written in *katakana*, and since they only appear once or twice they are never introduced without a Japanese translation. An example of this appears when *Onni* recalls some of the last words that she and Yuhi exchange. “Yuhi’s final words were quite naturally the words of parting, オンニ、アンニヨンヒケセヨ。 I replied coolly with the short, チャル・カ (お元気で)” (261).

While these first two types are not completely alienating to the Japanese reader, the last type of language that Yi uses may be so. As mentioned above, several times throughout the text Yi utilizes the Korean script, *hangul*, with a transliteration in *katakana* superscripted over the Korean and a translation in Japanese followed in parentheses. The first instance of this is when Yuhi struggles to pronounce the Korean word ‘rock’, but perhaps the most elucidatory moment of why Yi utilizes *hangul*, and *katanaka* throughout the text is when Yuhi describes her doubts about herself and languages. While Yuhi and *Onni* are looking out over the craggy mounts of Seoul, Yuhi talks about the sounds she makes first thing in the morning. She wonders whether the *a* sound she makes when waking up can be categorized as Japanese or Korean. Yuhi likens this experience to grasping what she describes as a “staff of words.”

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<sup>4</sup> オンニ. This word first appears on page 252, but is used thereafter in reference to the narrator, otherwise known as “I”(私)

“A crutch of words...I feel that I’m trying to see whether or not I can grasp a staff of words when I wake up...Is it<sup>a</sup>아, or is it<sup>a</sup>あ. If it is 아, then I can understand how the staff goes<sup>a ya o yo</sup>아 야 어여. But, if it is あ, then the crutch continues<sup>a i u e</sup>あ、い、う、え、<sup>o</sup>お. However, there is a never a day when I can tell if it is아or あ. Always been that way. I get more confused as time goes on. I just can’t grasp that crutch.

(359-60)

This passage succinctly expresses the conundrum of someone living between lands in a linguistic sense. The selection of a sound not normally assigned to one language or the other, this yawning sound one makes when first waking up, is especially significant. This sound is an utterance that does not carry any meaning, but is quite simply the sound *a*. This allows Yi to investigate whether or not there is some biological link between ethnicity and language; is this sound Korean because Yuhi is ethnically Korean, or is this sound Japanese because Yuhi grew up speaking Japanese as her first language?

Yuhi’s response to this question of which language she speaks when yawning is reminiscent of Anzaldúa’s notion of the borderland. Instead of choosing one language over the other, and Japan over the Korean Peninsula, Yuhi is stuck between the Japanese *a* (あ)and the

Korean *a* (ㅇ). Her yawn straddles the straight separating Japan and Korea, belonging to the borders between the two.

In the last few pages of the novella, the narrator seems to lose hold of this “crutch of words” as well. The South Korean *Onni* tries saying *a* but comes to the same conclusion as Yuhi - that she cannot tell whether she is speaking Korean or Japanese. Just as Yuhi is stuck, so too is the narrator – who does not even speak Japanese. This generates a borderland of linguistic uncertainty within the text. However, this borderland is not quite the borderland of wild tongues that Anzaldúa describes. In fact, Anzaldúa specifically points out that when she has to translate her Spanish for Anglos, her tongue will not be legitimate.

Of course, when comparing Anzaldúa’s views on linguistic identity and code-switching, one must realize that she grew up speaking Chicano Spanish in a community in a part of the country with a large population of Spanish speakers. Yi Yang-ji grew up not in one of the ‘Korea towns’<sup>5</sup> of Japan, but in a semi-rural region of Japan and was not bilingual, but learned Korean as her second language. This gap of personal experience does not take away from the play of languages within her text, and even though she translates for her audience, within the boundaries of Yi’s text language calls into doubt identities that the reader may assume are firmly established. The South Korean narrator becomes stuck between languages, between the ㅇ of Korean and the あ of Japanese not

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<sup>5</sup> The most famous of which is Ikaino in Osaka. For more on Ikaino female writers, see Wender *Lamentation as History*.

knowing what sound should come next. Furthermore, the reader also plays a role in the muddying of borders. As mentioned earlier, as the story progresses translated terms are no longer translated and simply written in *katakana*, effectively entering into not only the lexicon of the reader, but perhaps the Japanese language as well. However, does Yi live up to the goals of what Anzaldúa describes should be those of borderland consciousness? Does she “break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended”(Anzaldúa 80)?

According to Catherine Ryu, this break down is precisely what happens at the end of the novella, in what Ryu terms ““a moment of the real”” (Ryu 326). Ryu is speaking of the Lacanian Real, but defines this epiphany in further detail as “a moment when the boundaries between the Korean and Japanese languages, and between Self and Other, are rendered irrelevant through the narrator’s complete identification with Yuhi” (326). While Ryu focuses on the ending of the novel as a joining of the narrator and Yuhi as well as the Korean and Japanese languages through the Lacanian Real, I prefer Anzaldúa’s term *mestizaje*. *Mestizaje* aptly describes the momentum revealed in the ultimate scene of *Yuhi* precisely because I see *Yuhi* as a commentary on the ways in which languages can be fused, and people from different places and countries can be united. With respect to the last scene of the novella, Ryu views all the issues raised by the “crutch of words” through the lens of a psychoanalytic interpretation. While neither of these viewpoints are incorrect nor

incompatible, Anzaldúa's terminology is perhaps more applicable due to the relative ease with which her ideas can be transported to the text under discussion. Anzaldúa discusses perceived racial, linguistic, and historical divides and outlines a way in which humans should see past these impediments to understanding – the same ideas that underlie the linguistic transformations and anxieties present in *Yuhi*.

While Yi does not frolic freely between languages and dialects as Anzaldúa describes and does in her text, Yi's linguistically pluralistic story certainly fuzzies the borders of South Korea and Japan, and the Korean and Japanese languages. While Yi does not transcend the duality of Japanese-Korean in her work, she certainly brings attention to the fact that such a duality exists and undercuts the myth of Japanese homogeneity.

Yuko Yamade has also written about this scene in *Yuhi*, describing it as “a representative moment of Yuhi's realization of Zainichi identity. At the same time, it is the beginning of her consciousness of her identities with feminist and postcolonial theoretical insights”(Yamade 143).

While I agree with the second part of Yamade's statement, I have problems with her application of “Zainichi identity” in this text. In what I have argued, Anzaldúa's borderland is not the site of only one marginalized group, but a space where identity and language are problematized and deconstructed. The borderland is where “those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal’”(3) dwell.

Furthermore, Yamade suggests that there is one specific type of “Zainichi identity” that is somehow common amongst all Zainichi people. When looking at the diversity of literary representations of Zainichi characters, this can hardly be called accurate. Even Yi Yang-ji has denied such a simplistic interpretation of her characters as embodying “Zainichi identity.” In an interview with the literary critic Kawamura Minato, Yi states that “I think Zainichi Koreans are a diverse bunch; I do not feel able to represent them; I can speak only for myself or my characters” (Wender 129).<sup>6</sup>

## **Narrative Gaps in *Kazukime***

Whereas previously I have discussed the hints of a borderland within Yi’s texts through her use of language that destabilizes reader’s expectations and ushers them into a linguistic borderland, Yi is also quite adept at allowing the reader to draw conclusions from what is *not* explicit in her stories. More often than not, her stories end with more loose ends and questions raised that are never answered; this is true of her novella *Kazukime* (“*Diving Maiden*”).<sup>7</sup> What I argue is that the narrative structure of *Kazukime* reveals how often minorities are unable to tell their own stories, that the majority too often holds narrative authority over the stories and voices of minorities. This is illustrated on the level of the narrative in Keiko’s realization through her meetings with her

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<sup>6</sup> This is a translation by Wender of the interview between Kawamura and Yi.

<sup>7</sup> This story first appeared in 1983 in the literary magazine, *Gunzō*

stepsister's friends and acquaintances that she can only capture snippets and bits of her sister's life and further reinforced through the lack of a first-person narrative of *kanojo*<sup>8</sup>; the reader does not even know her name let alone her experience.

Much like *Yuhi*, this story centers around two women, a Zainichi woman who has recently died, and her younger Japanese stepsister, Keiko. The story is told by flitting back and forth between the unnamed Zainichi woman only known as *kanojo* and Keiko in alternating chapters. The two women's relationship was anything but close before the death of *kanojo*. Keiko is soon to turn twenty at the onset of the novella. Years before *kanojo* stole money from the family and ran away from their house and began working in a hostess bar. The driving force behind the narrative is the revelation of how little Keiko knew about her sister as she interviews *kanojo*'s acquaintances and friends, working her way through a list of telephone numbers. This is tempered with flashbacks narrated in the third person of *kanojo*'s life, which reveals an eating disorder, instances of incestuous rape, and fear surrounding the revelation of her Zainichi identity.

Although it appears that the character of Keiko truly desires to resurrect the truth of her sister from the depths of other people's memories, this endeavor ultimately ends in disappointment and failure. The structure of the narrative has Keiko speaking with *kanojo*'s friend/ex-lover Morimoto in the fourth chapter, and a woman deeply involved in a religious cult who sheltered

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<sup>8</sup> This is simply the third-person pronoun, like she in English. From here onward, I will simply refer to this character as *kanojo*.

*kanojo* in the sixth chapter. However, these people offer Keiko no new insights into her older sister's life. The following passage that appears after Keiko's interview with Morimoto encapsulates what Keiko ultimately learns from the memories of *kanojo*'s friends. "Morimoto spoke of her older sister as Morimoto saw her and Keiko chased after the image of her sister that came through that" ("Kazukime" *Yuhi Nabi Taryon* 150). The memories and experiences of whoever narrates these tales of Keiko's sister taints these stories. Keiko cannot draw forth from Morimoto's stories the truth of her sister's life after *kanojo* ran away from home; all Keiko hears are the stories that Morimoto has remembered and chooses to tell Keiko. These reminiscences are Morimoto's memories of *kanojo*, not those of *kanojo*.

However, the reader does have access to some of *kanojo*'s experiences. The odd chapters of this novella reveal either an omniscient narrator or, as Melissa Wender suggests, "a...narration in the voice of the dead" (132). However, either way the odd chapters have access to the thoughts of *kanojo* – even the thoughts directly preceding her death by drowning in the bathtub.

She began to take off her clothes. Completely naked, she opened the door to the bathroom. The tap water splashed, overflowing from the bathtub. <Go deeper, go deeper into the water!> The low grumbling voice appeared again from the depths of her mind. As if urged on by that voice, she lowered herself into the

bath tub and submerged her head. She heard the sound of waves crashing against the rocks of Saishūtō. (“Kazukime” *Yi Yang-ji zenshū* 94)

As shown in this passage, the narrator has access to the experiences of the protagonist moments before her death. This moment of clarity directly juxtaposed with Keiko’s futile search for information about her dead sister throws the experiential gap of the two sisters into relief. The reader of the text has the ability to know of *kanojo* and her last thoughts as she steps into the bathtub to die, and yet Keiko, who interviews friends and goes so far as to memorize the phone numbers of those she interviews, is ultimately left disenchant ed, abandoning her search.

In the last chapter of the novella, Keiko’s resignation that she will never understand or comprehend the totality of her sister’s experience is depicted in the bittersweet scene that closes the novella. Keiko has presumably finished interviewing Kayo, the woman who sheltered *kanojo*, and walks towards the phone booth to call the next contact on her list.

Keiko stood up and started to cross the street. She opened the door of the phone booth. Since she had dialed the one remaining phone number countless times, before she knew it she had it memorized. At the same time that the phone on the other end started ringing, her sister’s form became a photograph that flitted across

her vision. Her sister was sinking into the bathtub. The water was splashing over the sides. The same day Keiko phoned her sister from a nearby train station. The sound she heard now was the same, and rang at the same interval. The receiver on the other end picked up. Keiko instinctively hung up. (“Kazukime” *Yi Yang-ji zenshū* 95)

With this ending, Keiko abandons her search for the truth of her sister’s life, and the only memory that persists is that of her sister’s dead body floating in the bathtub. What can we then say about how Keiko’s narrative relates to the relationship between majority identity and the experiences of the minority? This section carries the name “gap” for a specific reason; Keiko is not only trying to extend across the gaps of the two sisters’ experiences and across the gap between life and death, but also across the gap embodied in the physical textual separation of these two women’s narratives. Perhaps ironically, part of the unrelated story of *kanojo* exists just inches across the page when one chapter recounting *kanojo*’s experience ends and Keiko’s chapters begin.

Tying this textual gap back to the concept of the borderland, is not this textual gap between *kanojo* and Keiko just another permutation of the separation that exists and persists between disparate people(s)? Much like Yi’s use of language in *Yuhi*, the narrative gaps in *Kazukime* expose the reader to yet another gap between the experiences of humanity. While Yi does not quite

accomplish the construction of a borderland where peoples converge in an idealized state, Yi does expose the pain that those who exist outside borders experience. More than anything, Yi's characters are examples of *heridas abiertas* (open wounds) of which Anzaldua speaks. And while Yi does not map out a borderland in her work, she at least exposes the wounding that results from those who live between borders.

## **Section 2: Writing the Abject Body**

The body is a contentious space. Be it the body of literature, the conception of the national body, the sexed body, or the minority body; all are at times claimed, deconstructed, and destroyed in the act of writing. The body is contested not only in Western literature, but also in Japanese literature and certainly in the works of Yi Yang-ji. Throughout her works, bodies, specifically those of women, spew forth vomit, bleed, are drowned, raped and command such attention that analysis of these bodies becomes almost compulsory. However, how do readers locate these bodies against not only Western literary theory, but also against the background of post-war Japanese literary history – and do these approaches complement or negate each other? This placement of the body will be the primary issue that I address in this chapter, paying attention in the process to the questions Yi's writing poses and potentially answers by constructing bodies that are then probed, cut, raped, and destroyed.

### **Historicizing Bodies**

Before delving into the specifics of Yi's literary/textual bodies, it is necessary to look back to the types of bodies in literature and the body of literature preceding the 1980s, when Yi was most prolific. The most violent shift in the depictions of the body in Japanese literary production occurred after the Pacific War. Douglas Slaymaker identifies three reasons for the body becoming

an obsessive focus in post-war Japan:

First, this resulted, at least partly, from the sheer physicality of everyday life—the demands of bodily needs – which, for urban population in particular, was given over to securing food and finding shelter...For a second reason, the body offered antidotes to the bankruptcy of the traditional and military values which characterized the previous fifteen years of war...Third, this obsession with the body was also, in part, a response to the wartime censorship that made it extremely difficult to write of the erotic, of the political, and of wartime deprivations. (*The Body in Postwar Japanese Fiction* 1-2)

Moreover, Slaymaker also identifies one of the key axes of meaning of *nikutai* in direct opposition to *kokutai* (10). That is, the carnal body(*nikutai*) is diametrically opposed to the national body(*kokutai*) that persisted into the postwar even after its conceptualization in pre-war Japan. The opposition of *nikutai* and *kokutai* is most clearly observed in the male writers that Slaymaker discusses.<sup>9</sup> This *nikutai/kokutai* dichotomy emerges throughout Japanese literature, and appears as one of the key issues in Yi's writings. While at times the country of Japan as imagined

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<sup>9</sup> Slaymaker's book gives a thorough treatment of Sakaguchi Ango, Noma Hiroshi, and Tanimura Taijiro with mention of women's writing in two other chapters.

and propagated by the wartime militaristic government is what Yi's characters are struggling to escape, at other times the carnal bodies of her characters are as stifling and constrictive as the national polity of Japan itself.

There has been much ink spilled on the concept of *kokutai*, a word composed of two Chinese characters meaning "country" and "body." I will use Slaymaker's explanation of the *kokutai* in guiding my own interpretation of this concept. He observes that, "[t]he *kokutai* was synonymous with the government but it was also an all-pervasive system of imagery that, even if submerged, persisted in postwar political society, still resonant with mystical, spiritual overtones. This normalizing force that was (and is) the *kokutai* was established vis-à-vis and opposed to the individual body, which was severely punished for any dissent"(12). One can imagine that what was considered stifling for the everyday Japanese citizen was even more suffocating for Zainichi Koreans, to whom Japanese citizenship is not even conferred at birth. Using this configuration of *kokutai*, I will formulate the manner in which Yi breaks down the borders of the *kokutai* in her novella *Kazukime* through descriptions of Zainichi bodies, as well as showing how Zainichi bodies are acted upon to scaffold the hegemony of the mono-ethnic conception of the *kokutai*.

While it may be contentious to define Yi Yang-ji, who was active in the mid 1980s, as belonging to the 'Post-war', I imagine her as one of the artists who was writing in response to the remaining ideologies of wartime Japan. That is, a writer who fits into the third category created

by Slaymaker, one of those writers who was writing “in response to the wartime censorship that made it extremely difficult to write of the erotic, of the political, and of wartime deprivations”(2). In this sense, she easily fits in with other female writers who embrace the erotic and the carnal in their writing, such as Nakamoto Takako and Kōno Taeko. However, not only do Yi’s characters contend with being Othered as female, but also as Zainichi Korean.

Within Slaymaker’s *nikutai/kokutai* dichotomy, I also will locate the description of the bodies in Yi Yang-ji’s writing as easily lending itself to the discourse on the body in Western literary criticism, springing from Julia Kristeva’s ideas about abjection. Scholars of Japanese literature have used Kristeva’s formulation of abjection to describe not only women, but also Zainichi Koreans, with respect to their position vis-à-vis the national body (*kokutai*). I will focus on the description of Zainichi bodies in Yi’s work as an exploration on the boundaries and borders of “Japaneseness” and how the *kokutai/nikutai* dichotomy plays a role in constructing notions of nationality, belonging, and ethnicity. Where does the Zainichi body belong in Japan? In what ways do abject bodies undermine *kokutai*, and what efforts are made to subject Zainichi bodies to the authority of the hegemonic *kokutai*? In Yi Yang-ji’s *Kazukime* (“Diving Maiden”), the Zainichi character breaks down the borders of her abject body, piercing the barriers that exist between inside and outside, between the *nikutai* and the *kokutai*. More than anything she desires an exit from the entire concept of “Japan.”

*Kazukime* is a story split into two narratives. As explained previously, the novella alternatively focuses the narrative on the ethnically Japanese Keiko and her unnamed Zainichi older sister. Whereas in the first chapter I explored the split of narrative focus, I will now focus on the description of the bodies in this work, specifically the body of the unnamed Zainichi protagonist, simply known as *kanojo*.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the most salient aspect of this novella for the purposes of this investigation is the many descriptions of boundary-breaking acts both carried out *on* and *by* the female Zainichi protagonist on her body.

First I will briefly describe the most pertinent episodes of boundary-breaking enacted on the body, and then I will move to a discussion of this boundary-breaking with respect to Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection. Two episodes of boundary-breaking in the novella are of particular note; one in which the narrator describes *kanojo* forcing herself to vomit and one in which another character describes to Keiko an instance in which *kanojo* takes a large knife and cuts her chest.

The aforementioned vomiting episode appears in the third chapter of *Kazukime*. At this point in the story, it has already been established in a previous chapter focusing on Keiko that *kanojo* has died. The third chapter, told from the point of view of *kanojo*, opens at the dinner table in the period before *kanojo* has run away from home. She is having dinner with her mother, stepfather, stepsister, and two stepbrothers. Food covers the table, and *kanojo* eats in a pitched frenzy. The

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<sup>10</sup> 彼女, which roughly translates to 'she'. At other times, this character is referred to as the older sister of Keiko but her true name is never revealed.

reader will soon follow her to the bathroom as she purges what she has just eaten.

She incessantly moved her mouth, and reached her chopsticks towards the plates and side dishes lined up on the table. Getting at all the side dishes within reach in turn, she slurped soup and raked rice into her mouth. Giving the food inside her mouth only a perfunctory chew, she quickly swallowed it and reached her chopsticks out again in haste. (“Kazukime” *Yuhi Nabi Taryon* 121)

The frenzy with which *kanojo* eats is only matched by the frenzy with which she expels that which she has eaten. Within the space of a few pages, the reader is treated to graphic depictions of the protagonist violently purging her body of all the food she has eaten. The following excerpt depicts the sort of violence that the protagonist enacts upon her body.

“Excuse me,” she said, barely managing to get these words out of her mouth as she stood up and left the living room. Pressing both hands over her mouth, she rushed to the bathroom and lowered herself to the toilet. She thrust her fingers down her throat so hard that it seemed as if her stomach might be ruptured by a crashing wave. Her face became red and puffy and tears overflowed from her eyes. Why do I have to

keep doing this? These kinds of doubts passed through her mind. But she didn't want to think of that doubt or anything beyond it...With three fingers she clawed at the base of her tongue so hard that she thought all her guts might come flying out. A bitter fluid rose to the back of her throat, and while bearing the unpleasant feeling of being on the verge of coughing but not coughing, she pulled the handle. She spit out with all her strength into the middle of the running water of the toilet (124-126).

The relationship between the inside of her body and the outside of her body is particularly salient in this excerpt. *Kanojo* claws "at the base of her tongue so hard that she thought all her guts might come flying out"(126). The protagonist also thrusts "her fingers down her throat so hard that it seemed as if her stomach might be ruptured by a crashing wave"(124). There is a strong need to force what has become internalized into something externalized. Slaymaker traces how post-war male writers try "to burrow into a woman's body for release. Woman represents the place where he hopes to lose himself in order to be found. She marks the location of liberation and reconstitution. She is a metaphorical and utopian marker of space wherein the man wishes to abandon himself"(39). In much the same way, the female protagonist in *Kazukime* seeks abandon in her own body. She burrows into her throat with her finger, seeking release from the Zainichi, the female, the Other-ed body. However, unlike the male writers that Slaymaker features, instead of looking outside of their

bodies for release, *kanojo* looks inside her body for release.

The second episode that I will look at comes to light during the investigative activities of Keiko, *kanojo*'s stepsister. Keiko meets with Morimoto Ichirō, an ex-boyfriend of Keiko's stepsister. He describes in detail how *kanojo* had come to live with him after she quit her job as a hostess at a gentleman's club (*sunakku*). Moreover, he also hints at her emotional instability, recounting an episode where he finds her huddled in the bathroom crying. The conversation *kanojo* and Morimoto have afterwards describes how *kanojo* hurts herself, and perhaps some of the reasons why she does so.

Ichchan, if another earthquake as big as the Great Kanto Earthquake happens, I wonder if Koreans will be slaughtered. I wonder if they will be made to say one yen and fifty sen, ten yen and fifty sen. I wonder if they will be impaled with bamboo spears. But I think this time that kind of thing won't happen. The state of the world has changed since then. Also Koreans have just about the same pronunciation as Japanese. Hey, Ichchan, even if there will be killing, will you say I was your lover and hold me, and stay with me? No, this time there will certainly not be a massacre. Even then there might be a problem, and you will have to kill me. I will run away to escape, and crazy Japanese will run after me carrying bamboo spears and Japanese

swords. I won't get away, they will stab my back, cut my chest and I will writhe about covered in blood. Icchan, that would be painful – so incredibly painful! The other day I got a hold of the kitchen knife you were sharpening. Then my body got all excited, almost electric, and I felt exactly like I do when I'm having sex. And I felt like I understood why I hate food. It was scary, that electric feeling was tremendous. Then I tried to cut my chest and wrist with that kitchen knife. It hurt. And then the blood started to *really* gush out. I plunged the knife in pretty far, so I thought even more blood might come out and I got scared. The next time I hit my leg with a hammer. That hurt too. Hey, Icchan, do you think I might be slaughtered? And what if, if I'm not killed, does that mean I'm Japanese? But what should I do... that really hurt, all that blood coming out (141-142).

The context of this passage is quite significant; the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 destroyed much of Tokyo, causing fires that ravaged the city with its large neighborhoods filled with wooden houses. However, amidst the chaos of the earthquake, false reports of Koreans poisoning wells spread. These reports lead to the slaughter of Koreans by gangs of Japanese soldiers and civilians. One account describes Japanese soldiers dragging all Koreans from the rubble of a train and killing them as shouts of “Banzai! Traitors! Kill all Koreans!” sounded out amongst the

ranks (Weiner, 177).

Knowing the background to the statements that *kanojo* makes to her lover Morimoto may befuddle the reader. Is *kanojo* cutting herself to remember the Koreans slaughtered during the Great Kanto Earthquake? Does she feel some sort of guilt for maybe being Japanese, and she sees cutting herself and hitting herself as an act of contrition?

Recalling the *kokutai/nikutai* binary, the slaughter of Koreans during the earthquake can be read as an attempt to redefine the boundaries and borders of the Japanese nation in a time of crisis. Tokyo was burning to the ground, and Koreans were any easy scapegoat in that time of crisis. The Japanese screamed “Banzai!” as they killed the Korean “traitors.” This overt scream of nationalism, that would later be linked to zealous soldiers in World War II, serves as yet another implication that this act of killing Korean others as a way of asserting Japanese-ness and the Japanese Empire at a time when things were falling apart. In this instance, asserting the definitions of the Japanese nation goes hand in hand with controlling individual bodies that undermine that definition of Japan as a mono-ethnic nation. Korean bodies were outliers that needed to be eliminated.

## **A Fascination with Abjection**

Many critics have written much about the breakdown of the boundaries of the body as well as the ejection of the internal. Julia Kristeva describes her notion of abjection in *The Powers of Horror* as,

The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. (1-2)

As opposed to most of the encounters with the abject that Kristeva discusses, such as viewing a cadaver, or a puss-filled wound, the bodily fluids that *kanojo* encounters engender more curiosity than repulsion, and instead of skulking away from the border of subject and object, between *I* and other, *kanojo* advances towards this border. Furthermore, interest in this border leads to the breakdown of meaning. There is a push towards borders in Yi's language use in many of her works, but within *Kazukime* there is also a distinct push towards the abject, towards the breakdown of the boundaries of the body and towards "the place where meaning collapses" as Kristeva proclaims.

The breakdown of meaning and the crossing of borders through abjection are further clarified in what Kristeva writes next about the physical reaction to the abject. "It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is expelled. The border has become an object. How can I be without border?

That elsewhere that I imagine beyond the present, or that I hallucinate so that I might, in a present time, speak to you, conceive of you – it is now here, jetted, abjected, into ‘my’ world”(3-4). How, then, can the reader connect this theoretical structure of the abject to the bodily fluids in *Kazukime*?

Looking back at the passages cited, there is a distinct break down in the subject/object position that Kristeva describes, as well as a breakdown in the inside and outside of the character’s body. When one vomits, all that has been ingested and consumed is forcibly expelled from the body. The breakdown of boundary between inside and outside is particularly stressed where at one point *kanojo* feels that “all her insides might come flying out”(126). The scene in which *kanojo* divulges that she cuts herself also calls into doubt the position of the attacker and attacked. As she states, during the Great Kanto earthquake Japanese attacked and killed Koreans. However, in inflicting damage upon her body, *kanojo* assumes both the role of attacker and attacked.

Furthermore, the reader must also consider that what haunts this particular character is her ethnic Korean identity that she hides on the inside, and her exterior appearance which passes as Japanese. Unlike some marginalized groups who are more or less immediately recognizable as Others, Zainichi Koreans can pass as Japanese, and many do. For this reason, the expelled insides of *kanojo* serve as a reminder of the boundary between inside and outside that also bounds her Japanese appearance and what she thinks are her Korean insides.

Even more fascinating is the urgency with which she must get to the bathroom before her

vomit is expelled from her body. Looking at the passage again, “Pressing both hands over her mouth, she rushed to the bathroom and lowered her head to the toilet. She thrust her fingers down her throat so hard that it seemed as if her stomach might be ruptured by a crashing wave”(124).

While this urgency to harm the body is probably a result of the stresses of *kanojo*'s dysfunctional family, the result of this expulsion of vomit from the body is the breakdown of her insides and her outside. The last lines of this chapter are, “A bitter fluid became rose to the back of her throat, and while bearing the unpleasant feeling of being on the verge of coughing but not coughing, she pulled the handle. She spit out with all her strength into the middle of the running water of the toilet”(126). She flushes away those fluids which were inside her, flushes away her anxieties, and in a sense disposes of her dysfunctional family in the waters of the toilet.

In this short section, there is yet another juxtaposition of inside/outside. *Kanojo* flits back and forth between the living room and the bathroom, between being the beautiful step-daughter and spewing up her dinner in the bathroom. In the same way, when *kanojo* cuts her wrist she exposes her blood to the outside. She breaks down the barriers between inside and outside, between her blood which ties her to the Korean peninsula by Japanese law and her skin which allows her to pass as Japanese. The toilet too acts as a liminal object. Historically located outside the house, the toilet now is an outside place that exists within the home. The boundary between toilet and living space manifests itself through the use of toilet slippers. When one enters the bathroom,

the slippers protect one's feet from the filth inherent in the nature of this space. Therefore, boundaries between inside and outside break down within the toilet, and in this liminal space *kanojo* approaches the break-down of meaning. The borders of inside and outside, performed identity and received identity, between the appearance of a Japanese subject position and the (perceived) reality of minority object position are blended, muddied and expelled into the waters of the toilet.

While the vomiting scene perhaps may not be convincing by itself as an example of the abject and the breakdown of borders in this text, the scene in which *kanojo* dies serves as a guide for reading this text. This scene allows the reader access to *kanojo*'s last thoughts before she drowns herself in her apartment.

She began to take off her clothes. And when she was completely naked, she opened the door to the bathroom. The water from the faucet splashed, overflowing from the tub. <Go deeper. Go deeper into the water.> A low groan rose from the depths of her mind. As if urged on by that voice, she submerged her body into the tub. Then she submerged her head. She heard the sound of waves crashing against the surface of the rocks on Saishuto. She dove in amongst the roaring waves. The sound of the broken surface receded, and she released her body into the water. Her two legs and two arms began to grope about, feeling the water, with freedom. A

tranquility that she had not tasted since birth permeated deep into her body and under the water she swayed for all eternity (166).

This scene concludes with what appears to be *kanojo* committing suicide by submerging her head in the bathtub and drowning herself. However, this scene does not simply narrate the circumstances of her death, but also superimposes the image of *kanojo* lowering herself into the bathtub with swimming amongst the waves off the coast of Saishuto, or Chejudo, an island off the coast of South Korea. Earlier, the reader learns that *kanojo*'s biological father is from Saishuto. However, can this be described as a return to the "fatherland"? I do not think so.

In John Swain's analysis of the Zainichi-Korean playwright Chong Wishin's female characters, Swain also argues that Zainichi-Koreans are abject. Furthermore, he also identifies the sea as "the space in which they [Zainichi-Korean female characters] have complete freedom to exist on their own terms, not those dictated by some more powerful other"(372). This is apparent in the feelings that *kanojo* experiences upon her death. Rather than suffering in her death, a deep tranquility washes over her as her lungs fill up with water. Her limbs begin "to grope about, feeling the water, with freedom" and "a tranquility that she had not tasted since birth permeated deep into her body and under the water she swayed for all eternity"(166). In actuality, the sea is not a space free from claims, but rather many seas and bodies of waters act as stages on which countries can

extend their national interests beyond their land borders. One such example of a disputed sea is the Sea of Japan. South Korea prefers the term East Sea, while North Korea advocates the term East Sea of Korea. While the term used historically is the Sea of Japan, and continues to be used before either East Sea or East Sea of Korea on maps, this method of naming quashes the idea that the sea is a place of freedom. The *kokutai* extends beyond the land borders of Japan and into the sea. While the protagonist appears to be at peace in the sea, feeling freedom from the binaries that constrained her in Japan, the sea is not free from Japanese nationalist rhetoric.

Progressing from the scenes in which the protagonist breaks down the borders between inside and outside, between subject and object, this scene shows the release and escape from this corporeality. Only in death can *kanojo* escape from the binaries that pin down her body in life. As a living body, she must be located within the *kokutai*. The abjection of *kanojo*'s body breaks down the meaning of the binaries that trap *kanojo*, and she attempts to escape these binaries through the elimination of the corporeal – her death. While it may seem rather pessimistic, what the author presents to the reader as the only escape from a state of abjection is death. However, this is a transcendent death in which *kanojo* frees herself not only from the constraints of her body, but also the constraints of being ethnically Korean in Japan. She does not sway for all eternity in the bathtub in Japan, but rather dives into the sea, where she can hear the waves crashing against the rocks of her imagined homeland, itself a periphery located between the Japanese islands and the

Korean Peninsula.

### Section 3: Placing Identity

Throughout the sections preceding this one, I have considered the different types of shifting territories that Yi explores through her use of language and description of bodies. In this section I turn my attention from metaphorical landscapes to the *actual* lands and borders present in her texts – namely, the configuration of the locales Yi depicts in relation to the Korean Peninsula and the Japanese archipelago.

Throughout history, peoples, nations and states have appropriated space and places. While in many cases this may be a military or financial venture, how does a place become part of the shared cultural memory of a people? Iconic images of countries are not benign methods of attracting tourists, but rather serve to strengthen ideas of *who* composes a country and *what* is a country. As for Japan, no image is more Japanese than that of Mount Fuji. Famously depicted in *ukiyo-e* prints, cherry blossoms in full bloom foregrounding Mount Fuji has become an iconic symbol of Japan. However, as will later be investigated, the government as well as scholars and religious sects have assigned different meanings to Mount Fuji that at times exclude and estrange certain peoples living within Japan.

For Yi, Mount Fuji serves as both a place of nostalgia but also as a reminder of the subjugation of the Korean Peninsula under the Japanese Empire. Ironically enough, Yi was born in Yamanashi Prefecture in a town close to the base of Mount Fuji. Both literally and figuratively, Yi

grew up in the shadow of Mount Fuji. She explores this conundrum in her essay, “Mount Fuji.”

While traveling back to her hometown as an adult, Mount Fuji comes into view and the narrator can barely stand to look at it. Waves of memories assault her of her difficult childhood as she confronts the iconic mountain that she both cherishes and hates. In later parts of the essay, the narrator travels to South Korea and looks upon another mountain range and imagines the lives of her ancestors. As her reveries continue, this mountain range overlaps with Mount Fuji – the two are inseparable. Instead of rejecting one mountain or place and accepting the other, Yi combines and overlaps the two. Much as in her other works, the very land of Japan and Korea is not something that can be defined and delineated as distinctly “Japanese” or “Korean.” Rather, just as language and bodies are places where meaning breaks down and presumed notions of identity are called into question, the very land and places of her texts shift under the feet of the reader.

### **Defining Place in *Mount Fuji***

“Mount Fuji” (1989) comprises a scant few pages, but encompasses many of the traits of Yi’s longer fictional works. The narrator, who may or may not be Yi herself, deals with issues of identity as she travels to her hometown of Fuji-Yoshida. Yi wrote the essay in three parts that were published in consecutive issues of the monthly literary journal *Gunzo* (*Yi Yang-ji zenshu* 692). The first section deals with the journey to her hometown and her feelings of confronting not only her past,

but also Mount Fuji – a place and image that has chased and burdened her for years. The second section recounts her journey to the house where she was born, situated at the base of a mountain range that encircles Mount Fuji called Mitsutoge. Finally, the third section delves into her reflections upon her visit to her birthplace and her feelings upon “returning home” to South Korea. The pacing and structure of the essay works well with the themes I have discussed previously, and highlight the import of place in the formulation of identity for Yi Yang-ji. However, Yi never proposes a simple one-to-one formula for identity. That is, one is not necessarily Japanese by virtue of being born in Japan (as the law governing the citizenship of Resident Koreans makes abundantly clear). Instead, Yi shows how we can embrace the places of our lives and the parts of our identity that seem to be contradictions. Rather than rejecting Mount Fuji as only a symbol of Japanese colonial enterprises on the Korean Peninsula, Yi can also embrace Fuji as the place of her birth while at the same time thinking fondly on the mountainscapes of South Korea as the place of her ancestors. Yi’s association of her identity with place and lands does not fall into a simple binary, but is rather a transcendent combination of Japan and Korea.

This identification with both Japan and South Korea is most apparent in the third section of her essay. While visiting her hometown, the narrator reflects on the questions that her friends ask her about going home.

Having visited my birthplace, seen old friends, and having been able to see the house where I was born, I ended my trip and returned to Tokyo.

One of my friends asked me, ‘When is the next time you’ll come back home to Japan?’

Another friend asked me, ‘Then, when are you going back home to South Korea?’

Go home.

I go home to both South Korea and Japan.

My fixation with these words “go home” made me reflect on the sufferings from the past, and I hesitated in summing up the complex emotions I have towards Mount Fuji with simply the words love and hate.

Come back home.

Go on home.

But I already use these words ‘go home’ towards both countries without much thought whenever I respond to my friends, saying ‘I go home on the...’ (624)

The word discussed in this passage, ‘go home’ (帰る) refers specifically to returning to a place where one has a sense of belonging. Therefore, there exists an implicit identification of one’s place of belonging or home whenever one utilizes this word. Yi not only directly addresses this

issue in her essay, but also toys with other words that one might use when referring to movement associated with conceptions of place. She says that she “ended my trip and returned to Tokyo”(624). The “returned” in this passage is the verb *modoru* (戻る), and differing significantly from *kaeru*, designates the location to which one moves as simply a place one has been before. Moreover, this word also defines the destination of movement as a place one does *not* identify as home or a place of belonging.

As Yi demonstrates in her essay, in the Japanese language the very act of asking someone where they are going also becomes a question of one’s conception of home. Indeed, even if Yi were to use a neutral verb of motion with respect to South Korea or Japan, this would also designate the destination of motion as *not* something. For instance, if Yi simply stated that she was returning (*modoru*) or going (*iku*) to South Korea this would exclude South Korea from the home category in Yi’s lexicon. While this part of Yi’s essay encapsulates the power of language in identifying place as either ‘home’ or ‘not home’, Yi calls the normal conception of the verb *kaeru* into doubt. Yi uses *kaeru* not only when going home to South Korea, but also when going home to Japan. That is, she designates both Japan and South Korea as ‘home’.

This is not the only way in which Yi redefines place and spaces in her text. As the title of the essay suggests, Mount Fuji figures prominently. However, instead of drawing on the rich history of positive depictions of Mount Fuji, typified by Hokusai and his 100 views of Mount Fuji,

Yi offers a different view – a hundred and first view if you will.

Mount Fuji has a long history of artistic depiction. One of the earliest appearances is in the poetry collection *Manyōshū* thought to have been compiled between sometime around 780 (xxvi The Nippon Gakujutsu Shinōkai). Poems mentioning Mount Fuji appear several times throughout the collection, and one written by Yamabe Akahito reads,

*On a distant view of Mount Fuji.*

Ever since the heaven and earth were parted,

It has towered lofty, noble, divine,

Mount Fuji in Suruga!

When we look up to the plains of heaven,

The light of the sky-traversing sun is shaded,

The gleam of the shining moon is not seen,

White clouds dare not cross it,

And forever it snows.

We shall tell of it from mouth to mouth,

O the lofty mountain of Fuji!” (187-8 The Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai)

The editors and translators note the significance of the heaven and earth parting in this poem, referring to the creation of the world out of chaos (187). Perhaps more significant is the manner in

which Mount Fuji defies the natural order of things. The moon is not seen, the sun's rays are blocked and clouds are barred passage. Furthermore, the mountain is described as "lofty, noble, divine." Mount Fuji is a special place; natural laws have no bearing on this divine mountain. The ideas espoused in poems like this one would be used throughout history by various groups to claim this space.

As Andrew Bernstein highlights in his article "Whose Fuji? Religion, Region and State in the Fight for a National Symbol,"

"[t]he celebration of Fuji in woodblock prints and other media, often in association with Edo, the seat of political power, set the stage for the mountain's transformation into a national symbol after the Meiji Restoration. Meiji leaders worked to build an emperor-centered nation-state that could stave off and eventually compete with the Western powers. Both public and private interests integrated Fuji into this multidimensional effort to foster a national consciousness along with national institutions"(59). He later comments on how Mount Fuji was embroiled in a property dispute between the government and Sengen shrine, a Shintō shrine. (76)

Not only was Mount Fuji seen as a national symbol throughout Japan, but as the modern Japanese nation-state coalesced, competing interests such as religious and government institutions, sought to claim it as their own.

Dennis Washburn also addresses the use of Mount Fuji as metaphor in Natsume Soseki's *Sanshiro*. One of the characters in the novel, Professor Hirota, speaks of how the government takes credit for Mount Fuji, even though it is not manmade (*Translating Mount Fuji* 75). While Washburn contends that Professor Hirota is in fact opposed to "those who translate...Mount Fuji as a chauvinistic symbol," this underscores the common wisdom that Mount Fuji was seen as such by a large portion of the population in Modern Japan (75).

Clearly, Mount Fuji has stood as an object of divine and natural beauty for centuries, and as a symbol of the nation-state in Meiji and post-war Japan. Yi writes against this cultural background when she describes her confrontation with Mount Fuji in the essay.

After seventeen years, I returned to my birthplace of Fuji-Yoshida City in Yamanashi Prefecture. After I finished writing *Yuhi* and its publication was announced around October of last year, a change that even I couldn't imagine began to occur within my heart.

I want to see Mount Fuji.

I have come to think of this obsessively. Seventeen years have passed since I dropped out of high school at the age of seventeen and left my hometown. Go home, Face Mount Fuji – these are the urges I have. (621)

Yi goes on to describe how throughout her childhood, the image of Mount Fuji that was visible from her house and from her school continued to haunt her. The narrator writes,

Mount Fuji was neither beautiful nor proud and did not stir me, but I didn't hate it.

I escaped from my hometown.

And yet, Mount Fuji still follows me.

After I began to call myself Yi not Tanaka, Mount Fuji manifested itself as a symbol of Japan's cruel history towards the Korean Peninsula. And after I studied abroad in South Korea, I pushed aside Mount Fuji along with the Japanese language as just another Japanese 'thing'.

I was set on denying Mount Fuji. I cursed that shape so many times, How far will you follow me?

But it was actually most regrettable.

I couldn't permit such a feeling. I tried to deny and oppose it, but the deep unknown strength of Mount Fuji was hidden away somewhere, unyielding.

Sometimes I yearn for the beauty and the majesty of the ridgeline and I become aware of how I think back upon Mount Fuji with pride. Mount Fuji holds raging flames in

its deep center and still soars above. Just thinking that it has continued to exist like

this, my chest gets warm and I tremble with a deep emotion as if lowering my head.

(621-2)

This passage illustrates how Japanese identity, for Yi, is tied to Mount Fuji. “I pushed aside Mount Fuji along with the Japanese language as just another Japanese ‘thing’” (261). The association of Mount Fuji with the Japanese language, and its classification as “just another Japanese ‘thing’,” maps all sorts of meanings onto Mount Fuji. Not only does Yi mark Fuji as distinctly “Japanese,” but also as “a symbol of Japan’s cruel history towards the Korean Peninsula.” Yi first redefines and rejects Mount Fuji and the Japanese landscape as something removed from her, something Japanese. But soon this redefinition and rejection of Mount Fuji is subverted, or rather undercut, by Yi’s feelings of pride at the majesty of Fuji’s iconic outline. However, as the essay develops this mapping of Mount Fuji will change a few more times.

In the second part of Yi’s essay, the narrator visits the house where she was born and experiences the reality of the landscape. As she drives with a friend through the twisting streets of her hometown and finally arrives at her house, she does not quite recognize it anymore. Her childhood home that seemed so large years ago seems smaller, the landscapes seem shrunken down. The only part of her hometown that remains the same is the sense of distance between the mountains

and herself.

In section three, the narrator arrives at the realization that she calls both South Korea and Japan home. Just as she returns home to Fuji-Yoshida, so too does she return home to South Korea. Just as she looks out over the mountains of her hometown, she also looks out over the mountains of South Korea. These landscapes and experiences overlap, and double, merging into one experience, one landscape.

As Yi views the valleys and peaks of the Joenlodo Mountain Range, she reflects on her identity as belonging to both Japan and South Korea and thinks of her Korean ancestors.

While the mountains were in sight, their flowing ridgelines one after another entered my view, and I gazed upon them almost wanting to bow my head.

The views that my ancestors looked upon with awe.

Rocks, earth, trees and shrubs existing right there.

All of it was beautiful. I look at the mountains and whisper, "I feel your beauty."

And I am honestly at peace.

I love South Korea. I love Japan. I love these two countries.

I encounter myself quietly listening to that single phrase.

Why can't we face and accept things and objects as they are without preconceptions

or judgments, without putting a value or a meaning on them? Even though I have been lost for so long, I think the first step towards my enduring secret wish has come to fruition. I tried to imagine Mount Fuji with my eyes closed. The Noryeong Mountains stretched out beyond the windows. (624-5)

Of the most value to my treatment of this text is the final paragraph. In the first sentence, Yi calls into question the practice of “putting a value or a meaning” onto “things and objects” that are shaped by “preconceptions or judgments.” What the narrator addresses here is the type of rhetoric surrounding definitions of ‘home’ that are wrapped up in how one chooses to superimpose ideologies onto physical landscapes. That is, why must Mount Fuji exclusively represent either the subjugation of the Korean Peninsula and the might of the Japanese Empire or nostalgic memories of Yi’s childhood growing up at the base of the mountain? Furthermore, she is also calling into question the appropriation of the very landscape of South Korea and Japan by nationalist discourses that preclude mountains, valleys and other physical features of countries from simply existing without meaning attached to them.

The next sentence of this final paragraph shows the fruition of the narrator’s thought process. In a self-reflective moment, Yi realizes that part of the process of fulfilling her “enduring secret wish” is to reveal the fallacy of the Japan/Korea binary. As she wrote just a few sentences

earlier, she loves both South Korea and Japan. Choosing between one or the other may seem to be the dominant thought/expectation amongst people living in Japan but is simply another hurdle to resolving her own fraught feelings towards nation and identity. Furthermore, in the next line she begins to see past these borders, past these meanings tied to the physical landscapes of Japan and South Korea.

As she closes her eyes and imagines Mount Fuji, she is at the same time looking at the Noryeong Mountains. In this moment, she superimposes the two landscapes, breaking down the meanings that others have foisted upon them as well as her own impressions. In the Japanese original, this act of inscribing Mount Fuji's outline is much more obvious. Yi does not simply "imagine" Mount Fuji behind her closed eyes, but rather she "draws."<sup>11</sup> Yi further emphasizes this action of "drawing" or "delineating" by describing "[t]he Noryeong Mountains stretched out beyond the windows."<sup>12</sup> This superimposition of the two landscapes confuses the differences between them, deconstructing these places defined by the "value[s] or meaning[s]" placed upon them.

This sentiment is further expressed in the final lines of the essay. Much like in *Yuhi*, Yi closes out the essay by utilizing both Korean words transcribed into *katakana* and the Korean script

*hangul*. <sup>Komapsimnida</sup> "고맙습니다 (Thank You). Even now I whisper the same words over and over"(625).

Yi directs this mix of a Japanese and Korean "thank you" to not only the Noryeong mountains that

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11 「瞼に、富士山を描き出してみた」

12 「車窓の外には、蘆嶺山脈が広がっていた」

stretch out from the train window, but also to the Mount Fuji that she traces onto this landscape.

That is, she creates a hybrid mountain range and maps both the Korean and Japanese languages onto it, simultaneously creating a new landscape, both physical and linguistic, and destroying the old landscape and all the preconceived associations that had been ascribed to it

### **Embracing Peripheries in *Kazukime***

This selection of new or different landscapes does not only appear in “Mount Fuji.” I touched on the location of the island *Saishūtō* at the end of the previous chapter of this study, but the location of this island with respect to the positioning of spaces investigated needs rethinking.

In *Kazukime*, the final resting place of the Resident Korean protagonist is also a location not specifically designated as distinctly Korean or Japanese. In the last sentences of the seventh chapter, the protagonist drowns. As the protagonist disrobes and enters the bathtub she hears a voice.

The water from the faucet splashed, overflowing from the tub. *Go deeper, Go deeper into the water.* She recalled a low groan from the depths of her mind. As if urged on by that voice, she submerged her body into the tub. Then she submerged her head. She heard the sound of waves crashing against the surface of the rocks on Saishūtō.

She dove in amongst the roaring waves. The sound of the broken surface receded,  
and she released her body into the water. Her two legs and two arms began to grope  
about, feeling the water, with freedom. A tranquility that she had not tasted since  
birth permeated deep into her body and under the water she swayed for all eternity. (94)

While I have already discussed the use of bodily description in this passage, I would now like to focus on the location where the consciousness of the protagonist drifts as she dies. Saishūtō is a small island off the coast of South Korea that is the southernmost point of South Korea. Historically, Saishūtō (or Jeju in Korean transcription) has defined itself as somewhat distinct from the mainland. According to the local government of the island, three brothers emerged from Mt. Halla, the volcano situated at the center of the island, becoming the progenitors of the Jeju people and building the foundations of civilization (Lee). The folklore of the island itself depicts Saishūtō as a distinct civilization with a distinct Jeju people. In this way, Saishūtō is a land at the crossroads of Chinese mainland, the Korean Peninsula, and the Japanese archipelago.

This island remains just as ambiguous in the text. Yi writes Saishūtō in *katakana*, not using the Chinese characters that both the Korean and Japanese languages normally use to designate this island. This usage preserves the homophony that allows the Japanese reader to interpret this as

both the place name Saishūtō and as “the final island.”<sup>13</sup> This island appears earlier in the story in *katakana* when the young protagonist describes how her mother was abused by both of her husbands. The mother tells the young protagonist “Daddy has gone home to Saishūtō”(72). From this, the young protagonist surmises that her ancestors had lived on that island (72).

So we have a protagonist who equates the home of her ancestors with a small island on the periphery of South Korea, and whose death transports her consciousness to the waters of that island where it sways “for all eternity.” How does this have anything to do with the themes already presented?

In order to guide my reading of the idea of location and the naming of places, I look toward the work of Saussure on semiotics. Specifically, the theorization of signifier and signified lends a new dimension to the manner in which place names are represented in Yi’s texts. As Saussure’s writings indicate, the linguistic sign can be divided into the signifier (the sound pattern) and the signified (concept) which together compose the sign (Saussure 67). Toying with this relationship between signifier and signified, Yi uses a proper name written utilizing a script devoid of semantic meaning.

The few times that the island *Saishūtō* is written in the text, Yi always utilizes *katakana*. That is, instead of writing 濟州島 or 最終島, Yi represents this place as サイシュウトウ. By

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<sup>13</sup> In the text, the writer uses サイシュウトウ preserving the interplay of the homophones 濟州島(the proper name) and 最終島(the “final island”).

doing so, Yi empties the signifier of the semantic information that usually accompanies place names in Japanese. Furthermore, she creates a location within the confines of her Japanese text where, to quote Kristeva, “meaning breaks down.” The emptying of the signifier of the ideographic *kanji* normally used to designate the island of Jeju or Saishūtō also frees the spirit of the nameless protagonist in *Kazukime*. Working off these ideas, it is not hard to imagine Saishūtō as a place without a meaning placed onto it through language. This use of an empty signifier is another aspect of the enduring secret wish of the narrator in *Mount Fuji*.

Looking back at Anzaldúa’s definition of the borderland, she describes it as a place in “a constant state of transition”(3). Thinking of the progression of the lands and places that I have discussed in this section, it is productive to apply this definition of a borderland to the ways in which Yi describes lands. At first, the narrator experiences Japan and Mount Fuji as bitter reminders of past experiences, in fact, as representative of these bitter memories. Finally, at the end of *Mount Fuji* the narrator overlaps Mount Fuji, inscribing its shape into her eyelids as she gazes across the mountains outside of her train window in South Korea. In this act of inscription, she blurs and ultimately destroys the original meanings that these two places carry. While *Mount Fuji* ends as the narrator thanks both of these locations in both Japanese and Korean, I see a natural link between this essay and *Kazukime*. In death, the nameless protagonist of *Kazukime* reaches a place without meaning where she can sway “for all eternity” in tranquility.

The progression of these lands shows the type of “constant state of transition” that Anzaldúa puts forth. Furthermore, the idealized “final island” that Yi writes of figures as the ultimate goal where meaning is transcended at a place situated beyond the mortal, beyond the define-able and beyond both Japan and Korea.

However, while the situation of physical places in these writings in the end appear to transcend the constraining notion that *Zainichi* Koreans must choose between the Korean Peninsula or Japan, on the whole Yi’s writings are not as optimistic and do not quite hold up to the transcendence of borders that Anzaldúa espouses in her essay. Keep in mind that the nameless protagonist has to die to access the peripheral “homeland” of her father. In the essay *Mount Fuji*, the narrator thanks both the overlapped landscapes of Japan and South Korea – but only “the first step” of her “enduring secret wish has come to fruition”(625). While the “final island” exists beyond the shores of both Japan and Korea and promises tranquility, and while the narrator of *Mount Fuji* has begun her journey to finding her secret wish, the two texts I have studied only expose the problems of the way in which place and identity are conceived. While they point in the direction of Anzaldúan borderlands, they have yet to arrive.

## Conclusion

Throughout this study, I have investigated the progression of the ways in which Yi has deconstructed, blurred and muddied language, bodies and lands in her works. Starting with the language use seen in *Yuhi*, Yi toyed with ideas about nation and language. What language do we speak in when we first wake up? Can sounds that have no semantic meaning belong to only one language, or rather do they exist in the gap between languages, in the gaps between sounds? At the conclusion of *Yuhi*, more questions were raised than answered, and Yi exposes linguistic uncertainty to both the reader as well as *Yuhi*'s South Korean landlady. Such is the language of the borderlands.

In the second chapter, I explored the way in which meaning breaks down through Kristeva's explication of abjection. While the protagonist in *Kazukime* certainly probes her body, exposing blood, and spewing vomit, even in death she is trapped between borders, between Japan and Korea near Saishūtō. Even though the character feels she is floating in tranquility, even the sea is not an escape from the far-reaching hand of the Japanese state. In the third and final chapter, the very land was shown to be a disputed and contentious space. The essay, "Mount Fuji," offers perhaps the most optimistic ending of the works discussed in this study. Ultimately the narrator is overcome by feelings of gratitude towards both the land of her ancestors (Korea) and the land of her birth (Japan). However, the question remains whether or not Yi constructs the idealized borderland

of Anzaldúa. While Yi certainly blurs, muddies, and deconstructs preconceived notions of “Japaneseness” and “Koreanness,” this seems to be only the first step away from the many problems facing the Zainichi community in Japan. As she writes in “Mount Fuji,” “Even though I have been lost for so long, I think the first step towards my enduring secret wish has come to fruition” (625). This is only the first step towards an ideal where people are not judged by preconceived notions of identity or state, but it is still a step, still an invitation to the borderlands.

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