



PROJECT MUSE®

Sleuth Cities: East L.A., Seoul, and Military Mysteries in Martin Limón's Slicky Boys and The Wandering Ghost

Joo Ok Kim

Journal of Asian American Studies, Volume 17, Number 2, June 2014, pp. 199-228 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: [10.1353/jaas.2014.0015](https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2014.0015)



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/547412>



SLEUTH CITIES

East L.A., Seoul, and Military Mysteries in Martin Limón's Slicky Boys and The Wandering Ghost

joo ok **kim**

So I'd lowered myself to a common thief. A Korean one, at that. Most GI's would swear that they'd never do such a thing. But most GI's bubbled over with racial hatred and an inflated sense of pride that came from being part of a country that had been on the top of the heap for over a century. Such things didn't bother me. I was from East L.A. I'd been fighting my way up from the bottom all my life.

—Martin Limón, *Slicky Boys*

The fellow who can write you a vivid and colorful prose simply won't be bothered with the coolie labor of breaking down unbreakable alibis.

—Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder"

WHAT RAYMOND CHANDLER CHARACTERIZES IN HIS 1950 essay "The Simple Art of Murder" as "the coolie labor" of writing detective stories neatly frames the hierarchies of "racial hatred and an inflated sense of pride" in Martin Limón's novels *Slicky Boys* (1997) and *The Wandering Ghost* (2007).¹ The date of publication for Chandler's 1950 essay also marks the official beginning of the Korean War, a war that was critical for shaping the urban spaces of East L.A. and the U.S. military districts of Itaewon and Tongdunchon. Popular contemporary novelist Martin Limón's "Sergeants Sueño & Bascom" mystery series features George Sueño as the Chicano military detective from East L.A. The early novels in the series take place during the 1970s in Itaewon, a place known for

the well-established U.S. Army base with military origins in the Korean War. Given the patterns of Korean immigration and the flows of labor and capital between L.A. and South Korea, especially in the decades following the Korean War, much scholarship has focused on the Korean diaspora in Los Angeles. In the wake of the 1992 L.A. riots, the number of academic texts centering Korean Americans as subjects increased, some of the texts explicitly addressing the racialized economic structures that accounted for Korean and Chicano/a experiences of the uprisings. There is very little scholarship surrounding the body of cultural texts, however, which engage and account for the Chicano/a presence in the Korean Peninsula. This article focuses on Limón's portrayals of an impoverished East L.A. as a gritty California counterpart to the desperate, sexually violent, and racist military districts in Itaewon and Tongduchon. Indeed, Limón's military police procedural genre functions as an aperture into white supremacy, gendered exploitation, militarization, and expansion of U.S. frontiers from California across the Pacific to Korea. Through an examination of Sueño's gendered, raced, and classed relationship to notions of "home," "domesticity," and what Chandler calls "coolie labor" in Limón's *Slicky Boys* and *The Wandering Ghost*, I contend that such categories operate on the engrained circuits of empire, while the novels potentially disrupt the naturalization of those notions.²

Chandler's formulation of the "coolie labor" of detective stories, in conjunction with *Slicky Boys*'s focus on the figure of the "houseboy," urges rethinking about domesticity, gender, race, and labor. Furthermore, the realities of sexual violence at the analytical intersections of race and empire haunt Sueño in *The Wandering Ghost*, during his investigation of sex work and rape in East L.A. and Tongduchon. That Limón's series begins with *Jade Lady Burning* in 1992, the year of the L.A. uprisings, and continues through a string of global U.S. police actions and wars marks his series as one that mediates the extension of U.S. military power and that registers the concomitant eruptions of racially and sexually oppressive institutions. Limón's series functions in part as a litany of misdeeds and criminal behavior perpetrated by the U.S. military, and also as an open index of the stubborn white supremacy, both temporal and spatial, of the United States. Limón's portrayals of racism, xenophobia, and sexual

exploitation in East L.A. and South Korea trace transnational circuits of racial formation, and at the same time locate Sueño as an unwitting guard of heteronormative masculinity.

“Sleuth Cities” brings together two fields that may initially appear unrelated—Korean War/Korean diaspora studies and Chicana/o studies—by situating bodies of scholarship that focus on U.S. militarization and empire in order to expose revealing intersections of racialization, militarization, Cold War contradictions, and U.S. empire building. Within this context, Limón’s series serves as an ambivalent site of cultural production for critiques of white supremacy and U.S. empire, but also for the maintenance of heteronormative masculinity and the myth of the American dream. The interventions of this article, which include bridging transnational Asian studies and Chicana/o studies, build a foundation for studies of what I call the literary Asian-Latino Pacific.³ As a framework, the Asian-Latino Pacific illuminates processes of transnational racialization that reveal the complex workings of U.S. white supremacy, both in its long history of crafting antiblackness and in its negotiations with the differential racialization of indigenous, Latina/o, and Asian peoples. Continuing attention to this subject illuminates the possibilities for cross-disciplinary conversations that bridge Asian American studies, Chicana/o studies, and U.S. ethnic studies, and enables a closer examination of important transnational relationships, especially to the possibilities of comparative studies to interrogate the doings of white supremacy in an era of colorblindness.⁴ Building on the spatial proximities to racialized empire generated by Limón’s series, the framework of the literary Asian-Latino Pacific may accommodate some of the protean narratives and understudied experiences emerging from the racialized legacies of the Korean War.

THEORIZING TRANSPACIFIC SPACE IN DETECTIVE AND HARD-BOILED FICTION

Limón’s *Slicky Boys* and *The Wandering Ghost* take place in the militarized spaces of 1970s Itaewon, Tongduchon, and East L.A., an important transnational frame that reveals legacies of the Korean War and the shifting dynamics of industrial capitalism. In addition to shaping the military and infrastructure development of Los Angeles, the Korean War forms the prehistory for Sueño’s deployment to Korea in the exact moment that

corporate disinvestment and deindustrialization empty the city of jobs. The deindustrialization of Los Angeles severely impacted nonwhite labor forces that relied on manufacturing and processing work, while ironically “deindustrialization in the advanced industrial countries occurred in tandem with industrialization in the newly industrialized economies” such as South Korea.⁵ The accelerating avenues of transpacific neoliberal exploitation contribute to a circuit of migration for Sueño, whose more apparent reason for migration is the occupying U.S. military presence in South Korea.

Because of Southern California’s development as a production center of the military-industrial complex, many newly enlisted Chicanos and Latinos received training in San Diego before crossing the Pacific to Korea. Furthermore, the same military defense production plants that sustained the economy of Southern Californian cities such as San Diego and Los Angeles demanded labor forces that were often racially segregated, mirroring the segregated military units during the Korean War and also during 1970s Itaewon and Tongduchon. In addition, while cultural and literary studies have focused on Los Angeles as a transnational noir city, Limón’s mystery series disrupts such readings by rejecting the representations of “hordes” of perilous Asians and other racialized groups infiltrating Los Angeles that frequently appear in many dominant versions of the noir tradition. Instead, Limón’s work depicts a sympathetic Chicano narrator’s memories and experiences in negotiating racial and class oppression in East L.A., which prove to be critical for solving military crimes in Itaewon and Tongduchon.⁶ Itaewon and Tongduchon during the 1970s also figure as “seedy” districts for military prostitution and transactional sex in the transnational cultural imagination, a representation that Limón embeds into Agent Sueño’s narratives. It is precisely at this intersection that I read Limón’s mystery series as one that binds together East L.A., Itaewon, and Tongduchon as interconnected sites of war, poverty, gender, and racial exploitation that inspire a critique of state power.

Framing Los Angeles and Seoul as layered spaces in Martin Limón’s military mystery series requires some historical detective work that brushes against accustomed understandings of militarization in both places. This section briefly introduces a theoretical discussion of the

overlapping spatial temporalities of Los Angeles and Seoul. The military development timelines of both cities provide the critical geographical framework for understanding Limón's mystery series. Los Angeles burst into economic development during World War II, when the city's residents became involved in the defense industry and military preparation for war personnel. Josh Sides states in *L.A. City Limits* that "fueled by the technological imperatives of World War II, the Korean War, and later Vietnam, the [aerospace] industry enjoyed phenomenal government subsidies."⁷⁷ Roderick Ferguson suggests the insidious correlation between the expanded economic opportunities for nonwhite workers in the defense industry and U.S. empire in East Asia: "The state used that labor as the motor for establishing hegemonic authority in Asia through war and economic imperialism."⁷⁸ In light of the multipronged impact of wartime development in Los Angeles, urban historian Norman Klein shows that Los Angeles did not randomly and serendipitously become a privileged site of development, but that the city was instead aggressively promoted by city and county officials. According to Klein, "Competition to attract government defense money was fierce during the war. L.A. became the center for military industries serving the Pacific, and many of these remained afterward, as part of the huge postwar defense industry here."⁷⁹ As much as the city was a center for military industries, Los Angeles was a microcosm for wartime contradictions, from segregated defense plants to explicit white supremacist hostility and violence against nonwhite people. For the city's Chicanos/as, participation in the booming war industries, which represented a militarized state's main avenue of access, changed little of prevailing white supremacist social attitudes. Indeed, following the war, the county of Los Angeles attempted to disrupt Chicano/a communities forcefully, for instance by situating prisons in Chicana/o neighborhoods.

The military language during this period performed a supple function; it was used to describe war strategies as well as city development plans. Furthermore, the development and use of militarized language to justify the unsettling of Chicano/a communities for urban renewal closely mirrors the larger U.S. public's support for devastating military actions in Korea. While the growth of Los Angeles in this era was fueled by military development and some of the city's residents unevenly benefited from

the growth, Seoul (along with the rest of the Korean Peninsula) suffered brutal attacks by the U.S. military on the people and the land during the Korean War. Grace Cho states that “between 1950 and 1953, U.S. bombers dumped as much as 600,000 tons of napalm over the Korean peninsula; in Churchill’s words, it was ‘splashed’ over the landscape. This was more napalm than had been used against Japan in World War II and more than would later be dropped over Vietnam.”¹⁰ The U.S. military “promiscuously” strafed living and working spaces on the Korean Peninsula, making it impossible for civilians to remain stationary, thereby adding to the ever-increasing refugee population on the move from random air attacks.¹¹ The movements of refugees putatively necessitated further aerial bombing, as the U.S. military made no effort to distinguish civilians from North Korean, Chinese, and South Korean troops. The discourse of American exceptionalism and white supremacy pardoned U.S. military attacks on civilians, justifying the military’s actions as necessary in order to protect defenseless South Koreans against communist North Korean “gooks.”

Significantly, Raúl Homero Villa and Norman Klein document the military language used in urban planning discourses in Los Angeles, in particular freeway development in the 1950s: “Urban-planning campaigns ‘took on the spirit of wartime propaganda, particularly aerial bombings,’ suggesting the urgent need for scorched-earth policies to raze the ‘infected’ central-city neighborhoods.”¹² As scholars such as Sides and Avila note, the people “infecting” these neighborhoods in Los Angeles were Black, Mexican, and Chicano/a residents, and urban planners used the language of “blight,” “rot,” and “decay” to justify urban renewal programs in nonwhite neighborhoods underdeveloped or impoverished by earlier instances of racist city planning. It is no surprise, then, that the military language used by planners carries a direct correlation to the concurrent Korean War. The rationale for using military language in city planning discourses is brought into forceful relief when we consider the popular support for napalm and popular opinion against communism in the wider U.S. public: “The scorched-earth policy and the widespread use of napalm were unquestioned, even celebrated. The American war propaganda of the time unabashedly and affectionately termed its new weapon ‘flaming death’ when captioning aerial photographs of napalm bombings. ‘Burn ’em out, cook ’em, fry ’em.’”¹³

It is important to make some distinctions here; the horrific use of napalm in Pacific wars is not tantamount to the aggressive discourse and practices of razing neighborhoods for freeways. Yet these phenomena share deep ideological roots. The common dehumanizing language of infection and decay, of burning and frying “gooks,” occurs at the same time for the purpose of spreading exceptionalist progress and modernity—for bringing modern development to Los Angeles, accompanied by accruing profits for the powerful, and for delivering “freedom” from communism to Korea. Acuña documents explicit connections between the ceasefire of the U.S. war in Korea and the impacts for residents of East L.A.: “The Korean War hostilities ended in July and an economic recession beset the nation. As is the case during all recessions, economic crisis surfaced a latent nativism. The press and the public always find scapegoats for the system’s structural defects. The daily Los Angeles press announced the ‘wetback’ invasion, easily making scapegoats of undocumented workers.”¹⁴ The treatment of workers in East L.A. exposed the hollowness of the first hot war of the Cold War, waged in the names of freedom and democracy.

Though narratives of gentrification have long occupied a central place in scholarship, especially about large U.S. cities and their urban renewal programs, there is little mainstream discussion about the development and gentrification of the spaces around military bases, which emerge through gendered discourse. Jin-kyung Lee states that “one of the ways in which modernization was made concrete was through the ongoing and fast-paced urbanization. The constantly changing landscape of the old city, Seoul, included the continual construction of buildings, the ever-expanding network of the mass transit system, and the growing ubiquity of squatters and their slums.”¹⁵ Lee’s statement applies at an even more intensified scale in the case of military bases in the 1970s, as the center of the bases gleam with new buildings, constructed as emblems of modernity, while the impoverished periphery is inhabited by people who work in the camp towns that serve the bases. Lee’s feminist scholarship about laborers, particularly sex workers, models deep commitments to critiquing structures of power that grid the life chances of workers in militarized places like Itaewon. In addition, “the men in charge of these camptowns—the local bar owners, the wealthy landowners, and even national legislators—extend geopolitical domination into the back alleys

of places like Itaewon and commodify women as products for rent.”¹⁶ It is unsurprising, then, that Limón constructs Itaewon and Tongduchon as perfect settings for his hard-boiled novels, with multiple entanglements of power-shaping spaces of devastating desperation, human disposability, and notions of criminality.

The concept of the criminal is central to the detective fiction genre in the Western literary tradition, which dates to the early nineteenth century, and follows established conventions of questioning, interrogating, and observing in attempts to gain empirical knowledge and truth, often resulting in neat resolutions and a restoration of the social order. Marxist theorist Ernest Mandel states that “the detective story is the realm of the happy ending. The criminal is always caught. Justice is always done. Crime never pays. Bourgeois legality, bourgeois values, bourgeois society, always triumph in the end. It is soothing, socially integrating literature, despite its concern with crime, violence and murder.”¹⁷ Mainstream detective fiction manufactures anxieties in attempts to reconcile readers with the current social order, often functioning to restore faith in justice systems, since the perpetrators are always found out. Indeed, without the criminals there would be very few satisfying ways of ensuring the uprightness of the social system as it exists. For scholars of cultural studies and racial history in the United States, detective fiction can function to individualize violence and criminality, to the effect of foreclosing any critiques of the system. Yet the genre also builds in a certain degree of self-conscious discovery, at least for the narrator, as scholars of detective fiction argue that “in a diverse array of mystery novels . . . time and again the detective also unravels a mystery about him- or herself. The novel is as much his or her story as it is the story of the crime.”¹⁸ Even so, readers’ perspectives are often confined to the narrators’ ideologically normative positions, including latent racism and more blatant heteropatriarchy, and readers may find themselves reaching beyond those limits in order to formulate social and political critiques.

Hard-boiled crime fiction, recognized as the U.S. response to more conventional bourgeois detective fiction emerging from Britain, can be traced to the years following World War I. According to Mandel, “Raymond Chandler actually theorized the turn, and dated it as beginning with

[Dashiell] Hammett's work [in the 1920s]. It was an abrupt break with the gentility of the classical detective story. . . . Social corruption, especially among the rich, now moves into the centre of the plots."¹⁹ Moving away from exclusively individualized and private motives for crimes, the hard-boiled genre often focuses specifically on the corruption of the powerful, featuring detectives or investigators that work for a living rather than solve mysteries as a hobby. Although grittier, more explicitly violent and sexual, less respectful of authority, and more attentive to working-class perspectives, the hard-boiled genre still carries over conventions from traditional detective fiction, often modifying them and creating different possibilities for critique. Maureen Reddy argues that given the initially white and masculine narrative perspectives of hard-boiled stories, writers that narrate from positions of racial and sexual marginality necessarily transform the genre with "other" ideological frameworks.²⁰ The genre's built-in features of critiquing various forms of modern authority—economic, legal, and social, among others—allow for critical modifications, in part due to its ideologically white male-dominated emergence and the challenges to that inheritance.

Raymond Chandler's "The Simple Art of Murder" (1950), while solidifying the conventions of the U.S. hard-boiled detective story in the decades prior to 1950, conforms wholeheartedly to Limón's portrayal of 1970s Itaewon: "The realist in murder writes of a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels . . . where no man can walk down a dark street in safety because law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practicing." As Chandler suggests above, and as Limón explicitly portrays in his novels, the real "criminals" in Itaewon are not, for instance, the workers in brothels, but the "men who made their money out of brothels," who are deeply complicit in the U.S. military structure. Following the conventions of the hard-boiled genre, Chandler flips the power structure not exactly on its head, but destabilizes it enough to create spaces of interrogation and critique.

The hard-boiled genre in turn influenced U.S. film noir in the 1940s and 1950s, significant here because of the role of film noir in representing

the “blight” of Los Angeles, and also because of Chandler’s use of racial stereotypes in his novels. Indeed, Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo state in *Noir Anxiety* that “in an important sense, film noir is born out of the hard-boiled racism of Chandler’s style.”²¹ U.S. film noir also captured and constructed images of racialized blight, as “Los Angeles noir deploys Orientalist themes and imagery to reinforce its racialization of white criminality.”²² On the subject of noir fiction, Klein remarks in *The History of Forgetting*, his study of erasure and memory on Los Angeles, “As much as I love *noir*, and find it exotically compelling, it is nevertheless often utterly false in its visions of the poor, of the non-white in particular. It is essentially a mythos about white male panic . . . the hard-boiled story cannot help but operate, very fundamentally, as white males building a social imaginary.”²³ Yet Chester Himes’s works of noir, such as *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, absolutely interrupt what Klein describes as the process of “white males building a social imaginary,” and instead show the possibilities for critical interrogations of white supremacy within the genre. Furthermore, Klein’s admission of the “exotically compelling” nature of noir and the hard-boiled story recall the military recruiting slogan during World War II, “Join the Army, See the World.” The “world” in the slogan is meant to be imagined from the perspective of a normative U.S. subject, who could be deployed to “exotic,” often feminized, locales such as Korea and Japan.

Such “exoticism,” whether in the “Far East” or U.S. urban spaces, functions as part of the appeal of the detective genre, according to Patricia Linton: “In the contemporary detective genre, novels often develop an intriguing complexity by drawing on culturally specific detail. . . . Indeed, the reader’s appetite for . . . exotic settings, rare expertise, cultural difference—is part of the appeal of the genre. . . . Thus, part of the satisfaction detective fiction provides is the (sense of) entree into another world.”²⁴ But for people of color, immigrants, women, and those who identify as queer—the people against whom the normative U.S. subject is defined—the “culturally specific detail,” the “exotic settings,” the “cultural difference,” and “another world” in mainstream detective fiction are stereotypical snapshots, prematurely saturated ways of “knowing” the world.

Over the past few decades, however, detective fiction by people of color and women, as well as scholarship on multiethnic and queer detective fiction, has flourished. Ralph Rodriguez addresses the critical possibili-

ties of the genre for Chicana/o writers, arguing that given the feeling of alienation many Chicanas/os confront in the United States, the voice of the alienated hero or detective functions as an ideal mediator. Regarding the potential of the genre, Rodriguez states, “Aztlán offered a place of being for the alienated Chicana/o other. By contrast, the Chicana/o detective novel offers the alienated hero not a mythic homeland, but a discursive space from which to examine the world and its shaping discourses.”²⁵ In Limón’s novels, George Sueño—the alienated Chicano hero of the series—delivers for readers both a seedy urban place and a layered discursive space that position his insights about transnational racism, critiques of the military power structure, and memories of East L.A.

“KOREANS MIGHT BE INSCRUTABLE TO MOST OF THE WORLD, BUT THEY AREN’T INSCRUTABLE TO ME”: THE CHICANO DETECTIVE IN *SLICKY BOYS*

The militarized developments in Itaewon and East L.A. and their operative ideologies become even more entwined in Limón’s 1997 novel *Slicky Boys*. *Slicky Boys*, like all of Limón’s military mysteries, chronicles the adventures of Sergeant George Sueño and his partner Ernie Bascom as they solve various military cases in their capacity as detectives for the Eighth Army, based in Itaewon during the 1970s. Their encounters often entail brushes with South Korean civilians, state entities, gangsters, and “business girls,” a term used as a euphemism for sex workers. Rarely do they solve their crimes and mysteries the “official” way, instead opting to work with shamans, “business girls,” and black market racketeers, especially since the perpetrators of the crimes are often military officials or personnel, complicit in or directly committing violent crimes against civilians and lower-ranking military personnel. Sueño and Bascom also operate at odds with various U.S. military agencies since the criminals are often representatives of the U.S. military. The detectives’ investigations usually showcase Sueño’s desire to understand, protect, and accurately represent South Korean society against the bald apathy of the U.S. military. While Sueño attempts to function as a voice and champion for South Korean civilians, he is nonetheless situated as a representative of the putatively protective and benevolent U.S. military, his position rendered even more complex for his status as a racialized U.S. soldier.

In this section, I analyze Limón's *Slicky Boys*, first focusing on the transnational circuits of racism that layer the "home" spaces of East L.A. and Itaewon, and then exploring critiques of gender, labor, domesticity, and "coolie labor" through the character of Mr. Yim, a "houseboy." The novel follows Sueño and Bascom as they try to find out who is committing a series of gruesome murders, starting with the murder of a UN guard. Their initial instinct is to blame the murders on a highly organized network of black market gangs called the "slicky boys." The "slicky boys" have roots in the Korean War, when people struggled to live by pilfering food and other necessities from the U.S. military. As they discover with the help of the gang leader, named Herbalist So, the murderer is in fact Lieutenant Commander Bo Shipton, a white Navy Seal who went AWOL after he was rebuffed by a Korean woman, the daughter of a Korean official, who planned to marry him. The twists include the Korean official covering up murders in order to protect his family's name and Shipton's hatred of Mexicans, which he developed growing up on his family's Texas ranch. Though not always as explicit as Shipton's racism, interrogations of various degrees of white supremacy critically underpin the novel's development.

Martin Limón's military mystery series embeds Sueño's childhood and adolescent memories of East L.A. into Itaewon in the 1970s. In doing so, not only do the novels urge the examination of the militarized development of both spaces, they also militate against dominant conceptions of race and frame a different racialized lens in operation in South Korea, compared to the United States. In *Slicky Boys*, Sueño notes that "Mexican or Anglo, we were all just Americans in the eyes of a Korean policeman. When I was growing up in Southern California that attitude would've come in handy if more people had shared it. Saved me a few lumps."²⁶ By using both East L.A. and Itaewon as frameworks for Sueño's observations on race and racisms, the novel raises important questions about the optics informing citizenship, national identification, and the transnational circuit of racialization.

Sueño considers the benefits, however problematic, of a "colorblind" Southern California that overlooks race in favor of a U.S. national identification. Describing himself, Sueño states, "I'm dark, tall, big, Mexican, and used to being stared at."²⁷ Indeed, Sueño's consideration privileges a

U.S. nationalism closely linked with citizenship, and his self-description captures the nuanced history of racism against Chicanas/os in the United States, that Chicana/o “symbolic status within the United States nevertheless remains in question as long as the nation continues to conflate citizenship with having an Anglo appearance.”²⁸ Sueño’s self-description belies his consideration of a “colorblind” Southern California, instead pointing to how his U.S. citizenship is already called into question when he is “being stared at.”²⁹ As in the World War II slogan “Join the Army, See the World,” when Sueño joins the army, he becomes the “world” that both Americans and Koreans “stare at.” Sueño’s reflections on U.S. racism in relation to South Korean state power suggest the possibility of challenges to U.S. national understandings of “race,” and potentially shift the emphasis to problems of nationality and citizenship.

Awkwardly, Sueño ventriloquizes lessons of the American dream in one of the few moments in the novel where he discusses his East L.A. childhood at length. Sueño’s father takes off to Mexico after Sueño is born, and from that point Sueño is moved from foster home to foster home: “I was brought up by the County of Los Angeles—in foster homes. It was a rough existence but I learned a lot about people, how to read them, how to hide when it was time to hide, and how to wait them out.”³⁰ Here he reverses and controls the dominant optic directing the American dream, “reading” and “hiding” his way into a space within that dominant dream. Sueño’s name, translated into English as “dream,” reflects his multiple, often untranslatable, and contradictory relationships with the ideologies undergirding the American dream.³¹

Recounting his difficult childhood, Sueño asks, “What was I grateful for? For having a real life, for having money coming in—not much, but enough—and for having a job to do. I was an investigator and I wore suits and did important work. A status I never thought I’d reach when I was a kid in East L.A.”³² Unsurprisingly, realizing the American dream in the United States does not appear to be a possibility, given the structural lack of opportunity permeating Sueño’s life in East L.A. Rather, Sueño’s “real life” unfolds in the camp towns of South Korea. Here Sueño serves as an ill-formed template of the rugged individual, wearing empire’s suits and doing important work he never thought possible as “a kid in East L.A.”

That Sueño needs to be in the American neocolony in order to achieve this dream speaks volumes about the possibilities really open to him. As Jorge Mariscal puts it, “Sustained by a constant flow of new immigrants and relatively limited career opportunities for the native-born working class of color, Latin@ military service has been a primary vehicle for assimilation, access to full rights of citizenship, and the construction of ‘American’ identities premised on traditional patriotism.”³³ Sueño participates in one of the readily available options for young people of color and working-class people from impoverished neighborhoods—the American military, which in this case sends him to Korea in order to serve at the empire’s Pacific edge.

Yet it is Sueño’s childhood in East L.A. that allows him access to less stereotypically saturated ways of understanding Koreans and forms the prehistory for being a detective in Itaewon, and feeling at “home” in Itaewon: “Koreans might be inscrutable to most of the world, but they aren’t inscrutable to me. I grew up in East L.A. speaking two languages, living in two worlds, the Anglo and the Mexican. . . . So learning a third language, Korean, hadn’t intimidated me. . . . And living in the Korean world hadn’t bothered me either. Their culture was just another puzzle to unravel, like so many that I’d faced when the County of Los Angeles moved me from home to home.”³⁴ The implications of Sueño’s use of Korean in his military tour in Korea include not only his willingness to learn the language as U.S. military personnel, but also chart an important postcolonial map, one that records the linguistic topography of the Cold War: the shifting parameters of Korea’s “third world” status are reflected in Sueño’s learning of a “third language.” Thus Sueño’s understanding of Korea and Koreans is contingent on spatialized knowledges of “worlds,” “cultures,” and “homes” that are Anglo, Mexican, and Korean.

Sueño’s usage of “home” registers in multiple decibels of empire, domesticity, nation, and gender. Sueño, at least within the county of Los Angeles, has no place to claim as “home,” though his spatial identifications are firmly with East L.A. This sense of ambivalent belonging points also to a critique of the U.S. annexation of Southern California from Mexico, and the ever-stringent surveillance of the U.S.-Mexico border, in the “two worlds” of East L.A. Ralph Rodriguez argues that “this feeling of being on the outside, being the alienated other, thematizes the hero of the detec-

tive novel and resonates especially well with Chicanas/os, who though subjects of the nation are often represented as alien to it.”³⁵ Sueño’s presence in Korea shifts the framework of this argument, considering Sueño’s position as a racialized U.S. subject who travels abroad on the circuits of militarization. When Sueño does leave East L.A., “living in the Korean world” becomes his job, his new homeland, in the neoimperial military outpost of Itaewon. Sueño’s claim that “living in the Korean world hadn’t bothered [him],” that Korean culture was “just another puzzle to unravel,” suggests an epistemological orientation he braids together from his lived entanglements with power: his foster home experiences, his racialized brushes with alienation and belonging in East L.A., and his participation in the U.S. military.

In the context of Korea, “world,” “culture,” and “home” also carry multiple valences in the decades following the Korean War, especially when we consider the border at the thirty-eighth parallel dividing the peninsula into putatively separate worlds and cultures, fragmenting the Korean “homeland.” In addition to the partition, the physical destruction of the peninsula in the war created millions of homeless refugees. Furthermore, Sueño’s statement urges consideration of the militarized borders both between the United States and Mexico, and between North and South Korea. Sueño’s discussion of the simultaneity of “two worlds” shows the constructed nature of space and reveals the sedimentation of imperial histories near the U.S.-Mexico border, significantly remapped in Korea during the 1970s when the peninsula is negotiating with the aftermaths of Japanese colonialism, the presence of U.S. military occupation, and the South Korean state’s engagements with the Vietnam War.³⁶ Sueño’s reflections on “home” denaturalize these national borders, revealing the artificiality of national spaces. Finally, in the contemporary context, Sueño’s presence in the military in Korea evokes the double threat of communism and nuclear war that North Korea represents in the mainstream imagination, noxiously articulated as belonging to a putative “axis of evil” by George W. Bush. In this way Sueño’s use of “home” also connects to Homeland Security, in both the imagined threat embodied by the near presence of Mexico and the looming presence of North Korea.

While Homeland Security ostensibly directs attention to a stable and vulnerable U.S. domestic space, another border that Sueño's use of "home" disrupts is the one marking the gendered confines of domesticity. Especially in consideration of the GI exploitation of domestic labor performed by houseboys in *Slicky Boys*, Sueño's articulations of South Korea as "home" is useful for rethinking the archive of the term "domestic." As Rosemary Marangoly George states in *Burning Down the House*, "The close association between women and the domestic arena is of such long standing that it is sometimes perceived as a natural affinity that draws the two together."³⁷ Because of the naturalized association between "domestic" and feminized labor, it is particularly important to examine narratives about "houseboys" in order to critique ongoing ideologies of domesticity, gender, and race, and their connections to military discourses. Dating back at least to World War II, "native" boys and men made their living by performing domestic work for foreign military personnel around the globe. Similar to the Filipino, Japanese, and Korean workers serving these functions in the United States, especially in California, the male workers, regardless of age, were called "houseboys." The very name links engrained understandings of domesticity in "house" to an implicitly undeveloped masculinity in "boy," a designation stripped of an ostensibly threatening masculinity and made instrumental by the military in Korea and middle- and upper-class families in the United States.

In the novel, Sueño interviews a houseboy named Mr. Yim for their investigation, which allows for Mr. Yim's voice, albeit through the patronizing, Orientalist filter of Sueño as an agent of the U.S. military. Sueño describes Mr. Yim's life as "an endless chain of shining shoes, washing laundry, ironing fatigues, and putting up with GI bullshit,"³⁸ despite the fact that Mr. Yim's "English was well pronounced. Hardly an accent. I knew he'd never gone to high school—probably not even middle school—or he wouldn't be working here. He'd picked it up from the GI's over the years. Intelligence radiated from his calm face. When I first arrived in Korea, I wondered why men such as this would settle for low positions. I learned later that after the Korean War, having work of any kind was a great accomplishment."³⁹ Sueño's description of Mr. Yim suggests tightly bound, normative understandings of domestic labor as private, unpaid

labor performed dutifully by women. Limón's discussion of houseboys in *Slicky Boys* is valuable for rethinking the archive of the term "domestic," especially in relationship to transnational gendered and racialized divisions of labor. According to George, "What is truly remarkable are the ways in which dominant domestic ideologies and practices have become globally hegemonic as a result of colonial and capitalist expansion and modernization, even as they have entered into contestation with other local forms of domesticity."⁴⁰

Sueño's narrative of Mr. Yim shows the "globally hegemonic" manifestation of domestic ideologies in several ways. First, Sueño's questioning of "why men such as this would settle for low positions" belies his assumptions about domestic labor as both gendered and classed. That is, women might perform the labor, but not men. Moreover, Sueño perceives something innately "low" and demeaning about the work itself, rather than the uneven logics of power that enable the devaluation of both the labor and the laborers. Second, "colonial and capitalist expansion and modernization"⁴¹ carve routes that allow U.S. GIs to maintain masculinist approaches to strictly policed military regulations such as "shining shoes, washing laundry, ironing fatigues,"⁴² by exploiting the work of houseboys. That Korean men in the U.S.-occupied militarized space of Itaewon perform this intimate labor functions to uphold the masculinity of GIs against the feminized bodies of Asian males, which has a long-standing tradition in the United States, and is used as justification for exercising various repressive mechanisms.

The devaluation of gendered labor operates multiply in the racialized labor of Korean men in Itaewon, as the "globally hegemonic" U.S. domestic ideologies entered "into contestation with other local forms of domesticity,"⁴³ especially given that within the patriarchal society of South Korea, domestic work was considered to be demeaning for men. Sueño attempts to construct the agency of workers like Mr. Yim to be dignified, as Mr. Yim is described as "lucid, calm, smart, sober," and laboring to value his work, though "houseboys were so low on the social scale that nobody took their testimony seriously."⁴⁴ "Domesticity" then reveals normative associations of feminized labor, a distinct private/home sphere, and unpaid or low-paying work, but Limón's depiction of Mr. Yim potentially reframes

masculinist power structures, questions the layering of private/public spheres, and critiques devalued notions of domestic work. Similarly, the word “houseboy” appears to affirm U.S. masculinity and generosity and denigrate the status of “native” men, but Mr. Yim registers a particular affect that shows him to be “lucid, calm, smart, [and] sober,” in comparison to “GI bullshit.”⁴⁵ Thus “houseboy,” a “positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture,” accrues possibility in Mr. Yim’s performance to dislodge dominant discourses, to gain traction to critique, and to create accessibility to different ways of understanding the “unthinkable.”⁴⁶

During the Korean War, and in its aftermath, the work that people could find was often devalued forms of labor which U.S. military personnel exploited, allured by the availability of the ostensible “coolie labor” they perceived through the lens of Orientalist ideology. Recalling Raymond Chandler’s insistence on describing certain elements of writing detective stories as “coolie labor,” I assert the historical and material significance of “coolie labor” in the figure of Mr. Yim as a houseboy, but also in Chandler’s formulation of the masculine writers of detective fiction. Chandler states in “The Simple Art of Murder” that “the fellow who can write you a vivid and colorful prose simply won’t be bothered with the coolie labor of breaking down unbreakable alibis.” In addition to Chandler’s formulation of detective fiction as the gendered discursive territory of “fellows,” he also imagines a rigid binary of “vivid and colorful prose” and “the coolie labor of breaking down unbreakable alibis,” in which the flamboyance of vivid writing is incommensurate with the mechanical, unimaginative work of narrative consistency. Sueño’s interview with Mr. Yim belies Sueño’s own participation in Chandler’s notion of “coolie labor,” as a racialized, diasporic subject of U.S. empire. Chandler’s use of “coolie labor” in reference to detective fiction is significant in light of his definitions of the hard-boiled genre and the ways in which, as I note earlier, his visions of Orientalism saturated the blighted cinema-scapes of Los Angeles in film noir. Of further significance are the ways the figure of the “coolie” has historically been appropriated for anti-Asian trade unionism in California: as “mere tool, the Asiatic lacks independent agency. The figure’s docile qualities are the effect of the physiological rigors imposed by cheapening wages as well as

the training of industrial discipline.”⁴⁷ In this light, Chandler’s racialization of detective fiction writers (and by extension, detective protagonists such as Sueño) through their “coolie labor” draws on the legacy of the racialized and gendered body of the figure of the Asiatic “coolie,” who functions as a “docile” “tool” with no “independent agency,” who with mechanical “discipline” performs the work of dismantling watertight alibis in detective fiction. Thus Sueño’s own racialized status as diasporic U.S. subject is twinned with the “coolie labor” of military detective work he conducts. As such, Sueño hovers in the liminal space manufactured by fantasies of the “American dream,” as a racialized U.S. subject in the Pacific circuit of empire performing the jaggedly doubled “coolie labor” putatively limited to characters like Mr. Yim.

While I argue that the figure of the “houseboy” indexes critical histories of militarism, empire, domesticity, and gender, I also want to exercise caution, so as not to elide the everyday laboring experiences of girls and women who do the same domestic work under often more rigid and exploitative constraints. In other words, I suggest that centering the “unthinkable” figure of the “houseboy” should not exceptionalize the domestic labor of boys and men, and that tracing this figure should not selectively valorize their labor. Rather, my aim is to make “thinkable” a critique of how feminized labor and domestic work itself is demeaned, and described as “low” labor, which continually justifies ongoing exploitation of the people performing this work. The next section investigates the limitations imposed by the raced hierarchies constructed by a white liberal feminist framework in the gendered exploitation of labor, and in sexual violence against women. Furthermore, I investigate Sueño’s maintenance of heteronormative masculinity licensed by the differentially racialized bodies of women in *The Wandering Ghost*.

TRANSNATIONAL CIRCUITS OF RACE, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, AND MILITARISM IN THE WANDERING GHOST

Like *Slickly Boys*, Limón’s novel *The Wandering Ghost* (2007) depicts gender and sexuality at the intersections of race and military occupation. In this section, I analyze Limón’s representations of torrid exercises of power against the novel’s backdrops of East L.A. and Korea’s camp towns. *The*

Wandering Ghost follows Sueño and his partner Bascom to Camp Casey, a U.S. military camp approximately forty miles north of Seoul and located near the DMZ, established at the Korean War ceasefire in 1953. While Itaewon was installed in a former Japanese military base after the Japanese defeat in 1945, Camp Casey was not constructed until 1952. Camp Casey is located near several other U.S. military camps close to the small city of Tongduchon. The main mystery in *The Wandering Ghost* is the disappearance of Jill Matthewson, “the first woman MP ever assigned to the 2nd Division Military Police,” with rumors and suspicions of sexual harassment and rape guiding Sueño and Bascom’s search for Matthewson.⁴⁸ As with Limón’s other novels in the series, Sueño and Bascom rely on the assistance of sex workers, shamans, and reluctant lower-ranking U.S. military personnel in order to solve the multiple crimes surrounding Matthewson’s disappearance: the U.S. military’s attempts to cover up the GI manslaughter of a schoolgirl named Chon Un-suk, several mysterious deaths, and black marketeering by high-ranking U.S. officials. As in the other novels from the series, and following hard-boiled fiction conventions, Sueño states, “I worked for the little guy. We worked for the private or the sergeant or the Korean civilian who’d been stepped on by criminals or by the system.”⁴⁹ However, I suggest that Sueño’s own masculinist identity comes to depend upon the differentially feminized bodies of racialized women.

While *Slicky Boys* upholds Mr. Yim as a dignified houseboy, *The Wandering Ghost* alludes to other exploitative factors that undergird gendered labor, such as different forms of sex work and the complex racial hierarchies within domestic labor performed by women. The same patriarchal ideology that constructs domestic work as demeaning to men, thereby devaluing the labor of “houseboys,” allows for the gendered exploitation by the U.S. military of girls and women who work to support their family members. In *The Wandering Ghost*, Pak Tong-i, an entertainment booking agent, explains why one of his workers, Kim Yong-ai, might have owed money: “‘Stripper always owe money,’ he said. ‘That’s why they get into business. Maybe their mom owe money, maybe their daddy owe money, maybe they have younger brother who want to go to school. Very expensive, how you say, hakbi?’”⁵⁰

“Hakbi” translates into English as “tuition,” and the phenomenon of young women participating in the sex work industry in order to support

their male siblings' tuitions is well documented. Jin-kyung Lee discusses this phenomenon taking place in the 1960s and 1970s in South Korea:

Under the new economic policies of the Park Chung Hee regime . . . young girls and women who had previously contributed to family farming and domestic work were now compelled to leave for the urban centers. There, they would be able to make more contributions to family finances, by supporting themselves and sending the rest of their income home to help with their male siblings' education. The traditional undervaluing of daughters placed the burden of helping to educate the male heirs of the family on the shoulders of these young women.⁵¹

Young women engaging in sex work in order to support their brothers' tuitions emerges as one of the violent trademarks of Korean and Korean diaspora camptown literature. In one South Korean camptown short story, Kang Sok-kyong's "Days and Dreams," a sex worker named Ae-ja states, "And I've heard that some of the girls are squeezed for money by their own families. If their families can't pity them, how can they take money the girls make by having their crotches ripped open and then use it for someone's tuition?"⁵² Furthermore, Elaine Kim states that "during the long decades of military rule in South Korea, beginning with the 1961 military coup d'état and extending to the end of the 1970s. . . . I heard many stories of women tricked or lured into working as prostitutes and 'service girls' to support families in the countryside or to send younger brothers through school."⁵³ Korean economic policies implemented by U.S.-supported military dictatorship form one condition of possibility for gendered labor exploitation, a condition that Sueño layers with his memories of gendered exploitation in East L.A.

In *The Wandering Ghost*, Pak Tong-i's statement that female sex workers labor in order to pay for their male siblings' tuitions unevenly foreshadows the multiple instances of gendered labor and violence in the novel. In one case, Sueño's memories of a Chicana friend who becomes a sex worker in East L.A. coincide with his investigations in South Korea, spinning a complex web of transnational racialized gendered exploitation. These memories haunt Sueño, and they partially explain his motivations to save the "little guys." He recalls, "One of my classmates, Vivian Matatoros, started hanging out with gang members. Everything about her changed . . . she slid down from the classes that held the top students

to the lowest rung of academic hell.”⁵⁴ Sueño remembers cornering Vivian, “forc[ing] her to talk,” and she tells him that she started hanging out with gang members because nobody was paying attention to her. When Sueño offers to help her, she “looked at [him] with contempt. ‘Where were you when I needed you?’”⁵⁵ Eventually, he hears about Vivian “working a corner off Whittier Boulevard.”⁵⁶ Sueño states that his friends “wanted me to go look—and laugh and shout names at her—but I couldn’t do it. I remembered the Vivian who used to help me with my algebra. The girl who’d shared a sandwich with me when I had no lunch. That Vivian was the only Vivian I wanted to remember. The only Vivian I could bear to remember.”⁵⁷

Sueño constructs Vivian Matatoros exclusively as an object of rescue, whom he then chooses to remember only as a top student. In “forc[ing] her to talk,”⁵⁸ not only does he take credit for attempting to save Vivian, but also by selectively remembering her, his response indicates that he individualizes the entire responsibility for her circumstance. For Sueño, Vivian does not own her actions in either case, and his characterization of Vivian forecloses ways of understanding her own mode of navigation through various structures differentially charged with power. Instead, Sueño can regard his relationship with Vivian only in terms of benevolent regret that ultimately bolsters his own sense of primacy within her transformation.

In contrast to the representations of Kim Yong-ai and Vivian Matatoros, both of whom Limón generally portrays as victims, he represents Jill Matthewson exercising more agency, though the portrayal is narrated through Sueño’s objectifying gaze. As a white female U.S. military police officer, Jill Matthewson’s relationship to the nonwhite women in the novel is fraught with racial tension. Many of the Korean women in the novel either remain victims, even though the military cases depend on their cooperation and participation, or need to be “saved,” like Vivian Matatoros. Limón represents Matthewson as a white liberal feminist, and I argue that this representation comes at the expense of portraying Korean sex workers as voiceless and object. In one instance, Limón creates a troubling portrayal of Korean sex workers idolizing Matthewson as a savior figure. In the excerpt below, as Matthewson walks through the streets of Camp Casey, the “business girls” spot her leading Sueño and Ernie to their destination:

They'd seen uniformed MPs before, plenty of them, but they'd never seen one shaped like this. . . . Even beneath her bulky fatigues one could see that her waist was small and her ample bosom had to be firmly held in place. . . . They elbowed one another, pointed, and stared in awe as Jill Matthewson waded through them . . . it was clear to me that these young, put-upon, Korean business girls, had just seen something akin to a miracle. A woman in a position of power. A woman leading men. A woman wearing a pistol and a uniform, set on her own self-determined goal, not letting anything stand in her way.⁵⁹

Limón shapes a tangled narrative of gender, race, and power in the passage above. Sueño's attention to Jill Matthewson's body is one of the many times he directs an objectifying male gaze at women in all of the novels. What is exceptional in this instance, however, is that he displaces his gaze to the "business girls," so that they see Matthewson's normatively feminized body, "even beneath her bulky fatigues."⁶⁰ Given that Sueño uses very similar language to describe women—especially sex workers—throughout the series, what "awes" the "business girls" is not Matthewson's body, and not just the MP uniform, but what in Sueño's perspective is the unlikely combination of the two. Furthermore, Limón uses the imagery of a tall, blonde woman "wading" through a group of Korean women who regard her as a "miracle," painting Matthewson as the feminist savior that Sueño failed to become, at least for Vivian Matatoros. More troubling, by portraying Matthewson and the "business girls" in this way, Limón bypasses both official and unrecorded legacies of feminists throughout Korean history, those who militated against Japanese colonialism and those who continue to agitate against U.S. neocolonialism. Finally, even if Matthewson functions as a sort of role model for the "business girls" who see her, it is in her role as an imperial soldier, as part of the occupying force in South Korea. The only kind of feminist power that is legible to Sueño in this instance is that of militarized masculine authority, "a woman wearing a pistol and a uniform."⁶¹

Limón's attempts to construct a visibly feminist figure in Jill Matthewson are directly related to her hypersexualized construction in the novel. He addresses early in the novel not just the issue of sexual harassment in the military, but also the speculation "that someone had sexually assaulted her, murdered her, and then disposed of her body."⁶² A higher-ranking of-

ficer, Lieutenant Colonel Alcott, attempts to throw suspicion to “a Korean” based on the normative hyperlegibility of Jill Matthewson’s sexuality: “‘A woman on the street,’ Alcott persisted. ‘An American woman. Tall. Blonde. A much more tempting target than a Korean would have seen before.’ ‘So you think her creamy white flesh drove some Korean mad with lust,’ Ernie said. Colonel Alcott nodded vigorously. ‘And why not?’”⁶³ Alcott invokes the white supremacist formula historically used in the United States, especially during the nineteenth century, in order to criminalize Black and other nonwhite men and subordinate women—the myth of a nonwhite male rapist.⁶⁴ Alcott’s glib remark, “‘And why not,’” indicates the saturation of the U.S. military structure in misogyny, and casts suspicion back to his character. Rhetorically, both Alcott and Bascom attempt to empty Korean women of personhood when they use “a Korean” and “some Korean” interchangeably to mean “Korean man,” remarkable in a sentence in which the actual rapist—Alcott—is trying to displace blame for his crime of raping Matthewson.

The novel ends with Matthewson “pulverizing” and starting to “gouge out . . . eyeballs” of another military officer who had previously raped her and is attempting to rape her again. Readers discover that a primary catalyst for Jill Matthewson’s feminist consciousness is her desire for revenge against the three military officers who raped her.⁶⁵ However, despite the discourse surrounding the sexual harassment and sexual assault of female military personnel throughout the novel, Sueño initially misreads the evidence documenting Matthewson’s rape in a photograph that clearly shows three men, “all naked. All working on some poor young woman who’d been bound and gagged. The lighting was dim. I studied the woman. I expected her to be the stripper, Jill’s friend, Kim Yong-ai. But then I realized that she wasn’t Kim. She wasn’t even Korean. She was American. And then I realized who she was. The impetus for Jill Matthewson’s rage became clear to me.”⁶⁶

Sueño’s misreading of the photograph is significant for several reasons. First, his matter-of-fact expectation that the victim would be a Korean woman speaks volumes about the embedded reality of sexual assault against South Korean women in U.S. military bases during the 1970s. The revelation that “she wasn’t even Korean” appears to be a surprise, implicitly revealing that sexualized violence against Korean women by

U.S. military personnel is a mundane occurrence. Second, the expression of Matthewson's rage suggests that although sexualized violence against Korean women is condoned, it would be punished if the violence were directed at a white American woman. Third, in this novel Matthewson appears to be the only woman with agency to pursue her rapists, despite the fact that Sueño frequently encounters many Korean women attempting to resist harassment and assault by military personnel. Given such representations, the novels frame the U.S. military as a misogynist institution, a rendering delivered through the objectifying complicity of the narrator. I suggest that past and present charges of sexual assault in the U.S. military are not exceptional deviances from some putatively noble and honorable norm, but rather a sexualized instantiation of the gendered and racialized violence that structures such an institution.

Furthermore, as in *Slickly Boys*, Sueño again conflates "American" with "white," despite the fact that he represents a tensely multiracial U.S. military throughout the series. That he chooses to employ the word "American" rather than "white" reiterates the presence of the occupying force in Korea, a presence that fights back rather than remains abject, as Sueño suggests a "Korean" might. Jill Matthewson was "bound and gagged" but ultimately breaks free to seek revenge, aided by both her whiteness and her American citizenship, posing a very sharp contrast to most of the South Korean "business girls" Limón portrays, who figuratively remain "bound and gagged." Indeed, throughout the novel, Matthewson speaks for Kim Yong-ai, whom Matthewson rescued from her financial debt to booking agent Pak Tong-i, and was unable to rescue from her rape by higher-ranking military officials: "Sullenly, Kim Yong-ai followed [Matthewson] but rather than speaking . . . she kept her eyes averted, ducked through the small entrance to the cement-floored kitchen, and shut the door behind her."⁶⁷ Rather than leaving Kim Yong-ai to refuse to speak with Sueño and Bascom, which would enable Kim Yong-ai to choose her silence, Limón instead shows Matthewson speaking on her behalf, "She's not comfortable with men."⁶⁸ Although Limón represents Matthewson as a white liberal feminist, certainly a bold move for an author who began the series with Sueño wholeheartedly enjoying the services of "business girls," I argue that this representation comes at the cost of portraying Korean sex workers as voiceless and abject.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Jin-kyung Lee, Lisa Lowe, Luis Martin-Cabrera, and Shelley Streeby for their incisive engagement with this article. Min Hyoung Song and the two anonymous readers also shared thorough, precise feedback that strengthened the essay. Martin Limón offered details in our conversations that enriched my thinking about his novels. Thea Quiray Tagle, Josen Masangkay Diaz, Gabriela Cázares, Laura Reizman, and Chris Perreira read early drafts of this article, and I thank them for their brilliant care.

In memory of Rosemary Marangoly George.

Notes

1. Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder," in *Later Novels and Other Writings: Raymond Chandler* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 980; Martin Limón, *Slicky Boys* (New York: Bantam, 1997); Martin Limón, *The Wandering Ghost* (New York: Soho Crime, 2007).
2. I situate Chandler's reference to "coolie labor" within the U.S. history of importing, managing, and manipulating racialized labor. As Erika Lee notes in *At America's Gates*, in the 1870s and 1880s in California "[b]laming Chinese workers for low wages and the scarcity of jobs, anti-Chinese leaders first charged that the Chinese were imported under servile conditions as 'coolies' and were engaged in a new system of slavery that degraded American labor" (26). Erica Lee, *At America's Gates* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Yet, as Colleen Lye has noted in *America's Asia*, the figure of the unfree "coolie" in the United States has been instrumental for consolidating the idea of the modern Western individual in U.S. literature, despite the legal status of Chinese workers as "free" labor. Colleen Lye, *America's Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). In the context of transatlantic Chinese labor, Lisa Lowe asserts in "The Intimacies of Four Continents" that "[i]n 1807, as Britain moved from mercantilist plantation production toward an expanded international trade in diversified manufactured goods, the Chinese coolie appears in colonial and parliamentary papers as a *figure* for this world division of labor, a new racial mode of managing and dividing labor groups through the liberal promise of *freedom* that would commence with the end of slavery" (195). Lisa Lowe, "The Intimacies of Four Continents," in *Haunted By Empire*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 195. Thus the idea of "coolie labor" in Chandler's formation contains the grains of history of the "coolie's" significance in demarcating the shifting boundaries of "free" and "unfree."
3. Historian Raul Morin has initiated conversations about Mexican American participation in World War II and the Korean War. Scholars such as Jorge Mariscal have offered critical cultural histories of the participation of Chi-

canos/as in the wars of U.S. empire and their aftermaths. Literature is one important site of cultural memory in this regard: Literary scholar Ramón Saldivar argues for the necessity of examining the works of Américo Paredes, for instance, in relation to his wartime experiences in East Asia. In the field of transnational Asian studies, on the other hand, sociologist Nadia Kim explores the importation of racist hierarchies to Korea through encounters with the U.S. military; Grace Cho traces the haunting of U.S. imperial aggression in Korea to the Korean diaspora in the United States through the figure of the GI bride; literary scholar Jin-kyung Lee analyzes the proletarianization of gendered labor in conjunction with South Korea's economic and military relationship to the United States; and literary scholar Jodi Kim examines how Asian American cultural productions critically reframe understandings of the Cold War.

4. I suggest these conversations are especially significant given the neoliberal exploitation made possible by South Korea's status as what Jin-kyung Lee calls in *Service Economies* "a subimperial immigrant nation" (214). Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
5. John Lie, *Han Unbound* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 86.
6. Limón's first novels were published by Bantam Books, but are now exclusively published and reprinted by Soho Press. Limón's first novel, *Jade Lady Burning*, was a *New York Times* Notable Book in 1992. Limón's next novel, *Slicky Boys*, was reviewed in the *New York Times* on May 25, 1997. Limón's *G.I. Bones* was one of National Public Radio's best books in 2009, and NPR excerpted the novel on their website on December 11, 2009. Limón's series is critically acclaimed, and receives attention in mainstream media. His most recent book in the series, titled *The Joy Brigade*, was published in hardcover in July 2012.
7. Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 81.
8. Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 71.
9. Norman Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (London: Verso, 1997), 42.
10. Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 71.
11. *Ibid.*, 69.
12. Norman Klein, quoted in Villa, 71. Raúl Homero Villa, *Barrio Logos* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 71.
13. *Ibid.*, 71.
14. Rodolfo Acuña, *A Community Under Siege* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center, UCLA, 1984), 40.
15. Lee, *Service Economies*, 101.

16. Mark Gillem, *America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 51.
17. Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 47–48.
18. Ralph Rodriguez, *Brown Gumshoes* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 8.
19. Mandel, *Delightful Murder*, 35.
20. Maureen Reddy, *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 9.
21. Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo, *Noir Anxiety* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 46.
22. Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 86.
23. Klein, *History of Forgetting*, 79.
24. Patricia Linton, “The Detective Novel as a Resistant Text,” in *Multicultural Detective Fiction: Murder from the “Other” Side*, ed. Adrienne Johnson Gosselin (New York: Garland, 1999), 18.
25. Rodriguez, *Brown Gumshoes*, 7.
26. Limón, *Slicky Boys*, 16. According to sociologist Nadia Kim in *Imperial Citizens*, “Koreans who immigrated to the United States in the 1970s and early 1980s knew very little about Latinos in general or about Mexican and Central Americans in Los Angeles in particular,” which intersects with Sueño’s encounter with the Korean policeman. However, the limitations of such racial conflation are called into sharp relief when we consider various forms of antiblack racism in Korea and in the United States. In other words, while the Korean policeman might not know or care to distinguish “Mexican or Anglo,” the situation would be different if Sueño were racialized as Black. Nadia Kim, *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to LA* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 129.
27. *Ibid.*, 193.
28. Mary Pat Brady, *Extinct Lands, Temporal Geographies: Chicana Literature and the Urgency of Space* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 78.
29. Limón, *Slicky Boys*, 193.
30. *Ibid.*, 22.
31. “The frequency of a term used in the Korean media, ‘the Korean Dream,’ referring to the desire of migrant workers from overseas to come to South Korea for work, seems at first puzzling. Echoing the more globally famous term ‘the American Dream,’ the South Korean counterpart implies a certain desire for equation between Korea and America as a destination for immigrants and migrants, as the term ‘the Korean Dream’ recognizes Korea’s new place in the global hierarchy as a semiperipheral metropole” (Lee, *Service Economies*, 214).
32. Limón, *Slicky Boys*, 22.
33. Jorge Mariscal, “Latin@s in the U.S. Military,” in *Inside the Latin@ Experience: A Latin@ Studies Reader*, ed. Norma Cantú and Maria Fránquiz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 37.

34. Limón, *Slicky Boys*, 25.
35. Rodríguez, *Brown Gumshoes*, 6.
36. In the series, the Vietnam War is staged as the “hot war” informing Ernie Bascom’s more extreme views, and is a significant occasion to historicize and examine the role of the war in U.S.-occupied South Korea.
37. Rosemary Marangoly George, ed., *Burning Down the House: Recycling Domesticity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 4–5.
38. Limón, *Slicky Boys*, 59.
39. *Ibid.*, 57.
40. Rosemary George, “Domestic,” in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 88–92.
41. *Ibid.*, 92.
42. Limón, *Slicky Boys*, 59.
43. George, “Domestic,” 92.
44. Limón, *Slicky Boys*, 59.
45. *Ibid.*, 59.
46. Here, I extend José Esteban Muñoz’s work on “disidentification”: “Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture” (31). José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 31.
47. Lye, *America’s Asia*, 66.
48. Martin Limón, *The Wandering Ghost* (New York: Soho Crime, 2007), 2.
49. *Ibid.*, 4.
50. *Ibid.*, 62.
51. Lee, *Service Economies*, 84–85.
52. Sök-kyöng Kang, Chi-wön Kim, Chöng-hüi O, Bruce Fulton, and Ju-Chan Fulton, *Words of Farewell: Stories by Korean Women Writers* (Seattle, WA: Seal, 1989), 17.
53. Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi, *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 109.
54. Limón, *The Wandering Ghost*, 104.
55. *Ibid.*, 105.
56. *Ibid.*, 105.
57. *Ibid.*, 105.
58. *Ibid.*, 105.
59. *Ibid.*, 226.
60. *Ibid.*, 226.

61. Ibid., 226.
62. Ibid., 3.
63. Ibid., 12.
64. Such racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence turns on the axis of white supremacist acts of disciplining Black bodies throughout U.S. history, and I suggest here the transpacific transference of the myth, in this case locating Korean men as insidious threats to white women.
65. Ibid., 309.
66. Ibid., 309.
67. Ibid., 230.
68. Ibid., 230.