

What Was Zainichi Literature?

Temporalities of Silence and the Incoherent Future in Yū Miri's Hachigatsu no hate

“When I die, Zainichi literature will be over.” So declared Kim Sōkpōm at a recent symposium in his honor. A bold statement, to be sure, but as discussed at the outset of this book, Kim is by no means the first or only member of the Zainichi literary establishment to predict that the genre may soon be a thing of the past. Indeed, the twenty-first century has been marked by anxiety over the future of Zainichi literature, as well as the unavoidable questions about the past and present that accompany such anxieties. It is not as if the prophets of Zainichi literature’s doom expect the population of Koreans in Japan to disappear or stop writing altogether. Rather, it is the erosion of certain boundaries—temporal and otherwise—that has raised doubts as to the future *coherence* of Zainichi literature as a literature. As I will argue here, the question invariably becomes, was there ever such a coherence in the first place?

Of course, the context for this anxiety is assimilation. As noted in previous chapters, even by the 1960s and 1970s, only a minority of Koreans in Japan attended ethnic schools or spoke Korean at home. The use of Japanese names and marriage to Japanese spouses were also on the rise, as was naturalization, despite vocal disapproval of the latter from Zainichi intellectual leaders. These trends have only intensified in the decades since. Passing is so commonplace that Yi Yangji’s story of discovering her Korean heritage in adulthood is not an uncommon one.¹ Without questioning the validity of the choices younger Koreans in Japan are making, it is easy enough to imagine that these trends toward assimilation, which mirror the explicit goals of the Japanese colonial government, are painful to witness for the older Koreans who lived through that very regime.

Meanwhile, the stated political project of the Zainichi (nationalist) literature nurtured by this older generation—the reunification of the Korean peninsula as

the condition of possibility for eventual return—has become all but irrelevant in the present day. Reunification may still be a worthy enterprise, but return as such is for all intents and purposes already impossible, as Yi so eloquently and tragically demonstrated. The Korea of the past can never be made whole, if it ever actually existed as imagined. In the aftermath of this temporal shift, with “Korea” now an object of nostalgia rather than aspiration, it is no wonder that an affect of impending loss should permeate the discourse on Zainichi literature.

This is not to imply universal agreement that the loss is to be mourned. Other (typically younger) voices argue that “Zainichi,” with its latent implication that Koreans in Japan are somehow out of place, is no longer or never was a viable framework for Koreans who wish to remain in Japan. As previously noted, Kaneshiro Kazuki is among the most vocal literary figures to push for alternative modes of Zainichi identification, such as “Korean-Japanese,” an embrace of ethnic minority status. Recognizing the limitations of this position, however, Kaneshiro has also expressed a desire to be read not as a writer belonging to any particularized category, longing for the day when such frameworks are superseded by his recognition as a universalized “human” writer.² This sentiment is by no means unique among Zainichi writers, or indeed among writers of minority, postcolonial, diasporic, or otherwise particularized literatures the world over. There is no shortage of critics arguing that such frameworks, with all the representational burdens and restrictions they impose on subjects within their spheres (as this book has discussed in detail), are best moved beyond once their political purposes have been served. The real question concerning the future of Koreans in Japan and their literary production is: whose political ends are actually served by Zainichi literature or even identity? Or, to put it another way, insofar as Zainichi ever existed, what was it founded upon, and should that foundation be preserved or dismantled as we turn toward the future?

These tensions came to a head with the 2006 publication of the eighteen-volume anthology “Zainichi” *bungaku zenshū* (*Collected Works of “Zainichi” Literature*).³ Notably missing were the works of the aforementioned Kaneshiro Kazuki and another of the last scions of Zainichi literature: Yū Miri. Since winning the Akutagawa Prize in 1996—third in a line of Zainichi writers to do so, after Ri Kaisei in 1971 and Yi Yangji in 1989⁴—Yū has achieved enormous success as a writer and public intellectual in the Japanese mainstream. As such, the Zainichi establishment seems keen to claim her as one of their own, while also being critical of her failure to toe the party line in terms of the subject matter and political disposition of her work. Though she is hardly the first to be put in this position by Zainichi critics—as we have seen in the last two chapters with Kin Kakuei and Yi Yangji—Yū’s omission from the *zenshū*, her unmatched popularity, and her frequent refusal to center ethnic issues in her work make her a particularly troublesome figure for those contemplating the “end” of Zainichi literature as well as the problems and possibilities engendered by a “post-Zainichi” framework.

In this chapter, I read Yū Miri's career in conversation with the discourse of the "post-racial" in the United States, particularly its implications for literary historiography. In both cases, I argue that an intersectional lens is crucial for understanding the gendered and class exclusions that go into constructing a coherent literary history, and that the (re-)emergence of these excised voices challenges the notion of a coherent future for a literature. Then, by thinking through "colorblindness" as a specifically corporeal metaphor for an imagined post-racial temporality, I ask what happens if, as in the case of the Zainichi, difference is less visual than sonic. What would it mean to hear, in an embodied sense, the voices of the post-difference future? I explore these questions through a reading of Yū's *Hachigatsu no hate* (*The End of August*, 2004), wherein the author's attempt to reconstruct the silenced voices of the past, including so-called "comfort women" and other victims of wartime and postcolonial atrocities, suggests alternative modes for listening—not only to the past, but also to the future, with all the endings and beginnings it contains.

TOWARD AN INTERSECTIONAL LITERARY HISTORY

As noted above, Zainichi literature is hardly unique in its contemplation of its own demise. I begin by discussing the implications of "the end" for the project of Zainichi literary history in comparative frame with African American literature, which is undergoing an eerily similar critical debate. This comparison is fruitful not only due to the parallels of "post-racial" discrimination surviving a coherent notion of difference, but also because of the specific manifestation of this crisis in terms of a perceived ending of the corresponding literary genre. On the American side, Kenneth Warren's *What Was African American Literature?*—whose polemical title this chapter echoes—is a case in point.⁵

Warren's position is that African American literature as such emerged in the context of the Jim Crow social order of segregation and state-sanctioned discrimination arising post-Reconstruction, and ended with the collapse of this social order in the Civil Rights era. The crux of his argument is that during this period, African American literature was characterized by a set of shared assumptions between writers and critics regarding the political orientation of the literature they were creating: they proceeded with the understanding that their work would be judged both "instrumentally," in terms of its usefulness for combating the injustices of Jim Crow, as well as "indexically," as a barometer of racial progress or solidarity.⁶ In other words, what makes (or made) African American literature a genre was not a set of abstract characteristics that could be projected onto black writing across history. Rather, it was defined by the knowledge that texts within would be read according to frameworks imposed by the genre itself. By now, what Warren calls the instrumental and indexical modes of reading should be recognizable as a hermeneutics of representation. A text is African American literature so long

as it is *read as* African American literature, which is to say read as representing (in both instrumental and indexical senses) African Americans. The same can be said of Zainichi literature.

No wonder that when these hermeneutical frames begin to crumble, suddenly the end is nigh—but the end of what? The most obvious counter to Warren’s claim (and one that he of course anticipates) is that the oppressive social order to which African American literature was conceived as resistance still exists, and so therefore must the literature. Even if we accept that African American literature is historically bounded by the specific political project of dismantling Jim Crow racial hierarchy, we need not concede that this project is finished. Though Warren readily acknowledges the continuing legacy of Jim Crow and the ongoing salience of racism, he argues that “with the legal demise of Jim Crow, the coherence of African American literature has been correspondingly, if sometimes imperceptibly, eroded as well.”⁷ As ever, the culprit for eroding this “coherence” is the admission of a broader range of voices into the cacophony of those representing the larger group. Conversely, it was the exclusion of all but the most elite black writers from recognition by the American literary scene that created a semblance of coherence in the first place. These writers ended up inadvertently reinforcing the disenfranchisement of black people

by giving credence to the idea that certain African American individuals and cadres by virtue of their achievements, expertise, and goodwill could direct and speak on behalf of the nation’s black population. Such was the context that gave rise to African American literature—one in which the black literary voice could count for so much because, in political terms, the voice of black people generally counted for so little. . . . The ending of legalized segregation, however imperfect it has been in desegregating American society, could not but change this situation.⁸

The end of Zainichi literature obviously cannot be tied to such a specific point as the Civil Rights era and the end of Jim Crow, even as the community has seen undeniable political progress on issues of fingerprinting, citizenship, and political participation in recent decades. But that is precisely the point: it is not the end of oppression that brings about the end of the literature, but rather the end of its internal coherence. This coherence, as Warren shows in the case of African American literature and as this book has detailed in the case of Zainichi literature, is a product of ignoring *intersecting* oppressions that are mutually constitutive of the oppression faced by the group in question. In both cases, anxieties toward the fraying of collective ties and the erosion of political solidarity—without an accompanying disappearance of racial or ethnic discrimination—coincide with increased attention to intersectional concerns within the collective. Moreover, if the coherence of an ethnic literature comes into question when its standard bearers are no longer elite (mostly male) writers of high-brow or “pure” literature, then intersectionality implies not so much an end to that literature as a never having been.

The distinction between pure literature (*jun bungaku*) and mass literature (*taishū bungaku*) in Japanese-language literary circles is certainly a factor in producing the fear that Zainichi literature is ending. Indeed, no small part of what makes Kaneshiro Kazuki and Yū Miri problematic in the eyes of the Zainichi literary establishment has been their mass appeal, as well as their willingness to cross over into popular media.⁹ Nonetheless, perhaps an even more visible fracture in Zainichi literary history falls along gender lines. In fact, it would not be unfair to say that standard accounts of Zainichi literary history fail to mention a single woman before Yi Yangji.¹⁰

Recent years have seen attempts to rectify this imbalance, the most thorough of which is Song Hyewon's provocatively titled "*Zainichi Chōsenjin bungaku shi*" *no tame ni: Koe naki koe no porifonī* (*Toward a "Zainichi Korean Literary History": The Polyphony of Voiceless Voices*, 2014).¹¹ Song's main contention is that the received history of Zainichi literature focuses so myopically on its origins in the male colonial elite writing for high-brow Japanese readers as to render "voiceless" a rich array of other "voices," especially women and Korean-language writers.¹² She critiques the generational narrative of Zainichi literature's origins and trajectory, with Kim Talsu as its patriarch and the male bundan figures of Zainichi nationalism as its heirs. She demonstrates that this narrative was essential for constructing the coherence of Zainichi literature and its history. Reintroducing women's writing, Korean-language literature, and the work of postwar Korean migrants to Japan makes for a much messier history, generating anxiety for those invested in its coherence.

How, then, does Yū Miri fit into this picture? Yū certainly has moments at which her attitude seems to skirt toward the erasure of Zainichi specificity in a way we might deem "post-racial" or "post-Zainichi." Nevertheless, it would be a stretch to claim that she shows a desire to move past Zainichi identity as it pertains to the ethnic discrimination that has its roots in the colonial oppression of the past and continues into the present. Rather, if she takes part in deconstructing the category of Zainichi and hastening its end, she does so by exposing the failures of Zainichi as a framework to accommodate the internal heterogeneity of its community members and the intersectionality of race with gender and sexuality especially.¹³ To get a glimpse at the politics of this, I examine here two interviews taking place in 1997, on the occasion of her being awarded the Akutagawa Prize.

The first is a conversation between Yū and Ri Kaisei, published in the literary magazine *Gunzō*.¹⁴ In one of the first exchanges in the interview, Ri objects to Yū Miri's characterization of her own place within the Zainichi community.

Ri: By the way, Ms. Yū, you often refer to yourself as second-generation, so I'd like you to correct yourself on this point. I am second-generation, you are third-generation, and the generation after you will be fourth-generation. Did you think of yourself as second-generation?

Yū: I say I am second-generation because my mother and father were born in South Korea and came to Japan where they had me. Wouldn't that make me second-generation?

Ri: I suppose you could say that, but in any case, since I'm second-generation, I wondered how you could be when our ages are so different—you're the same age as my second son. (Laughs.)¹⁵

This is a prototypical example of what is known as “mansplaining.”¹⁶ Ri feels the need to ask Yū to “correct herself” on a matter about which she is better positioned to be an authority—in this case, her own generational identity. But more than simply an example of paternalism from the Zainichi old guard, this exchange is noteworthy for Ri's assumption of the role of arbiter of who gets to identify how. He allows that Yū might have a sense of herself as second-generation, but at the same time dismisses that kind of autonomous identification in favor of an arbitrary age-based scheme of his own. He has the final word on the generation to which Yū Miri belongs—never mind that Yū's understanding of what “second-generation” means is more standard across migrant communities. More than that, however, what this minor disagreement on Yū's status illustrates is a larger problem with Zainichi identity, or perhaps even identity in the abstract. Namely, if the terms of identity discourse impose a schema like Ri's, that a given subject simply *is* in one category or another, then there is no room for self-determination, for the active sense of identification. Conversely, no matter how one might choose to identify in this autonomous sense, one is nevertheless beholden to the recognition of such an identity by others in order for it to function socially.

Finally, by adding that he is old enough to be her father, he stops one step short of making explicit what seems to be implied by all of this: that he is her daddy. As the conversation goes on, Ri continues to invoke this generational logic to frame the ways that Yū and other young writers will inherit the projects and concerns of elder Zainichi writers. Most prominently, Ri sees promise in Yū's probing of the relationship between the broken homes portrayed so often in her stories and the politics of the Korean peninsula, broken in half by postwar division. However, what pleases him most is her statement that she plans to continue to “bear the burden” of Korean identity:

Yū: I am grateful that my father never naturalized. To exist in the space between Japan and Korea, to be placed in a situation I have to think about has been good for me as a writer, I think. I myself never think of naturalizing. There is plenty of baggage that comes with that, but it's a burden I want to bear. I never wish to run from it.

Ri: That's such a wonderful thing. Once when I was out drinking with someone or other somewhere, you came up in conversation, so I said something like “That Yū Miri is a dutiful daughter”—as if I knew anything about it. (Laughs.) But to hear you talk just now, that's what I feel.¹⁷

Here, Ri's troubling paternalism returns in perhaps more explicit terms. Nevertheless, even in his position as father-figure, he appears to be the more vulnerable in this instance. Where he could have said that Yū cannot help but bear those burdens because she *is* Zainichi, he instead recognizes the volition she ascribes to herself. Perhaps this is simply a reflection of Ri's agreement that an identity that navigates "between Japan and Korea" is the proper one for Zainichi Koreans to espouse. At the same time, it also seems to reflect an anxiety on Ri's part that so many in Yū's generation choose not to bear that burden, whether by passing, naturalizing, or simply not going to the considerable lengths required to "awaken" to a Zainichi identity—a process described by earlier Zainichi writers like Yi Yangji and Kin Kakuei. The impression Ri gives here is one of relief, that the "end" of Zainichi literature will be forestalled, at least as long as Yū Miri continues to shoulder the burden of carrying it forward.

This exchange highlights the temporality of the post-Zainichi, in addition to the centrality of assimilation to the anxieties and reorientations that create it. The "post-racial," in the Zainichi context, is rarely presented as a utopian fantasy. Even aside from the emptiness of its promise of an end to discrimination within the present climate, the "post-racial" for Koreans necessarily reanimates a history of imperial Japanese efforts to eradicate Korean difference through assimilation and imperialization. Particularly fraught is Zainichi literature's position vis-à-vis the colonial Korean practice of writing in Japanese, which produced the very founders of what is now considered Zainichi literature, but has also been viewed as a sort of complicity in the assimilation project. The "end" of Zainichi is terrifying precisely because it presents itself as a return to the beginning.

On the other hand, Ri also betrays a concern about the loss of patriarchal control within a post-Zainichi world. After all, what makes Yū Miri a "dutiful daughter" (*oyakōkō*) is her choice to remain within a Zainichi framework. That is, her claim to ownership of such an identity—which emerges alongside the specter of naturalization that she raises here—belies the possibility that she may also choose to be disobedient, to abandon her father along with her ethnic heritage. This is the flip side of the contradiction in their earlier exchange on the generation to which Yū Miri belongs. In this case, when Yū Miri explicitly identifies as Zainichi (insofar as Zainichi can be conflated with the sense of inbetweenness that Yū affirms), she undermines the logic of Zainichi as an ontological category to which she simply belongs or does not belong. If she can opt in, she may be able to opt out. In this way, the boundaries of the Zainichi community become impossible to police—yet another process by which the "end" of Zainichi might come about.

Compounding this problem, from the perspective of a Zainichi patriarch demanding filial piety from his daughter, is that his faith may be misplaced. Too much is riding on his assumption that Yū's statement here is a commitment to carry on the legacy of Zainichi literature as Ri understands it. In another interview from the same year, this one with novelist Hayashi Mariko, Yū takes a strikingly

different tone: “I do not possess an awareness of being a Zainichi South Korean writer.” She goes on: “If I write about South Koreans, my works are framed as ‘Zainichi literature.’ And that is what I don’t like.”¹⁸ The remarkable difference in stance here is not necessarily indicative of disingenuousness on Yū’s part. It may simply arise as a result of different understandings of what it means to be a Zainichi writer or to perform Zainichi identity. Still, it is intriguing that Yū’s framing of her own commitment to the project of reproducing Zainichi literature changes so starkly depending on her audience. Even if this project was not specifically what she had in mind when she refers to the “burden” she wishes to bear, she raises no objection to Ri Kaisei’s repeated implication that she is situated firmly within the genealogy of Zainichi literature. If that is indeed something to which she objects, as she seems to say to Hayashi, then she does not voice such an objection to Ri. Perhaps we could see Yū’s slipping in and out of the Zainichi literature framework as a part of the post-Zainichi temporality. Either way, the dutiful daughter would eventually betray her daddy: Yū Miri’s declining to have her work included in the “Zainichi” *bungaku zenshū* undermined its claims to comprehensiveness and authority, and triggered anew a sense of the looming “end” of Zainichi literature.

In the end, the controversy around the anthology may actually give us the clearest sense of what Zainichi literature actually means for the authors working within. It is a “textual identity.”¹⁹ It is not useful as a map of an ontologically definable collective, though it may often be presented or received as such. Rather, it is nothing more than an understanding of how a text will be read within its rubric. Signing onto this understanding allows access to a network of publishing venues and contacts that, depending on one’s standing, may be a useful conduit for gaining access to readership. For Yū Miri at this point in her career, inclusion in the anthology was not necessary for this kind of access, especially when her work’s presence in a Zainichi literature anthology would inevitably frame her readers’ reception of it in ways she might find undesirable. It is thus not necessary to make any determination of Yū Miri’s personal identification with or outside the framework of Zainichi-ness in order to uncover the practical consequences of naming her work “Zainichi literature” or not.

In this way, a “post-racial” or “post-Zainichi” framework, while making us aware of the historicity of ethnic categorization, has further potential to alert us to the intersectional nature of such categories. This is meant not only in the common sense of intersectionality, which insists that race, gender, and other identity categories are mutually dependent. It also suggests a shift away from a concern with the internal coherence of collective categories produced by single-axis frameworks and toward a praxis that asks first *how* such frameworks are working, and more importantly, *for whom*. If Yū Miri can be said to have rejected Zainichi, it may just be that Zainichi rejected her first.

At the same time, if the previous generation is anxious about the end of Zainichi, what that really indicates is that they perceive a benefit to be derived

from Zainichi as a mode of identity or a publishing network. Neither can this anxiety be separated from the history of violent assimilation and collaboration in which it is embedded. In the end, we may find ourselves looking for a way to define Zainichi such that Yū Miri is at once the dutiful daughter and the liminal presence. What the notion of the post-racial or post-Zainichi offers us—as long as we fully appreciate the irony of its failure to overcome actual racial oppression—is the opportunity to bring the contradictions of the present into the light and demand alternative futures. It is toward the future that we now turn.

THE “COLORBLIND” FUTURE AND THE POETICS OF PASSING

If there remains an uneasiness with the notion that Zainichi (or African American) literature is over, how then are we to imagine its future? As with the question of literary history, it is easier to expose the limitations of existing understandings of what Zainichi literature is or was, or its place within larger categories of Japanese-language or even World Literature, than it is to articulate a positive vision for what it can or should be. Moreover, it is far from clear to all involved that the framework of Zainichi is worth maintaining in the first place. Is it better to set our sights on a speculative post-Zainichi future? In this section, I examine the discourse of the “post-racial,” specifically the ambivalent corporeal metaphor of “colorblindness,” to tease out the pitfalls and potency of imagining such a future.

By “post-racial” I am referring to the white American fantasy that the country’s long history of racial oppression and injustice is now over, and the problem of systemic racism is no longer relevant to American politics. Yet more insidiously, this myth further entails the notion that it is now *white* Americans who are the main target of discrimination.²⁰ The fallacy of a “post-racial” America has of course been obvious to people of color all along, and the disastrous consequences of its circulation are underscored by the current climate. Japan is not without its parallels to this kind of post-racial thinking, from the increasing potency of ethno-nationalism on the national political scale to the slow creep of far-right fringe ideas from the dark corners of the internet to the mainstream. One of the main hate groups emerging from the latter calls itself the “Zainichi tokken o yurusanai shimin no kai,” or “Citizens Against Zainichi Privilege,” an accident of translation echoing the language of white privilege and “reverse racism.”

Aside from such explicit outpourings of racial animus, post-racial rhetoric shifts the burden of responsibility onto the minority to move past or overcome the history of racism. Indeed, its successes are visible in the occasional reactionary embrace of this kind of logic by members of the minority group. Among the more prominent American examples of this was recording artist Pharrell Williams’s statement in an interview with Oprah Winfrey that “The New Black doesn’t blame other races for our issues. The New Black dreams and realizes that

it's not pigmentation: it's a mentality, and it's either going to work for you or it's going to work against you."²¹

On the Zainichi side, Tei Taikin articulates similar sentiments in his book *Zainichi Kankokujin no shūen* (The Demise of Zainichi Koreans, 2001), arguing that Koreans in Japan need to let go of their victimhood mentality and stop clinging to the history of colonial violence.²² The fault in this reasoning arises in part from a paradoxical temporality. If the post-racial *precedes* the imperative to relegate racism to the past, then it engenders dual impossibilities: first, it becomes impossible to insist that racism precedes race, and second, it becomes impossible to conceive of race as anything other than victimhood. In fact, as in the case of “post-racial” America, the emergence of what could be called a “post-Zainichi” era predates the demise of the discrimination to which an organized Zainichi politics is a necessary response. Perhaps the most prominent and troubling emblem of ongoing discrimination is the rise of anti-Korean hate speech in the public sphere.

Worse still, as in the case of “colorblind” racism in the United States, the goal of equal treatment is easily co-opted in the service of maintaining an unequal status quo.²³ In *Seeing a Colorblind Future*, Patricia Williams connects the ideology of colorblindness—the notion that the path to racial equity lies in ignoring racial difference—to the incoherent temporality of the post-racial. If a colorblind future is to exist, she argues, it cannot emerge from a colorblind present that erases a past that is anything but colorblind:

While I do want to underscore that I embrace color-blindness as a legitimate hope for the future, I worry that we tend to enshrine the notion with a kind of utopianism whose naïveté will ensure its elusiveness. . . . ‘I don’t think about color, therefore your problems don’t exist.’ If only it were so easy. But if indeed it’s not that easy then the application of such quick fixes becomes not just a shortcut but a short-circuiting of the process of resolution.²⁴

The willful blindness as “quick fix” that Williams describes recalls the politics of Japanese reckoning with wartime atrocities on the Asian continent. In a 2016 agreement between the Park Geun-hye and Abe Shinzo administrations, the Japanese government agreed to create a restitution fund to compensate the victims of its program of military sex slavery, in exchange for which the South Korean government committed to silence on the so-called “comfort women” issue. The sense was that if we would all just agree not to talk about it anymore, we could move on. Here, redress becomes a way to silence the voices pointing out injustice rather than to enable their speech—both of which have their problems, as I further discuss below in the context of Yū Miri’s fiction writing.

However, what I want to focus on here is the strangeness of referring to this ideology in the language of physical impairment as “colorblindness,” or even “blindness” full stop. This corporeal metaphor has gone largely uninterrogated since it appeared in Justice John Marshall Harlan’s famous dissent in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.²⁵

That the making of racial knowledge should be located literally in the eye of the beholder, whose *inability* to see constitutes the utopian ideal, is a much more suggestive notion than it is given credit for.

Williams comes close to acknowledging this uncanniness when she opens her essay with an anecdote about her son. When his nursery school teachers report that he is colorblind, Williams takes him to an ophthalmologist who “pronounce[s] his vision perfect.”²⁶ An actually colorblind or otherwise visually impaired person might reasonably ask whether their eyes are not also perfect, but the point of the story turns out to be that his diagnosis never had anything to do with his eyes. Rather, his teachers had been assuring the whole class that color “doesn’t matter” as a direct response to racist incidents among the children (so obviously color did matter). Williams’s son had extrapolated from there to insisting that the colors of everyday objects did not matter, leading to the initial misunderstanding. Only a child could mistake one kind of colorblindness for the other.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this distinction, Williams and other critics of colorblind racism generally do not question its specific sensory framing in terms of visual impairment. They even reappropriate the metaphor to refer to colorblind racism’s constituent “blindness” to inequity rather than blindness to visually presented difference. In either case, it goes without saying that the blindness in question is not a problem of bodily impairment, but rather an unwillingness to admit the consequences of the racial hierarchies that have been inscribed as visual signs apparent on the body. That this is spoken of in terms of the body actually provides a useful reminder of how this racial meaning is made: it does not exist *a priori* in or on the body of a person of color, but must be *read* on such bodies in order to come into being.

Lurking beneath the surface of this discussion is the problem of passing, which opens up a fissure between knowledge of difference and difference itself, between perception and ontology. If one were reducible to the other, then passing would eliminate difference itself, but clearly it does not. Instead, those who experience passing describe crushing anxieties that accompany it, whether from fear of being found out, fear of the failure to represent oneself authentically, or uncertainty of or ambivalence toward one’s own identity.²⁷ The problem of passing makes it clear that a utopian post-racial or post-difference future cannot be founded merely on the lack of *knowledge* of difference, since passing cannot produce equity when its burdensome psychology is taken into account.

Passing further menaces the idealized post-racial future in the case of Koreans in Japan, where it is frequently the voice that betrays. Most prominently, in the aftermath of the Great Kantō Earthquake, thousands of Koreans were massacred by vigilante groups, which gave pronunciation tests to determine the ethnicity of their victims. Many Zainichi writers, including Yū Miri, have written fiction portraying the “becoming Korean” that occurs in the moment of speaking one’s own name. These figures are presented with a choice between passing and speech

itself—assimilation versus giving voice to their difference—where neither option presents a tenable path to an ethical post-difference future.

It seems worth asking, then, what might be gained from considering the issue of racial knowledge in a sonic rather than visual register. What happens when difference (or the injustice that co-figures it) is heard rather than seen, or better yet, silent rather than invisible? Perhaps more fundamentally, why frame the speculative future disappearance of racial knowledge in terms of bodily impairment in the first place? Thus, whether the imagined future is difference-deaf or colorblind, it remains a struggle to conceive of such a future as anything other than assimilation on the terms of past or present-day hegemonies. Just as the post-racial body shades toward whiteness, and just as the utopian medical rhetoric of “cure” posits a future absent of disabled bodies, the body of the future may only be able to speak in the language of the powerful.²⁸

Thus, the question I want to keep in mind for the remainder of the chapter is: what happens to language in the post-difference future? Can the post-racial, post-able body speak? How might it engage with its history? Does it need to forget the past in order to live in the future it inhabits? To imagine this future body is to rethink basic assumptions about language, commensurability, and the notions of subjectivity and otherness they entail. Speculative futures of the post-racial, the post-disability, and the post-Zainichi all produce versions of the same anxiety toward the threat of assimilation on the terms of the powerful—the eradication of alternative modes of speech or representation. It is this silence and its accompanying anxieties that Yū Miri deals with in her magnum opus, *Hachigatsu no hate*, to which I now turn.

THE SILENT PAST AND FUTURE IN *HACHIGATSU NO HATE*

Yū's project in *Hachigatsu no hate* echoes Song's book title and so many other projects of a similar nature: recovering lost voices from the past. The novel, clocking in at over eight hundred pages, is a meditation on the violence of Korean history from roughly the 1920s to the 1970s, viewed through the life of Olympic hopeful long-distance runner Yi Uch'öl and his sprawling family.²⁹ It is a story of movement and rupture, following Uch'öl as he moves between Korea and Japan, narrating the turmoil in his own childhood home and its repetition in subsequent generations. The family is devastated by the untimely deaths of all his siblings except for his youngest brother Ugün—a promising runner in his own right—and the illegitimate half sister born to his father's mistress. Despite Uch'öl's anger at his father for betraying his mother, he goes on to engage in a series of dalliances, eventually abandoning four different mothers of his children. At every turn this family chaos is exacerbated by the turbulence of the historical context: colonization and an escalating total war effort, the short-lived liberation and long-term occupation

and division of the peninsula, the Korean War, and the violent suppression of leftist activity in South Korea under Rhee Syngman and Park Chung Hee.

This cross section of national history is oriented around a family history, as Yi Uchöl is a fictional stand-in for the author's grandfather, whose personal life and running career Yü meticulously researched for the book. Moreover, the novel employs a framing device in which Uchöl's story—and the larger family history and national story in which it is embedded—is initiated by the character "Yü Miri," who actively seeks to reconstruct it. As with many of texts covered in this book, then, *Hachigatsu no hate* operates in a strained and self-conscious relationship to the I-novel mode, as well as the larger question of personal versus political narrative raised by literary taxonomies—I-novel, Zainichi, or otherwise.

Ultimately, I would argue, what *Hachigatsu no hate* portrays is a sense of Korean colonial and postcolonial history as a burden, its telling and retelling a painful exercise that its subjects endure rather than relish—in other words, the burden of representation. If the novel represents an attempt to "recover" silenced voices from the past, that effort results in the reimposition of this burden and runs the risk of serving the "listener" (or, perhaps, the reader) more than the voices themselves. In this way, Yü's texts suggests the limitations of empathy, perhaps even representation more broadly, as the aim of literature. In reading *Hachigatsu no hate*, I hope to tease out these limitations and begin to suggest alternative readerly affects, which might allow for a less violent or assimilative mode of engaging with the radical others of the past and future.

Hachigatsu no hate opens on an instance of silence: "Even though I am running along the river, the water doesn't make a sound. Neither does the wind. . . . The only sound that can be heard is the sound of my breath: ssu ssu hah hah (すっすっはっはっ)."³⁰ This sound of a runner's breathing (much more awkward to render in English than in the original Japanese) will be a refrain throughout the novel. The first few pages of the text continue to repeat the sound of breath, interspersed between the fragmented narrating voice, here the spirit of Yi Uchöl, who recalls moments, images, names, and even songs (rendered in boldface text) from his life. The narrative then shifts abruptly to the scene of a *ssikkim-kut*, a shamanistic ritual for cleansing the spirits of the dead of bitterness and attachment, allowing their souls to leave the world.³¹ In the process of this ritual, performed by several female shamans (*mudang*), their male accompanist (*paksu*), and "Yü Miri" as hostess, Yi Uchöl and other figures from his family are resurrected, possessing the bodies of the shamans and borrowing their voices to narrate their stories of resentment. From the start, the novel asks the reader to be conscious of voice as a matter not only of history and narrative, but of sound and embodiment.

This first chapter, by way of the *ssikkim-kut*, tells in condensed form the story the rest of the novel will go on to detail. Yi Uchöl is a talented distance runner whose hopes of appearing in the Olympics are dashed when the 1940 Tokyo games are canceled. Shortly thereafter Uchöl escapes to Japan to avoid being drafted

into the war, abandoning his family in the process. After a brief return to Korea following the Japanese defeat and Korean independence in 1945, Uchöl runs away to Japan again, this time to escape the violence of the Korean War. He starts a new life, running a pachinko parlor and marrying a Japanese woman who bears his youngest son. He also begins a second running career in his middle-aged years, but eventually gives it all up again to return to Korea, where he dies alone. Also appearing in the *ssikkim-kut* are the angry spirits of his abandoned wives and lovers, his youngest brother and running partner Ugün, and a young girl from their hometown of Miryang who was infatuated with Ugün. Both of the latter, we learn, met with tragic ends. Ugün was shot by the South Korean police for leftist activities and buried alive. The girl was trafficked into sex slavery at a “comfort station” for the Japanese military, and threw herself overboard after serendipitously meeting and confessing her story to Uchöl on a ship returning to Korea after the war. Yü Miri leaves the ceremony with instructions to have Ugün and the girl posthumously married in another shamanistic ritual, bringing both of their spirits back to Miryang and within the fold of the family’s enshrined ancestors. In many ways, the opening chapter frames the novel as literally a project of resurrecting the lost voices of the past.

The next chapter complicates this framing by once again offering embodiment of the deceased as a means of accessing the personal and national histories they witnessed, but in a completely different context. In this case, Yü Miri is running a marathon in Seoul. The narrative is once again punctuated by the onomatopoeitic refrain of the breath: *ssu ssu hah hah* (すっすっはっはっ). This time it is not Uchöl’s breath but Yü Miri’s, as she struggles to complete the longest distance she has ever run while nursing the pain of an injured knee. Whereas the other runners, like her grandfather, “run for the sake of running,” Yü “runs for the sake of writing” (48), ostensibly in order to reconstruct her grandfather’s experience and provide inspiration for the very novel in which this appears.

What she finds, however, is that even within the secularized shamanistic ritual she has set up for herself by running the marathon, it proves impossible to live the experience of another. As the pain in her knee spreads throughout the rest of her body with the finish line still miles away, she ponders the fate of her grandfather’s brother, Ugün, who was “stronger than pain,” (56) refusing to give up the names of his leftist associates in the face of torture by the police (and his eventual live burial). However, as soon as she has these thoughts, she rejects her own implicit comparison of her suffering to that of her great-uncle:

ssu ssu hah hah Trying to imagine his pain through my pain *ssu ssu hah hah* Is a waste of time *ssu ssu hah hah* ‘Put yourself in someone else’s shoes’ or ‘I feel your pain’ *ssu ssu hah hah* That’s just shit people say *ssu ssu hah hah ssu ssu hah hah* You can’t really feel someone else’s pain *ssu ssu hah hah* No matter how much you care about the person suffering, no matter how much you might want to take their place *ssu ssu hah hah* The only pain you can feel is the pain of not being able to feel their

pain ssu ssu hah hah (56–57).

If her project in running this race or even writing this book was to empathize with her long-deceased family members and the larger Korean nation they might be read as representing, then this early framing of that project already suggests its limitations. Neither “Yū Miri” nor Yū Miri (nor indeed the reader of this text) can access their experiences. Instead, Yū begins to feel her grandfather running alongside her, hearing his breath in the same *すっすっはっはっ* rhythm as her own. His spirit encourages her to keep going, to embrace the pain as her running companion. She cannot run *as* Uchōl, but she can run *with* him.

At the end of the chapter, Yū Miri finishes the marathon, but Yi Uchōl’s spirit keeps running, arriving at his childhood self on the day his brother Ugūn was born. This flashback marks the beginning of the main story, taking up the vast majority of the novel, nested within the dual framing devices of the *ssikkim-kut* and the marathon. The novel’s ponderous pacing within this main narrative defies its sweeping historical scope. The sense of time here feels quotidian rather than historical; it lingers rather than flows. This stilted temporality is especially palpable in the stories of the women in Uchōl’s life, who are usually depicted as waiting bitterly for the return of their perpetually absent husband or lover. These narratives are almost always confined to a single day or even part of a day, focusing on the sights, sounds, and scents of the scene at hand. Most of the female characters introduced are found cooking, doing laundry, or performing other ritualized household duties. The text offers vivid descriptions of the sequence of tasks they perform, listing every ingredient added in preparation of the dinner menu, the sounds of knives chopping and water boiling always rendered in Korean transcribed into katakana and glossed with Japanese equivalents. These sensory details facilitate the imagination of a shared corporeal presence with these women, stopping time in a moment of everyday life which the reader’s senses are drafted into co-creating.

This is part of what makes it so devastating when the day-in-the-life presented is that of a so-called “comfort woman.” Her story, arriving in the second half of the novel, is where the smooth flow of the everyday meets the traumatic rupture of violent historical events. For her, this violence becomes matter-of-fact, each day bringing a new repetition of rape after rape after rape, presented in all the vivid, now horrifying detail of the previous chapters. What has been a hotly contested footnote in the history of the Asia-Pacific War—taboo for decades in Korea, to say nothing of the reluctance to speak of it in Japan—takes on all the weight of embodied experience in *Hachigatsu no hate*.

At the same time, the comfort woman’s story of corporeal violence dovetails with the novel’s more general exploration of the violence of language and speech. Woven into the story of her sexual exploitation and forced labor are descriptions

of the women's struggles to pronounce Japanese accurately in order to avoid beatings, reminiscent of the violence in the aftermath of the Kantō Earthquake. Their training in the Japanese language, adoption of Japanese names, and recitation of the Imperial Subject Oath recall Yi Uchōl's experience of the same as part of his primary and secondary education. In both contexts, speech is compelled for the purpose of disciplining colonial subjects.

By contrast, the comfort woman's story ends with a steadfast refusal to speak. When the news of Japan's military defeat reaches the comfort station, the girl escapes and ends up on a ferry to Korea, where she crosses paths with Uchōl. She remembers him due to his status as a minor celebrity in Miryang, where he is known as the Olympic runner who might have been. Despite this tenuous connection, she confesses that she admired his brother Ugūn from afar, and once wished to marry him before her hopes of marriage were dashed by her experiences in the comfort station—or, more accurately, her correct assumption that she will bear the shame for those experiences. Uchōl consoles her, assuring her that, to the contrary, she can hold her head high in the newly liberated Korea.

As they near the shores of the peninsula, Uchōl asks her name. The girl refuses to answer, other than to give him her comfort-woman name, Namiko, and her "sōshi kaimei name," Kanemoto Eiko. Within the novel to this point, including the introductory *ssikkim-kut*, the reader is also not given her name. She is introduced when her main storyline begins as Eiko, then is referred to more and more often as "the girl" (*shōjo*), her name slowly vanishing as she approaches the site of her trauma. In the comfort station, she is assigned the name "Namiko," and the narrative refers to her as such thereafter. It is perhaps a safe assumption that she has an "original" Korean name, but it never comes up until Uchōl asks and she refuses to tell.

Uchōl then retires for the night, leaving Eiko/Namiko alone on deck. By this point she knows that she cannot bring herself to set foot back on the Korean peninsula:

Kim Yōnghūi! Namiko screamed her own name. Father! If nothing else, the name you gave me has never been raped. Mother! No one has laid a finger on the name you called me. **Kim Yōnghūi!** The name of a thirteen-year-old virgin. Namiko held the name **Kim Yōnghūi** close. **Kim Yōnghūi!** Namiko cried, throwing herself into the sea. No one saw it. No one heard it. (642–43; emphasis original).

Yōnghūi's careful guarding of her real name offers a twist on the trope of passing that appears in so much Zainichi literature. Rather than posing as Japanese in order to avoid the violence enacted on Koreans, Yōnghūi (Namiko) is always recognized as Korean and thus subject to this violence. What she hides is the name itself, rather than the identity it is supposed to represent. When she finally shouts her name into the void, it is clear that *not* being heard is more liberating for her than the recognition and patriarchal absolution Uchōl provides. Nonetheless,

her eternal silence is underscored by the scene immediately following her death, in which the ferry passengers wake and spot the Korean coastline in the distance, shouting “Long live Korea!” (万歳！万歳！大韓独立万歳！) as they rejoice in its liberation (643).³² Yōnghŭi’s absence—or silence—is conveniently forgotten.

As the discourse on colorblind racism makes clear, a future that depends on willful forgetting of past and present injustice offers no path to the post-racial utopia it promises. The celebration of a liberated Korea depicted in *Hachigatsu no hate* rings hollow precisely because it is enabled by the erasure of comfort women’s experiences. As such, the project of recovering and recognizing the “silenced” voices of the past is certainly a noble one. However, as the thorny case of comfort women demonstrates, recognition does not necessarily lead to redress, and a reckoning with the past may be necessary but not sufficient for imagining a better future.³³ I would also suggest that the straightforward interpretation of silence as victimhood implied by the impetus to recover lost voices from the past is flawed. Yōnghŭi’s refusal to speak is her one tether to agency, and seems to provide her with a semblance of comfort in her tragic final moments. Her voice, like so many others, is ultimately unrecoverable. Rather than forcing such voices to speak, in some cases the more compassionate move may be to learn to cope with their silence, on their terms rather than our own.

Yōnghŭi’s climactic silence encapsulates much of how *Hachigatsu no hate* deals with the trauma of *sōshi kaimei* and its reverberations in the present day.³⁴ In fact, Yōnghŭi is not the only character to keep her name a secret. Ugŭn does so as well, albeit in reverse: he adopts a new name to keep hidden since, unlike Yōnghŭi, he considers “the name his father gave him”³⁵ sullied by its pronunciation in Japanese to conform to *sōshi kaimei* policy. On the fateful August evening Uchōl leaves for Japan, perhaps never to see his brother again—the same night Yōnghŭi leaves for what she believes is a job sewing military uniforms—Ugŭn asks his brother to give him a new name. He knows that Uchōl had been thinking of names for his baby brother, and asks him to give him one of them as a pseudonym.

「．．．号？なぜ号が必要なんだ」

「戸籍上は倭奴に隷従して国本雨根になってしまったけれど、ここまで服属したわけじゃないあかし証しるしに倭の戸籍から離脱したいんだ。恥辱にまみれた国本雨根という名を使うわけにいかない。抵抗をつづけるための、立ち向かうための、闘うためのとりで砦として新しい名前が必要なんだ。おれは今日から李春植と名乗るよ。ヒョンがいったじゃないか．．．春に植える．．．芽を出してすくすく伸びて大きな樹になるという希望を込めた名前だって」

「ああ いい名だ」

‘A pseudonym? What do you need that for?’

‘On my *koseki*, it says I am Kunimoto Ukon, a slave of the Japs (*waenom*). So as a sign that they haven’t yet conquered my heart and soul, I want to break away from my

Jap *koseki*. There's no way I can use the name Kunimoto Ukon, which is covered in shame. I need a new name as a fortress from which to resist, to stand up to them, to fight them. From today forward, I will be known as Yi Ch'unsik. You said so yourself, didn't you *hyōng*? It means "planted in spring." It's a name filled with the hope that what starts as a tiny bud will soon grow into a towering tree.

'Yes, it's a fine name.' (467; emphasis original).

Despite Ugūn's declaration that he will now call himself Ch'unsik, he of course still uses his *sōshi kaimei* name in public-facing situations, and continues to use "Yi Ugūn" in the same contexts after the war. Only his closest friends know him as Yi Ch'unsik. Not unlike the case of Kim Yōnghūi, Ugūn's situational usage of his names is ostensibly about preserving a sense of purity in private where such purity is publicly lost. In both cases, however, the guarding of the name essentially boils down to a preservation of agency. By using, or more suggestively, by refusing to use their names, Ugūn and Yōnghūi have some measure of control over what is known about them. They both show a desire not to speak, not to reveal, *not to be known*.

Ultimately, this desire is betrayed by their representation in the novel itself. Almost in spite of itself, *Hachigatsu no hate* reveals Ugūn and Yōnghūi's inner secrets. In the moment of Yōnghūi's death, the reader learns her name even if no one in the universe of the story ever does. But in the end, even that silence is broken. The novel concludes with a return to the framing devices of its opening chapters. The penultimate chapter narrates another shamanistic rite, this time a *sahu kyōlhonsik*, a posthumous wedding ceremony that serves a similar function to the *ssikkim-kut*, allowing the couple to leave the world behind and enter the afterlife together. In this case, the couple is Yōnghūi and Ugūn. Before the two can be "wed," however, "Yū Miri" and the shamans have to coax Yōnghūi into revealing her name, which she eventually does. With this, the couple is supposed to be cleansed of their bitterness, their spirits finally able to rest. However, when the two dolls representing the bride and groom are placed on a raft and floated down the stream, the female doll falls off into the water, eerily reenacting Yōnghūi's suicide.

This lack of resolution is in keeping with the righteous anger and resentment these two characters hold onto up to this point. Yū spends the entire novel building up a dissonant, unresolved sense of history, which the "Yū Miri" character within the story attempts to undermine by producing a happy ending for the couple. One cannot escape the sense that what the *sahu kyōlhonsik* achieves is not a comforting of the dead, but rather a comforting of Yū Miri. The rage of Yōnghūi and Ugūn—again, the one sure sign of their agency—must be quenched for our benefit, not for theirs.

The last chapter, however, the shortest of the entire novel, returns to the figure of a breathing runner. This runner may be Uchōl, or possibly Ugūn or Yū Miri, or possibly anyone, identifiable only by the sound and rhythm of the breath: すっすっはっはっ. The text here returns to the absence of sound with which it

started, noting once again that the water flowing along the river cannot be heard, nor can the buzz of cicadas that would ordinarily monopolize the August soundscape. The narrating runner also begins to feel disembodied, noticing the absence of sweat, and the sense that they could run as fast as they wanted without ever tiring. Finally, the runner begins to detach from language itself:

なにかいいたいのか？ すっすっはっはっ アニヤ なにもいいたくない すっ
すっはっはっ もう言葉を追いかけてくはない すっすっはっはっ 言葉に追
いつき すっすっはっはっ 言葉から抜け出し 言葉がついてこられない速度
ですっすっはっはっ 言葉という言葉振り切って すっすっはっはっ すっ
すっはっはっ 言葉から遠く離れたところで すっすっはっはっ 走る

Is there something I want to say? ssu ssu hah hah *Aniya* (no), nothing at all ssu ssu
hah hah I'm tired of chasing after the words ssu ssu hah hah Catching up to the words
ssu ssu hah hah Slipping past the words, moving so fast they can never catch up ssu
ssu hah hah Shaking loose the word "words" itself ssu ssu hah hah ssu ssu hah hah In
a place far removed from language ssu ssu hah hah I am running (824).

Having broken loose from language, the runner then moves past time itself, the narrative breaking down into nothing more than the sound of the breath, until its final boldface word: "**Freedom!** (自由!)" (825).

The runner's escape from language suggests a way of imagining a future liberation, one that is enabled by silence itself. Crucially, this muteness is enabled and enabling not as the suppression of speech, but only insofar as it represents an end to the burden of speech, where that burden is understood as the demand that others make themselves known. It requires a different kind of listening, or perhaps even a departure from listening, a willingness simply to be and to breathe together. What Uchōl's story comes down to, like that of Ugūn and Yōnghūi, is the gap between what goes down on paper—a *koseki*, an official history, a newspaper article reporting on the achievements of a promising marathon runner—and the unknown remnant shared only with the most intimate loved ones, or perhaps no one at all. This gap represents a sort of agency, to not speak, to not be known, to arrive at a place beyond words. Moreover, to accept this kind of relationship with the other, in which the other is allowed to remain unknown, is to open up more ethical possibilities for engaging with the radical others of the past and future. By learning to cope with silence, we may begin to imagine ways of being that do not depend on normative modes of speaking, providing hope for an unassimilated future.