"'Allied Masculinities' and the Absent Presences of the Other: Recuperation of Japanese Soldiers in the Age of American Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: An Analysis of *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*"

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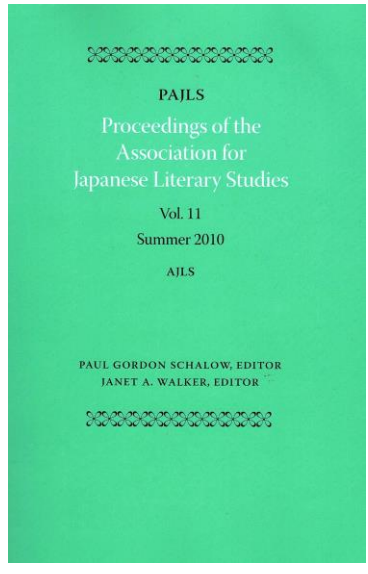

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"Allied Masculinities" and the Absent Presences of the Other

Recuperation of Japanese Soldiers in the Age of American Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan–An Analysis of *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*

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In January 2007, Japanese media hailed an actress Kikuchi Rinko and the film *Letters from Iwo Jima* when they were nominated for the seventy-ninth Academy Awards: *Letters from Iwo Jima* for the best picture and Kikuchi for the best supporting actress for playing what the film *Babel* claims to be a "Japanese" high school girl with a hearing impairment. A year prior to this, another "Japanese film," *Memoir of a Geisha*, was released. Despite its unchanging portrayal of "Japan" as the Disney-fairy world of geishas, what surprised me about the film was the fact that a Hollywood movie in which all central characters are "Asians" speaking accented English was made at all.[1] In particular, I was struck that *Memoir of a Geisha* comprises a distinctly *intra*-racial (i.e., not an *inter*-racial) romance, in which the male romantic hero was performed by Watanabe Ken, an actor who also starred in *Letters from Iwo Jima*. Watanabe's role apparently broke the long-standing Hollywood taboo regarding the representation of Asian male sexualities. As Elaine Kim suggests, Japanese/"Asian" men in Hollywood films are usually represented either in their sinister masculinity, as "rapists," or in their comical and ridiculous masculinities, which has prevented them from being the object of romantic desires of either white or

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[1] I recall some popular remarks made about the film *Joy Luck Club* when it was released in 1993: namely, Who would want to see a film with all Asian faces? The film is based on Amy Tan's best-selling novel with the same title, featuring four Chinese American families.

non-white women (Kim 2008). Although, as Takashi Fujitani points out, this is not the first time that the images of Japanese went through such dramatic transformations in mainstream U.S. discourse,[2] the rather abrupt shift in the representation of Japanese men from that of previous Hollywood films is striking, nonetheless. In this context, I might mention *Rising Sun* (1994), made in the wake of Japan Bashing around the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II, and the more recent *Pearl Harbor*, which was released in the summer immediately prior to 9.11.

Needless to say, Hollywood is not the only representational medium to convey the (in)humanities of Japanese. Various scholarly and other disciplinary efforts, including those by AJLS, have been made to counter those representations and to explore the more complex humanities of those who have often been deemed the racial and cultural Other in mainstream U.S. discourse.[3] However, the sudden transformation in this particular industry, which has long reproduced the images of Japanese soldiers as the inhuman enemy, makes me wonder: What are the uses and functions of those "Japanese" bodies on Hollywood screens in the post 9.11, post-multiculturalist era of globalization and transnationalism, which is also marked by the American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? Like Clint Eastwood's Pima Indian soldier Ira Hayes in *Flags of Our Fathers* and the real-life Native American soldiers such as the Navajo code talkers, who have been re-embraced as loyal citizens and soldiers for their contributions to U.S. wars, their Japanese counterparts are also recuperated, as Eastwood's films reclaim the humanities of those former enemies/ Others both inside and outside the United States. At what and at whose cost do these films (re)claim the humanities of those former enemies? This is the question I would like to explore in this brief paper in my examination of Eastwood's two films.

Clint Eastwood's film *Flags of Our Fathers* and its companion piece *Letters from Iwo Jima* portray what is known as the Battle of Iwo Jima during World War II from the two nationally differing, though perhaps homogenized, perspectives: *Flags of Our Fathers* from the American and *Letters from Iwo Jima* from the Japanese.[4] In particular, I note that *Letters from Iwo Jima* interrogates the traditional Hollywood image of masculinities assigned to Japanese soldiers as the sinister, inhuman enemy Other: the images that we witness in its companion piece *Flags of Our Fathers*.

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[2] See Fujitani, "Go for Broke, the Movie: Japanese American Soldiers in U.S. National, Military, and Racial Discourses" (2001).

[3] According to Geoffrey M. White, a different Pearl Harbor film from the 2001 Hollywood version was produced in 1991 for the screening at the Arizona Memorial. In "Moving History: The Pearl Harbor Film(s)," White discusses the multiple contexts that have produced the film's "representations of Pearl Harbor history," including the demands from the veterans' group and the "increasingly global and international audience" (p. 287) at the memorial. He also points out how the film has attracted a "wide latitude in responses" (p. 289). I mention this because, while I refer to one context of the production and reception of Eastwood's films, i.e., the current American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the contexts and receptions are never singular.

[4] While they juxtapose the tragedies and futilities of the Battle of Iwo Jima from both perspectives, however, neither *Flags of Our Fathers* nor *Letters from Iwo Jima* provides enough historicization of World War II. In effect, the juxtaposition ends up in relativism, where the films do not question the larger *historical* meanings of World War II.

In rehabilitating Japanese soldiers through their sound masculinities as "fathers" and "sons," which mirrors the masculinities of their white American counterparts, however, *Letters from Iwo Jima* tries to comprehend its Other through their affinities with white American soldiers and by establishing a heterosexual, albeit interracial, brotherhood across the Pacific. The film, in turn, risks domesticating its Others while erasing their irreducible difference, Otherness, and unknowability.

In contrast to this configuration of Japanese men in *Letters from Iwo Jima*, I will argue that what I call the "allied masculinities" of the Japanese soldiers are represented in *Flags of Our Fathers* in their "absent presences": i.e., inter-racially, through the figure of the Native American soldier, Private First Class Ira Hayes, who stands as the sole racialized figure in this nearly all white film. Significantly, Hayes demonstrates an abortive, failed, and betrayed masculinity, as Eastwood's film strongly denounces the way Hayes, an honest but sentimentalized figure, is used and then cast aside by the American military and public when the war is over. Unlike *Letters from Iwo Jima*, which assumes that the enemy/ Other is representable and knowable—as the film comes to a realization about the essential affinities between Japanese and American soldiers—*Flags of Our Fathers* underscores the ambiguity of vision, unsettling the viewers' perceptions about those Others to the extent that their subjectivities are only implied through those of the *different* Other, and through the proximities *and* differences between the two Others, the Japanese and the Indians. In discussing how the Japanese soldiers' humanity is delineated not just in relation to that of white American soldiers but also through the Pima Indian soldier's racialized, allied, albeit failed and betrayed masculinity, I will explore the significance of their racial/ gender figurations, the meanings of "allied masculinities," as well as the use of Japanese male bodies on Hollywood screens in the age of American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Portrayals of Japanese Soldiers: *Flags of Our Fathers* versus *Letters from Iwo Jima*

But before going any further, I would like to take a brief look at the actual representations of Japanese soldiers in Eastwood's films. *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* offer quite contrasting portrayals of those same Japanese men. A quick glance at *Flags of Our Fathers* shows that the Japanese soldiers in this film are constructed in accordance with the traditional Hollywood image of the "sinister Oriental," an image that is familiar from previous Hollywood films that deal with "racialized wars" such as the Pacific War and the (American) Vietnam War.[5] In fact, in a manner

[5] In the book *Hollywood Asian*, Hye Seung Chung discusses the comparative shortage of Hollywood-produced Korean War films and attributes this shortage to factors that include "audience apathy," the war's "lack of convincing patriotic agendas" as well as the climate of the Red Scare and Cold War paranoia. In "the culture of fear and mistrust," producers preferred to avoid risky and controversial subjects and played it safe with "sure-fire escapist fare—musicals, cowboy films, and mysteries" (pp. 123–25).

typical of those films that deal with racialized enemies, in *Flags of Our Fathers* no Japanese characters appear except in the form of dead bodies and dark faceless shadows screaming incomprehensible languages, as they assault U.S. soldiers from behind in darkness. I hasten to add, however, that the majority of Japanese films depicting U.S. soldiers as enemies represent them in ways not much different from this kind of dehumanizing portrayal. Interestingly, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, which depicts the perceptions of Japanese soldiers, does not depict the American soldiers as the same dehumanized mass as *Flags of Our Fathers* does with its enemies.

Among the devices that *Flags of Our Fathers* employs to accomplish this task, I would like to look at the trope of "lurking enemies," which is also familiar from Vietnam War films. *Flags of Our Fathers* utilizes shots that demonstrate how U.S. soldiers are being watched by some invisible enemies, enemies who themselves never appear on screen yet point their guns at U.S. soldiers, who are unaware of the enemies' presences—hence the danger. Needless to say, these shots utilize a common trope, which conjures up the image of unseen, lurking, and treacherous enemies, a trope which is also popularly employed in horror films. These representations thus conform to the conventional demonized image of Japanese soldiers as the "'sinister Orientals' of inscrutable and cunning nature," as Renny Christopher puts it in his study of the image of "Asians" in U.S. war narratives.[6]

Notable also is that a scene occurs in which Hayes shows his white army mates the photographs of Japanese soldiers carrying out the beheading of American POWs. (I shall explore the significance of this scene in depth later on.) As Hayes tells his white American army mates, referring to the act of beheading, "It's what they do to prisoners"; he warns the American soldiers about the notorious ill-treatment of POWs by the Japanese, reminding them of the brutality of the Japanese, and of the different values that the Japanese are believed to hold, as non-Western savages. In this way, the inhuman portraits of Japanese soldiers depicted in *Flags of Our Fathers* mime the image represented in the photographs Hayes shows to his army mates. Both provide the most typical, indeed classic representations of Japanese as the enemy/ Other, which circulate within the popular U.S. imagination, as John Dower famously analyzed them in his book *War without Mercy*.

Indeed, it is these classic images and representations of Japanese as the Other that the companion piece *Letters from Iwo Jima* challenges, through its presentation of the perspective of Japanese soldiers. One symbolic scene occurs when the aforementioned shot of unseen enemies pointing guns at U.S. soldiers is followed by shots which put the enemy gunmen in view, thus disclosing their human presence. Here, Eastwood uses the same shots from *Flags of Our Fathers* in *Letters from Iwo Jima*, though this time they are grafted onto the point of view of the Japanese, as the film shifts and switches the perspective of those shots.

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[6] Christopher, *The Viet Nam War, the American War: Images and Representations in Euro-American and Vietnamese Exile Narratives*, p. 116.

Similarly significant is that *Letters from Iwo Jima* offers stories of Japanese men that remain invisible in *Flags of Our Fathers:* for instance, the film tells stories behind the Japanese soldiers' seemingly incomprehensible and inhuman acts of suicide by hand grenade. Whereas *Flags of Our Fathers* only displays their dead bodies, *Letters from Iwo Jima* provides humanized narratives leading to the soldiers' suicides, so that the film unveils the pains, conflicts, and fears that those soldiers went through, as some of them were actually coerced into the acts of self-termination. The individualized stories here also serve to disrupt the stereotypical U.S. perception of Japanese as being "devoid of individual identity," to use Dower's phrase (p. 19). In this way, we can say that *Flags of Our Fathers* employs the familiar trope of the enemy as invisible, inhuman, and incomprehensible Other in order to deconstruct that image as well as, perhaps, the normative American perceptions about the enemy, as *Letters from Iwo Jima* attempts to provide re-humanized portraits of those Japanese soldiers.[7]

What is less obvious—and perhaps more interesting—is that *Flags of Our Fathers* also depicts the *absent* humanities and subjectivities of those Japanese soldiers in and through the figure of the Pima Indian U.S. soldier, Ira Hayes. Unlike in *Letters from Iwo Jima*, however, their humanities are only implied through their "absent presences" rather than their fully recovered and complete presences, as in *Letters from Iwo Jima*. (By the term "absent presences," I refer to the implied presence of what is conspicuously absent in the filmic frame, physically or otherwise.) To explore this point, let me first return to the scene in which Hayes makes a reference to the Japanese soldiers' beheading of American POWs. He says: "It's what they do to prisoners."

What is significant about this scene to me is that these lines of Othering, or (more accurately) "they-ing," are articulated by Hayes: it is noteworthy that it is Hayes who makes the remarks about the brutality and uncivilized difference of Japanese soldiers, when he himself stands as the conspicuous racial Other in the film. Notably, his is the only colored body on the screen in this nearly all-white film, i.e., of course, apart from the invisible Japanese soldiers. Or, to put it differently, the image of Japanese soldiers in the beheading photographs coincides with the traditional image of "Indians" that circulates within the popular U.S. imagination, one that has designated the "Indians" as savages who do not share the values and practices of Western civilization and war codes. And this despite the

[7]Similarly, Risa Morimoto's film *Wings of Defeat* (2007a) tells a story of a U.S.-born Japanese American woman, Morimoto, who begins to question the dominant U.S. perceptions of Japanese kamikaze pilots (*tokkōtai*) upon learning the fact that her uncle trained as one. In an interview, Morimoto states, "Growing up in America, I never questioned that kamikaze were fanatics, suicide attacks, self-immolation" until she discovered that those words she "associate[d] with terrorists now appl[ied] to [her] own family" (2007b). Her film traces this perspectival shift; it begins with the American footage of kamikaze attacks on the USS *Drexler*, and then moves on to juxtapose the U.S. veterans' testimonies with those of surviving Japanese kamikaze pilots. Consequently, the film disrupts a singular vision.

fact that Hayes as a U.S. soldier is now temporarily included in the national body and citizenry.

Renny Christopher argues that a sense of Otherness often accompanied and haunted the U.S. perceptions of their non-white allies, such as the Chinese and Japanese. Christopher attributes this to the confusion created by the United States' constant warfare with different Asian nations, and the resultant shifting in the perception of the same group from "enemy" to "ally." In other words, when a former enemy becomes incorporated as a present ally, there is the residual sense of Otherness attached to his image as an ally. Christopher also argues that racial difference played a huge part in this perception of the ally as also the Other. Indeed, in her book *America's Asia*, Colleen Lye analyzes George Kennan's reportage of the Russo-Japanese War and looks at moments at which the American "geopolitical alignment" with Japan becomes superseded by the "racial identification" with Russians.[8] Lye notes that even Kennan's pro-Japanese text can "slip between the subject-position" of the American correspondent gazing at the allied Japanese force and "the military position of the besieged Russians" (p. 28).

Likewise, in the domestic U.S. context, Takashi Fujitani argues that the Nisei Japanese American soldiers during World War II were conceived, in dual terms, as both the citizen and the unassimilable Other. According to Fujitani, their contradictory identities were the result of the U.S. government's "official disavowal of racism," instituted to mobilize the racialized citizens as soldiers, while this disavowal was "coupled with its ongoing reproduction" (p. 243). Like the Nisei soldiers and the racialized (former-enemy) allies, Hayes here stands for a contradictory border figure, an insider who is also haunted with the sense of Otherness and unassimilability. Notably, a scene occurs later in the film when a U.S. Senator asks Hayes if it was true that he had "used a tomahawk on those Japs." "Is that true, chief?" he says. As Hayes denies the allegation, the senator continues: "Tell them you did. That makes a better story." The image of a tomahawk resonates with the *katana* sword which the Japanese soldiers brandish as they carry out the beheading of their enemies, even though the "tomahawk" here, unlike the *katana* sword, is domesticated and, to borrow from a Canadian First Nation writer Loretta Todd, its "threat of difference is disavowed."[9]

Similarly, in the scene in which Hayes shows the photographs of Japanese men to his army mates, the white soldiers point to his difference, using the kind of vocabulary that separates him and places him outside of the mainstream white American racial and cultural norm. Noticing the photos Hayes studies, one soldier says, "That your girlfriend, *chief?* Bet she's a pretty damn good-looking *squaw*" (my emphasis). Another one similarly pokes fun at him: "Bet you're missing her, and that little *wigwam* of yours" (my emphasis). As if to return the charge in an act of retaliation, Hayes shows them the photographs of Japanese soldiers, giving

[8] Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893–1945*, p. 28.
[9] Todd, "Notes on Appropriation," p. 30.

them a due warning: "It's what they do to prisoners. . . . If I were you, cowpokes, I wouldn't think of waving a white bandana." Unlike the domesticated "wigwam" and "squaw," those photographs represent the "real" threat of difference of the Other, and Hayes, in effect, leaves the soldiers in gloomy silence. So, once again, while Hayes now stands as an insider of the U.S. military body, as the film shows how he forms a close comradeship with some white soldiers, he is also constantly reminded by others of his foreignness and difference.

In this respect, it seems no accident that in the scene in which the young white American soldiers become initiated into their first, albeit indirect, encounter with their cultural and racial Other/ enemies (i.e., the Japanese), Hayes is the one to convey their ominous difference to the extent that he embodies such difference himself. The image in the photographs implicitly connects this Indian "chief" to the Japanese, aligning him also with those unseen racial and cultural Others *outside* the U.S. national borders. The film employs his single colored body and alien corporeality to point to the unseen presence, if not the stories and subjectivities, of those invisible Others whose humanities remain hidden behind their dark faceless figures and shadowy portrayals.[10]

Triangulations of Enemies/ Others: The Absent Presences

The juxtaposition of the two Others, the Japanese and the Native Americans, is crucial in that it further illuminates the "absent presence" of another war that is taking place outside the movie screen, one where Japanese soldiers now serve, like Hayes, as U.S. allies. Like Hayes, whose allied masculinity has granted him the temporary elevation to the status of insider and citizen, hence permitting his "human" representations—despite the constant reminding of his Otherness—Japanese soldiers, too, gain the privilege of being portrayed as human in *Letters from Iwo Jima,* as they now serve, like Hayes, as U.S. allies for the other wars that are taking place outside the filmic frame. The films imply that it is those absent present and invisible enemies, the Iraqis and Afghans, who have enabled the rehabilitation of Japanese men as and into the human presence. (As I noted earlier, by "absent presences" I mean the implied presence of what is absent in the film's discursive frame.)

Earlier, I argued that *Letters from Iwo Jima* offers a deconstruction of its companion piece *Flags of Our Fathers* in that the former challenges the normative U.S. perceptions about their unknown and unknow*able* enemies that are inscribed in the latter film. At the same time, I would equally like to emphasize that *Flags of*

[10] Interestingly, the 2002 *New York Times* article, which tells the story of World War II Navajo code talkers, points to the perceived similarities between Japanese and Navajos—hence the ambiguity of their identities/difference—that was perceived even then. When an American Marine radio operator first heard a coded message in Navajo, for instance, he thought "what sounded like gibberish" was Japanese. Similarly, the article states that the Navajo code talkers were assigned bodyguards in part to "protect them from being mistaken for Japanese."

Our Fathers also re-deconstructs, so to speak, its companion piece *Letters from Iwo Jima*. Through its deployment of the Hayes figure, and its triangulation of Japanese, Native Americans, and the absent present Iraqis and Afghans, the film illuminates one socio-political context (among others) in which the *mainstream* U.S. production, circulation, and reception of the film *Letters from Iwo Jima*—with its re-humanized portraits of the classical Hollywood enemy/ Other—became possible. The two films then seem to offer a self-critique: At what and whose cost and expense does the re-humanization of the former enemy, the classic Hollywood Other, become possible?

Perhaps it will be useful to look at this from a slightly different perspective. What I find interesting about *Flags of Our Fathers* is that the Japanese men in this film are not completely rehabilitated as full human beings as they are in *Letters from Iwo Jima*, even though "human" in this latter film appears often synonymous with being American(ized). It is that the "good guys" are those who have some connection with the United States, as Nicholas Barber has pointed out in his review.[11] Even more problematically to me, the film is heavily dependent on American narrative conventions in delineating Japanese characters as well as the notion of what counts as "human." Much like the "Japanese" high school girl that Kikuchi played in *Babel*, the two central characters in *Letters from Iwo Jima*, Private First Class Saigo and the commander, Lt. General Kuribayashi, are delineated according to familiar American character conventions: Kuribayashi conveys his compassion to Saigo through open friendliness rather than in the more silent and hierarchical terms that are more frequently deployed in Japanese films. Similarly, the open sulkiness and rebelliousness that Saigo demonstrates, instead of the more typically "Japanese" form of reticent resistance makes an appeal to the U.S. audience. Watching the film, I sometimes felt as if I were watching an American war movie with Japanese faces. While this is not to essentialize Japanese filmic conventions as the sole and accurate delineation of the characters' emotions and behaviors, I question the way *Letters from Iwo Jima* utilizes familiar U.S. character conventions to make those Others accessible and comprehensible to the U.S. audience.

In other words, what I find problematic about *Letters from Iwo Jima*'s construction of Japanese soldiers is that, instead of attempting to understand its racial and cultural Other as and through their irreducible Otherness *as well as* their affinities, the film likens those cultural Others to the familiar American soldiers and war narratives in order to make those Others comprehensible and accessible to the U.S. audience. It seems no accident that a moment of revelation occurs about one's enemy/ Other in *Letters from Iwo Jima* when the Japanese men who were initially prejudiced against U.S. soldiers discover their essential affinities, as they

[11] See his review "Letters from Iwo Jima (15)" in *The Independent* (2007). In fact, these characterizations seem quite blatant. Both Lt. General Kuribayashi and Lt. Colonel Baron Nishi had lived in the United States before the war and had white American friends. And Saigo had run a bakery before he was conscripted.

learn about the love which the enemy-soldier's mother expresses for her son. In the episode in question, Lt. Colonel Nishi, who once lived in Los Angeles, saves a young white American soldier, who is captured and eventually dies despite Nishi's effort to give him medical treatment. As Nishi reads, translating the letter that the deceased U.S. soldier had received from his mother, the Japanese soldiers are moved to silence. In particular, one young soldier, Superior Private Shimizu who used to have a strong conviction that Americans were "cowards" and "savages," corrects what he now recognizes as his erroneous and prejudicial belief. Referring to Nishi's question if he has actually "met an American," Shimizu admits that he does not "know anything about the enemy": "I believed the Americans were cowards, but they weren't. I was taught that they were savages but that American soldier, his mother's words were the same as my mother's." Here, the Japanese soldier recognizes in those words the same humanity that connects him and his enemy. On the one hand, this sense of affinity, as well as the possibility of mutual understanding, are indicated through the premise of translatability of the mother's words: despite the difference in the language, the Japanese soldiers can understand the essential affinity between the Japanese and American soldiers, and the components of those words: the mother's love for her soldier-son. (It is implied that this moment of epiphany also applies to the other side.) Yet, disturbingly, it is this assumption of the sameness, the film claims, that makes the enemy/ Other a human, distinguishing them from the "savages."

Borrowing Laura Kang's critique, we can say that in Eastwood's film the viewers' "sympathetic investment and ethical identification" with their cultural Others are accomplished "through the imposition of accessible subjectivity" upon those Others:[12] the film "domesticat[es] these un-American bodies [. . .] into the properly gendered criteria of U.S. citizenship" (p. 152)—here, as sons. It is no accident that *Letters from Iwo Jima* also underscores the role of fathers that the two central characters, Kuribayashi and Saigo, assume, while their paternity connects these Japanese men to their American soldier-father counterparts in *Flags of Our Fathers*. What disturbs me, then, is the kind of self-centeredness that lies at the bottom of this compassionate identification: the feeling of empathy that is rooted in resemblance. As Viet Nguyen warns us, drawing on Homi Bhabha: "our narcissistic desire to see the other as someone like us can suddenly force us to do an about-face, giving in to a paranoid fear of the other's threat to us. The discovery that the other may neither be like us nor wish to be like us can compel us to furious violence."[13] The question that arises here, indeed, is: if one's recognition of the Other's humanity and the subsequent sense of empathy for the Other are predicated upon the sense of affinities between them and us, what happens if the enemy/ Other turns out to be *not* like us? Does that justify their dehumanization and destruction?

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[12] See Kang, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women*, p. 157.

[13] See Nguyen, "Remembering War, Dreaming Peace: On Cosmopolitanism, Compassion, and Literature," p. 155.

Patricia Chu explains the discursive strategy that some Asian American authors employ to depict Asian female characters who are often conceived as the Other in mainstream U.S. culture. In rendering "very alien experience accessible to a middle-class American readership in the interest of promoting intercultural understanding,"[14] Chu argues that Asian American authors often "emphasiz[e] the Asian women's likeness to the (presumably middle-class) American reader" by manipulating the "convention for representing subjectivity in the Anglo-American literary tradition" (p. 62). Chu's comment also applies to Eastwood's representations of the Japanese soldiers in *Letters from Iwo Jima*, where the Others are ultimately domesticated so as to enable the U.S. audience to understand *their* Others. In so arguing, I hasten to add that I do not intend to deny the sincerity of efforts by Eastwood to understand his Other. I am disturbed, however, by the film's assumption that such an understanding is possible.

To return to my point, what I find important about these films is that, unlike *Letters from Iwo Jima*, *Flags of Our Fathers* does not fully restore and recuperate the presence of its Others. Rather, the film points not only to their implied and unseen presences through their absent presences; it further indicates, when seen in juxtaposition with its companion piece's humanized portrayals of Japanese soldiers, the failure of the audience to see the "human" in and beyond those stereotypical images of the Other. Watching the two films through the frame of each other makes the viewers reflect upon the gap in perception that they experience in-between the two films. It also encourages them to consider how their failed vision can apply to their view of the current and other enemies outside the movie screen: the Iraqis and Afghans, for instance, who are often conceived of as dehumanized terrorists in the way the Japanese soldiers appear to their eyes in *Flags of Our Fathers*.

In other words, unlike *Letters from Iwo Jima*, which ultimately assumes that the enemies/ Others are both representable and comprehensible to the American audience, *Flags of Our Fathers*, seen together with the other film, underscores the ambiguity of vision, the shadowy presence of those Others who reside on the border between visibility and invisibility. In this sense, the two films together not only unsettle our perceptions about those unseen enemies/ Others but also make us question the certainty of such perceptions. As I have discussed earlier, in *Flags of Our Fathers*, the audience cannot get a full, exact, and complete picture of those enemy Japanese men to the extent that their presences, psyches, stories, and subjectivities are only implied through those of the *different* Other, the Native American man whose stories can never be identical with those of Japanese, as the latter's stories are narrated through both their proximities and differences. (And the same can be said about the Iraqis and Afghans, whose absent presences are delineated through Japanese.) In this way, while the film portrays the absent bodies and humanities of its Others through the racialized body of the Indian

[14] Chu, "'To Hide Her True Self': Sentimentality and the Search for an Intersubjective Self in Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*," p. 61.

(and, in *Letters from Iwo Jima*, the Japanese) man, it also represents those Others through an absence that can never be completely retrieved and is not retrievable. In short, in *Flags of Our Fathers*, the Others remain an Other—that is, except for Hayes.

In this sense, it seems useful to return to our initial discussion of the photographs, in which Japanese soldiers are beheading American POWs, to consider how *Flags of Our Fathers* is a film about the "absent presences" that are inscribed in a famous heroic photograph of the flag-raising during the Battle of Iwo Jima and what remains invisible in that photographic frame. After all, as John Bradley, the film's central flag-raiser and corpsman, testifies in the film, despite the victorious image presented in the photo, the picture was taken on the fifth day of the combat, while the "battle went on for thirty-five more." The film tells the stories that the photograph does not tell, or stories that are erased and made invisible in that stereotypically heroic photograph. The bloodshed and "the cruelty," "What we see and do in war," as one of the veterans in the film says, "is unbelievable." Similarly significant is that Eastwood's two films together deconstruct the stereotypical and propagandistic photographic image of their enemies as well. The films point to what remains invisible in those notorious photographs, in which the Japanese carry out the brutal beheading, by conjuring up the absent presences in those photographs—without, however, completely restoring their full human presences and stories.

Deconstructing the Binaries: Enemies/Other/Allies

It is perhaps appropriate here to make a brief reference to a different kind of "absent presence." At the 2005 Association for Asian American Studies Annual Conference held in Los Angeles, Mina Shin gave an interesting analysis of the film *The Last Samurai*—another film that portrays U.S.-Japan "allied masculinities"—in her paper entitled "Rethinking Cultural Globalization: Japan and the White Samurai Fantasy in 'The Last Samurai' [*sic*]." Shin argues that the film illustrates "America's desire for a strong Asian ally" in the post-9.11 geopolitical order and that the choice and representation of the countries themselves are premised on what she calls "Japanese exceptionalism," where Japan is seen and privileged as a unique Asian nation that can be equal to the United States and the West. Against such portrayals, Shin asks, as she concludes her talk: How are China and the rest of Asia represented in that film?—a film that, indeed, depicts the era in which Japan began its imperialist incursions into China and then into "the rest of Asia."

Considering the fact that World War II was fought not only between the United States and Japan, her question is certainly relevant to our discussion. To the extent that Japanese men become rehabilitated as U.S. allies in the age of American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, our films invoke yet another kind of absent presence: those of "Asians" under Japanese imperialism during Asia-Pacific Wars. In its attempts at re-humanizing the former enemies, Eastwood's films seem to ask more

questions than they perhaps intend: What is erased and made invisible in these new stories? What are the "absent presences" that the films do not articulate? For one, Hayes' presence certainly invokes his Japanese equivalents, such as the Koreans, Taiwanese or Okinawans who fought, or were coerced to fight, as Japanese imperial soldiers and were cast out and betrayed after the war.[15] Furthermore, as Japanese soldiers become rehabilitated as the U.S. ally in the age of American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, one cannot help but think of the striking change that has occurred in terms of the Hollywood representations before and after 9.11. In this respect, "allied masculinity" also seems to signify an exemption from their guilt, as Japanese soldiers become liberated from the charges of aggressors, victimizers, and rapists in the usual Hollywood constructions.

And it is here, perhaps, that *The Last Samurai* may suggest a disturbing affinity with one of our two films, *Letters from Iwo Jima*, in its binarized perceptions of enemies and war. *The Last Samurai* recuperates "Indians" as brave and noble fighters, the *wrong enemies* whom the white Americans made the mistake of fighting. The film shows how its protagonist, Captain Nathan Algren, is tormented by an overwhelming remorse because of his experience of the battle with the "Indians" and his participation in their massacre. He recalls, extolling them, that "they were brave." Depicting the "Indians" as the wrong enemies, however, the film never interrogates Manifest Destiny as the God-assigned U.S. mission. Indeed, *The Last Samurai* ends with a white American samurai, Algren, fighting and losing, though this time it is *a good war*, which redeems his, if not also his nation's, past errors. In other words, the film shows that with this battle, Algren (and the film) at last found and fought the *good* war against the *right* enemy. Ultimately, it is this binarized comprehension of the Other which *Letters from Iwo Jima* seems to share with *The Last Samurai* that I find disturbing. If, as I have suggested, the recuperation of their former enemy in Eastwood's film is predicated upon the premise of their affinity with U.S. soldiers, as sons and fathers, an affinity that establishes a homosocial and inter-racial brotherhood, does this justify the persecutions of the "real" enemy/ Others who do not share the "same humanity" with them? Disturbingly, we recall that, when Algren attacks the real enemies at the end of *The Last Samurai*, he demonstrates no remorse or guilt in destroying them. In this way, the film sustains the binary between the right and wrong enemy, as well as the right and wrong war. Does *Letters from Iwo Jima*, with its notion of enemies who are "like us/ not like us," share *The Last Samurai*'s binarized construction of Others to ultimately reinscribe former President Bush's conceptualization of "our allies" vs. "the terrorists"?

And yet, it is precisely this dichotomy that Eastwood's two films, *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima, together* disrupt and interrogate. On the one hand, the two films, when they are viewed separately, appear to show only the binarized portraits of the enemy/Other. Like *The Last Samurai*'s right and wrong enemies, the

[15] For the stories of Taiwanese and Korean imperial soldiers, see Yingzhen Chen, Utsumi Aiko, and Hyun Chang Il, among many others.

two films shift the portrayals of their enemies from the typical inhuman savages in *Flags of Our Fathers* to the exemplary "human"—soldier-sons and fathers—in *Letters from Iwo Jima*. When the two films are seen together, however, they reveal more complex, elusive, and phantasmal images and presences of the enemy/ Other, where ordinary fathers are perceived as savages and terrorists are also sons like us; where the contrasting portraits of the enemy/ Other/ ally, as well as their sound and deviant masculinities, are shown to constitute only different sides of the same "humanity."

It is significant, then, that Eastwood's films portray two opposing kinds of "allied masculinities," where the two sets of interracial brotherhoods are placed in tension: one where Japanese, Native American, and white American soldiers share their healthy and legitimate manhood as fathers, sons, *and* soldiers in a context where the films do not disrupt the continuity among those positions. It seems no accident that in neither film do women appear, except as wives and mothers of the soldiers. The films embrace the soldiers who fought bravely on both sides of the Pacific, and their heterosexual masculinities. Against this portrayal, a different kind of masculinity and interracial link is implied through the Hayes figure. Through his abortive, failed, and betrayed masculinity, Hayes represents what the "allied masculinity" *could* ultimately end up as. As the film delineates its dark side, it suggests a similar possibility and future for the present allies. Just as the identities of the enemy/Other/ally have gone through constant shifts in the course of U.S. histories of wars with different nations and races, the enemy-savage has gone back and forth between the ally/human, and the enemy. If the term "allied masculinities" signifies masculinity which is *temporarily* granted to the former enemy/ savages as they become the ally, the films unsettle the boundaries between the two, constructing them as less fixed than they appear. To borrow Paul Schalow's conceptualization of the Other, the Other emerges as something elusive and slippery, where there remains a profound sense of ambivalence and unknowability.[16] As *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* embody such changing presences of Others, the two films together question the Others' complete knowability despite the very imperative to know and learn about those Others that Eastwood's films insist upon.

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