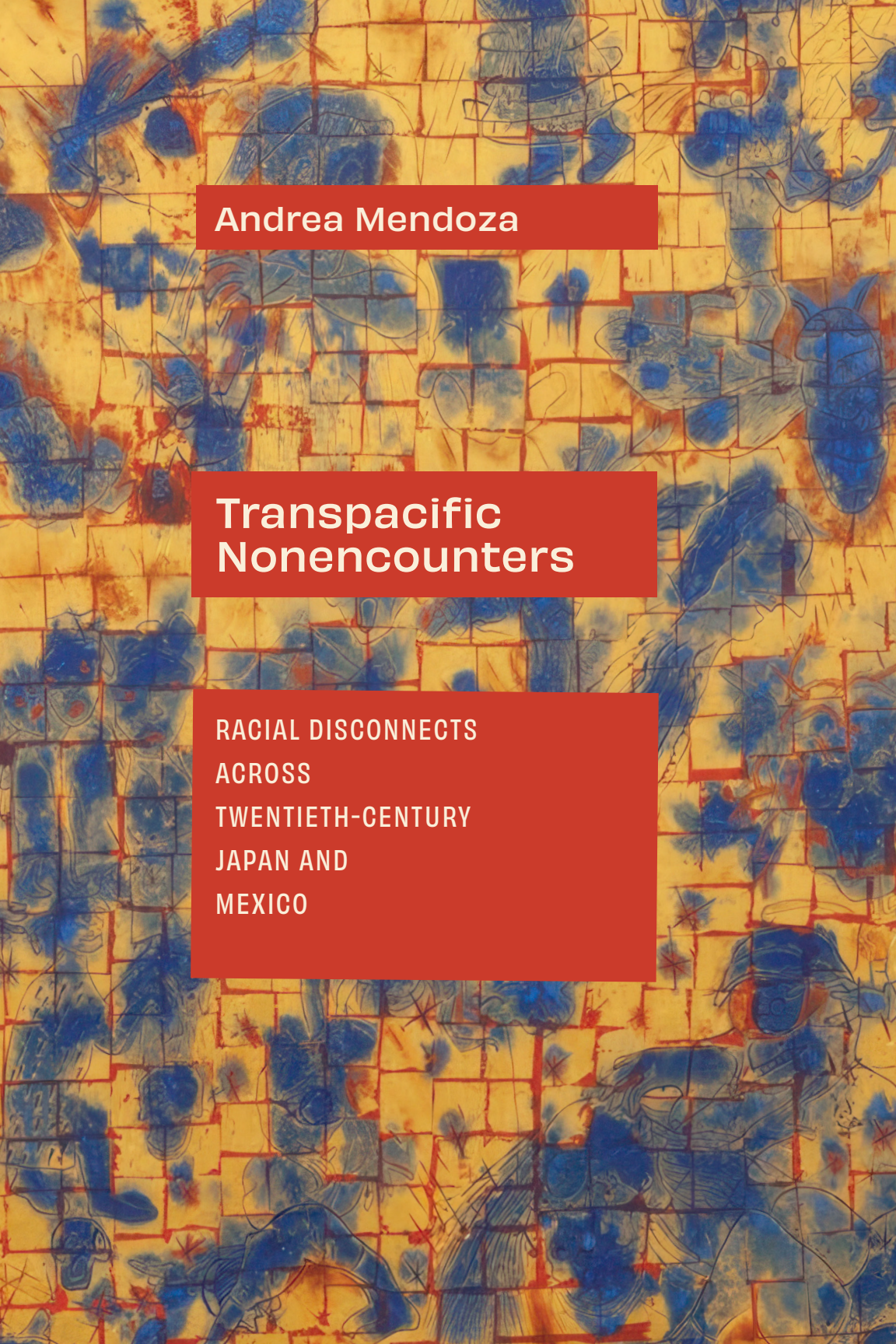
Andrea Mendoza
Transpacific Nonencounters
RACIAL DISCONNECTS ACROSS TWENTIETH-CENTURY JAPAN AND MEXICO

Transpacific Nonencounters

Transpacific Nonencounters

Racial Disconnects Across Twentieth-Century Japan and Mexico

ANDREA MENDOZA

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS *Durham and London* 2026

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Typeset in Portrait Text Regular by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Mendoza, Andrea, [date] author
Title: Transpacific nonencounters : racial disconnects across twentieth-century Japan and Mexico / Andrea Mendoza.
Other titles: Racial disconnects across twentieth-century Japan and Mexico
Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2026. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2025040030 (print)
LCCN 2025040031 (ebook)
ISBN 9781478038627 paperback
ISBN 9781478033738 hardcover
ISBN 9781478062202 ebook
ISBN 9781478094593 ebook other
Subjects: LCSH: Comparative literature—Japanese and Mexican | Comparative literature—Mexican and Japanese | Nationalism in literature | Race in literature | Mexican literature—History and criticism | Japanese literature—History and criticism | Critical race theory
Classification: LCC PL720.55.M6 M463 2026 (print) | LCC PL720.55.M6 (ebook) | DDC 809/.933552—dc23/eng/20251120
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025040030
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2025040031

Cover art: Sergio Hernández, *La vida en Japón* (detail), 2022. Courtesy of the artist.

Contents

Note on Terminology

Korean and Japanese words follow the revised romanization, or McCune-Reischauer and modified Hepburn systems, respectively. For names of those who primarily reside in countries where names are written with surnames preceding given names (such as Japan and Korea), I follow these conventions. For individuals who reside and publish primarily in English or other European languages, I follow the convention of surname following the given name.

Introduction

Transpacific Nonencounters

I didn't know why the target of the violence was always us. The only thing I know is that, at the time that these instances came to was when our Fatherland, North Korea, had nuclear weapons suspicions and pressure to show their nuclear facilities to the United States. And after they rejected, Japanese antinuclear sentiment, fueled by the United States, it turned to actual violence toward our bodies. When some political problem was sensationalized through the media—for example, when there were suspicions of a North Korean terrorist aboard a Korean airline—the political target of the violence was always us.—KUM SONI, *Beast of Me*

Then all of the sudden they tell you to be at ease with what you are, with someone dying, with surviving whatever you have had to survive, the violence you have been through, because God wanted it that way. God had illuminated a path you had to follow, and you can only arrive that way.—MARE ADVERTENCIA LIRIKA, *Cuando una mujer avanza* (When a woman steps forward)

Kum Soni's experimental short documentary *Beast of Me* opens with footage of a home video showing a group of girls performing on a school stage in Japan to a song and dance dedicated to Kim Il Sung. They glide gracefully

across the stage with unflinching smiles painted across their clean, bright faces, syncing their lips to the song that conveys a devotion to the North Korean leader and explains the importance of their costumes: "Although this is not our land or our sky, we live in happiness within the embrace of our fatherland. . . . Our scout's motto is always one: even though foreign enemies attack us, we are going to keep our Korean clothes until the end." Through the footage, *Beast of Me* archives Kum's intimate observations of the lived experiences of Zainichi (a term used to refer to Koreans living as permanent residents in Japan for multiple generations since the Second World War) girls and women who inherit the effects of Japanese colonialism, the partition of Korea, and present-day Japanese ethnonationalism. These are girls and women who belong, as Kum describes in a separate project, to "a community left out of the official record of history."[1] The performance of nationalist devotion evinces a disjointed reality for Kum, for the young girls, and for those whose bodies sync and spiral as they grasp for a sense of homeland in a state of statelessness.

The Zapotec "xip xop" artist and activist Mare Advertencia Lirika likewise understands the potential of art in dissolving the silences, borderlines, and demarcations surrounding the legacies of colonial violence. Made in collaboration with the US community organizer and filmmaker Simón Sedillo, Advertencia Lirika's 2012 documentary, *Cuando una mujer avanza* (When a woman steps forward), opens with juxtaposing images of the city of Oaxaca, first in 1939, then in 2012, to frame a multigenerational story of a young artist who traces her feminism to matrilineal genealogy of "the class of women who might even go completely unnoticed in the street."[2] Her story is one of stepping forward in a country where Indigenous identity and Indigenous roots have been systemically challenged and threatened, often through the perpetuation of misogynistic and racial violence. In response, Advertencia Lirika uses her story to construct a multigenerational model of a Zapotec community life and activism that connects the legacies of settler colonial appropriation of Indigenous identity and cultural practices to the Mexican state's continued attempts to control and eradicate Indigenous rebellion against systems of oppression.[3] Like *Beast of Me*, *Cuando una mujer avanza* highlights a refusal of official history. Kum's and Advertencia Lirika's works offer mediations that unravel institutionalized knowledge and work through how the official record contorts the real experiences of dispossession and violence for those whom it leaves out.

By turning their experiences of vulnerability to violence and marginalization into sites for radical solidarity, Advertencia Lirika and Kum show

that official discourses justify the conditions of their transgenerational oppression. Kum and Advertencia Lirika are, admittedly, speaking about instances of misogyny and xenophobic violence occurring in geographically and historically disconnected contexts. Kum retells her experience with systematized racial violence against girls of Korean descent in Japan. Advertencia Lirika addresses the heterosexist underpinnings of religious colonialism in discourses that justify the oppression of Zapotec women and girls in Mexico. And while Japanese colonial aggression against Koreans extends to the histories of forced migration that shape the little-attended-to history of the entanglements between the Korean diaspora and Indigenous populations in Mexico, even the savviest historians might be hard-pressed to find evidence of meaningful empirical links that connect the context of *Beast of Me* and that of *Cuando una mujer avanza*.[4] Traditional disciplinary approaches may therefore treat Kum and Advertencia Lirika as voices of separate archives, pertinent to distinct areas of study, if they are studied at all. But does that absence of relation necessarily premise irrelevance?

If demonstrating proof of connection is the prerequisite for relating histories and experiences of gendered and racial violence, then one must conclude that Kum and Advertencia Lirika cannot be studied or spoken about together. At least in the production of humanistic and social scientific knowledge, the echo chambers of disciplinary authority teach us that disconnection premises the particularity of an "area" or "field." Reified disparity was, after all, the framework that heralded the establishment of area studies in the North American academe during the Cold War, which relegates the study of subjects from distant geographic regions into neat, regionalized epistemic boxes—Asian Studies, Latin American Studies, Africana Studies, Middle East Studies, and so forth—each box containing numerous more boxes depending on the target of empirical particularity. And before then, the anthropological method offered epistemologies that sustained the incommensurability of human subjects based on an array of racial colonial categorizations that mediated the reification of cultural difference. Post–Cold War critiques, including postcolonial thought and theories of decolonization, variously theorized the inheritance of colonial disconnections as a "denial of coevalness" or even as "hauntings" to explain the workings of subjugated knowledge and its effective role in silencing subjugated peoples.[5] But what if we hold on to the possibility of resonance in and *because of* (not despite) disconnect? How does the refusal to adhere to disciplinary enclosure and official records generate a possible

dialogue out of separation? These are some questions that guide the proposal of this book about nonencounters.

.....

Transpacific Nonencounters: Racial Disconnects Across Twentieth-Century Japan and Mexico argues that key texts of Japanese and Mexican intellectual and cultural production generate a disconnected, albeit critical, perspective on twentieth-century transpacific racial politics that extends conceptualizations of global racism. I begin with disconnect to write against the persistent perception that questions relating to colonialism and racism are either tangential or irrelevant when it comes to the connected or comparative study of Asian and Latin American contexts when not speaking about migrant or diasporic subjects (for instance, Asians in Latin America as a specific, racialized population). In titling this book *Transpacific Nonencounters*, I signal an approach to using transpacific critique to find ways to engage the initial perceived absence of relationality between the historical and cultural phenomena that Kum and Advertencia Lirika address. In it, I examine the formation of philosophies of race and racism across Mexican and Japanese intellectual histories and cultural productions of the twentieth century to rethink the ongoing effects of transpacific imperialism and nationalism since the 1910s. I proceed, however, not from the perspective of empirical historiography but from a speculative, critical inquiry. Beyond the task of affirming how Mexico and Japan interact across the connected histories of labor migration, intercultural exchange, and other evidence of contact, this book interrogates the de-emphasized role that ideas about race played in the formation of transpacific imperial and settler national modernities. I turn to the construction of two racial ideologies as my points of departure—Pan-Asianism, an ideology that promoted the construction of a multiracial and multiethnic Japanese imperial identity; and *mestizaje*, an ideology that promoted the supremacy of Mexican racial polygenism by promoting the "whitening" of the Americas through miscegenation and Indigenous dispossession—as resonant phenomena that shaped modern transpacific racial politics. While these ideologies did not shape or influence each other in any proven capacity, when put against an intensifying racist world order, the ideological formations and residues of Pan-Asianism and *mestizaje* reveal a common strand of thinking among elite male intellectual and political actors that fomented figurations of modern state power and their long-standing cultural impact. Analyzing Pan-Asianism and *mestizaje* as the transpacific legacies of racism draws

attention to how ideas that promote racial inclusion and incorporation conceal the underpinning and interlinked structures of what I will call racial settler colonialism and imperial nationalism.

In using the term *nonencounter*, I refer to what has been erased, divided, or kept distant by official archives, disciplinary traditions, and colonial modalities of knowing. Through theorizing nonencounter as what is constructed as absent, I show how the structures and legacies of racism and colonial dispossession are embedded in the structures of *disconnect* that unevenly shaped global modernity and how we are trained to study its effects. With this provocation, I excavate the political and epistemic stakes of analyzing histories of settler colonial and imperial racial formations and racisms across Japan and Mexico as being embedded in the larger effects of global coloniality, anti-Indigenous and anti-Black dispossession, and violence. Throughout, my interrogations probe into the inequities and limits of the frames for understanding questions of racism, heterosexism, coloniality, and empire within a post–Cold War North American academe and conversations surrounding methods of comparison, the object and objective of world literary systems, and—the site of my project's departure—the role of the critique of area studies in addressing as well as perpetuating disciplinary disconnections.

Finding meaning in resonance without direct relatability has been a key practice for the anticolonial feminist politics of solidarity and theoretical practices I draw on in my citational framework. Kum and Advertencia Lirika address gendered racial violence and its erasure in ways that mirror how philosophers like Sylvia Wynter and Denise Ferreira da Silva theorize racism and heterosexism as structures threaded into the ideological contours of our popular and cultural imaginaries through the signifying power of the language of difference, the ethico-civilizational binarism of religious colonialism, and the legacies of imperial and colonial violence.[6] For Kum, who identifies as a third-generation Zainichi North Korean, the attention of news media to crafting popular conceptions of North Korea within the Japanese mainstream imaginary becomes a fuel for racialized and gendered violence against her and other Zainichi girls and women. Left out of the official record, Kum uses her artistic practice to offer a new archive of memory and its transmission. For Advertencia Lirika (whose stage name translates to "Lyrikal Warning"), participating in the production of an Indigenous Oaxacan feminist "xip xop" (spelled with an *x* to identify with Indigenous Oaxaca) becomes a way to confront the systemic oppression and violence against Indigenous women and girls in Mexico

that has continued since the heteropatriarchal colonial impositions of Catholicism in the state. In their disconnected trajectories, Advertencia Lirika and Kum share the power of refusing to be made to disappear. "The class of women who might even go completely unnoticed in the street" step forward in a resonant, lyrical warning.[7] And from the limits of archives and official narratives, they invent new modes of speaking and listening to histories shaped by the uneven structures and legacies of global colonialism. The two works address at once the intersectional, overlapping, and ruptured dimensions of gender, race, and class not through frames of temporal entrapment—structures that affix their stories in a particular time or place—but as conditions for a new way to understand the embeddedness of colonialism and dispossession in the present.

Throughout this book, transpacific nonencounters generate opportunities for reading through a queer phenomenology, to draw on the philosopher Sara Ahmed's terminology. Phenomenology's theories of perception, directionality, and consciousness provide a groundwork for conceptualizing nonencounter as a figure that emerges from within and against the impetus of transpacific frameworks to provide accounts of fraught geopolitical and cultural phenomena. Thinking through nonencounter crystallizes for me the ways of reckoning with a sense and condition of the inability to re-encounter or relate to intimate pasts without relational intimacies. Although Kum and Advertencia Lirika voice incongruent geohistorical reflections of what it means to resist being caught at the violence of margins, their incongruence is nevertheless generative and directional. My task as a reader and audience to their texts is to develop a critical framework that draws on the moments of resonance between the structures and histories that they unearth for each other. Through that framing, the discursive, political, and epistemic underpinnings of gendered and colonial violence in Japan and Mexico become less discordant. Their disconnect transforms into a fragile, perhaps even resisted, echo that exposes the intertwined logics of heterosexism and racial coloniality on a scale beyond the national and regional frames that attempt to secure a sense of distant particularization. Ahmed's discussion about how "things deemed breakable" share stories through fragile connections can be helpful here. Fragility is a thread, Ahmed writes, "a way of opening up a reflection on histories that have become hard, histories that leave some more fragile than others."[8] If histories, as objects constructed from particular and disciplinary perspectives, require hardening to "become hard," then opening them, by way of breaking them and breaking from them, means

exposing them to a different modality of understanding the past and how its legacies bear into the present. *Beast of Me* and *Cuando una mujer avanza* propose a way of working through the fragility of broken histories and caution us against the convenience of the official record. Together, Kum and Advertencia Lirika help me make sense of how to work through the unrecognized and disavowed. They guide my hypothesis that contemporaneous or resonant phenomena can remain unrelated but still allow for a shared critique of how estrangement brings phenomena to light. Reading their deeply philosophical and political projects through the transpacific phenomenology of nonencounter unfolds the resonant yet distant ways that the legacies of empire and settler coloniality in Japan and Mexico may bear on and inflect each other.

Nonencounter. A Hermeneutic for the Disconnected

The transpacific phenomenological approach to nonencounter both draws from and struggles to align with frameworks of intimacy and entanglement. Typically, these relational figures help signify how diverse archives of intellectual, cultural, and political production inherit interweaving genealogies of capitalist expansion and colonial exploitation to create complex networks of relationality among people, texts, and objects. In Lisa Lowe's foundational contribution to reading across the archives of liberal modernity, "intimacy" attends to "spatial proximity, or adjacent connection" that can "evoke the political and economic logics" through which racial capitalism and the rise of the liberal modern bourgeois republic forced violent colonial encounters.[9] Intimacy, then, not only highlights the rich, intersecting histories of colonialism, empire, and their entanglements but also offers a targeted point of critique for interrogating schematized archival and disciplinary divisions in the production of knowledge. Such divisions often rely on the putative boundedness of geographic, linguistic, and temporal categorizations when producing knowledge about contexts that we register as being outside the liberal modern West while emphasizing the politics of universalism in liberal modernity's ontology.

Nonencounter therefore does not mean non-encounter—it does not signify a reification of an absence of encounter. Instead, it points out a phenomenon that emerges when discipline and epistemology disavow and refuse to acknowledge encounters with, for instance, questions of race and racism and their global application across the study of the legacies and consequences of colonialism. The term *nonconformity*, for example, means

a "failure or refusal to conform"—a *choice* and *structure* of going against the evidence and possibility of conformity—rather than the absence of conformity overall. In similar fashion, *nonencounter* implies a failure or refusal to bring critical attention to the centrality of certain topics within the systems of epistemic representation that shape the study of culture and race. This failure or refusal takes place across the variety of disciplines that concern themselves with producing knowledge about contexts such as modern Japan and Mexico and questions of race in a globalized perspective—namely, US formations of area and ethnic studies, whose histories intersect across the militarized and politicized relationship between university departments and state power. It is thus apt, albeit with irony, that the term *nonencounter* exists for me in English, as it derives from the specific Anglo-American spheres of knowledge production that I attempt to trouble in this book. While my efforts to place discourses on race across twentieth-century Japan and Mexico emerge at moments where material connections may be present, a practice of reading transpacific nonencounters is a way to theorize and imagine a larger network of obfuscated resonances and legacies that compose the incomprehensive and uncontainable archives of transpacific and global modernity. The critical frame of nonencounter signifies more than unlikeliness or absence of linkages between racial formations in Japan and Mexico. Transpacific nonencounters refer also to the implied suppression of accounts of how thinking about the violence of imperialism and settler colonialism requires a capacious and imaginative understanding of the workings of racial supremacist domination as a global structure that goes beyond the centrality of white hegemony.

Recent studies on the politics of race in the development of national modernity reveal the shared institutional and imaginary dimensions of settler and colonial governance that brought the political regimes of Japan and Mexico into contact. Laura Torres-Rodríguez's *Orientaciones transpacíficas* examines how Japan's role in Asia, as a site of geopolitical dominance and cultural influence in the context of twentieth-century international relations, inspired ideas about national modernity and modernization in Mexico. Critically, Torres-Rodríguez points to the administration of Porfirio Díaz, whose three-decades-long dictatorship (termed the *Porfiriato*) was marked by its attention to the Meiji Restoration and an ambition to align Mexico with the Pacific rim at the turn of the century.[10] In tandem, the work of Eiichiro Azuma, Sidney Xu Lu, and others has highlighted how Japanese government officials and military leaders of the early

decades of the twentieth century increasingly viewed Mexico, more than other countries in Latin America, as a "racially tolerant" nation.[11] During the years that marked the period of what Azuma calls "emigration-led colonial expansion" into and across the Pacific, the Meiji government looked to Mexico and Brazil as the preferred destinations for ambitious Japanese frontiersmen.[12] The crucial contributions of scholars such as Jason Oliver Chang, Robert Chao Romero, Selfa A. Chew, Rachel Lim, and Jessica Fernández de Lara Harada furthermore teach us the importance of examining the particular conditions of Asian migrant and diasporic experience in Latin America. These scholars and their work contribute tremendously to contextualizing formations of race and racism in the global dimensions of Asian diaspora, the impact of US anti-Asian immigration laws on transpacific migration, and the role that the exploitation of Asian migrants played in the uneven capitalist development of Latin American states.

While the historical and present-day connections between Asia and the Americas are the backdrop of the texts I examine, the absence of empirical encounter as well as the strategic de-linking of Asia and Latin America in the institutionalized production of knowledge are my premise for analysis. In other words, to register disconnection as something epistemically constructed is only a first step to a methodology that resists the prerequisites of the empirical or archival. The epistemic construction of nonencounter serves as a critical analytical grounding in the project of antiracist epistemology. With this goal in mind, the approach to the nonencounter brings to the fore the problems, both pedagogical and structural, with methods of comparison and the structures that uphold the model of world literary studies in North America. That is, nonencounter responds to the caveats of attempts to overcome the systems of difference and distance that come into play when geographic, temporal, or cultural contexts do not seem to "touch" but require forms of disciplining.[13] Under the reconciliatory model of "world literature," comparison implicates accounts of literary and cultural production to a territorial regime that values the quantification of cultural texts, imagining a spectral extension of the relationship between war and diplomacy onto the politics of literary study.[14] Thus, while the area studies approach to read literatures by strategically "mining" them for information on the essentialized "other" or in their mimetic relationship to more "universalized" Euro-American texts, comparative and world literary methodologies pose similar ethical foreclosure. When the disciplinary takes precedent, an understanding of relation comes through as reification. Worlding and comparison, then,

can be read as apparatuses of disconnect and disconnection. In this vein, Édouard Glissant's theory of relation as "the possibility for each one at every moment to be both solidary and solitary there" encapsulates the hermeneutic role of nonencounter in terms of the colonial inheritance of epistemic division.[15] When comparison is complicit in forms of racial objectification that disable possibilities for solidarity, attention to the racism that informs the construction of separations of regimes of knowledge provides a possibility to reformulate an account of the "world" of "world literature" in terms of Silva's theorization of the global as racial.

Kum's and Advertencia Lirika's artistic practices define for me what it means to "be both solidary and solitary there," to see how histories of oppression that are not our own, that are far from our own, unravel and unearth, as Kum describes when writing on her own work, "the chaotic reality that shapes our worlds."[16] I read them, therefore, as suggesting something similar to Glissant's proposal of relations that honor opacity and remain solidary without putting energy into repairing the incommensurable. When I talk about the idea of nonencounter as a trace or evidence of the construction of absences (disciplinary, political, racial), I am discussing an alternative strategy for addressing the many actors—people, institutions, ideas—involved in forging devices that erase certain modalities of encounter from official archives and forms of knowing. Rather than tracking the history of nonencounter, which would assume that nonencounter has been consistently upheld, I offer in this book an interpretive cultural historiography and analysis that works to disentangle how its logic operates and how it can be reexamined in specific spatiotemporal frames. This by no means limits the hermeneutics of nonencounter to these frames. The historiographic approach tracks and excavates nonencounters in association with other accounts that deviate from and *queer* the histories of racist worlding. Nonencounter can teach us, in other words, to make meaning not *despite* but *from* and *because* of absence by asking us to interpret foreclosure as having heuristic potential.

Throughout the chapters of this book, the heuristic of nonencounter helps me situate various figurations of constructed absence and its violence: chapter 1's tracing of the ingrained disavowal of gender in conceptions of universalism that contour the "grammars" of "anti-racist" ideologies that legitimated genocide and continued colonial and racial oppression; chapter 2's description of Mexican philosophy as a *tierra incógnita* by a prominent Japanese intellectual after meeting with a visiting philosopher from Mexico City; chapter 3's exploration of the gendered and racial politics

of "cacophonous" representations of Japanese people as Indigenous in popular cinema and literary fiction; and chapter 4's analysis of the inscriptive legacies of anti-Blackness in literary works from the 1960s that have reached a worldwide canonical status. At times, nonencounter is a way to think about how the absence of empirical links generates the possibility of a critical comparative inquiry. At other times, I employ the term *nonencounter* to give meaning to how the obfuscated histories of racism across Asia and Latin America figure in the ways that Indigenous, Black, Asian, and other marginalized subjects experience the continued effects of racial settler colonial violence. Nonencounter operates, therefore, to signify how the constructed disparities of discipline and the structural erasures of racialized and colonized subjects are not only entangled and resonant but also central to transpacific cultural critique.

Through a focus on the hermeneutic value of disparity and disconnect, a framework of nonencounters provides a way of mapping out a practice of reading against spatial registers of nation- and area-based models of study. Attending to a perceived absence of encounter or connection requires us to dismantle not only how we traditionally privilege evidence as a basis for empirical comparisons but also the ways that Asia and Latin America are broadly imagined as disparate fields for study and therefore as almost hermetically sealed off from one another. Indeed, the very conception of "Latin America" and "Asia" as geopolitical *ideas* as early as the fifteenth century was premised on the paradox of their equivalence and disparity within the cartographies of colonialism. The failure of an encounter with Asia led, after all, to the colonization of the space that would be later abstracted into the terrain called "Latin America." As Evelyn Hu-DeHart is correct to point out, "After all, was not Columbus heading to Asia when he got lost instead in a part of the world heretofore unknown to Europe and later named America?"[17] Wynter's "1492," of course, offers a more nuanced interpretation of Columbus's failure to encounter Asia not as a story that gives meaning to the geopolitical organization of the modern world but as one that understands global colonialism as a system reproduced through the ongoing subjugation, displacement, and marginalization of Indigenous and Black populations as well as the fungibility of Asian subjects.[18] In Wynter's account, the violence of a failure of encounter is foundational to the uneven power structures that underwrite a modern liberal global capitalist ethos that still reduces the relationality of Latin America and Asia to their capacity for extractive economic practices. "1492," in other words, cannot be understood outside European colonial objectives to classify swaths of

the human population of the world to the status of labor and capital. The Black theorist of Marxist thought Cedric Robinson elaborates this as part of the history of racial capitalism.[19]

The analytical traditions of Asian American critique, Pacific studies, studies in comparative racial formations, and an ever-growing corpus of critical area studies enable this book's examination of the racist capitalist logic of imperial nationalisms across Asia and the Americas. Still, too often, popular narratives of race mythologize a nation's ability to neutralize race or deracialize itself altogether—for instance, in cases where Mexico or Japan are discussed as not being racist because they "do not have race" (in the case of Mexico) or because they are "ethnically homogeneous" (in the case of Japan). Through the framework of nonencounter, my approach to the study of racial formations in twentieth-century Japan and Mexico attends to an analysis of the modern state and global modernity as apparatuses of racial differentiation and inequality. In other words, understanding European white supremacy as exclusive of the fundamental role that racial colonialism played in Mexico and Japan puts at stake a comprehensive analysis of how the *discursive* spheres that constructed Japanese, Mexican, and other "nonwhite" cultural nationalisms were themselves complicit in legitimizing the violence of colonial racial supremacy. Functionally and publicly, mestizo and Japanese identities were negotiated with and against a desire to attain forms of racial hegemonic power. Following Bolivar Echeverría's analysis of *blanquitud*, which argues that the hegemony of whiteness does not need white people to be upheld, I read Japanese imperialism and mestizo nationalism as supremacist models of using race as an instrument of power and as upholding standards of racial belonging and segregation. In so doing, the focus of this book is less about inquiring into how nonwhite nations can be racially supremacist and more about asking how transpacific national modernities not only participated in the global structuring of race as a field of settler and imperial domination but also produced oppressive racial hierarchies and forms of racial hegemony that are not often taken into account in Anglo-American and Western European–centered dialogues.

The hermeneutic approach of nonencounter also doubles as a citational reframing. The work of Wendy Matsumura has taught me to think about how the politics of knowledge production in and about modern non-European settler states such as Japan and Mexico "ha[s] to contend with anti-Blackness, as well as anti-Indigeneity, not as additive context but as the very grounds on which our understandings of imperialism, colonialism, and

total war must stand."[20] In this vein, this project is also indebted to anticolonial and decolonial feminist scholarship that has shown in varying ways how to attend to the dehumanizing violence of area epistemologies by engaging models that emerge from Black and Indigenous critiques of the colonial violence of knowledge production. I also draw on and am in intellectual debt to the scholarship of Denise Ferreira da Silva, Sylvia Wynter, Hortense Spillers, Jodi A. Byrd, Christina Sharpe, and other scholars of Black and Indigenous epistemologies who link the construction of the modern world to violent anti-Black and anti-Indigenous structures and processes. Anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity, after all, shape relations among all subjects implicated within the systems of power produced by the enduring conditions of empire, settler colonialism, and the legacies of exclusionary liberalism and universalism. I call my citation of the work by these scholars a form of indebtedness, however, because I view their interventions as absented links within the critical discourses that have been used to deconstruct the traditional model of area studies. Conversations in the critique of area studies have crafted historical materialist narratives that attempt to reckon with the implications of what Wynter termed, in her 1987 article "On Disenchanting Discourse," the partitioning "discourse of the universal Human self from 'anthropology'" (as is the episteme of area studies).[21] Yet as Matsumura has incisively pointed out, even as they illuminate the twentieth-century formations of racial heteropatriarchal colonial violence, the genealogies of Indigenous Black radical, intellectual, and philosophical production are rarely recognized within the corpus of the materialist critique of area studies.[22] Similarly—though outside the scope of my work here—despite long-standing citation of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, much of the work done to criticize the discipline of area studies has eliminated from its agenda the decolonizing imperative of Edward Said's critique of ongoing dehumanization and destruction of Arab life under the continuing effects of European and North American settler and colonial violence. (How come?)

Theorizing nonencounter is thus a heuristic hermeneutic for refusing the limits of disconnected histories and intellectual genealogies that helps me understand why an analysis of anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity are not just inscribed in the logics of Pan-Asianism and *mestizaje* but also reinscribed in the critiques of colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and racism that fail to register their centrality. This refusal to *not recognize* pushes me to reconfigure my own intellectual formation and consider instead how the failure to register processes of dehumanization was symptomatic in the violence

perpetuated by the intellectual contours of transpacific racial settler and imperial oppression.

Racial Settler Colonialism and Imperial Nationalism

While the imperialistic function of area studies has been the target of criticism mainly because of its formation as a tool for the US military apparatus and its complicity with reproducing the trappings of US military power and racial supremacy, it is also important to extend our criticism to the disavowal of the structures of racial supremacy perpetuated within the conception of "Asia" and "Latin America" as objects of study. "Disavowal," in this sense, refers to what Nayoung Aimee Kwon defines as "the ambivalent and unstable play of recognition and denial" that underpins the social, political, and cultural contexts of imperialism.[23] Often, in making questions of racism and settler coloniality—or, further, racial settler colonialism—into non-matters (nonencounter) for the production of cultural knowledge, traditional area studies (as well as many of its critiques) default to white epistemological genealogies of anthropology, theory, and comparative methodologies. Analyzing Japanese and Mexican imperial nationalist discourses and ideologies through the frame of racial settler colonialism is key, for me, to providing a capacious analysis of race and racism. From Indigenous American critique, the term *settler colonialism* has typically been employed to reflect on the exploitation, exclusion, and dispossession of Indigenous communities in the colonial processes that constituted the history of modern nation-statehood in, especially, anglophone America. But as the scholar of comparative colonialisms J. Kēhaulani Kauanui incisively argues, settler colonialism is a *structure* rather than a single historical event within a single context.[24] By "structure," Kauanui refers to the continued subjection of Indigenous people to "an ongoing genocidal project" that has not ended, as evidenced by the permanence of settlers on Indigenous lands and the continued removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands. Confronting the notion that "colonialism is something that ends" with the dissolution of formal colonies, the use of settler colonialism as an analytic furthermore debunks the myth that Indigenous and other marginalized peoples subjugated by colonial violence exist in the past of the settler nation.[25] As Kum's and Advertencia Lirika's projects prove, resistance to the historical and present structures of settler colonial violence and empire remains very much a part of the enduring and global legacies of racial and anti-Indigenous dispossession.

The focus of this book is the global colonial context in which disparate "anti-racist" discourses emerge across transpacific formations of racial settler power. I argue that the ideological productions of Mexican and Japanese racial settler colonialisms demonstrate a shared tendency for intertwining the violent colonial processes of nation-building—the coercive integration of colonized populations and territories into a hegemonic state—with processes of imperial domination. Therefore, a critical point that I emphasize throughout is defining Mexican mestizo nationalism and Japanese Pan-Asianism as ideologies of imperial nationalism. The term *imperial nationalism* denotes, more than the physical attributes that constituted the spatial expansion and reorganization of the territorial sovereignty, the intellectual and speculative investments that invariably inform the occupation of colonized space—be they geographic, political, or sociocultural terrains.

The intellectual historian and cultural theorist Naoki Sakai has defined imperial nationalism as an emotive attachment whereby the project of the nation adopts imperialistic rhetoric and ideologies that intersect with the systematization of the territorial state.[26] In the context of the Japanese Empire, Sakai describes imperial nationalism as a "pastoral power structure" of Japanese imperialism that later transmuted itself into US (neo)imperial nationalism.[27] Here I extend the notion of imperial nationalism to the constitution of Mexican settler nationalism in order to make visible the multiple forms of subjugation that Indigenous, Black, and Asian populations in Mexico experienced during the systemization of mestizo hegemony in the twentieth century. While the constitution of Mexican racial settler and cultural nationalisms has apparent differences to Japanese imperialism, the ideological productions that underwrote them shared a justification of state power as a pastoral apparatus for administering colonial and Indigenous subjects. From Sakai's definition, I conceptualize imperial nationalism as a phenomenon of a racial colonial transference in transpacific national modernization wherein the racial heteropatriarchal logic of empire helps assert nonwhite settler hegemony.

The co-occurrence of intellectual histories of racial philosophy in Mexican and Japanese national modernities demonstrates that transpacific modernity was underwritten by a recurring and violent scene of conquest and the making of race into an object of liberal humanism. Of course, the modern Mexican state, unlike the Japanese Empire, never participated in what could be recognized as a formal model of colonialism.[28] But when I talk about Mexican imperial nationalism and its resonances

with—rather than equivalence to—Japanese imperial nationalism, I refer to the discursive construction of a national ideology that predicated itself on the coercive linguistic, cultural, and racial subjugation of Indigenous populations and the exclusion of other racialized, migrant, enslaved, and formerly enslaved people from the ideological and political aspirations of Mexican modernity. Rather than only identifying an emotive-affective structure of the imperial framework of national identification, the term *imperial nationalism* also theorizes the role of cultural and ideological discourses in the erasure and dehumanization of subjects, which conditioned the construction of multiracial settler hegemony. Furthermore, early twentieth-century discourses on the formation of *Mexicanidad* through mestizo nationalism parallel Japan's imperial project of Pan-Asianism in several ways, even while attempting to meet different goals. It matters as well that the view of *mestizaje* as justification for Mexican cultural universalism carries enormous hegemonic weight in the construction of Latin Americanism and *Latinidad* across the Americas. As I explore in chapter 2, one of the critical components of *mestizaje* ideology was that it theorized Latin American scientific racialism and became central, as Juan De Castro explains, to different national elitist attempts to promote the "whitening" of Latin American populations.[29] Thinking about Mexican racial settler nationalism as an *imperial* nationalism, I push for a way to analyze the role of Mexico as a cultural hegemon in the construction of Latin American modernity and place it in uneasy juxtaposition with the continued impact of Japanese cultural imperialism in East Asian geopolitics.

While underscoring imperial nationalism as an ideological structure within the formation of the Japanese Empire and the postrevolutionary Mexican state, I also examine how this ideological phenomenon intersects with the present-day articulations of Japan and Mexico as settler colonial states that uphold their status through the perpetuation of anti-Indigeneity. As Indigenous critiques have highlighted, the modern nation-state cannot be considered without the co-constitutive ontologies of settler possession and the colonial underpinnings of the national. As Jodi A. Byrd argues, the emphasis on the national in international law "predicates that indigenous people remain still colonized liminally within and beside the established and geopolitical and biopolitical borders and institutions of (post)colonial governance as stateless entities."[30] In anglophone academic discussions, *settler colonialism* typically refers to how the dispossession and exploitation of colonized Indigenous populations serve the purpose of the nation-state. By systematizing the exclusion of subjects included within the nation-state

proper, settler colonialism encodes modes of internal settler colonization as racialization, and such racialization as an imperative for the forceful remediation and assimilation of colonized people and territories into the borders of the settler colonial state.[31] This is why key scholars in Indigenous studies—from Byrd, to Aileen Moreton-Robinson, to Tiffany Lethabo King, to Kathryn Walkiewicz—argue for analyses of nation-state formation that emphasize the role of racial possession and dispossession in the establishment of national identity and culture. In the context of Japan, alongside Lu and Azuma, Danika Medak-Saltzman demonstrates how crucial settler colonialism was not only for the primitive accumulation of capital in modernizing Japan at the end of the nineteenth century but also, overall, for Japan's colonial influence in Asia and the Americas.[32] Beginning with the development of Hokkaido through violent interventions in Ainu homelands, the creation of Japanese settlers and Japanese settler colonial subjects transformed the legacies of Japanese imperialism across each side of the Pacific. To attend to the question of settler colonialism from the perspectives of both Japanese and Indigenous studies, as Medak-Saltzman inspiringly demonstrates, means to better engage with arguments that address the settler colonial contexts "already haunted by the specters of colonialism" while enabling deeper engagement with the consequences of colonialism as they bear on continued practices of incorporating Indigeneity into cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship.[33]

Imperial nationalism can furthermore be theorized as the nexus between the production of ideology that justifies the formation of the state and the mechanisms of racial supremacy and settler colonialism. The projects of racial settler colonialism in both Japan and Mexico gave way to a slew of academic and cultural discourses that looked to "discover" a national past in the identities and cultural practices of the people whose Indigeneity they erased. More than an "emotive-affective" identification of the nation as an imperial project, imperial nationalist disciplines like *minzokugaku* ("folk" studies) and cultural aesthetic ideologies like *indigenismo* in the early 1900s ensured that what became the ideal of the national community could manage Indigeneity through the possession of Indigenous lands, labor, and practices while eschewing the role of Indigenous people in the projects of modernization.[34]

Considering imperial nationalism as an intellectual enterprise cannot, therefore, be divorced from an analysis of its role as a racial settler colonial phenomenon that animates heteropatriarchal understandings of

land, people, culture, and community. Another resonance across Japanese and Mexican imperial nationalist epistemologies, for instance—the role of male elites in these nonwhite European majority states—served a role in the consecration of racial settler hegemonic discourses. Through their knowledge production, discourses on race were used to transform the definition of the national community, including those forced within it, through performative sloganizations—or, as Silva argues, "discursive short-cuts" for the "racial (ethical-political) truths that set in motion the colonial mechanisms of expropriation."[35] As such, I read the construction of some of these sloganized "short-cuts" that signify imperial nationalist endeavors—the "cosmic race," "the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere"—to examine how, within them, race becomes a conceptual vehicle and terrain of political fantasy through which to compose a homosocial vision of global modernity.

The Question of Area and Transpacific Critique

My vision of transpacific critique theorizes the transpacific according to a perspective that brings into alignment, without collapsing the differences among, the various, if disconnected, historiographies of oppression and resistance that underwrite the uneven structures of global coloniality.[36] Thus, when I refer to "transpacific racial discourses," I mean a set of perspectives situated in the entangled histories of racial formations across Asia and the Americas that shaped how the category of "humanity" could be processed and bifurcated in the construction of a global modern world. Transpacific critique, in other words, provides a frame for holding to account relations of dominance and power to the continued and intersecting legacies of Japanese, Spanish, and North American colonialisms. I interpret, therefore, the transpacific as a frame that enables an analysis of the geopolitical and biopolitical dimensions of what Silva conceptualizes as "a global idea of race"—how race shapes and conditions how human difference is reproduced across the social and political configurations of modernity. As a global idea that has evident structural and systemic manifestations, race continues to link the legacies of colonialism to dominant epistemological formations, both materially and discursively. If we take race as a global idea, it therefore follows that this book's formulation of the transpacific might find itself at odds with dominant definitions of the framework of transpacific studies.

Wynter's writings on how "present arrangements of knowledge" (disciplines) perpetuate the global colonial division of humanity formulate my understanding of the stakes of the transpacific critique of area studies as a critique of the overrepresentation of hegemonic figures and discourses.[37] Wynter describes how limited the "figure of Man"—constituted by eschewing the universality of those who are not Western European (ergo, white) bourgeois men—is for new vantage points and objects of knowledge to emerge. While creating an account for the genealogies that sustain the academic fields concerning humanity in general—the humanities—the "figure of Man" has historically politicized itself *against* the inclusion and *for* the erasure of Black, Indigenous, Asian, and other marginalized and nonheteronormative subjects. In many ways, this figure of disciplinary authority dominates the frameworks and questions that we turn to when we produce global knowledge, especially in ways that devalue, ignore, or discredit work that holds disciplines and practices of teaching accountable to their supremacist constructions. If the traditional racist and heterosexist model of knowledge production renders the "figure of Man" into a universal, relatable subject, I argue here for further ethical interrogation of the impetus toward relation, relationality, and relatability. As coloniality is premised on a relational center, de- and anticolonial thinking must be antirelational.

In a similar vein, Lisa Yoneyama's mindful analysis of the prefix *trans-* in *transpacific* plays a further, indispensable role in the way I understand the transpacific as a critical vantage point. Yoneyama reads *trans-* as a pathway that dislocates the directions of paths carved through the heterosexist, racist structures of empire and colonialism.[38] It is through and across—*trans*—the partitions enabled by the effects of racism, colonialism, and imperialism that we begin to denaturalize the ongoing reification and expropriation of those marginalized and rendered disposable by their effects. After all, area studies do not reflect the world; rather, they produce a world that inscribes the hegemonic specters of empire and racial supremacy onto how we receive "our present arrangements of knowledge." For instance, Shu-mei Shih identifies how area studies' disavowals of race and racialization limit these fields' viability as lenses for humanistic knowledge production.[39] What Shih terms the "deracialization" of area studies applied to a neocolonial operation that made it possible for scholars to produce knowledges about racialized others without considering the systemic and interpersonal manifestations of racism at play in

the operations of these fields and their use. Vicente Rafael likewise raises a critique of US area studies' disavowal of race and racism as "conceived at a moment . . . when liberal ambitions for enforcing global peace [were] necessary for capitalist expansion."[40] By disavowing race and racism as part of their institutionalization, area studies have been able to perpetuate the militarized racist practices of knowledge production as a form of strategic diplomacy.

In other words, the enforcement of cultural difference through what Rafael characterizes as "disciplinary containment" of the non-liberal-capitalist world had further consequences in the formation of Latin American studies—a field founded at the beginning of the Cold War to contain and control leftist and populist movements in the region. In his discussion of the construction of Latin America in Latin American studies, Alberto Moreiras cites Uruguayan writer Ángel Rama's *La ciudad letrada* (The Lettered City, 1984) to argue that historically, the "lettered city" that typifies academic imaginaries of Latin American cosmopolitanism and constructed the ideal of Latin America "structurally excludes a number of historic populations, some of them originary, some mestizos or descendants of slave groups."[41] As Latin American studies privileges cultural and intellectual productions from the "militantly liberal-criollo" and majority-white populations of Latin America, Moreiras points out, even experts of the field who identify as Latin American framed a relationship to the field of study "that left behind literary priorities in order to center themselves."[42]

If area studies is an orientation, a direction, and a way of centering certain formations of the "figure of Man," we might call area studies a type of phenomenological apparatus that functions as a device to flatten the world into anthropological knowledges that follow the racial colonial divisions of humanity. The unraveling of the kind of systemic *worlding* engaged in the area model—and often reproduced as a comparative method—would offer a possibility of forging new directions and approaches beyond racial disciplinary containment. In many respects, reconsiderations of the area model reenact the strategies and approaches that characterized how the problems of essentialism and particularism have been interrogated since the 1980s. For this reason, however, holding the area model to account as an articulation of false universalism and hegemonic worlding can expose it as a model that forecloses relationalities and relatabilities. Indeed, even at the level of the politics of language and translation, the apparatus of area (as a silo that enables cultures and histories to be studied in utmost

specificity) persists in foreclosing relationships to and among languages by managing and articulating differences through their separation.

I therefore engage transpacific critique not simply to chronicle the translation of national languages into others (though instances of this do emerge in my writing) but to use translational modes as a practice for representing how moments of instability, constructed differences, and strategies of categorization can be negotiated. The geographical, political, and, indeed, linguistic contexts that shape the arguments of this book are also consequential to my own intellectual stakes as a Mexican immigrant and scholar trained in area studies. Writing as someone born to the millennial generation, following the end of the Cold War, my life has encompassed many instances in which human lives were lost to the violence of systemic inequalities and reproductions of the colonial divisions of humanity. I therefore often think about what we owe to disciplinarily constructed erasures. Yet I am aware of the forms of privilege that my positionality as a mestiza with educational privilege has afforded me, including in my ability to traverse the fields and languages of Asian and Latin American studies within US academe. It is therefore pertinent to me, both personally and intellectually, to delineate why interrogating area studies as a racist disciplinary formation is not just a form of antiracist decolonization but also a crucial critical intervention that constitutes a new form of understanding the work of translation as an anticolonial practice. It is not merely that the materials that I engage are originally produced in languages other than English and require the work of translation but rather that the work of translation reconciles the disciplinary lenses and traditions that inflect how we understand the materialities of these texts (the context of their production based on understandings of their historical and geopolitical specificities).

In my field of training—Japanese literary studies—for example, those who inhabit bodies like mine often struggle to attain legibility as scholars—and, in some ways, as human beings. In part, this is likely because bodies like mine were not imagined as having voices in the field upon its inception. After all, Japanese studies was founded by a group of scholars affiliated with US military and intelligence agencies who were tasked with the reconstruction of the image of Japan after the Second World War.[43] In other words, the economy and, indeed, the capital—both financial and cultural—of Japanese literary studies is built on the exclusion of nonwhite racialized subjects from the practices of the discipline, beginning with the recruitment of military and intelligence officers from prestigious schools

who founded and shaped the field in the 1940s to their continuing influence in how Japanese literary studies is taught, who gets to teach it, and who gets to be taught it. If we begin with the account of how militarized and politicized discrimination truncated academic and financial opportunities for nonwhite Americans in the field, we can begin to think about how the history of area studies largely involved biopolitical processes that decided whose lives were more valuable and expendable. Who was allowed to live and produce knowledge about Japan after 1945? Who was excluded or left to die? The debt that I feel is not a moralistic one that pushes me to condemn the cis white men whose names adorn prestigious centers and libraries across the country; rather, it is a debt precisely to those who did not get to be disciplined, those whom I did not encounter. But more than a moralistic debt, it is an intellectual debt that I am attempting to begin to pay in *Transpacific Nonencounters*.

Key to paying my intellectual debt is my turning to the transpacific as a vantage point that does not make a particular demographic, ethnic, or regional group into an object of study. If in the context of the North American academy, the rubrics of Asian and Latin American studies—area studies—have been insufficient for examining the global historicity of racism, I cannot comfortably say that the antidote to the field's disavowal of racism exists in frameworks that study how Asian, Brown, Black, and Indigenous subjects are subjugated in the specificity of the United States or Anglo-America. The branches comprising ethnic studies, in other words, do not often account for structures and histories of race and racism encountered outside the imaginary of the so-called West. Knowledge production around questions of race, in disciplinary practices at the very least, often places race and racism in the domain of Eurocentric ideas about whiteness. US-centered ethnic studies are limited because they do not address the heterogeneity of the global structures of colonialism, racism, and white supremacy, which are not incommensurate with Eurocentric racisms but require multiple axes of historical analysis and cultural critique to account for. Joo Ok Kim addresses the connections between the establishment of ethnic studies and the deracialization of area studies a step further by arguing that the branches of ethnic studies are "tethered through Cold War militarization" in Asia. "The Cold War and neo-liberal university's incorporation of the radical political desires of differentially positioned social movements into such disciplines and fields as ethnic studies," Kim writes, function "to manage, order, integrate, secure, and rule subjects marked as unruly."[44]

Amid area studies' disavowal of questions of racism and ethnic studies' self-reflexive critical model, which pays little attention to the material conditions of racism in most of the world, a disciplinary model of transpacific studies seems like a productive venue for staging a deconstructive dialogue that remedies the distances between these fields. In Anglo-American academe, transpacific studies typically functions today to connect the histories of the United States' military, colonial, and neocolonial impact on Asian and Pacific diasporic movements in anglophone North America while illuminating prospective convergences among the fields of Asian studies, Asian American studies, and American studies. Such a notion of transpacific studies, however, often forecloses the possibility of creating a "decolonial genealogy," as Lisa Yoneyama argues, that may "clarify the specific geohistorical conditions under which that space has been constituted as an object of knowledge and nonknowledge."[45] Further, such a notion does not consider the transpacific as a conceptual frame for critiquing intersecting geohistorical structures of colonialism, empire, racism, and Indigenous dispossession beyond an anglophone colonial and postcolonial center. In Pacific studies, meanwhile, critiques of the transpacific engage in a critique of transpacific studies in order to highlight the erasure of the Pacific Islands and Pacific Islanders from an Asia-centered ideology of the Asia Pacific and the disregard for the continued violence of the interrelated structures of Japanese and US colonialism.[46] As Erin Suzuki incisively points out, early twenty-first-century articulations of US-oriented "transpacific studies" often understood the transpacific as a productive metaphor that highlights the histories that traverse the Pacific but that often renders invisible other modes of relating and orienting the critical decolonial scope of the transpacific.[47] Okinawan feminist scholar Ayano Ginoza's proposal of the term "archipelagic feminisms" similarly highlights the intention "to nuance relationalities and solidarities of islands and islanders in a way that their agencies and mobilizations are not predetermined by language barriers or ideological divisions, as well as the hegemonic geopolitical designation of islands by their isolation, distance, and smallness."[48]

The limitations of the disciplines of area and ethnic studies in providing a language structure of racial and anti-Indigenous violence within non-Anglo-American contexts inflect the ways that the histories of Japanese imperialism and Mexican mestizo nationalism bear on the ways that forms of anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, and anti-Asianness structure and inflect on each other across these contexts. To register the specificity

of anti-Indigeneity and anti-Asian racism in the discourses of *mestizaje* and Pan-Asianism, for instance, I use terms such as *racial settler coloniality* and *imperial nationalism*, which target the ways that categories such as "Japanese" and "mestizo" were produced as structures of racial supremacy vis-à-vis Black, Indigenous, and colonized and migrant Asian subjects.

To be clear, in holding the Anglocentrism of transpacific studies to account, I am not calling for the valuation of a Latin American or East Asian transpacific. I do want to conceive transpacific critique as a troubled conversation with Anglo-American epistemologies that can interrogate the systems of power that shape the disconnects of race across Latin America and Asia. But arguments proposed by Latin American decolonial theory to replace the overrepresentation of European or anglophone contexts with hispanophone ones is not the decolonial praxis I espouse.[49] To critique area studies as a problem requires a critique of how a proposal to center hispanophone, lusophone, or other non-Anglocentric configurations of the transpacific may center the cultural and political hegemony of Europeanness. Junyoung Verónica Kim's work has therefore been uniquely important to my understanding of how to conceive the perceived (non)relationship of Latin America to the transpacific. Writing on the expansion of critical race studies through a framework she terms "Asia-Latin America as Method," Kim offers a powerful foundation for how we may deconstruct the divisive formations of Asian and Latin American studies not through a centering of an inter-geopolitical, regional, or "area" model but through a "method" that offers a more nuanced and capacious approach to the contexts of racial, gendered, and capitalist violence that underwrite relations of power across the formations of "Asia–Latin America."[50] To move away from the schematization of the non-West as spaces where relationality cannot occur without the mediation of the West is a process of refusing the enclosures of discipline, of carrying out an approach and account of transpacific historiographies that may shift how we perceive the once prearranged representations of those spaces and their relations. What interests me in Kim's critical revision of the transpacific approach to Asia–Latin America is that she notes the epistemic violence of discipline itself, not affording the frames of area or ethnic studies any reprieve from their complicity in naturalizing knowledges that in fact erase and dislodge the experiences of racial and migratory formations situated outside the discursive regime of "the West and the Rest."[51] I join Kim's effort in this book to theorize Asia–Latin America not as a framework of peripheral exchange or exception but as a site for a critical anticolonial epistemic practice. For

such a practice to emerge in transpacific critique, the intersections of Black, Indigenous, and anticolonial epistemologies should be central to interrupting arrangements of knowledge, present or otherwise, that participate in strategies of domination and dispossession.

Chapters

Deploying transpacific nonencounters to confront the legacies of area means bringing together critical epistemologies that can examine what has been historically devalued, erased, and excluded. Of course, a more encompassing project might require several volumes and many other voices. While I have written this book with several audiences in mind—first and foremost being students of literary and cultural studies for whom a transpacific framework of nonencounter resonates with analyses of power, knowledge production, and formations of race and racism—I recognize that it is part of an unfinished critical theoretical endeavor. My archive is, after all, mainly limited to Japanese, Spanish, and English-language sources. I recognize as well that this book is not just indebted to but *depends* on conversations with works that engage the multitude of Indigenous and Asian languages that exist in the margins of the narratives, geographies, and histories explored here. Transpacific nonencounters are also the many fissures that are left over, even in and despite the attempts to address and tend to them. Nonencounter is therefore a reappearing structure because it functions as a figurative way to address the melancholic apparatus of constructed disciplinary fragmentations and structural removals as they emerge, even if in obfuscated and disarticulated ways, in the global legacies of modern racism. In other words, transpacific nonencounters require constant pathological attempts to *return to* and *witness* their formations, even when the systems that sustain them might be coming to an end (as is the ongoing promise and threat to the area-studies method).

This book is thus organized as threads of arguments that reach out to the expansive possibilities of types of relations that are "solidary and solitary there" across unlikely sites of knowledge making and unmaking. I bring together a set of texts and histories that may appear disconnected from one another but that, in nonencounter, collectively contextualize and help conceive a transpacific critique of imperial nationalism and twentieth-century modernity. In terms of periodization and the genre of materials I examine, the book's four body chapters can be read as two parts, with the first two chapters focused on analyzing intellectual histories from

the first half of the twentieth century, and the second focused on the legacies of those histories in post-1945 literary and cinematic representations. Together, the chapters respond to the ways that the structures of modernity and legacies of imperial nationalist ideologies inform, produce, and influence how categories of race emerge and get reinscribed.

The first two chapters examine the heteropatriarchal and racial colonial formations of the intellectual terrains in which imperial nationalist ideologies emerged during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Chapter 1 analyzes the role that elite male intellectuals associated with two schools of thought played in the production of imperial nationalist and culturalist philosophies. From the 1910s, the Kyoto School and El Ateneo de la Juventud (the Mexican Youth Athenaeum) gained national prominence. Philosophers associated with these epistemological currents, including well-known figures such as Miki Kiyoshi and José Vasconcelos, provided terminology for conceptualizing Pan-Asianism and *mestizaje* as part of the modernizing systems of racial settler governance. Drawing on Hortense Spillers's analysis of the "grammars" that structure the consequences of histories of racism and dehumanization in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," I explore how Pan-Asianism and *mestizaje* structure the racial grammars of imperial nationalisms. I discuss how philosophical discourses were codified by the heteropatriarchal and supremacist apparatuses of empire and settler coloniality and track how the two strains of multiracialist ideologies culminate in the political subjugation of racialized and colonized subjects within the project of imperial national capitalist development. Thus, they testify not to the intellectual or historical allegiances or similarities between Mexican and Japanese philosophers of race but rather to how the dispossession of colonized Indigenous, Asian, and Black subjects participates in the conceptualization and production of transpacific modernity.

While the philosophers and political figures juxtaposed in chapter 1 very likely never formally met, chapter 2 traces an instance in which archival evidence creates the record of the encounter between Kuwaki Gen'yoku and Adalberto García de Mendoza, two philosophers who met at a symposium on phenomenology in Tokyo in 1931. Across both philosopher's writings about their meeting, Kuwaki's repeated surprise over the existence of a "Mexican philosophy" is striking. In a letter that García de Mendoza translates and reprints in his collection of essays about his time in Japan, Kuwaki goes so far as to say that, to him, Mexico had been a "*tierra incógnita*" (terra incognita). I trace how this term echoes the disconnect that mediates

an inability for "Japanese" and "Mexican" to be aligned with the object of philosophy. First, *tierra incógnita* signals the sense of the power of Wynter's "figure of Man," in which philosophy, as a regime of universal humanity, can only be filtered through as a European practice, which transforms the relationship between the anthropological Japanese and Mexican philosophies into one of nonencounter, wherein Japan and Mexico cannot be recognized without the triangulation of Europe. And second, *tierra incógnita* demonstrates how the politics of knowledge and exchange are influenced by the workings of global racial politics. Probing further into each philosopher's contributions to the conceptualization of imperial nationalist ideologies, I read their encounter as premised on the homosocial dynamics of nonwhite male elites' latent identification with the demands of relational and relative whiteness.

Chapters 3 and 4 shift to consider the legacies of imperial nationalist philosophies within popular literary and cinematic texts. Chapter 3 grapples with how *indigenismo* and *mestizaje* discourse structure the cacophonous nonencounter between Indigenous and Asian racialization in Ismael Rodríguez's 1961 film *Ánimas Trujano* and Ōe Kenzaburō's novel *An Echo of Heaven*. In an extended dialogue with both texts, my analysis focuses on how Japanese individuals are "transformed" into Mexicans to represent the moral and racial excesses of modern national community-making. Using Jodi Byrd's concept of "cacophony," I argue the structures of anti-Indigeneity in both texts enact the erasure of Asian characters and reenact the normalization of anti-Asian racism as a legacy of twentieth-century imperial nationalism. By juxtaposing the film and novel, I track how representations and performances of racialized subjects contend with the continuing globality of settler colonial power, in which the traces of modern coloniality and progress intersect to condition racial and gendered othering and belonging.

The final chapter turns to the ways that post-1945 models of racial national belonging are conditioned by their association to the *longue durée* of anti-Black racism in the constitution of Japanese and Mexican nationalisms. Christina Sharpe's assertion that anti-Blackness is an all-encompassing climate in the wake of the violent construction of global modernity illustrates the urgent critical theoretical approach to any explorations of national belonging and coherence among modern subjects. In the chapter, I reassess how Blackness becomes a referent for social displacement and political dispossession in two globally popular and prolifically translated novels, Abe Kōbō's *Tanin no kao* (The Face of Another, 1964)

and Carlos Fuentes's *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (*The Death of Artemio Cruz*, 1962). Despite their wide circulation and canonicity, scholarly discussions around *The Face of Another* and *The Death of Artemio Cruz* have seldom touched their intertextual mediations of race and of Black cultural production in the twentieth century. In examining the nonencounter between the two novels as the trace of the narrative and historical influence of Black creative and intellectual productions on both works, I discuss how they reinscribe the struggle for Black liberation across the histories of colonialism. The novels and their reception signal how, even in the absence, eradication, and denial of Black presence, anti-Black racism shapes the dominant discourses on nation, identity, and racial genealogies in Mexico and Japan.

The coda returns to the works of the feminist artists and filmmakers I introduced here, the Zapotec rapper Mare Advertencia Lirika and the Zainichi Korean multimedia artist Kum Soni. My final analyses situate anticolonial feminist histories and creative and critical productions as models of how transpacific nonencounter builds on the entangled struggles against settler and imperial nation-state formations and the apparatuses of knowledge production that construe and uphold them. Engaging decolonial imaginaries, we might arrive, I want to hope, at better ways of listening and attending to the silences, erasures, and exclusions that structure the multiple tendencies to refuse relationality in scholarly work and community-making. Nonencounters and other complex manifestations of constructed disconnection or abstraction are a product of what Cindi Textor terms "intersectional incoherence"—the structures of inequity that render differences across the perceived divides of race, gender, sexuality, language, physical ability, and class illegible even when they are visible or representable.[52] Perhaps transpacific nonencounters may be used, then, to address such experiences of refusal and being refused. They might confront how disciplines such as area studies negate and devalue lives, voices, and knowledges. If so, perhaps nonencounters may redirect, or even misdirect, our attentions to imagine new ways of untying the loose ends of area.

Notes

Introduction

Early versions of portions of the introduction and coda originally appeared in the volume *East Asia, Latin America, and the Decolonization of Transpacific Studies*, edited by Chiara Olivieri and Jodi Serrano-Muñoz (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022) for the series Historical and Cultural Interconnections Between Latin America and Asia.

1 Kum, *Foreign Sky*.

2 Advertencia Lirika and Sedillo, *Cuando una mujer avanza*.

3 *Cuando una mujer avanza* was released six years after Advertencia Lirika stepped into public activism and joined the popular protests that broke out across Oaxaca for more than seven months in 2006. Led by local teachers' unions, the coalition of over one million included Indigenous community leaders, university students, and professors from across the state calling for the ouster of the governor, Ulises Ruíz Ortíz, after their demands for increased school budgets were met with further budgetary cuts to education. In a demonstration of civil disobedience, protesters led marches and set up encampments in the city center, remaining resolute even when local officials urged strikers to leave and return to work. Within days, Ruíz Ortíz deployed the state police to attack the encampments with pepper spray and tear gas and fight protesters with deadly weapons, including batons and firearms. In total, reports conclude that the militarized police attack killed seventeen people. Associated Press, "A Week Later, Protesters Still Hanging On at University of Oaxaca."

4 Historian Rachel Haejin Lim has written about indentured Korean labor in Mexico in the first decades of the twentieth century and the early years

of Japanese colonization in the Korean Peninsula. See Lim, "Ephemeral Nations."

5 Fabian, *Time and the Other*; Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*.

6 Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom"; Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*.

7 Advertencia Lirika and Sedillo, *Cuando una mujer avanza*.

8 Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*, 164.

9 Lowe, "Intimacies of Four Continents," 193.

10 Torres-Rodríguez, *Orientaciones transpacíficas*, 22.

11 See Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier*; Lu, *Making of Japanese Settler Colonialism*.

12 As Azuma describes, "In Japanese public discourse in the 1910s, Mexico consistently ranked third (after Korea and Brazil) on the list of preferred destinations for ambitious Japanese frontiersmen." Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier*, 114.

13 As Natalie Melas explicates, the comparative method has a tradition of creating taxonomies of cultural media to collect data and reveal fundamental equivalencies and hierarchies among them. See Melas, "Merely Comparative."

14 See Hubert, "World Literature, Diplomacy, and War."

15 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 132.

16 Kum Soni, "About," accessed July 28, 2025, http://www.sonikum.com/about.

17 Hu-DeHart, "Transpacific Confrontation/*Confrontación transpacífica*," 4.

18 Wynter, "1492: A New World View."

19 Robinson, *Black Marxism*.

20 Matsumura, *Waiting for the Cool Moon*, 3.

21 Wynter, "On Disenchanting Discourse." I should note that critics of the area studies model have turned to Naoki Sakai's "Theory and Asian Humanity" (2010) as well as Étienne Balibar's discussion of "anthropological difference" in "Civic Universalism and Its Internal Exclusions" (2012). Before these, the earliest instance of materialist critiques of area studies' analysis of anthropological difference appears in Nishitani Osamu's 2006 "Anthropos and Humanitas," in which the mention of the dehumanization of Black slaves as a component in the construction of anthropological difference is relegated to a footnote. This is one significant example of the erasure of Wynter and other Black philosophers from the genealogy of the deconstruction of the universal human from the anthropological subject.

22 Matsumura, *Waiting for the Cool Moon*, 2.

23 Kwon, *Intimate Empire*, 6.

24 Kauanui, "'Structure, Not an Event.'"

25 Kauanui, "'Structure, Not an Event,'" 5.

26 Sakai, "Subject and Substratum."

27 Sakai, "Subject and Substratum," 511.

28 One exception to the postindependence Mexican state's lack of a formal history of expansionist colonialism occurred during the short-lived First

Mexican Empire (1821–1823), when the Mexican government (then operating as an independent monarchy) attempted to expand its borders into other territories of the viceroyalty of New Spain and into what is present-day Guatemala. For more on the history of the First Mexican Empire, see Vázquez Olivera, *El Imperio Mexicano y el Reino de Guatemala*.

29 De Castro, *Mestizo Nations*, 17.

30 Byrd, *Transit of Empire*, xix.

31 Byrd, *Transit of Empire*, 170.

32 Medak-Saltzman, "Staging Empire."

33 Medak-Saltzman, "Empire's Haunted Logics," 16.

34 See Amino, *Rekishigaku to minzokugaku*; Loo, *Heritage Politics*; Tarica, *Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism*.

35 Silva, "Globality," 36.

36 As Tina Chen cites from my comments on a 2021 Zoom-based seminar in her article "Global Asias," the goal of the transpacific framework, as is the stated concept of an epistemology of global Asia, is not to generate another disciplinary silo but rather to "encourag[e] us to consider the multiple and relating parts of a situation, the dis/connections that make possible world-spanning dynamics and suggests a modality of representation/anti-representation that can offer alternatives to nation-based frameworks" (1002).

37 Wynter, "On Disenchanting Discourse," 208.

38 Yoneyama, "Towards a Decolonial Genealogy of the Transpacific."

39 Shih, "Racializing Area Studies, Defetishizing China."

40 Rafael, "Cultures of Area Studies in the United States," 97.

41 Moreiras, *Against Abstraction*, 15.

42 Moreiras, *Against Abstraction*, 15

43 Helen Hardacre's edited volume *The Postwar Development of Japanese Studies in the United States* historicizes and chronicles the postwar military development of Japanese studies as a field that charted its future through its complicity in US Cold War governmentality.

44 Joo Ok Kim, *Warring Genealogies*, 11.

45 Yoneyama, "Towards a Decolonial Genealogy of the Transpacific," 472.

46 See Shigematsu and Camacho, *Militarized Currents*; Fujikane and Okamura, *Asian Settler Colonialism*; Annmaria Shimabuku, *Alegal*.

47 Suzuki, *Ocean Passages*, 27.

48 Ginoza, "Archipelagic Feminisms."

49 I refer here to a tension that I perceive in the contributions of prominent scholars of decolonial theory, such as Anibal Quijano and Walter Mignolo. In the United States, it is rare to still question that white intellectuals dominate discussions about what is deemed "decolonial" in spaces where those very intellectuals and the structures that uphold their authorities are themselves evidence of the impossibility of decolonization in Latin America.

50 Junyoung Verónica Kim, "Asia-Latin America as Method."
51 Junyoung Verónica Kim, "Asia-Latin America as Method," 106.
52 Textor, *Intersectional Incoherence*.

Chapter 1. Grammars of Imperial Nationalism

1 Terada, *Metaracial*, 17.
2 See Sakai, "Subject and Substratum."
3 Nast, "'Race' and the Bio(necro)polis," 1458.
4 Echeverría, *Modernidad y blanquitud*, 10 (my translation).
5 See Matsumura, *Waiting for the Cool Moon*.
6 See Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex."
7 Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom"; Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*; Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*; Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins*.
8 After the Spanish Empire began to colonize the territory that became Mexico, especially from the seventeenth to the late nineteenth century, *mestizo* identified people through their specific genetic proportions of European versus Indigenous heritage. Other categories helped to further delineate the genotypical and racial differences among colonial populations, including *criollos* (people of "full" Spanish descent with no Indigenous or Black lineage) and *mulattos* (people of Black and Spanish descent). For a more comprehensive discussion of the Spanish caste system and contemporary racism in Mexico, see Moreno Figueroa, "Distributed Intensities."
9 In *Keywords for Latina/o Studies*, Alicia Arrizón refers specifically to the distinctions in the uses of *mestizaje* across Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Philippines as sites that inherited the settler colonial and racial supremacist structures of Spanish colonialism since the sixteenth century. I refer here specifically to Mexican mestizo nationalism in view of the fact that, for contexts like the Philippines, racial *mestizaje* was not simply a discursive ideology of national identity formation but a structural condition for socioeconomic mobility and access to property.
10 Sierra, *Discurso inaugural de la Universidad Nacional*, 19. All translations of Sierra's works are mine.
11 Sierra, *Evolución politica del pueblo mexicano*, 394.
12 Tanaka, "Time and the Paradox of the Orient," 170.
13 Qtd. in Seok-Won Lee, *Japan's Pan-Asian Empire*, 62.
14 For further discussions on the politics of *minzokugaku*, see Loo, *Heritage Politics*.
15 Fukuzawa Yukichi's essay, which first appeared in the March 1, 1885, edition of his newspaper *Jiji shinpō*, argued for the Meiji government to cut ties with the governments of Qing China and Joseon Korea in order to align itself with European powers.