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US Military Bases and the Politics of Gender, Sexuality, Race, and Class: A Comparative Study of South Korea and Okinawa

Thursday, November 18, 2010 5:00-6:30 pm. Literature Building Room 155 (deCerteau)



During the post-World War II era, the U.S. has built and managed its global network of military bases and over two thirds of these bases have been concentrated in South Korea, Japan/Okinawa, and Germany. Based on her forthcoming volume, *“Over There”: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War II to the Present* (Duke University Press, 2010; Maria Hoehn and Seungsook Moon, co-editors and primary authors; names listed in alphabetical order), Moon will present a comparative discussion of how U.S. military bases impact social relations of gender, sexuality, race, and class in the two Asian societies of South Korea and Okinawa. Approaching the U.S. military as a global and transnational phenomenon, Moon will focus on the politics of gender, sexuality, race, and class, which are constitutive of the maintenance of the military empire. In particular, Moon will analyze recurring patterns and differentiations in this politics intertwined with the social costs of maintaining the empire, paying special attention to the hybrid spaces in and around U.S. military bases

that obscure the boundary between civilian society and the military. The comparative analysis illuminates the following findings: 1) the contour of the U.S. military empire is not as monolithic as many existing studies of the U.S. military presence abroad assume or imply. 2) Hierarchical social relations of gender, sexuality, race, and class inform the nature of the local civilian-US military relationships. 3) These relationships vary across these countries and within a country over time, depending on the following factors: the nature of host government (e.g., democratic or authoritarian) and the nature of its political and military alliance to the U.S. government (e.g., egalitarian or neocolonial), the type of spatial arrangements that regulate the interactions between a U.S. base and surrounding communities, the demographic and social features of US soldiers sent to these countries, and the presence or absence of cultural and “racial” affinity between the U.S. and these societies.

Seungsook Moon is Professor of Sociology and Chair of the department at Vassar College. She also served as Director of Asian Studies Program (2006-2009). She earned her B.A. from Yonsei University in Seoul and her Ph.D. from Brandeis University. She is the author of *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Duke University Press, 2005, reprinted in 2007), *Kunsajuŭie kach’in kŭndae: kungminmandŭlgi, simindaegi, kŭrigo sŏngŭi chŏngch’i*, (Seoul: Alternative Culture Publication, 2007) and co-editor and a primary author of *“Over There”: Living with the U.S. Military Empire from World War II to the Present* (Duke University Press, 2010). She has published numerous articles on political and cultural sociology of gender, including such topics as nationalism, militarism, civil society and social movement organizations, collective memory of late presidents, globalization, democratization, and food. Currently, she is working on a book manuscript, tentatively entitled “Cultural Construction of Civil Society in South Korea.” She is a recipient of the Fulbright Scholar Award and the Korea Foundation Advanced Research Grant. She is currently serving as Korea Book Review Editor of the *Journal of Asian Studies*. She served on the editorial board of *Gender & Society* and has been serving on the editorial board of *Asian Women*. She was the chair (2008-2010) of the executive board of the Committee on Korean Studies in the Northeast Asia Council-the Association for Asian Studies and the chair (2009-2010) of James B. Palais Book Prize Committee in NEAC-AAS. She also served as a faculty mentor for the Social Science Research Council Korean Studies Dissertation Workshop in both 2010 and 2009.

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