

Double Returns:

Marking Loss, Memory, and Absence in the Korean Adoptee Diaspora

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MAIJA E. BROWN

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Margaret Werry

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## DEDICATION

For my loving family, David and Asha

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## INTRODUCTION

During the summer of my eighth grade, I traveled with my mom to Finland. She was spearheading an exhibition called “Women Who Dared” which looked at the ways Finnish women who had immigrated to the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century negotiated their cultural and national identities. At that time, she was also accompanying a group of twenty Finnish American women to explore their Finnish cultural heritage. When I reflect on it now, for my mother, it seemed like an important and exciting trip, where she could help me understand and share our family history. In particular, my maternal grandmother had frequently moved between Finland and the US and my mom would explain to me how despite being born a US citizen, her sense of cultural and national belonging was forged and produced through those movements. In this sense, she was interested in mapping out the kinds of cultural and national continuities and discontinuities that had shaped the Finnish American diaspora and the women who participated. At the same, she was protectively trying to secure me a place within a lineage of Finnish women whose traces of cultural practice I had grown up with as her adopted daughter.

While I was growing up, my sense of national, cultural, and ethnic identity was deeply influenced by my family’s identification not just as Americans, but as Finnish Americans. My trip to Finland with my mother was exciting because it was my first trip outside of the United States. Being outside the borders of the United States and traveling to Finland heightened the way I nationally identified myself as an American and made me more

conscious of my Finnish cultural upbringing. Since it was my first time leaving the United States, the trip also necessitated me applying for my US passport. At the time, I mostly thought of the document as just another piece of paper. The significance of my passport only became clear to me when I misplaced it while I was shopping, and casually mentioned it to my mother several days afterwards. It wasn't the words she said, but the panic in her voice, "We're leaving in three days Maija! How are you going to get back into the United States?" I responded by saying, "What is the big deal mom? I'm clearly American." My passport was eventually returned by the secret police. We met clandestinely in a secluded square where he closely inspected the body standing before him, comparing it with the photograph on the passport. My mom was relieved when he handed the passport back to me and later we laughed at the surrealness of the experience. Yet, when I reflect on my experience in Finland as an adult I realize that the loss of my passport also called attention to my Asian body and called into question my national membership. As an adult, I also realize that despite having completely assimilated into Finnish American culture, my body produced a double exclusion, both as not Finnish and not American, and not white.

It wasn't until I was an adult, well into my early 30's that I discovered my Korean passport with my baby photograph attached to it in my adoption file.<sup>1</sup> The pages of my Korean passport were still well preserved, protected in a plastic sleeve with the edges still uncurled from barely being used. Sifting through the documents in the file, I also found a

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation when I refer to "Korea" and "Korean," I am referring to the Republic of Korea, commonly known as South Korea.

photograph I recognized. It was the photograph that I had used for my US passport, except in this case it was also affixed to my US naturalization document. In excavating these stories of my past, the discovery of my two documents illuminate a double haunting tied to issues of citizenship and memory. On the one hand, I had completely forgotten that I had ever been a Korean citizen. On the other hand, I had no memory of ever becoming a US citizen, as if I had been a US citizen for my entire life. Indeed, these unremembered processes of losing and acquiring citizenship are part of what has led me to write this dissertation.

This personal anecdote touches on several key themes of my dissertation: diaspora, memory, citizenship, transnationality, and kinship. At the same time my use of auto-ethnography in the introduction attempts to illuminate my personal experiences of moving through spaces of liminal cultural citizenship and national belonging by exposing the different affective desires, fantasies, and vulnerabilities I brought to those spaces and memories. As the opening story of traveling to Finland suggests, my sense of national and ethnic identity was very much secured by my sense of belonging within the Finnish diaspora as well as my identity as a Finnish American. At the same time, it demonstrates the erasure and loss of my Korean identity as the result of my adoption.

My dissertation traces what I refer to as “double returns” within the drama of Korean adoptee transnational kinship. As a jumping off point, I think about Korean adoptees within the broader context of Asian American immigration. In the case of Asian

immigration to the United States, the question of cultural citizenship is embedded within a pronounced history of immigration laws either excluding Asians from either entering the US or becoming US citizens. At the same time, mainstream cultural representations have historically depicted Asian as outside of the white, US national imaginary. Within this national paradigm of Asian American racial and cultural exclusion, the Korean adoptee paradoxically never returns to the United States, despite the citizenship s/he carries, but is always figured as perpetually arriving to the US. Borrowing from Karen Shimakawa, I suggest Asian American performance texts and staged performance are insightful because they “negotiate the process of coming into visibility” (“National” 18).

Double returns also foregrounds the intersection between tourism discourses around “arrivals” and “departures” and discourses around (legal and cultural) citizenship and diasporic belonging. In this sense, double returns describes the kinds of conditions experienced by the Korean adoptee diaspora that are necessarily informed by the advent of globalization and transnational migrations. Furthermore, the notion of double returns is meant to call attention to the contradictions transnational/transracial Korean adoptees face as subjects moving between Korea and their adoptive countries. In one respect, the double return can be understood within the context of citizenship and belonging, and the mechanisms that structure transnational mobility of the Korean adoptee diaspora. It suggests that many Korean adoptees, despite having acquired the citizenship of their adoptive countries can never simply *arrive* in Korea. Instead, Korean adoptees are hailed as part of the Korean government’s focus on the Korean diaspora and as such always

*return* to their national and ethnic origins. Yet, to *return* to Korea, rather than arrive, is also a process which makes visible the betrayal of the Korean nation of its exported citizenry, and the national shame Korean adoptees evoke when they return. Double returns also points to the fact that despite returning to Korea, Korean adoptees must always return to their adoptive countries.

This dissertation's focus on performance demonstrates that the contradictions surrounding issues of cultural citizenship and belonging in transnational migrations cannot be easily divorced from the body. On the one hand, the Korean government hails Korean adoptees as part of an ongoing Korean ethnic nationalism that depends on notions of racial descent and kinship; and on the other hand, America hails those same subjects in the context of a history of racialized exclusion within Asian American formations. Yet, the adoptee diaspora is quite unlike other parts of the Korean diaspora(s), in that the adoptee is, first, exiled from Korean structures of descent and kinship, and second, included within the intimate communities of white American families. These conditions make the transnational/transracial Korean adoptee body a heightened site to question the ways in which discourses of race, nation, and culture become sedimented in the body in ways that don't neatly align with the experiences or identifications of actual bodies/subjects as they traverse the topographies of belonging and citizenship in a globalizing world. The presencing of the body in performance consistently draws attention to these paradoxical processes.

Performance theory highlights the ways in which identity and subject formation (race, nation, gender) take place at the level of the body. Judith Butler's theory of performativity points to the constructedness of identity as a repertoire of "performative acts" which are behaviors or actions that are repeated over time. Butler's theory has a particular resonance with Korean adoptees with respect to performing whiteness. I use the term transracial to foreground the multiple contradictions and movement between constructions of whiteness and Koreanness that Korean adoptees perform as they move between Korea and the US. Transracial, in particular, foregrounds the unique conditions through which Korean adoptees acquire white subjectivities through growing up in predominantly white communities and families, while also having bodies which are racially marked as Asian. Unlike other bi-racial or multiracial subjects, Korean adoptees are often culturally and ethnically cut off from other Korean American or Asian communities. In particular, Tobias Hübinette analyzes the psychic violence imposed on Korean adoptees, arguing that Korean adoptees are constantly in a process of having to negotiate the incompatibilities of their white subjectivities and performances with their racially marked bodies. In this respect, Hübinette draws attention to the material bodies of Korean adoptees as sites where this confrontation is revealed. Indeed, Hübinette suggests that, "Korean adoptees become strangers to their own bodies" ("Bodies Out-of-Control" 150). This condition of alienation is heightened when Korean adoptees return to Korea because their performances and subjectivities identify them as racial and national outsiders. Paradoxically, their bodies are read through ethnic kinship and haunting figures from the past, that Korean adoptees, themselves, may have either forgotten or not known.

My dissertation is a further elaboration of what it might mean to be a “stranger in one’s own body”, and the contradictions produced through moving between the US and Korea.

My understanding of the Korean adoptee as a transnational subject also challenges understandings of the Korean adoptee diaspora as being defined by unidirectional migrations from Korea to adoptees’ adoptive countries. Since the early 1990’s, Korean adoptees have returned to Korea in ever increasing numbers either to live or visit. While earlier paradigms of diaspora studies have often invoked the notion of exile and return, the intensification of globalization has contributed to shifting the classical diaspora paradigm to one of increased mobility (Ang 287). My understanding of double returns takes into account Korean adoptees’ multiple movements to and from Korea and their adoptive countries as a form of transnationality.<sup>2</sup> Aihwa Ong describes transnationality as the “the condition of interconnectedness and mobility across space—intensified under late capitalism” (5). In particular, Ong argues, “In the era of globalization, individuals as well as governments develop a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty as strategies to accumulate capital and power” (6). Ong’s articulation of “flexible citizenship” and “transnationality” as processes of “empowerment, enrichment, and expansion” certainly pertain to Korean state’s efforts to include Korean adoptees in the Korean diaspora (287). However, Ong’s notion of “flexible citizenship” provides a model of the transnational subject that is not predicated on exile or loss. As the beneficiaries of Korean government policies towards overseas Koreans, Korean adoptees may appear to have the kind of

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<sup>2</sup> In this dissertation, I specifically consider the movement between Korea and the United States.

“flexible citizenship” espoused by Ong. However, Korean adoptees’ ability to participate in the benefits of “flexible citizenship” are limited by their loss of language, culture, nation, and kinship.

While my dissertation considers transnational movements of Korean adoptees and notions of cultural citizenship, I primarily address a loss of cultural and national memory, absence, and haunting in Korea and beyond. In this respect, the ways in which Korean adoptees have formed alternative communities of belonging in Korea, in their adoptive countries, and in cyberspace is valuable, but is not within the purview of this dissertation. Instead, moving through the different sites of my dissertation, I reflect on these questions: How are the histories of Korean adoptees forgotten within national commemorations of Korean immigration to the US? In what ways do Korean adoptees haunt Korean national memory as social figures from the past? How is the Korean adoptee body/subject hailed and erased in the context of Korean ethnic nationalism, tourism and Korean globalization?

### ***Brief history of international adoption from Korea***

In the last fifty years, Korea has placed an estimated 200,000 Korean children and infants in Western countries. Within that number, over 100,000 Korean adoptees are located in the United States, while western European nations, most notably France and the Nordic nations of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway constitute the most prominent geographic regions where Korean adoptees have been dispersed. International adoption from Korea

began at the end of Korean War as a temporary measure to address the widespread devastation left behind by the Korean War. It is estimated that in Korea, there were over 20,000 widows and 100,000 orphans. The first cohort of Korean adoptees were predominantly mixed race children of US and UN soldiers and Korean military prostitutes. Most notably, the fervor of Harry Holt, an American Christian from Oregon, along with the aid of humanitarian organizations such as World Vision, helped to establish Korea's rise in prominence as the world's largest supplier of children in international adoption. Harry Holt himself adopted eight mixed race children in 1956, later forming one of the largest international adoption agencies, Holt Inc. As adoption historians have noted, the history of international adoption in the US began near the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and resulted primarily because of wars the US was involved in overseas (C. Choy). The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 allowed up to 3000 war orphans to enter the US. In 1961, the Immigration and Nationality Act was enacted. According to Dong Soo Kim, this policy "became the *defacto* legal tool of international adoption" (6).

A history of national shame around the origins of international adoption from Korea also needs to be addressed with respect to the geopolitical relationship between the US and Korea. Over seventy five percent of adoptions from Korea have ended up with Korean children being placed in the United States, into predominantly white families. As Christina Klein has demonstrated, the adoption of Asian children in white middlebrow families allowed families to contribute to the national project of expanding American

influence in the Asian region, in alignment with US foreign policy and cold war containment (143-146). At the same time it coincided with the US military expansion into the Asian region, which led to the first wave of bi-racial children fathered by the US military. Framed as a humanitarian endeavor, US adoption of Korean children helped to establish a paternal attitude between Korea and the US where white Americans rescued Asian orphans, while concealing the US responsibility in the Korean War.

While the first wave of Korean adoptions was predominantly comprised of mixed race children and orphans, the second historical wave of Korean adoptees was comprised mainly of “full blooded” Koreans who were adopted during a period of aggressive economic policy and growth in Korea during the Park Chung Hee administration (1961-1979). In 1961, in an effort to facilitate international adoption from Korea, the Korean government enacted the Orphan Adoption Special Law. During this period, many Korean adoptees were abandoned or placed for international adoption due to the high poverty rate in Korea (Hübinette “Comforting”). While Korea actively encouraged families to “send away” their children through national programs, the number of Korean adoptees did not decline as a result of Korea’s rise in economic status. Instead, the peak number of Korean children adopted overseas occurred in 1986 with over 8,000 children sent away (Overseas Koreans Foundation “Stats”). The last cohort of Korean adoptees have predominantly been relinquished because of teenage pregnancies and unwed mothers.

Since the early 1990's, a growing number of Korean adoptees have returned in order to search for birth family, to visit, or to live and work, much to the surprise of the Korean government and Korean adoption agencies. The increasing number of Korean adoptees returning has led to an increase in the number of different post-adoption services available to Korean adoptees by Korean government funded agencies such as the Overseas Koreans Foundation (OKF), in addition to services offered by the Korean adoption agencies. Many of these organizations assist Korean adoptees by offering free or reduced-cost Korean language education, birth family search, cultural heritage tours (such as the Overseas Korean Foundation "motherland tours") and affordable housing for Korean adoptees.

The increasing numbers of Korean adoptees who return to Korea has been assisted by the growing Korean adoptee expatriate community living in Korea. In 1988, the Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (GOA'L), a decade-old advocacy non-profit organization, was founded by adult Korean adoptees living in Seoul to address the needs of an emergent American and European Korean adoptee expatriate community. While I was living in Seoul, I had the opportunity to intern at GOA'L for seven months. In addition to providing post adoption services, the organization also played a central role in advocating for the recognition of Korean adoptees in important government policies (GOA'L "Collection") as well as providing a network for Korean adoptees who were living in Korea to connect with one another.

My experiences of living and working in Korea also made me conscious of the kinds of political activism taking place within the Korean adoptee expat community living in Seoul. While I was living in Korea, I had the good fortune to participate in the non-profit organization Adoptee Solidarity Korea (ASK) whose events, workshops, and meetings brought critical attention to the current state of international adoption from Korea. According to the organization's mission, ASK seeks to "address the problems associated with Korean overseas adoption. Through education and activism, we aim to raise awareness, advocate change and support alternatives to inter country adoption" (Adoptee Solidarity Korea). Through monthly forums, and ASK sponsored events, the organization regularly focused on issues Korean adoptees faced while living in Korea, the systemic issues of international Korean adoption, and helping to lobby for Korean adoptee rights. At the same time it also served as a community space for Korean adoptees living Seoul.

While non-profit adoptee organizations in Korea like GOA'L and ASK have made it easier for Korean adoptees to return and participate in vibrant community, several key pieces of legislation have also helped to facilitate the increase in Korean adoptees returning to Korea. In particular, the controversial Overseas Immigration Act in 1999, enacted by the Kim Dae Jung administration was designed to attract overseas Korean business and talent, predominantly from the United States and wealthy western countries.<sup>3</sup> The F-4 visa, first offered to Korean adoptees in 1999 as part of the

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<sup>3</sup> See Samuel Kim for more information about the The Overseas Korean Act. The policy was controversial because it excluded the large Korean diaspora in China and other Korean diasporas in the Asian region.

provisions of The Overseas Immigration Act, accorded overseas Koreans living in South Korea status as resident aliens with nearly the same rights provided to Korean citizens. Organizations like GOA'L and ASK successfully lobbied the National Assembly for the inclusion of overseas Korean adoptees. More recently in 2010, the South Korean government enacted new legislation allowing multiple citizenship for overseas Koreans, with the inclusion of overseas Korean adoptees (GOA'L "Multiple"; Jung; Park).

The number of Korean adoptees returning to Korea has coincided with the rise of Korea as an international tourism destination and President Kim Young Sam's and successor President Kim Dae Jung's efforts towards Korean globalization. Furthermore, recent efforts of the Korean tourism industry to create a positive image of itself to a global audience address the ways in which south Korea imagines itself as a global competitor through mediatized landscapes by hosting mega events such as the 1998 Olympics and 2002 World Cup (C. Lee et.al). At the same time, large Korean conglomerates, such as Samsung and Hyundai, with the aid of the South Korean tourism industry, have played a key role in mobilizing national interests of reunification through economic cooperatives and the establishment of Special Economic Zones. The Kaesung Industrial complex, for example, employs more than 40,000 North Korean workers in over 100 South Korean run factories 6 miles north of the DMZ in North Korea. South Korean tourists have been able to visit the popular tourist site, Kumgang Mountain, in North Korea since 1998 through a partnership between Hyundai Asan and the North Korea government (Lim). Yet as

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Eligibility to apply was mainly restricted to the Korean diaspora in the United States and Western countries.

Eleana Kim has convincingly argued, Korean efforts at globalization are inherently tied to the ways in which the Korean government invites Korean adoptees into Korea's global family ("Our Adoptee" 57-74). These developments inflect the contradictory ways in which Korean adoptees return as tourists, but also as part of the Korean diaspora.

### ***The Korean adoptee diaspora***

More traditional approaches to diaspora have often posited "an immutable link between cultures, people, or identities and specific places" (Swedenburg 2). Eng has located this within the historical understanding of the Jewish diaspora which has often framed the diasporic experience in terms of a traumatic past which is predicated on loss, displacement, exile, and the desire to return to the homeland as important features of the diasporic consciousness (286). As Eng elaborates, such an interpretation foregrounds the assumption that "all peoples must have a territorial specific homeland and that living away from it is an unnatural and undesirable condition" (286). While this notion attaches significance to the continuity between people, place and culture, it also has an implicitly racial logic to it. In this paradigm, the presumption is that certain bodies carry culture across transnational space more indelibly than others. Furthermore, transnational migrations are implicitly defined by the yoking of culture and body, that is the sedimentation of culture in the body, rather than by the motion of culture alone. These are the implicit understandings that transnational/transracial Korean adoptee subjects trouble because of the ways their histories and identities are ruptured and often do not form an interrupted continuity between Korea and their adoptive countries. While my dissertation

certainly touches on classical understandings of diaspora, which include the notion of returning to Korea and the relationship of Korean adoptees to their “homeland”, the bodies of Korean adoptees are dissimilar to other diasporas because they are abruptly severed from their Korean and national heritage. Instead, Korean adoptee bodies disrupt the kinds of cultural continuity such a paradigm insists on.

My research also challenges notions that summarily exclude Korean adoptees in discourses about diaspora. Talking about transnational Korean adoptees in Norway, Signe Howell argues, “Transnationally adopted persons’ relationship with their country of origin is not analogous to that of other migrants... they do not form a diaspora because they were de-kinned and re-kinned...and they are not knowingly party to any histories linked to the persons in the country of origin” (266-267). While I agree that the Korean adoptee diaspora(s) are unique from other notions of diaspora, Howell’s perspective does not take into account the migration of many Korean adoptees returning to Korea, the growing expat community of Korean adoptees living in Seoul, or the emergence of Korean adoptee run organizations like the Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link in Korea which provide services for Korean adoptees visiting or living in Seoul. Furthermore, her position fails to account for the ways in which the Korea government has hailed Korean adoptees as part of the Korean diaspora, or to address the legislative, political, and cultural measures taken by Korean adoptees to be included within the designation as overseas Koreans in the Overseas Immigration Act, and more recently to acquire dual citizenship.

Instead, I find more recent understandings of diaspora, ones which take into consideration the processes of globalization as a condition of late capitalism to more accurately reflect the positioning of Korean adoptees within the diaspora as transnational subjects. Eng states, “Diasporic groups imagine themselves increasingly not as ‘ethnic minorities’ *within* nation states, but as transnational subjects whose affiliations and loyalties reside in the interstices *between* nation states” (287). I find this understanding of diaspora more useful because it foregrounds movement between different nations. It pictures diaspora not as a static identity, but as a complex, ambivalent identity process resulting from geopolitical forces and government policies, and the individual movements through which these forces converge and become visible. In particular, shifts in government policy regarding overseas Koreans since 1999 have had a profound effect on the ways in which Korean adoptees are able to return to their homeland and the ways in which they are able to position themselves in relation to their adoptive countries and Korea.

While questions of Korean diaspora have been framed in terms of legal understanding of citizenship, in her research on Chinese diaspora in Panama, Lok Siu asks, “What does it mean for a diasporic people to ‘belong’?” (4). My dissertation addresses a similar question about belonging for Korean adoptee diasporas: How do Korean adoptees navigate through issues of cultural citizenship and national belonging in their transnational movement? In particular, Siu’s notion of the diasporic citizen is useful for bringing questions of belonging and diaspora together under one analytic frame. She

argues, “Diasporic citizenship describes the processes by which diasporic subjects experience and practice cultural and social belonging amid shifting geopolitical circumstances and webs of transnational relations” (5). Siu’s definition of diasporic citizenship is provocative because it suggests that that citizenship is something which is both produced and contested by the national and cultural entities which define belonging. While Siu’s idea addresses the ways in which the diasporic citizen is able to navigate and potentially transform a sense of belonging, I investigate the ways in which a sense of belonging is thwarted by cultural kinship, loss of memory, racial (dis)identification, dislocation, and unaddressed trauma for Korean adoptee diasporic citizens.

My dissertation attempts to use transnationalism and diaspora studies as a way to bridge the movement of Korean adoptees between Korea and the United States. I understand this positionality as being more broadly engaged in scholarship using diaspora as an analytic framework that links Asian studies and Asian American studies. As Parreñas and Siu suggest, the notion of diaspora has only recently emerged as an analytic framework in Asian American Studies since the 1990’s, in part because of the new waves of Asian immigrants to the United States after the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. Not only was this new wave of immigration able to use new technologies to help maintain their relationship to their homelands, but many of them were foreign born, as opposed to a new generation of Asian Americans who were born in the US. Parreñas and Siu argue, “Within Asian American studies, [the Asian] diaspora has been used primarily to refer to the ties and relationships between Asians in the United States and their

respective ethnic homelands in Asia...Diaspora provided an intellectual framework that both legitimated their [Asian and Asian American studies] coming together as one institutional program or department” (6). My notion of double returns contributes to understanding the movement of Korean adoptees within the context of moving across Asian studies and Asian American studies.

Both diaspora studies and Asian American studies grapple with the Asian American immigrant subject. In writing about Asian immigration to the United States, Lisa Lowe examines how notions of US citizenship have been defined in relationship to the immigrant in legal, economic and cultural spheres (4). Specifically she calls attention to the conditions around Asian immigration to the US, which historically have placed Asian Americans as both inside and outside of the US national imaginary. Lowe’s argument compellingly focuses on the distinction between the “immigrant” who is excluded from the national polity and the “citizen” who designates inclusion into American national and cultural formations. Lowe’s paradigm of Asian America significantly takes into account the contradictory relationship between cultural citizenship and national belonging embedded in within the political formation of Asian America.

The histories of Korean adoptees complicate this paradigm of the Asian American immigrant subject because of the privileged ways Korean adoptees acquire citizenship through the intimacy and legal redefinitions of kinship. Unlike other Asian immigrants in the US and US born Asian Americans who can trace a genealogy of immigration to the

United States, Korean adoptees are frequently completely cut off from a genealogy of Asian American immigration. In writing about Korean American adoption, Cenzia Choy notes, “Many scholars have contextualized the rise of international adoption against the backdrop of postwar political and humanitarian efforts. Relatively few studies have emphasized the role that international adoptive children play as immigrants” (“Institutionalizing International Adoption” 28). The lack of scholarship identifying Korean adoptees as immigrants, in addition to Korean adoptees not identifying themselves as immigrants is complicated by the contradictory ways Korean adoptees’ racialized bodies are hailed as perpetual foreign in US racial formations and perpetually marked out against their cultural and national identities as Americans. Traditional understandings of the Asian diaspora in the United States often posit an unbroken historical and cultural continuity, through which understandings of race, nationality, and ethnicity are sedimented together. To simply suggest that the transnational/transracial Korean adoptee needs to be included within a history of Asian Americans would insufficiently draw attention to the ways in which the transnational/transracial Korean adoptee in the US redefines notions of the diaspora—not through an imagined and immutable link or shared geographic national origin, but instead as delineating a history of geopolitical tensions and relations between the US and Korea, and the impact of economic and cultural globalization.

### *Performance strategies*

My dissertation focuses on the construction of Korean adoptees' identity as transnational mobile subjects. In my dissertation, I use performance to name the embodied, ambivalent/troubled/troubling, and ephemeral presencings of identity that occur when mobile adoptee subjects encounter more fixed/located articulations of identity, such as nation, race, kinship, in and beyond Korea. Performance scholars aptly articulate the uniqueness of performance as a discipline which is grounded in disappearance and the inherent failure of its reproduction. In describing an ontology of performance, Peggy Phelan suggests performance can only reside in the temporal present, and "becomes itself through disappearance" (147). In this respect, performance is ephemeral and cannot be replicated. Phelan's articulation of performance is useful when I look at the double returns of Korean adoptees because it suggests that the performance of Korean adoptee identity is ephemeral, and disappears. Korean adoptee identity is something which cannot be fixed or recorded, but is rather temporarily produced in relation to the presence of Korean adoptees within specific sites.

In the past decade Asian American performance has emerged as a distinct site where Asian America and Asian American identity are imagined, explored, and contested. In particular Josephine Lee looks at the ways Asian American theatrical productions become sites to interrogate how race and ethnicity is performed and negotiated (22). Esther Kim has documented the emergence of Asian American theater companies, playwrights, and actors--identifying several distinct waves of Asian American theater. However, as Yutian Wong has suggested, the majority of scholarly literature on Asian

American performance has been dominated by text-based performance, where writing overshadows the material and corporeal body on stage (4-5). An exception to this is the work of Karen Shimakawa, who informs my own research by analyzing the ways in which the Asian body was rendered “abject” in relationship to cultural and legal forms of citizenship, through a history of racial exclusion that defined Americanness as not Asian. She asks the question: “How might the Asian American body be performed?” (“National Abjection” 7). Shimakawa’s project looks at the conflicting process of Asian Americans’ inclusion and exclusion within the national imagination. I find her notion of abjection useful for understanding how Korean adoptees are positioned within a paradigm of Asian America, but also the ways in which they are abject in relation to Korea as well. In a similar gesture, my first chapter is a point of departure to talk about Korean adoptees’ movement between Asian America and their inclusion by the Korean government as part of the Korean diaspora.

In my second section, I call upon performance as a medium that makes visible a kind of haunting left behind by the continued legacy of international adoption in Korea. Many performance scholars have embraced hauntology as a way to describe theater’s intimate relationship to memory. Marvin Carlson considers how theater is haunted because of the way it relies of the repetition and use of theatrical conventions alongside the memory of the spectator. Herbert Blau addresses “ghosting” as a mode of consciousness that address the unconscious terror of loss and disappearance. Alice Rayner defines theater’s haunting practice as, “ghostly theatricality: repetition, the double, matter and memory”

(xvi). Specifically, my work draws from Roach's theory of surrogation, which sees performance as a social process that embodies and fills roles which have been left empty by the violent ruptures of history. He writes, "Into the cavities created by loss through death or other forms of departure, I hypothesize, survivors attempt to fill satisfactory alternates" (2). In my dissertation, I address the traumatic history of Korea sending its children away for adoption as a form of departure and disappearance. By looking at Deann Borshay Liem's film, *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*, I suggest that Liem is individually haunted because of her substitution with another girl at the orphanage, but also returns as a socially haunted figure within Korea. While Korean adoptees have histories which connect them to Korea, many Korean adoptee auto ethnographies express this connection through a narrative of loss. I consider how loss of Korean identity, memory, and culture is illuminated in terms of a haunting. In my creative nonfiction, performance becomes a way to describe the process and attempt to fill in absent roles of kinship created through adoption. In many ways, these roles were voluntarily performed, but at times I often felt compelled and expected to perform (and often performed poorly) roles that felt both intimate and strange. Performance helps to illuminate the kinds of individual and national loss which was momentarily embodied through these interactions, but which could never be fully reconciled.

I consider my movement through the Gathering and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) as an exploration of what Diana Taylor describes as the "repertoire". Taylor argues, "The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of

knowledge by ‘being there,’ being a part of the transmission...the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning” (20). Taylor’s understanding of the repertoire calls attention to the notion of presence as embodied and integral to the transmission of knowledge. At both the Gathering and the DMZ, my bodily presence and “being there” was integral to understanding how Korean social memory around international adoption became known to Korean adoptees. By the same token, the performance of Korean adoptee identity was ephemeral to the extent that the meaning produced was contingent on the bodies being present in those spaces.

Performance studies as a disciplinary lens has also informed my decision to investigate spaces such as the Gathering and the DMZ as potential sites of inquiry. Performance studies scholars such as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett have focused on museums and festivals as sites that stage national anxieties and articulate how national identities are formed. Furthermore, the intersection of performance studies with the rise of tourism studies has helped to distinguish the role of tourism in shaping national images for international communities. Both the Gathering and the DMZ are defined spaces that foreground the relationship between Korean national agendas of globalization and a sense of national loss and shame. Furthermore, both sites are attached to social memories of the ways in which the Korean War and military violence is collectively remembered or forgotten.

### *Writing oneself into existence*

Much of my dissertation is based in auto-ethnography, using creative and narrative writing to locate myself in the work. One of the reasons I chose this modality of writing was to foreground the ways in which being and moving in different spaces generated individual affect and meaning. Korean adoptees cut across many different national, generational, and cultural boundaries which challenge any collective group identification around any singular experience and meaning of what it means to be a Korean adoptee. Using auto-ethnography attends to my individual experiences while also framing my experiences through different historical and political lenses. Several parts of my dissertation engage with individual and social haunting related to my own desires and anxieties around adoption. Revisionist, empirical scholarship, while certainly valuable in its own right, fails to adequately illuminate this haunting because it fails to grapple with the affective and psychic residues of adoption that define the condition for so many adoptee subjects.

I also consider auto-ethnography as a methodology to write myself into existence.

Dorinne Kondo, writing about Asian American theater, points to the urgency “for Asian Americans to write ourselves in existence” (110). For Kondo writing oneself into existence is a strategy for people in the margins to assert their identities. To write myself into existence is to consider the ways in which others have written and spoken for the experiences of transnational/transracial Korean adoptees. Within the past decade, transnational/transracial Korean adoptee writing has burgeoned, in both scholarly and

creative, as well as visual and performance mediums. As Trenka, Oparah, and Shin point out in the anthology *Outsiders Within*, the recent spate of writing on transnational/transracial adoption can be attributed to the critical mass of adoptees who constitute the first, second and third wave of adoptees from South Korea. Furthermore, to write oneself into existence is to acknowledge a new body of critical research written by transnational/transracial adult adoptees about their experiences with adoption. Writing oneself into existence functions as a “corrective” to prior research, which situates Korean adoptees as empirical objects of study, and fails to approach Korean adoptees as subjects and agents within their own right (Trenka, Oparah, Shin 1-15). To write oneself into existence is also a process that acknowledges and critiques the discursive formations that derealize the adoptee as a subject.

My work also borrows from Grace Cho’s original methodology of weaving together auto-ethnography, memoir and fiction to create a narrative of the unconscious in which the text itself has an affective force of trauma and haunting. While my research does not entirely focus on the transmission of trauma, her research on how the figure of the Korean War brides creates a ghostly haunting within the Korean American diaspora and is useful to understand how transracial/transnational Korean adoptees may themselves be haunted. Like Cho, throughout the chapters, I rely on partial fragments that reflect my experiences of moving to and from different sites in the United States and Korea. In doing so, I align my writing with the methodological traditions and legacies of women of color (Moraga and Anzaldúa) and feminist ethnographers (Abu-lughod) who challenge

traditional and dominant modes of writing by defining their locations and using self-reflexivity as critical interventions. In this respect, the insistence of feminist writers of color on using the intersections between the personal and political to create partial, rather than dominant historical narratives deeply informs this project.

Lastly, in using auto-ethnography as a way to write myself into existence, I want to be cautious about the dangers of using personal experience as a way to sustain an essentialized portrait of the Korean adoptee as sad and tragic. As Kim Park Nelson argues, many Korean adoptee auto-ethnographies may be identified as being tragic and sentimental; however, such an account does not take into consideration how writing “sad” stories also offer a way to situate and question the continuing practices of international adoption from Korea (231-250).

My use of memoir and story production has also been informed by Orhan Pamuk’s literary work. His exploration of personal objects from his past--of photographs, furniture, and memories of the city spaces--creates a spatial and temporal practice which reveals the collective national sentiment of melancholy. My individual memories and experiences as a Korean adoptee diasporic subject living in and returning to Korea are written into this essay; however these memories are fragmented and never whole.

Although I use memoir, I am fully aware of the selectiveness of memory and the fictional aspects of writing memoir. As de Certeau argues, when writing histories, and in this case, personal histories, that history is always bound to fiction.

### ***Breakdown of chapters***

My first chapter begins by looking at how Korean immigration to the United States is commemorated within Asian American performance. Looking at the work of Korean American choreographer Dana Tai Soon Burgess, I am interested in the ways in which his staged performance of *Tracings* tells a story of Korean immigration to the United States through family, history, and memory. Staged within the context of 100 years of Korean immigration to the United States, this commemoration makes visible certain histories of Korean immigration, ones imagined within the context of Asian American studies. I suggest that staged performance offers a productive medium through which the Asian American body comes into a field of visibility. In this respect, I am interested in exploring how US citizenship and national belonging are staged in relationship to Korean immigration in the United States. As a point of departure for my dissertation, I suggest that the transnational movement of Korean adoptees double returns disrupts the model of Asian American immigration forwarded by *Tracings*. The adoptee's entry to the United States and acquisition of citizenship is predicated not on remembering, but through the erasure and loss of cultural and social memory.

In chapters 2 and 3, I address the notion of the double return by looking at Korean adoptees who return to Korea. I explore two Korean adoptee auto-ethnographic works that address returning to Korea: Deann Borshay Liem's most recent film *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*, (2010) and my own creative non-fiction. The two works are thematically

connected through an exploration of haunting within the context of returning to Korea. In my first chapter I assay a thematic analysis of Liem's film *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* in order to understand how the figure of the Korean adoptee appears as a haunted social figure within the Korean imagination. Furthermore, I consider how the film interrogates substitution as a process and condition that haunts Liem's individual history of adoption, but ultimately becomes a way for Liem to offer an institutional critique of international adoption from Korea. My creative non-fiction work explores individual desire and social haunting through my experiences of living in Korea and teaching English to a group of birthmothers. I explore how performing roles of kinship stemmed from own desire and as a way to address the social and cultural trauma of Korea's past. In this respect, both of these chapters attempt to understand haunting as being located both within the individual, but also as subject to the social and historical memory of international adoption from Korea.

Chapters 4 and 5 foreground tourism and globalization, on the one hand, and Korean national memory, on the other, as two simultaneous forces affecting Korean adoptees when they return to Korea. I engage in an analysis of two different sites: the 2004 Gathering, a conference where over 400 Korean adoptees returned to Korea, and a tour of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in 2006. I chose the Gathering because it was a defined space where a critical number of Korean adoptees returning to Korea were formally addressed by government officials and organizations in speeches and events held throughout a four day conference. In my chapter on the Gathering, I address how the

Korean adoptee body in that space incites a history of national shame while simultaneously being celebrated as a tourist and cultural ambassador. By looking at my movement through the space, I identify and question the ways in which the Korean adoptee body becomes a site where contradictory narratives around ethnic nationalism, Korean diaspora, and tourism play out. My chapter on the Gathering is followed by my chapter on the DMZ and my movement through the site as a tourist and as a Korean adoptee. I discuss how discourses of economic globalization and corporate tourism are staged at national sites of memory. By juxtaposing the Gathering and the DMZ, I argue that locating the Korean adoptee body within narratives of the trauma of the Korean War, represented by the DMZ, ultimately fails to afford the Korean adoptee a place with Korean national memory.

### *Locating my double returns*

My itinerary of double returns have indelibly shaped my experiences of moving and living in Korea and the United States. Indeed, the several times I have returned to Korea over the past decade reflect the different policies towards overseas Koreans established by the Korean government in an era when Korea was attempting to redefine itself within a new era of globalization. My first trip returning to Korea was when I graduated from college in 1999 and I applied for a tourist visa in order to stay for longer than 30 days. My second trip to Korea was near the tail end of my coursework in graduate studies, in 2004. At that time, I had applied for a student visa and was studying the Korean language intensively at Yonsei University for three months. It was at that time that I

happened to participate in the first Gathering in Korea, a four day international conference that brought Korean adult adoptee from around the world together. My last trip occurred in 2005, during which I lived and worked in Seoul for nearly 3 years. At that time, instead of coming under the work visa usually given to Americans working in Korea, I came under the recently enacted F-4 visa. Unlike work, tourist or students visas which designated individuals as foreigners, the F-4 visa identified me as an overseas Korean. In 2007, I was working on the Dual Citizenship campaign in at the Global Overseas Adoptees' Link (GOA'L) In the earlier stages of the campaign, discussions within the GOA'L community focused on whether there was a desire or practical reasons among adoptees to obtain multiple citizenship, or obstacles in doing so, especially given that the F-4 visa already provided many of the same privileges afforded to Korean nationals. Yet, surveys administered through the GOA'L network identified that having the choice of dual citizenship would have symbolic meaning to adoptees of reclaiming citizenship which had been involuntarily relinquished in the adoption process, or deliberately rescinded by adoptive parents (GOA'L "Multiple"). My continual movement back and forth between Korea and the US deeply inform the background for the questions around cultural citizenship and national belonging for the Korean adoptee diaspora that I raise in my dissertation.

In Orhan Pamuk's short essay, *My First Passport*, he leaves his readers with an unanswered question concerning the issue of national citizenship and personal identity. He states, "[it is] the question of how much we belong to the country of our first passport

and how much we belong to the ‘other countries’ that it allows us to enter” (par. 10). Pamuk’s assertion is provocative because his notion of belonging is closely tied to a sense of national ownership, one which is ambiguously positioned between the national borders of where our first passports are issued, but also the “other countries” which mark our identities. My dissertation is an exploration of the ways in which national and cultural belonging are imagined by and for the transnational/transracial Korean adoptee. At the same time, it is a project which looks at the performance of movement—both the movement of the body crossing borders and those of bodily aesthetics—as a way to negotiate and retrieve the loss and memory of my first passport.

## CHAPTER 1

### Tracing Histories: Commemorating Korean Immigration to the US

#### *Tracings as a point of departure*

In this chapter, I begin by looking at Korean immigration and the Korean diaspora in the US within the context of US national imaginaries and racial formations. As a point of departure, I examine *Tracings*, a choreographed dance performance by Dana Tai Soon Burgess celebrating 100 years of Korean immigration to the United States. By looking at *Tracings* within the context of Asian American performance and commemoration, I suggest that while *Tracings* importantly remembers Korean immigration to the US prior to 1965, it also proposes a model of the Asian American immigrant in ways that do not neatly align with the histories of Korean adoptees immigrating to the US. I consider Burgess' performance of *Tracings* as a site to explore the ways in which Korean immigration to the US is remembered within Asian American memory, and as a jumping off point to explore how Korean adoptee double returns shatters epistemologically and ontologically the continuity of Asian American identity proposed in *Tracings*.

In analyzing *Tracings*, I would like to follow Yutian Wong's understanding of Asian American performance "as a social space in which Asian American artists are grappling with questions of form, content, and process as markers of identity" (page 38). Wong's perspective importantly views Asian American dance performance not as discretely bound, but rather as part of an ongoing negotiation of identity through artistic

considerations. At the same time, in *Performing Asian America*, Josephine Lee calls attention to the inherent problematic of creating the category of Asian America Theater. Rather than defining Asian American performance texts through the inclusion and representation of different Asian ethnicities, she argues, “What they share are certain theatrical strategies that make issues of performance, dramatic form, and audience response inseparable from considerations of ethnicity and race” (26). Both of these understandings of Asian American performance call attention to the centrality of race and ethnicity as markers of identity within theatrical performance. In these respects, *Tracings* meaningfully contributes to the field of Asian American performance by thematically depicting the struggles around Korean immigrant identity in the US in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*Tracings* is the culmination of nearly a decade of Burgess’ work which address Korean, and more broadly Asian American immigrant experiences. According to Dana Tai Soon Burgess, he established his company *Moving Forward* in the early 1990’s “because Asian American culture was being left out in the United States, especially in the Washington [DC] area” (qtd. in Sun 2). Some of his earlier work, *Plantation Hawaii* (1993) addressed memories of his mother working on pineapple plantations. In *Red Cans, White and Blue Bowls* (1995) Burgess worked intensively with Washington DC Asian American youth to create a piece that addressed questions of national belonging and hybrid identities. Also, his choreography in *Passages from the Journey* (1995) thematically focused on the theme of immigrant experience. Likewise, his later work,

*Leaving Pusan* (2002) focused on a woman's struggle of leaving Korea for the United States and the struggle of reconciling her Korean and American identities.

The world premiere of *Tracings*, choreographed by Dana Tai Soon Burgess and his company *Moving Forward*, was performed on November 6-7, 2003 at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington D.C. As an evening length dance work commissioned by the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program for the Korean American centennial celebration of Korean immigration to the United States, *Tracings* commingled personal memory and national memory via the commemorative event. Danced by ten performers including Burgess himself, with cameo appearances by his mother Anna Kang Burgess, his performance presented strong images of individual family genealogy within the context of Asian American history. Under the auspices of the Kennedy Center and the Smithsonian, *Tracings* posited and marked the origin of Koreans coming to America, asking the audience to collectively remember first generation Korean immigrants arriving to the United States to labor on sugar cane and pineapple plantations.

*Tracings* drew from several different production elements to imagine the Asian American immigrant subject. The sound design, crafted by Jason Kao Hwang, incorporated traditional Korean instruments with fading interludes of "Ariang", a well known national song of Korea. The light design by Jennifer Tipton also contributed to a haunting and ethereal quality of memory. Using projected images against the back wall, Burgess often infused his work with archival images of Korean American immigrants as well as

personal photographs culled from his family archives. Burgess also used a multi-racial cast to depict Asian American immigrant identity, often conflating the Asian body with memory and identity as a structure of representation.

While *Tracings* loosely forms a narrative structure, in an interview about *Tracings*, Burgess described the piece less as a chronological history and more as a “memory montage” (Buggs 37). The arc of the entire piece makes a full circle from the present to the past to the present, tracing the departures of Korean immigrants from Korea to Hawaii, and anchoring Hawaii as a point of origin to remember Korean immigrants arrivals to the US. *Tracings* is structured into two distinct sections around the Korean immigrant experience of departure and arrival. The first section depicts a young Korean woman leaving Korea and her journey to the US; it conveys her struggle to both carry and leave behind her Korean cultural identity. The second section communicates a Korean immigrant experience of arriving to the US to work on Hawaii pineapple plantations, as well as draws from Korean picture brides as new immigrants to Hawaii. Importantly, both of these models of immigrant experience illuminate a history of Asian America which is grounded in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century immigration experiences of Asians to the US prior to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act which eliminated quotas based on an individual’s national origins.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Ronald Takaki for a comprehensive history of Asian immigration to the United States.

My reading of *Tracings* focuses on three different aspects of performing Asian American history and identity. In the first section of the chapter, I look at the ways in which Burgess proposes a model of Asian American identity through *Tracings* by placing his family genealogy within a history of Korean immigration to the United States. In the second section, I locate Dana Tai Soon Burgess' Company, formerly Moving Forward, within the disciplinary context of Asian America studies. Finally, I suggest that *Tracings* as a commemoration and model of Asian American immigrant identity implicitly cannot adequately remember Korean adoptees, setting into motion the double return.

### ***Tracing Korean immigration to the United States***

As a fourth generation Korean American who can trace his history back to the first wave of Korean immigration to the pineapple plantations, Burgess' exploration of family memory is rooted in remembering/honoring the origins of Korean immigration to the United States. It honors those Korean immigrants whose arrivals to the US were marked by intensive labor in the pineapple fields of Hawaii, but who went on to establish roots in the US and acquire American citizenship. It also honors the subsequent generations who were born US citizens, and Korean Americans who can trace their family lineage back to this originary point in Asian American history. This remembering of Korean American immigration implicitly asserts a linear and unidirectional continuity of bodies with identity and history that can be traced through family kinship and genealogy.

Burgess begins *Tracings* through the reconstitution of an immigrant Asian American subject through family memory and the place-specific imagination of Hawaii. As the lights fade in, an older Korean woman (Anna Kang Burgess) sits in a rocking chair dressed in a white traditional Korean robe and bathed in a pool of light. As she sits, images of windswept palm trees and a ship appear projected behind her. The images appear as historical markers and sites, but linked to her body on stage, they also appear as sites that belong to her memory. As the first image fades a new image of fields of pineapples are projected behind her. Established as a territory of the United States in 1900, Hawaii was a destination for Korean immigrants who were fleeing Japanese colonial rule in 1903. The arrival of the first Korean immigrants aboard the ship, the S.S. Galiec, supplied cheap labor from Asia and elsewhere. From the opening sequence of *Tracings*, Burgess invites its audience to contemplate Korean immigration by moving through memory and the cultural and social memory of laboring on plantations.

As the lights fade from the opening vignette, the older Korean woman is escorted off stage, and an Asian female soloist appears. Like the older Korean woman, she also wears a traditional Korean robe and carries a round white suitcase. In the piece, the soloist fluidly navigates between constructed oppositions of Korea and her new identity. In one particular sequence, the soloist places her suitcase on the floor, kneeling down to the floor she emerges with a traditional Korean mask covering her face. Throughout the sequence, the soloist continuously removes her mask and puts it back on. Symbolic of her Korean cultural heritage and identity, the dancer struggles with whether to wear her

mask or leave it in her suitcase. At the same time, an ensemble of four dancers constantly surrounds the soloist and her suitcase. Their precise gestural movements appear to hold absent pineapples in the palms of their hand, traces of another identity that moves alongside the soloist and with her.

Burgess' choreography suggests a universal process of acculturation which is embodied through the figure of the Asian American immigrant subject. Burgess' main soloist struggles to reconcile two discrete and oppositional identities, moving between her Korean cultural identity and acquiring a new cultural identity in the US. Burgess's thematic narrative illuminates what Lori Tsang identifies as "a dialectical process of acculturation" (5). Unlike a model of cultural assimilation, whereby ethnic minorities assimilate into the dominant culture, effectively erasing cultural difference, acculturation suggests cultural identity formation is a process which is created through the relationship between two oppositional cultures. These two identities, however rehearse binaries which Asian American studies has tried to dismantle: traditional and modern, East and West, old and new.

Burgess imagines the continuity of Korean immigrant bodies with identity memory and history. Korean migration is imagined as moving in one direction, and follows a trajectory of departing from Korea and arriving at Hawaii plantations. In the second half of the piece, as the lights come up, six dancers carrying suitcases emerge from down stage. Their movement appears deliberately slow and trance like as they form a semi

circle around two female dancers, one white and one Asian, who are sitting on the ground, gazing at a pineapple. Burgess' choreography creates a tenuous relationship between the two female dancers who mirror each other's movement and appear as two intertwined identities. As the section continues, the company ensemble opens their suitcases and takes out pineapples. The two female dancers flow into a lengthy sequence with four ensemble dancers who fluidly move between sculptural poses, high balletic kicks, and falling into the ground. A sense of place is evoked through the ensemble members who continuously move in and out of the circle, holding out pineapples and gesture towards the pineapple as a symbol of hospitality. Hawaii as a site of personal and national memory is haunted by detailed hand gestures that carry absent pineapples. While the execution of the movement is fluid, the choreography breaks the movement into discrete parts, often breaking the line of the body: a tilted head, a thrust out hip, a drop to the floor.

*Tracings* also evokes a history of Korean immigration in Hawaii by depicting Korean picture brides. In the next section, Burgess projects onto the back screen a photographic image of a Korean woman in a traditional robe and a Korean man in a western suit. Two dancers appear below the images, a female and male dancer [Dana Tai Soon Burgess] in a similar posture, standing side by side. As the images fade, the duet begins with gestures reminiscent of walking down a wedding aisle. The male dancer supports and female dancer in a sequence of falls, dips and bends as they move together and apart, and in unison. Eventually, both dancers return to the same matrimonial position as an image

of a western styled wedding photo appears at the end of the duet, marking the end of the section. Burgess' duet evokes not only familial kinship, but also evokes Korean immigrants within the broader history of Korean picture brides in Hawaii who immigrated to the US to be brides of Hawaii plantation laborers.

Memory unfolds as a circular process in *Tracing*. Burgess notes, "It is through my family's memories that I created *Tracings*. This evening is a series of danced memories" (Bugg 37). Yet, unlike a diachronic history of past events in Korean American history, Burgess instead depicts personal memory as subjective and circular. In the lengthy final section, the ensemble of dancers form a large circle, walking slowly and deliberately. As the dancers individually move in and out of the circle, they create an ebb and flow of time and memory. The circle appears as history and memory itself, continuously moving and connected, but in a nonlinear way. Previous sequences of movement are recalled by the dancers through repetitions as they move into the circle and out of the circle. At the end of the production, memory comes full circle when the elder Korean woman [Anna Kang Burgess] emerges once again into the spotlight as if returning from a journey into her memory. Photographic images of Hawaii re-emerge against the back screen; however, the final images are group photographs of Burgess' family. The choreography, then, posits both the generational continuity of memory and kinship as the basis for understanding the Korean American immigrant subject.

*Tracings* proposes a model of Korean American identity that stakes a claim of national belonging through tracing ones cultural heritage and claiming inclusion into the US imaginary. Dance choreographer and scholar Peggy Choy in her writing on Asian American dance makes a connection between the Asian diaspora and political resistance:

Resistance and the assertion of our own dance comes through our process of searching for and claiming our heritage in America. It means navigating through stereotypes and what others assert as representations of ourselves and moving through our own processes of identity formation through creation of new work. Our excavating the past includes looking at the history our ancestors, as active people with bodies in perpetual movement. (378)

I quote Choy at length because she eloquently identifies the terrain in which Asian American choreographers such as Burgess imagine a politics and process of resistance through his work in remembering and tracing his(story). Choy and Burgess are both fourth generation Korean Americans who can generationally trace the continuity between Korean heritage and their American citizenship through kinship. While I admire and share Choy's goals, my own diasporic identity story places me at odd with her strategies. Choy's paradigm cannot adequately address the generational rupture of Korean adoptee subjects whose adoptions legally and nationally sever them from their identities as Korean. The costs of assuming that the only path to resisting ossifying stereotypes is through this specific structuration of memory and identity, however, is that Korean adoptees are not only alienated from Korea, but from paradigms of Asian American immigration.

Choy's call to action also importantly recognizes a history of entrenched, gendered, and racialized stereotypes haunt the Euro-American stage. These include large national and international Broadway musicals, such as *Miss Saigon*, which continue to circulate in the US national imaginary. In contrast, Asian American theater, emerging in the post civil rights era, has served to correctively redress mainstream representations of Asian stereotypes and provide a site for Asian Americans to perform, contest and negotiate their own histories and identities.

As an Asian American performance, *Tracings* importantly challenges racialized stereotypes of Asians which have historically plagued the American concert dance stage. In Yutian Wong's book *Choreographing Asian America*, she explores the terrain of Asian American performance by considering the challenges Asian American dance in particular faces. Wong, tracing the history of Asian America within dance studies, demonstrates how American modern dance has been informed by a history of Orientalism. Indeed, many Modern dance pioneers at the turn of the century, such as Ruth St. Dennis and Martha Graham relied on the Orient as a way to construct their identities. My point in bringing up these early twentieth century modern dance pioneers is to help define the field in which *Tracings* comes into visibility for modern dance audiences. *Tracings* importantly challenges the kinds of stereotypes which have infested the history of modern dance by offering an alternative narrative of Asian immigration, one which is authenticated by Burgess' individual genealogy.

While Burgess' model of an Asian American immigrant subject implicitly rehearses a politics of US national inclusion and exclusion, the abstract movement vocabulary and the romanticization of memory and labor makes it difficult to locate political resistance within the piece. Wong wryly notes, "The vocabulary of abstract movement poses a difficult challenge in the retelling of Asian American stories. Unlike the ways in which dance has been written into diasporic African cultural history as a mode of resistance to slavery, Jim Crow laws, and institutional racism, there is no pan-Asian American discourse about the role of dance in Asian America" (32). For Wong, the aesthetics of abstract dance movement cannot easily be translated to Asian America's preoccupation with political representation and self-representation. Instead, Asian American dance is frequently framed in terms of its abstract movement, evacuated of any political meaning.

### *Commemorating Asian America*

Sponsored as a public *commemorative event* of 100 years of Korean immigration into the United States, *Tracings* extends beyond individual and family memories into collective remembering of Korean American history. In *How Societies Remember*, sociologist Paul Connerton aptly argues, "Commemorations do not simply imply continuity with the past, but explicitly claim such a continuity" (65). As such, commemorative events act as a space where re-enactment becomes a necessary factor in constituting collective memory. As commemorative events, it is important to recognize the specific institutional agendas that contribute making these performances available for the public. Commissioned by the Asian Pacific American program in the Smithsonian, the focus of the Korean

American Centennial performance was to celebrate the hybrid cultural identities of Korean Americans. By locating the past origins of the Korean immigration to the US to Hawaii, the Smithsonian commemorated not only the generational continuity of Korean Americans, but also remembered Korean Americans within Asian American history.

Connerton also explores how personal history through the memoir, "allows for the individual to think of life retrospectively, through which objective history unfolds" (28). Through personal family genealogy, Burgess' *Tracings* creates a space not only for private individual recollection, but more specifically invokes national belonging in the construction of a Korean American history and identity. In this section, I attempt to situate *Tracings* within the discipline of Asian American studies. My point is to articulate how *Tracings* as an Asian American commemorative event reveals tensions and contradictions inherent within the discipline of Asian American studies. Describing the rise of Asian American performance, Karen Shimakawa suggests that the first impulses of Asian American theater were rooted in "a desire to tell our stories"—to create and perform roles that would reflect the heretofore buried or erased histories and experiences of Asian Americans as American" ("(Re)Viewing" 42). Such an impulse importantly marks a history of exclusion from the dominant (white) American national imaginaries. A statement issued by the Smithsonian APA director, Franklin Odo, and journalist Terry Hong, echoes a similar motivation to commission *Tracings* as a way to legitimize Korean American history through the inclusion of Korean immigration into mainstream venues. They write, "Having something happen in the Smithsonian, having

endorsement, support and recognition is important in building Korean American self-esteem and sense of history and a sense of entitlement. Entitlement should belong to everyone” (Odo 2). In this respect, entitlement also becomes a way to align the history of Korean immigration within a broader paradigm of racial exclusion of Asian Americans. They continue, "The whole history until 1965 over six decades is similar to Chinese, Japanese and Filipino, they were subjected to the same laws, discrimination, oppression and working conditions” (Odo 2). Odo and Hong’s statement moves between specifically viewing *Tracings* as commemorating Korean American history to more broadly viewing Korean American as part of a pan-ethnic Asian America.

Odo and Hong’s statement on entitlement suggests the ways in which *Tracings*, as an Asian American commemoration is conditioned by the emergence of a US liberal multiculturalism. On the one hand, the paradigm of liberal multiculturalism justifies the motivations for supporting *Tracings* as a historical narrative which correctively (re)views and includes Korean Americans as part of the social fabric within US history. At the same time, multiculturalism reinforces an understanding of Korean American history as lying within the pan-ethnic formation of Asian America. As Candice Chuh argues, this form of cultural nationalism, while used as a strategy for anti-racist work, is based on the notion of pan-ethnicity, which may or may not reflect the diverse identity of different waves of Asian immigration to the United States. Importantly, in her critique she notes that while multiculturalism can “indicate multiplicity, it does not adequately ‘account’ for difference” (21). Chuh also suggests that notions of “entitlement” and “rights” are

politically rooted in cultural nationalism, and that Asian America is also contradictorily linked to the enlightenment and the universal liberal subject. When viewed within liberal multiculturalism in the United State the universal subject, “occludes and effaces the historicity of racism and the deep rootedness of racialization as a technology through which the United States, also contradictorily, has perpetuated a self stylization as the achievement of the universalist Enlightenment values of equality and liberty” (“Imagine Otherwise” 6). In this respect, Hong and Odo’s statement, while affirming Korean and Asian American history, draws from notions of “entitlement” which paradoxically erase and forget a history of racism through the production of a universal subject who is entitled to rights.

As a commemorative event, *Tracings* invites its audience to reflect on the Asian American immigrant subject. Yet, Pei-te Lien describes the pan ethnicity within Asian America as "constructing a community that (almost) cannot be" (42). Indeed, as Lien demonstrates, historically, pan ethnic Asian American communities have mobilized around addressing practices of racism and injustice: they have their roots in the civil rights movement, political activism on college campuses for the inception of Asian American studies programs in the curriculum, and protesting violence against hate crimes such as the killing of Vincent Chin in Detroit in 1982. As Lien also elucidates, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 greatly impacted the wave of Asian immigration between 1965 and the 1990s, making it increasingly difficult to accommodate a model of collective experience, much less collective memory of Asian

America. The dramatic increase in the number of middle class, skilled laborers from India, China, Korea, the Philippines and the influx of Vietnamese, Laotian, and Hmong refugees after the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War and Cambodia have led to a very diverse constituency, and suggest the impossibility of forming any homogenous representation of Asian America. *Tracings* as a model of the Asian American immigrant subject does not take into consideration the ways in which the advent of globalization, new technologies, and post colonial studies, have challenged the very paradigm of Asian America from a US-centered national context to a transnational and diasporic context. As such, Burgess' paradigm of Korean/Asian immigration history—if taken as fully representative, in the way his promoters advocate—runs the risk of erasing the complexity and differences between very disparate waves of Korean immigration and Asian American immigration.

Dana Takagi argues that, “the interior of the category ‘Asian American’ ought not to be viewed as the hierarchy of identities led by ethnic based narratives, but rather the complicated interplay and collision of identity” (359). Instead, she suggests the limitations of creating stabilized categories reinforce essentialized identities as one-dimensional operations of ethnic recognition. Her statement also addresses how identifying oneself as part of an ethnic category privileges only one facet of identity to the exclusion of other forms of identification. Furthermore, Takagi's assertion elucidates how the terrain of identity politics remains a contested field that involves not only the agency of the Asian American subject to insert themselves into particular ethnic

narratives, but also the process by which Asian Americans have been lumped into limiting categories.

The notion of commemoration is predicated on the sharing and exchange of memory. By understanding Korean American history through the lens of immigration, the location of transnational/transracial Korean adoptees within this history is not always visible. It is my contention that Korean adoptees are frequently absent from being remembered or even identified as an immigrant group to the United States because of the privileged ways they acquire and have access to US citizenship. Adopted primarily into white families, Korean adoptees frequently describe a process of identification whereby they acquire white subjectivities, despite their racialized bodies that mark them otherwise. *Tracings* commemorates a paradigm of Asian America where Korean adoptees might find a sense of racial belonging because of the history of discriminatory practices against Asian Americans in the US. However, because the generational model of the Asian American immigrant relies on the continuous transmission and inheritance of culture through kinship, *Tracing* implicitly forecloses the possibility of Korean adoptees being identified as immigrants.

While *Tracings* stakes a claim of belonging to Asian American performance discourse, in Candice Chuh's *Imagine Otherwise*, she calls for the radical deconstruction of Asian America by asserting the ways in which narratives produced by multiculturalism efface the historical specificity of racism and work within a nation-based paradigm. Instead, she

argues for a subjectless discourse, whereby "[subjectless] means to create the conceptual space to prioritize difference by foregrounding the discursive constructedness of subjectivity" (9). As a commemorative event, *Tracings* performs a bodily narrative of Asian America that allows for personal memory to stake the claim of a stabilized subject position within the fixtures of a continuous and sustained history. In this way, Burgess's work *Tracings* performs both a personal and collective act of remembering, but is conditioned by the existing framework of multiculturalism. *Tracings* commemorates Korean Americans by foregrounding their subject position within America and affirming their place in US history by marking a desired point of origin. Chuh suggests that in the advent of a global economy, the imagination needs to be activated in order to "situate difference" ("Imagine" 9). *Tracings* is indeed haunting and beautiful and importantly honors both Burgess' family history and the 5,000 Koreans immigrants who also came to the United States to find a better life. Yet, *Tracings*, as a national commemorative event also legitimizes a prototypical narrative of Korean American immigration through a multicultural lens that uses the sentiments of nostalgia to assert a universal transparent body.

The history of Korean immigration to the US reflected in *Tracings* posits a cultural continuity between bodies and the transmission of memory. While, I do not disagree that bodies carry memory in the Korean diaspora, the absence of memory is an issue many Korean adoptees face. What does commemoration mean in the absence of memory? What happens when cultural memory is not continuous, but marked by rupture and

discontinuities? These are questions that the histories of the transnational/transracial Korean adoptee raise, but that are implicitly forgotten when Korean American history is selectively remembered.

While *Tracings* imagines Korea and the US as two discrete entities, Korean adoptee histories draw attention to Korea as a site of transnational militarized violence and economic, gendered violence that is always unfinished and ongoing. To remember and commemorate a history of transnational/transracial Korean adoptees is to reflect on a history of US imperialism in Korea and military violence, which gave rise to the international adoption industry from Korea. Linking Korean immigration to the Korean war and the US involvement in Korea is also a project imperiled by the absence of US national memory. As Korean scholar Bruce Cumings has argued, the Korean War is not nationally remembered in the US national context, and it is within this history of US imperialism that the origins of international adoption from Korea begin (“Divided”).

My dissertation, like *Tracings*, draws upon individual/collective memory and performance as a way to explore and contest identity and history. Also, similarly to *Tracings*, my dissertation draws from the disciplinary fields linking Asian diaspora studies with Asian American studies. Like *Tracings*, my dissertation is invested in a history of remembering. Yet, unlike *Tracings*, I emphasize the unfinished and restless transnational movements of Korean adoptees, imagined through the double return. The paradigm of the double return acknowledges the contradictoriness of Korean adoptee

identity which becomes present and destabilized through moving between different racial, national, and ethnic formations.

## CHAPTER 2

### Exploring Social Haunting in the Film, *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*

#### ***Between disappearance and reappearance***

In the spring of 2007, I worked on the GOA'L national birth family search campaign. The idea was to set up tables in public spaces where people passing by could anonymously inquire or obtain information and resources about Korean adoptees who were searching for birth relatives, as well as provide information about the status of international adoption from Korea. For the national campaign, GOA'L decided that train station entrances and exits were optimal locations for reaching large numbers of people. Seoul Station, the largest train/subway station in Seoul, was chosen along with the central train station in the large southern port city of Pusan as well as the main terminal in the city of Daegu. I accompanied the other GOA'L workers to Pusan as well as helped at Seoul Station.

The birth family search campaign was an extension of an earlier booklet project supported by GOA'L to help Korean adoptees who were searching for their biological families, but who had limited options due to lack of information about their biological families. In the booklet, photographs of Korean adoptees as infants were placed next to their adult photographs. Several of these images had been blown up and mounted prominently on poster boards in public spaces. On occasion I observed people stopping in

front of the posters, carefully examining the faces, perhaps looking for a person, and then continuing on their way.

I bring up this campaign mainly because the experience of witnessing people look at the images of Korean adoptees mounted in the subway stations provoked a strong and uncomfortable response in me. The images themselves pointed to two moments in time: the past Korean infant or child, juxtaposed with a more current image of the same Korean adoptee as an adult. In the space demarcating the temporal past and the present was the empty space marking everything in between and cementing the two images as the same person. Compressed between the Korean infant and the adult was an absence and erasure of time itself, from the past to the present.

From a dramaturgical perspective, the decision to stage the campaign in the subway also struck me as provocative. Entrances to tunnels and the underground reminded me of the stigma and shame attached to adoption as something to be secretly buried underground and out of sight. By the same token, bringing these images to the public spaces of the train stations also felt like forcing a forgotten social memory to be acknowledged. A portal for the disappeared and reappeared, the subway tunnel marked a symbolic point of entry.

For me, the photographs themselves were disturbingly reminiscent of images of missing children on milk carton boxes I grew up looking at while eating breakfast in Minnesota;

children who had vanished. Often times, the missing children would have birthdates that prompted the viewer to imagine what the child would like today as an adult. Unable to make the temporal leap, the image of the child was suspended somewhere between the past and an uncertain present and future. Yet, mounted in the subway stations, those images of Korean adoptee children who disappeared from the Korean consciousness to reappear as adult faces staring back at the viewers, constituted the most basic haunting; a moment when those who departed made their presence known to those who had never left, as if to say “I’m looking at you. I am looking for you.”

### *Locations and returns*

Since the early 1990’s, there has been a growing number of Korean adoptees who have returned to Korea to visit, or to stay for extended periods of time. In a study conducted in 2008 by the Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link an estimated 2,000 Korean adoptees return per year. (GOA’L “Collection”) At the same time, films by Korean adoptees documenting their returns to Korea have proliferated within the past decade. In these films, Korean adoptees craft their own personal histories, in contrast to the dominant narrative of Western countries as the benevolent rescuers of helpless Korean orphans popularized by adoption institution literature and Western media images after the Korean War.

The experiences and motivations of Korean adoptees returning to Korea are varied and diverse, crossing cultural, national, and generational chasms. Rather than positing any

generalizations about the desires and experiences of Korean adoptees who return, I would like to approach these experiences as grounded in the particular and historically contingent, drawing from auto-ethnographic films and texts. Eleana Kim, who writes about the emerging body of Korean adoptee films in the early 2000's, describes a body of Korean adoptee films as "Korean adoptee auto-ethnography" because "the film maker or video maker understands his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes" (qtd. in "Korean Adoptee Auto-Ethnography" 43).

In this essay, I offer an analysis of Deann Borshay Liem's documentary film, *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*. Since its release in 2010, the film has aired several times in the United States as part of the Public Broadcasting Station's *Point of View* series, in addition to being screened at several international film festivals. *In the Matter of Cha Chung Hee* comes a decade after Liem's first and much acclaimed film, *First Person Plural*.

Together, the two films portray Liem's individual experience and history of her own adoption and also explore the broader historical relations between the United States and Korea, including the social conditions which resulted in her adoption.

As the title *First Person Plural* suggests, the subject position that Liem occupies is seemingly contradictory. Rather than occupying a singular subject position, Liem must navigate between multiple identities resulting from her adoption when she was nine years old. As both films, *First Person Plural* and *In The Matter of Cha Jung Hee* establish, Liem negotiates three distinct identities which surround her adoption. Her first identity is

Kang, Ok Jin, born June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1957, the name given to her by her Korean biological family. After the Korean War, Liem's biological mother placed Liem into the Sun Duk Orphanage from which she was later sent to the United States to be adopted by the Borshay family. Yet, rather than retaining her Korean identity as Kang, Ok Jin, the orphanage sent Liem to be adopted under the legal identity of another girl at the orphanage, Cha, Jung Hee. Lastly, she is Deann Borshay, the legal name she was given when she was adopted into the Borshay family. As Choy and Choy have convincingly argued, *First Person Plural* challenges American post-racial narratives by documenting the social and individual costs of racial assimilation in the United States (130).

*In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*, offers a historiography of Liem's identity as Cha Jung Hee as she returns to Korea in order to search for and be reunited with the real Cha Jung Hee. *First Person Plural*, documents one of her returns to Korea when she arranges to have her adoptive parents, Alveen and Arnold Borshay meet her Korean biological family. Liem's film is not alone in documenting a return to Korea. Like other Korean adoptee auto-ethnographic films, Liem's film explores returning to Korea through the lens of transnational kinship and reunions. Documentary films such as Tammy Chu's film *Searching for Gohyong* and literary works such as Jane Jeong Trenka's *Language of Blood*, are examples of this. Furthermore, popular depictions of Korean adoptees in contemporary Korean films such as the 2007 blockbuster, *My Father*, a story based on the reunion between Korean adoptee Aaron Bates and his Korean father on death row, also show Korean adoptees returning with the pretext of reuniting with biological

families. As narratives of returning to Korea, these films reveal post-reunion challenges Korean adoptees face when confronted with their Korean families, including difficulties with the Korean language, and bridging cultural differences as the result of their transnational adoption.

*In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* distinguishes itself from other Korean adoptee return narratives by shifting the focus from searching and reuniting with biological family, to searching for the person whose identity she was given at the time of her adoption. As the central premise in the film, Liem returns to Korea to search and be reunited with the individual Cha Jung Hee. Yet, as the film develops, the question of *who* or *what* Cha Jung Hee represents is not a simple matter and cannot be reduced to either a singular person, or Liem's othered identity. Instead, Cha Jung Hee is a historically-rooted social figure, who haunts Liem's individual history of adoption, but also traffics as a ghostly figure within the institution of international adoption from Korea.

This chapter attempts to understand the multiple dimensions of haunting which become visible in Liem's film. Researchers in the field of sociology have made significant contributions towards expanding understandings of haunting as being rooted in the sociological imagination. For example, Gordon suggests that the understanding of ghosts as social figures is deeply connected to epistemology. She argues, "The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a

bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition (8). Gordon's statement is provocative because she insists on acknowledging how a haunting comes to be perceived. To understand haunting as a relationship between the social and affective perception, also draws attention to the relationship between haunting and performance.

In this chapter, I offer an analysis of Liem's film, *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* through an exploration of haunting grounded in three distinct areas. In the first area, I look at the relationship between memory and performance that results from Liem's substitution. By approaching Liem's individual haunting within the context of her desire to remember her past in relation to performance, I suggest that assuming the role of Cha Jung Hee provides the conditions for the erasure of Liem's Korean identity as well as provides the foundation of her US identity as Deann Borshay. The second area looks at Cha Jung Hee as a haunted figure within the Korean adoptee diaspora, specifically in relation to the trauma produced by the United States and Korea during the post-Korean War reconstruction era. In this respect, I consider the ways in which the Korean adoptee is attached to the production, reification and circulation of the Korean war orphan in order to justify and rationalize a fifty year history of adoption. By the same token, I attempt to show how Liem's film strategically intervenes into this historical narrative by offering counter-narratives of the multiple Cha Jung Hees she interviews in the film.

### ***Haunted identities***

Liem opens her film *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* with a sequence of grainy faded images of an unremembered past: children jumping rope, and an unidentified person tracing outlines of feet on a sheet of paper. Yet, as Liem's voiceover quickly alerts her viewers, these images of the past do not *belong* to her. Liem states, "I wish I could call this memory, *my* memory, of *my* sisters and friends playing together. I wish I had a picture of all the lost moments of the past so I could string them together into one unbroken history. Instead, I invent stories of what might have been, inserting myself into spaces I never occupied." Liem's opening remarks illuminate a haunting absence of individual memory, where desire and invention result in the fabrication of memory. Liem's opening sequence also captures the visual image of retracing feet, unmoored from geographic location and detached from a body whose specific history is both unremembered, yet full of desire. Liem's desire to piece together all her forgotten memories into a continuous history also foregrounds the ways in which her own personal history of adoption is aligned within the larger framework of US Korea relations dating back to the Korean War.

A piece of white tissue paper with the feet cut out; a pair of shoes; photographs of two different girls each labeled Cha Jung Hee. These objects discovered by Liem as an adult prod forgotten memories of her adoption, her arrival to the United States, and a singular identity divided between two persons. Indeed, these closely interrelated objects, constitute the remarkable history of the events leading to Liem's adoption. When the Borshay family decided to adopt Cha Jung Hee, Alveen Borshay asked the Korean social

worker handling her case to send tracings of Cha Jung Hee's feet so she could send her a new pair of shoes. Alveen sent a new pair of shoes for Cha Jung Hee, yet, when the Borshays decided to adopt Cha Jung Hee, she had disappeared from the orphanage. Instead, the orphanage substituted another girl named Kang Ok Jin (later named Deann Borshay) in Cha Jung Hee's place. When Liem arrived in the United States, she arrived, literally, walking in Cha Jung Hee's shoes with the legal documents proving her identity as Cha Jung Hee, not Kang Ok Jin.

The process of substitution deeply informs Liem's individual haunting. In writing about surrogation, Roach argues, "the process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric" (2). For Roach, the process of surrogation is a site to explore cultural performance and memory as a historical continuity. In distinction to Roach's understanding of surrogation, I talk about the process of substitution as participating in the formation and erasure of Liem's multiple identities. In this sense, the process of substitution is also intimately linked to loss of memory, as in the film when Liem states she "forgets who she really is." The film forces viewers to confront the ways in which Liem herself unwittingly participates in the conditions that lead to the erasure of her own identity as Kang Ok Jin by assuming the identity of Cha Jung Hee.

Like Roach's relation of surrogation to performance and memory, Liem's substitution is also related to performance. In this sense, I am interested in the ways Liem assumes the

identity of Cha Jung Hee. While Liem is forced to acquire multiple identities as Deann Borshay, Cha Jung Hee, and Kang Ok Jin, it is the relational dynamic between memory and performance that forms the basis of Liem's loss and haunting. Liem confesses, "I forgot everything about Korea, including my real name. In elementary school my best friend asked me what my Korean name was. I told her it was Cha Jung Hee and that my parents had died. There was no proof that I had ever been anyone else." Liem's statement illuminates the complexities of the haunting nature of substitution; in the ways substitution conspires in the formation of an "other" identity for Liem, but also in the way in which her substitution provides the conditions for the erasure of her memory and identity as Kang Ok Jin. In doing so, Liem asks her viewers to grapple with the unthinkable possibilities and failure of individual memory and the consequences of performing multiple identities.

Significantly, Liem draws attention to the ways in which her identity as Cha Jung Hee is a fabricated identity, reinforced by the documents provided by the adoption agency and given to the Borshay family. Liem explicitly instructed by the Korean social worker to hide her identity as Kang Ok Jin. However, after acquiring enough English language skills, Liem confesses to her adoptive parents she is Kang Ok Jin, and that she has a Korean family that she remembers. Yet, despite Liem revealing her true identity to the Borshays, Alveen tells her, "No honey, you're a war orphan and both your parents are dead." Furthermore, as an adult, when Liem tells her parents she is not Cha Jung Hee, but rather Kang Ok Jin, their response is indifference. What remains is not Liem's

identity as a specific individual with a specific name and family, but rather her general identity as a Korean war orphan.

Although Liem arrives in the United States literally walking in Cha Jung Hee's shoes, the individual and social consequences of Liem assuming the identity of Cha Jung Hee results in a haunting alienation from herself. In a scene from the film, Liem recreates her discovery of two photographs of different girls each labeled with the name Cha Jung Hee, the shoes and the feet tracings. She recognizes one photograph as herself, and the other as the Cha Jung Hee. Liem's discovery of these objects rupture the seamless process of Liem's substitution, exposing the discontinuities in Liem's memory.

While as a child, Liem had the ability to seamlessly identify as Cha Jung Hee, as an adult, Liem is haunted by the failure of substitution. Describing the period of time when she became conscious she was not Cha Jung Hee, she recounts, "Then everything fell apart. I became obsessed with home movies and kept going backwards in time searching for the exact moment when I forgot who I really was. If I can find Cha Jung Hee, perhaps I'll be able to locate myself within these frames." Liem's statement suggests that her desire is to recognize the person she once was identified as, yet her statement also raises the elusive question of which identity she is trying to locate in the film. Indeed, Liem's integration of a sequence of home video footage from her childhood in the United States is particularly compelling because the home video reveals how Liem's identity as Deann is performed through her racial assimilation into middle class white America, despite the

ways she is racially marked as other within her adoptive family. The home videos further underscore the erasure of her two Korean identities, while also magnifying the whiteness around her. In this sense, Liem's locates her identity through a dual process of understanding the conditions which led her to identify as Cha Jung Hee as well as reconciling her identity as Deann Borshay with the two other Korean identities.

### *Cha Jung Hee as a social figure*

The fifty plus year legacy of international adoption from Korea has produced irreconcilable and lingering forces that emerge from the Korean nation having experienced the trauma of the Korean War and relinquishing its children to Western adoptive countries. Attached to the trauma of the Korea War and American military violence, the departures of approximately 200,000 Korean adoptees leave behind gaping absences, both physically and psychically, which constitute the unremembered presence of a Korean national haunting. I consider how Liem's return to Korea to search for Cha Jung Hee makes visible this haunting.

My understanding of Cha Jung Hee as a haunted social figure is informed by Avery Gordon who reminds her readers that ghosts are merely the sign that a haunting is taking place. She argues, "The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (8). Gordon's articulation of ghosts is provocative because being ghosts and haunting are not individuated, but are more deeply connected to the social and historical

conditions which give rise to the ghost. Liem returns to Korea in search of Cha Jung Hee, but what she discovers is that Cha Jung Hee cannot be located in a singular person. Instead, Cha Jung Hee is a socially constructed historical figure who emerges within the photograph albums and adoption files she encounters when she visits the Korean adoption agencies. As a ghostly social figure, Cha Jung Hee's origins can be traced to the aftermath of the Korean War and the diplomatic and geopolitical relationship between the United States and Korea. Liem interrogates how the social figure of the Korean war orphan haunts both the national memory of adoption from Korea, as well as forms the foundation of her relationship with her adoptive parents in the United States. In doing so, Liem invites her viewers to grapple with how the system of adoption from Korea was contingent upon the reification and circulation of the Korean adoptee as war orphan.

It is estimated that 5 million Koreans were killed as a result of the Korean War, and over 100,000 Korean children were orphaned. The lack of an adequate social welfare infrastructure immediately following the Armistice Agreement ending the war led to thousands of Korean children being placed in 500 orphanages across the country. As a way to promote international adoption to Western countries, the Extraordinary Law of Adoption for the Orphan Child was enacted by the Korean government. This law provided the legal mechanisms through which international adoptions from Korea proliferated in the subsequent decades. The social construction of the Korean adoptee as a war orphan emerged during the Korean post war reconstruction era between the United States military, US humanitarian institutions, and Korea. Yet, as a social figure, the

Korean war orphan has transnational dimensions, specifically in the context of US humanitarian efforts and missionary efforts after the war to facilitate adoptions for Korean infants and children. In writing about the relationship between the historical origins of Korean adoptees and Korean war orphans, Eleana Kim has argued that the emergence of the Korean war orphan viewed through the lens of humanitarian objectives was closely tied to US Cold War containment strategies, and was partially aimed at helping facilitate friendly relations between American military occupiers and Koreans after the war (“Adopted Territory” 49).

Liem’s film offers a critique of international adoption from Korea by visually juxtaposing images taken from Korea’s past with the present conditions of Korea as a wealthy nation. Indeed, there is an affective temporal dissonance in the film narrative Liem creates as she pieces together visual documentation drawn from the black and white archival footage of the Korean War and US relief efforts, and with images of contemporary Korea in which she finds herself in search of Cha Jung Hee. As Liem suggests later in the film, it was in the context of US humanitarian efforts in the aftermath of war that the Borshays initially decided to sponsor Cha Jung Hee, who they believed was a Korean war orphan without living parents and whose legal documents affirmed her status as a Korean war orphan. The circulation of media images historically constructed the Korean adoptee as an orphan.

While the Korean war orphan is a central character in the historical narrative of adoption, scholars have traced the first wave of Korean adoptions immediately following the War to predominantly bi-racial children of Korean women and US military servicemen. It was not until the second wave of adoption after the 1961 Korean Orphan Child act that Korean adoptees leaving the country were mostly of Korean only lineage. Indeed, the United States military often portrayed Korean war orphans as helpless children in need of rescue. Such a representation is problematic because it effectively absolves US military men of their paternal responsibilities in fathering the first wave of adoptees, while recasting their image as benevolent and reminiscent of the destructive violence of the Korean War.

While Gordon lays out a theoretical case for the sociality of ghosts, Grace Cho's book, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, argues more explicitly for the significance of exploring ghosts and haunting within the context of Korea's national and diasporic articulations as a way to perceive and recognize trauma. In her work, Cho investigates the figure of the *yonggongju* (Korean camptown workers) whose silent histories of trauma run through the diaspora across generational and national borders. For Cho, the haunting and ghostliness of the *yonggongju* are defined by the silence of the diaspora. Cho states, "Bodies of the diaspora, and particularly the Korean diaspora, are constituted by unremembered trauma and loss" (40). Cho's analysis of the *yonggongju* is also relevant to the figure of Cha Jung Hee, because like the *yonggongju*, the historical conditions informing the

transnational mobility of Korean adoptees are often silenced through the adoption process itself, rather than being linked to a history of loss and trauma.

In particular, Cho challenges the historical role of the United States as the benevolent nation in aiding Korea during the Korean War. Instead she locates a genealogy of trauma that can be traced back to an unremembered history of military violence between the United States and Korea. Indeed, Cho argues, the vast devastation inflicted by the US military participation in the Korean War has been forgotten within the US consciousness, but still continues to form an absent presence.

The material bodies of Korean adoptees who have departed and then return to Korea have a ghostly presence. Yet as Cho suggests, what makes Korean adoptees ghostly is not entirely the result of their individual histories of adoption. And while Cho suggests that the trauma of the *yonggongju* is experienced as a transgenerational silence conditioned by the “forgotten” war, the Korean adoptee is also tied to a history of loss, defined by the abrupt rupture of identity and national belonging from Korean social memory. As embodied social figures who have been systemically sent away from the Korean nation as children and infants, absent adoptees become visible when they reappear as adults in search of someone or something.

Cho’s unique contribution towards understanding the haunting figures of the Korean diaspora comes into focus through her particular focus on bodies as affective transmitters

of trauma. In particular, Cho defines ghosts as a “spectral agency” not only located in material and immaterial bodies, but constituted as a Deleuzian postmodern assemblage which makes trauma mobile and embodied within the Korean diaspora. She continues, “When an unspeakable or uncertain history, both personal and collective, takes the form of a ‘ghost’ it searches for bodies through which to speak. In this way, the ghost is distributed across the time-space of diaspora. I want to rethink the ghost not just as the psychic representation of the dead or repressed, but as a body assembled to transmit traumatic memory” (41). Cho’s understanding of an “assembled body” is productive because it suggests that trauma manifests itself through a confluence of forces and histories that are discontinuous and fragmented, but nonetheless, pieced together to form a whole. The Korean war orphan is a ghostly figure attached to the body of the Korean adoptee diasporic subject whose haunting becomes particularly visible when Korean adoptees return as adults. It is through the presence of these Korean adoptee bodies that this national trauma becomes perceived.

Liem’s return to South Korea is premised on her search for the individual named Cha Jung Hee. Yet, unlike the archival footage of a blighted and impoverished post-war Korea that Liem begins her film with, the visual imagery in the second half of the film is instead dominated by Korea’s modernity. Walking in the streets of Seoul, Liem’s camera captures the urban and modern feel of Seoul. It is within this jarring visual juxtaposition of Korea’s post war reconstruction with its present day modern environment where the

social conditions leading to international adoption appear as a temporal lacuna between the past and present.

Importantly, as a social figure, Cha Jung Hee's ghostly haunting is imagined as a child whose fate was determined by the Korean War and resulting in the large scale humanitarian operations of the United States rescuing orphaned children, and eventually establishing international adoption as a permanent solution to Korea's social welfare system. Liem begins her search for Cha Jung Hee at the Sun Duk orphanage, where she hopes to find information about the girl Cha Jung Hee who was in the photograph sent to Alveen and Arnold Borshay by the orphanage. Yet, when the director of the orphanage and the social worker show Liem records of the children who were at the orphanage at the same time, Liem is surprised to discover yet another photograph with a different girl labeled Cha Jung Hee. The new photograph of Cha Jung Hee draws attention to the ways in which Cha Jung Hee's ghostly presence is always made visible by the photograph of the child in which the paternalistic role ascribed to the US humanitarian efforts is further narrativized.

Liem investigates the social mechanisms and social myths which created the conditions for her substitution, but also the fabrication and perpetuation of the Korean war orphan. Interviewing the social worker responsible for Liem's adoption, Hyo-Jung Park, she describes how Cha Jung Hee's biological father returned to the orphanage in the middle of the night to retrieve his daughter. Yet, when the Borshays requested to adopt Cha Jung

Hee, she was no longer at the orphanage. Instead, Park provides the rationale for Liem's substitution. In the film she states, "Plan Korea asked us to substitute a girl who was similar to Cha Jung Hee. That is how, you Ok Jin, went in the name of Cha Jung Hee."

Liem's film critically interrogates the figure of the Korean war orphan as the lucky recipient of transnational mobility. When Liem presses the social worker and director of the orphanage in interview, their responses reflect a narrative of US charity and willful forgetting of the potential trauma of adoption. A social worker in the film explains, "In a way Cha Jung Hee was sort of out of luck, and, you, Kang Ok Jin, you have Jung Hee's birth date and went to America. You were lucky—maybe it's possible that you were happier." While the Director of the Sun Duk Orphanage uncomfortably explains, "Koreans...in general, we'd like to believe that it is wise to forget about the unfortunate past or things that went awry." A similar response is echoed by Hyo Jung Park, the social worker responsible for substituting Liem. Park explains, "The switch was done out of a belief that you would be happy. I'm sorry it's still haunting you." Liem's inquiry of Cha Jung Hee's identity disrupts historical narratives that propose a history of adoption from Korea to the US within a paradigm of the luck and economic fortune. Indeed, Liem strategically questions this narrative by foregrounding the relationship between adoption and the Korean economy, showing the viewers the human costs associated with international adoption.

*A generation of Korean women*

While Liem search for Cha Jung Hee makes visible the historical attachments of Korean war orphans to Korean adoptees, her search also allows her to meet multiple women named Cha Jung Hee who grew up during the post war reconstruction era in Korea. The first Cha Jung Hee Liem meets in the film works in a restaurant in Seoul. Liem recounts “The minute we walked in here I thought, oh well, this could be the real Cha Jung Hee, and I also could have had this life. You know, I myself could be in Seoul running a bar like this if I had stayed.”

In her search, Liem also meets a second Cha Jung Hee in the city of Kwang-ju. Asking the second Cha Jung Hee about her life in Korea, Cha Jung Hee tearfully recounts how her mother single handedly raised eight children and subsequently how her husband had left her and she raised her children as a single mother. When questioned about why she did not remarry, she responds “I came to the conclusion that if I sacrifice, my kids will be able to live a better life.” Liem’s film makes visible women who grew up in Korea during the post Korean war construction era. In doing so, Liem offers a counter narrative to the prevailing historiography of the Korean orphan in which parents easily relinquish their children. Instead, her film renarrativizes lives and hardships of Korean women, who sacrifice to keep their children.

Liem’s film also draws critical attention to the temporal displacement and Korean national amnesia around international adoption from Korea. During her return to Seoul, Liem visits the Social Welfare Society, the oldest adoption agency in South Korea and

one that continues to place Korean infants internationally for adoption. Indeed, what is not visible from the camera lens, Liem draws attention to through her narration describing the social conditions that enable the Korean adoption to continue. She notes, “Most of the nearly 1,500 children currently sent overseas every year are infants from unwed mothers who face severe social stigma and lack support to raise their children on their own.” As Liem’s critique makes visible, while the wealth of the Korean nation has dramatically been transformed over the past fifty, policies enabling international adoption have remained steadfastly in place. Her film also suggests that while the origins of international adoption from Korea began with the war, the current justifications for international adoption reflect the social hardships unwed mothers must face.

After meeting two Cha Jung Hee’s, Liem, with the help of a policeman who specializes in reuniting families, finally meets the third and final Cha Jung Hee. The third Cha Jung Hee recounts her memories of how she had become lost and ended up in an orphanage. Her father had come to retrieve her, saying, “My father said they were desperately looking for me. When my father came to take me home, I remember he said, ‘If it had been any later, I would have never found you.’ I would have gone to America.” As Choy and Choy argue, Cha Jung Hee’s father searching for his daughter counters the prevailing media images of Koreans relinquishing their children.

Liem’s presence forces memories from the past to emerge in the present. Showing Cha Jung Hee the photographs taken from the Sun Duk orphanage, Cha Jung Hee struggles to

recognize the little girl in the photograph who may or may not be her. At the end of the film, Liem meets with Cha Jung Hee for a final visit, bringing the Borshays' letters and shoes. Liem, explaining how for many years she has felt guilty for taking Cha Jung Hee's place to go to America, is met with Cha Jung Hee's response. "I found my father and family, so I didn't go through hardship. But you were sent to a foreign country and had to get used to a new culture. That must have been very difficult for a young child. It hurts me to think about it. I had a happy life in Korea. Don't feel bad about me." Cha Jung Hee's response to Liem is provocative because it shifts the paradigm of the Korean adoptee from the lucky orphan going to the United States to articulating the difficulties of assimilating to a new culture. At the same time, by affirming her happiness about staying in Korea, Cha Jung Hee's response reiterates the Korean war orphan as someone to have pity on and feel sorry for. Poised between the lucky Korean adoptee and the Korean war orphan, Borshay's presence seems to affectively haunt Cha Jung Hee.

### ***Substitution as institutional haunting***

Liem's film is grounded in her individual history of adoption, yet what is most striking about her film is how substitution is deeply enmeshed within the system of international adoption itself. Piecing together the different fragments of her individual adoption, she states, "I believe she [the third Cha Jung Hee] was the original Cha Jung Hee sponsored by my parents. After she went home with her father, I think this girl was put in her place. Cha Jung Hee became a perfect template for an orphan. Once the template existed, any girl could step into it." Liem's description reveals a story of substitution that on the

surface appears exceptional, yet upon further investigation, shows how substitution forms an integral role in shaping the conditions of international adoption from Korea.

Liem's film also explores how haunting and memory are relational and move in both directions. While Liem is herself haunted by Cha Jung Hee's identity, when Liem returns to South Korea, her presence also seems to haunt the Cha Jung Hees she encounters, provoking both collective national memories alongside individual memories. When Liem asks the third Cha Jung Hee if she would like to keep the shoes and letters sent from the Borshays, Cha Jung Hee replies, "No. I don't want to keep them. I want to forget about the past. I am afraid I might dream about it." While it is unclear what exactly Cha Jung Hee wants to forget, or what she might dream of, for Cha Jung Hee, Liem's bodily presence also seems to be a traumatic reminder of something that no longer wants to be remembered.

Liem ends her film with a reflection on identity, mobility and belonging. She states, "I originally thought if I gave back Cha Jung Hee's shoes I would be free of the identity they symbolized, but I realized they don't belong to her. They belong to me. Although I arrived in America walking in Cha Jung Hee's shoes I can see the path I've taken...and if I look closely I can see the girl I used to be and I can picture her stepping out of the past." Liem's statement is a reflection of haunting: *What does it mean to not only haunt others, but to be haunted?* In Avery Gordon's literary analysis of Toni Morrison's ghost *Beloved*, she argues Morrison's greatest challenge to her readers is understanding that the ghost,

Beloved, not only haunts those she comes into contact with, but is herself haunted (139). Furthermore, as Alice Rayner suggests of ghosts both in visual and narrative representation, such a moment begs the question, “How do we know a ghost when we see one? How, especially, do we know the ghost is us? And how do I live with my own unknowing?” (175). In other words, how are Korean adoptees conscious of the ways in which they are haunted and are socially haunting figures? The ending of Liem’s film invites her viewers to think about haunting and who that haunting belongs to. While Liem reflects on her own haunting by claiming her past identification as Cha Jung Hee, she also forces her viewers and those she comes in contact with during the film, to deliberate the ways in which her identity as Cha Jung Hee haunts the Korean nation.

## CHAPTER 3

### Performing Roles of Kinship: My Stories about Desire and Loss in Korean Adoption

#### *The English lesson*

--This is a story of love between mothers and their children who disappeared, but returned. But when they returned they were different.

*Do you remember that morning in Hongdae when I taught you English? The weather was cool and crisp and there was no one on the streets except for us and the stray dogs. We met at the GOA'L office. I came there to meet you for the first time and you didn't recognize my face, and you called me your teacher. I taught you English grammar, past tense, present tense, and future tense. We learned how to greet each other and say goodbye.*

The *ajumas* came individually to Hongdae by train. Some arrived from the North, like Ms. Park who took the brown line. She could have taken the green city bus, but she preferred the metro on Saturday mornings. Cleaner and newer than the older lines in Seoul, the escalators went further and deeper underground the city than most other lines. The emptiness of the station and the subway cars allowed her to think without being distracted. Standing on the platform, she glanced at the subway signs in Korean and English, gently reminding her of the purpose of her excursion to Hongdae. She began to try to discern the English letters when the train announced its arrival in Korean and English. She remembered when South Korea hosted the World Cup and a brand new

stadium and the brown metro line in the Northwest section of Seoul was constructed especially for the honor. Built on the landfills of the city, World Cup Stadium conveniently covered up the garbage that had become an eyesore of the city and sprouted up new malls and parks where little kids rollerbladed with their parents on weekends. The subway ride took only 15 minutes before she arrived at Hapjeoung Station, where she began her long ascent and exited at number 6.

From Hapjeoung, the walk from the station to the meeting spot was short and bypassed the main drag. She had a sense of nervous anticipation that caused her to speed by the quiet coffee shops and trendy new wine bars nestled between tofu houses and barbeque pork dives. She walked past a young man lying asleep underneath a metal bench in front of a park, an empty bottle of Cho-um Chorum soju cradled in his arms. Normally, it might have bothered her to witness the after effects of such carefree recklessness, but not today.

Some of the *ajumas*, like Ms. Jong, took the green line to arrive in Hongdae. The oldest of the subways lines, the green line had no starting or ending point, endlessly circling Seoul proper from 6am to midnight. The main vein of Seoul's subway system, nearly every line at some point touched the green line. On the green line, the protocols of Seoul subway etiquette were ruled by indifference and pure exhaustion. There had been several occasions when there were no more seats available, and she had to stand because students feigning sleep and listening to their loud music would not offer her their seat. Sometimes

Ms. Jong had to patiently wait several stops before a woman in her thirties or forties, quietly reading the newspaper might look up and realize no one younger than herself had given up their seat and then quickly offer her seat. But on days when Ms. Jong could no longer tolerate the un-politeness of youth she responded in kind. A pre-calculated push and shove of those blocking her path almost always guaranteed her a seat; an aggressive action she didn't mind taking despite the looks of disdain and disgust from those around her. But at 9am on a Saturday morning, Ms. Jong easily found a place to sit on the green line without needing to push or shove anyone.

Ms. Jong got off at Hongdae station, exit number four. While she gathered her bearings, she caught the stale smell of Kentucky Fried Chicken and vomit lingering around the exit from the previous night. At this hour, the absence of people in the street allowed her to move around freely and to avoid maneuvering through the teeming throng of students who descended on Hongdae every Friday night and didn't go to sleep until early in the morning. As she walked to her rendezvous spot, the small fashion boutiques flanking the main drag were all closed; only the lone 7-11 whose lights were on 24 hours a day invited people in. On the street, she saw a pretty model posing for a photographer, taking advantage of the morning light and empty streets of Hongdae. The model had a fashionable straight perm, making her already straight hair appear even straighter, and she sported a mini skirt so short, her slender legs appeared extra long and made her look unusually tall. Ms. Jong stopped a moment to show her disapproval of the mini skirt that barely covered the model's backside. Those kinds of mini-skirts invited wandering eyes

and could only spell trouble. When she arrived at the doorstep of the office she felt relief to have come while Hongdae rested. She was relieved to not hear the loud pop and jarring rock music coming from nightclubs; she was relieved that all the students had retreated to their *haksukjips*, dormitories and homes to sleep off their night of drinking; she was relieved to not have to witness college students “body touch” in public of all places; and she was relieved to see other women her own age.

The teacher had not one single memory of Korea. No memory of her mother whose shabby and tattered clothes had been noted by the social worker in her file. No memory of her three siblings who also came to the midwife’s home on that cold December day in Sinchon. Perhaps they had been born out of wedlock, the social worker seemed to imply. No memory of the midwife who had begrudgingly taken in her mother. The midwife must not have been able to refuse and woman holding her belly and reeling from contractions, surrounded by other children who were too young to help their mother. No memory of her mother’s face, older and more withered like her beggar clothing. No memory of how she must have cried when her mother and siblings were sent back into the cold winter concrete. No memory of the social worker who came to pick her up and took her the Eastern Social Welfare Society or who had arranged her adoption to the US. No memory of whether her mother had chosen her Korean name or the social worker. No memory of taking the long trip in the airplane from Seoul to Seattle, and then Seattle to Minneapolis.

The teacher could not speak Korean, though she had studied it. Some of her earliest memories were dated to a time when she was in pre-school. She must have only been around three or four years old, but she quite clearly remembered the day when one of her friends dared her to lick her tongue on an exposed metal pole on a cold winter day. In an instant, her tongue automatically affixed itself to the pole, securely attached. Unable to talk and humiliated by her peers, the fear that she would lose her tongue and be a monstrous mute for the rest of her life loomed over her as a real possibility. When her pre-school teacher finally came and yanked her tongue off the pole, she remembered the sharp pain and the taste the warm oozing blood. After the ordeal, only a small piece of flesh remained on the pole, a reminder of what stuck. Trying to speak Korean brought her back to her childhood nightmare of being a mute monster, with a scrap of tongue remaining on the pole.

Still, she studied Korean until the classes made her ill and became intolerable. The first year, the symptoms were quite mild. She seemed to exhibit a mild allergic reaction when she practiced counting and sounding out words in *hangul*. The second year, her condition had worsened and she developed an eczema rash that would sometimes appear on her face, her fingers and insides of her elbows and knees. The raised pustules itched and were quite painful when they broke, leaving her tender skin raw and exposed. By the time she had arrived in Korea and was taking all day language classes, her symptoms had developed into full blown migraines. She often found herself comforted by walking

alone in quiet neighborhoods where no one expected her to speak, and she didn't have to try to discern the flurry of Korean words that she could not understand.

Trash always littered the streets of Seoul. Empty bowls, wooden chopsticks, and bits of restaurant refuse here and there. Stray dogs were frequently seen in the street eating the leftovers and making their rounds in the neighborhood. If they were lucky, some college girl might take pity on a stray dog and give it some of her milk or part of her dried fish stick she didn't dare eat anymore of, but mostly they were kicked around and shooed away by older men who found them to be dirty and disgusting. The teacher had become quite fond of one stray dog in particular who at first she called "Little." Her relationship with Little had developed over a semester's time when she had been learning Korean. She called him Little because he was scrappy looking with wiry fur and uneven chin hair which gave him the appearance of being an old dog. She would see him when she was in the neighborhood hiding under parked cars or nestled in the bushes. Sometimes she might only catch a glimpse of him running down a nearby street, but she always looked for him to give him cans of tuna, and sometimes he let her and sometimes he didn't. In all their interactions Little never let the teacher come too close, certainly never close enough to pet him or pick him up. Still, her relationship with Little offered her companionship that wasn't based on language and she felt inextricably bound to him.

It was the coldest winter in Seoul in ten years. Even the students had ditched their fashionable coats and wore long down coats and wooly boots. The teacher snatched

Little when he least expected it. The last few times she had been in the neighborhood, she hadn't seen Little anywhere and the cold was starting to set in fast. But on this day, the sun was hitting the entrance of the Family Mart where she normally bought him tuna. Stretched out with a slight grin, Little basked in the warmth of the sun. He would die in the cold she told herself; he would starve to death in the subway station; no one would mourn his passing. So she snatched him, put him in cardboard box and took a taxi across the city. In the taxi, fear, not the cold, made Little shiver uncontrollably. Small amounts of drool fell from his mouth in long gooey stretches quickly becoming more and more copious. The teacher felt so much happiness bringing Little to her home, she barely noticed when the worms living inside his stomach, so shaken and lubricated, spilled out of his mouth onto the taxi floor.

The teacher walked to the GOA'L office to meet the ajumas. For the past two years she had depended on the train to take her everywhere. Often riding the train for several hours a day to go to and from work, she had developed a familiarity and ease with the underground stations. At first she found the subways comfortable and anonymous. She didn't need to open her mouth to figure her way around the subway system because everything was marked in English letters. But, after two years of ridership, she had grown very weary of being underground. The fluorescent lights of the subway made people appear sallow and dead. And she tired of bearing witness to people's daily inhumanity. She stopped riding the subway when nobody offered their seat up for a full term pregnant woman and she herself had to think twice about whether it was it worth it.

Moving to Hongdae allowed her to walk and take the bus to work. And she began to discern the city from above ground. GOA'L was only a ten minute jaunt if she walked quickly and put on her walking shoes instead of her high heels.

She didn't sleep well the night before. Instead she dreamt about a surreal photo she had seen hanging in a modern gallery just the month before at an exhibition showcasing adoptee art work. In the photo, Laura Swanson, a Korean adoptee dwarf, sat poised in a small red armchair on top of a white box platform, in a gallery of modern art. She wore a red velvety button down coat, slightly exposing her chubby legs in white tights and black patent leather shoes. Her small feet touched the platform because the chair appeared to be tailored to her dwarf body. At first glance, someone looking at the photo might have thought the woman in the photo was a child, but something about the size of her face made the viewer reconsider. Perhaps it was the nose that was slightly too large or her painted red lipstick that a full grown woman might wear that lowered the gaze of the viewer to look at her breasts, which although proportionate to her body seemed fully developed. In her dream, the single, tall, undisclosed white man in the photo who examined the dwarf-objet d'art had been replaced by a group of faceless *ajumas* pointing, contemplating. Moving between sometimes being the dwarf and sometimes being outside of the photo altogether, the teacher watched and felt like she was being watched. And while *ajumas* in the dream inspected this half-child half-woman, the teacher/dwarf did not return their gazes, instead looking outward into space as if she had grown fully accustomed to being looked at.

Despite the ten minute walk from the subway station, and two flights of stairs, the *ajumas* did not sweat, not one drop. The monsoon season of a month ago in July and August had washed away the dirt from the streets of Seoul, but in the process had also opened the pores of every person who lived there. The dilated pores made the labor of living in the city become visible to the naked eye. Sweat would drip freely across the foreheads of individuals. Yet, the cathartic release would also leave people exposed and vulnerable to the disgust and humiliation of public scrutiny. Rings of salt in the armpits of blouses and shirts and the malodorous smell of perspiring bodies unleashed unto the subways had to be covered up. But when the rainy season gradually faded, it took the moisture from the air with it. Pores tightened and shrunk and became invisible again and *ajumas* who carried handkerchiefs to guard their embarrassment, locked them away in their purses. Already a month had passed since the rainy season, and the *ajumas* who arrived that fall morning had stopped sweating long ago.

The *ajumas* were curious to meet the English teacher who would give them free English lessons. Learning English was not a new experience for them. They had already memorized and practiced the most important phrases--“I love you,” “Thank you,” “Forgive me”--once before. They had all spoken these words and phrases before to their children who had disappeared and reappeared, rehearsed over and over for when the time might come to say them out loud again, but somewhere from when the words escaped from their mouths, too much time had passed. Too few words to carry the meaning they

were supposed to carry. Too old to learn a new language, they said to themselves. Their English had already failed them once before and forced them to sweat. So, the *ajumas* came to Hongdae to be reassured; reassured that they had made the best decision many years ago when they relinquished their babies into the arms of God and social workers; reassured that their sons and daughters had a beautiful life they had wished upon them; reassured that they could be forgiven and have peace.

The GOA'L office was discretely located off the main shopping drag of Hongdae, down a small side street where foot traffic was usually sparse. Planted in the heart of Seoul, GOA'L's roots had stubbornly twisted their way through the invisible cracks and crevices of Seoul's concrete pavement before they found black soil where they could grow. The first adoptees who returned were a surprise. Not because they came back, but because they refused to leave. Transplanting themselves, the first adoptees who returned to Korea set down roots, whether they intended to or not. And despite unfavorable and unwelcoming conditions, the adoptees survived.

The *ajuma*'s hair permanents revealed their age more than the wrinkles that made pathways on their faces. Coiffed so as to not expose the fluttering of a single strand of hair, their hair stood still and unchanged, as though time itself could not shake the roots and hairspray that held it firmly in place. The wavy permanent, no longer than the shoulder length, placed them from a certain era. Black hair that should have shown the passing of decades in hues of grey and white remained the color of their youth. Once

only a luxury afforded by wealthy women, these permanents gave dignity in the face of indignities they had endured and suffered. It may be for these reasons that the first thing the teacher remarked about the women who came that Saturday morning was their hair.

The teacher seemed familiar, and not unlike the teachers they had seen on the television.

The faces of adoptees regularly appeared on the television, every Tuesday morning.

When their schedule permitted, the *ajumas* tuned in to watch the show *The Person I Miss*.

At first, the show didn't regularly feature adoptees, but reuniting adoptees with their birth parents proved to be filled with such voyeuristic pleasure and emotional catharsis, the climax of watching adoptees reunite with their birth parents was too irresistible for the television producers to ignore. To add to that, the television station had become inundated with requests from adoption social service agencies requesting the show to accommodate adoptees searching for their families, and so the television producers decided to regularly reserve a spot for adoptees who had a high probability of being reunited with family. And so the *ajumas* had grown familiar with the awkward mannerisms of adoptees they saw on television who mispronounced their names in Korean, spoke in languages that required translators, and were unashamed to make private family matters open to the public.

But the TV was not flesh. Sharing an English lesson with the teacher gave them something the television program never could replicate, a body. Standing in front of them, the teacher was something they could not only look at and observe, but something

they could feel, and touch even if they could only understand one or two words she said. It was listening to her breathing in and out that reassured them. In the room, they could feel her presence and the physical sensation of being close to something that had felt absent.

Speaking English changed the teacher's face. The *ajumas* closely examined the teacher's face. Maybe it was the way her mouth moved when she greeted them with "Hello's" and "Nice to meet you," pronounced the consonants and vowels that didn't exist in their language, but when the teacher spoke in English the physiology of her face changed, subtly morphed before them. The slight asymmetry between the two sides of her face made one side seem up and the other side tense and while her nose appeared narrower and with a higher bridge. When the teacher spoke in English, the tensing and relaxing of her jaw and throat as she enunciated her words gave her an unquestioned authority they did not possess, despite their age which commanded respect. Her eyes seemed larger...maybe it was the way the light shining from the window created shadows across her face. And her skin tone looked browner, too brown to be respectable, prompting Ms. Jong to ask, "You are Filipino?" "No, Korean," the teacher replied.

It was the gratitude that rolled so quickly off the tongues of the *ajumas* that bothered the teacher and caused her to sweat, "Thank you, teacher." The words stank of an older generation who had lived through the Korean War and who thought it was only polite to express gratitude to the Americans who adopted the babies they could not take care of;

gratitude to the American military who had fought with them and helped to protect them from the North Korean communism; gratitude to the US for the free trade agreements that had helped to raise Korea from the ashes of war into one of the strongest economies of the world. Their gratitude made their shame palpable and in turn made the teacher feel ashamed for them and herself.

The English lesson made the *ajumas* appear small. With each grammar lesson, they seemed to take on a more childish demeanor, like elementary school girls squirming in their seats when they were called on by the teacher. The lesson covered numbers and conversational greetings and conversation. “How are you?” “I’m fine.” “What time is it?” Their pronunciations of English words were unpleasant for the teacher to listen to and the more they spoke the smaller they seemed. Shrinking gradually with every word, at the end of the lesson they appeared no older than young toddlers. The teacher couldn’t understand the *ajumas* when they spoke Korean. Concentrating and listening made her tired, especially when she was locked standing up in front of the *ajumas* at the dry erase board. Cemented into place, like a silent witness to the conversations that were taking place in the spaces between the lesson, the teacher was present but unacknowledged. The *ajumas* did not speak to her in Korean either, and instead only spoke to her in English. At times when the teacher suspected they might have been talking about her, the *ajumas* might talk rapidly in a slur of words before addressing her in broken English.

Only relief remained at the end of the language lesson. Leaving the office space together, the quiet streets of Hongdae had started to show signs of life, and the teacher and the *ajumas* retreated into the comfort of their respective anonymity.

### ***The teacher's visit to Great Auntie***

The teacher was not a disbeliever. She found the possibility of the other world both frightening and alluring. Belief in the unknown made her curious about people who were bestowed with supernatural abilities she herself did not possess. The gift of being able to see into the future or look into the past didn't seem completely out of the realm of possibility. So, she listened closely when her student described her Great Auntie who possessed unworldly powers. Her Great Auntie had reappeared in the family after quite some time, she had simply arrived at their doorstep after many years had passed and announced her presence. She was not known because she had disappeared from the family records, but she was immediately recognized. Identical twins, separated at birth, one sister was kept and raised in the family and the other was sent away, disappearing without a trace. Nobody came to look for her and nobody in the family knew of her existence and so she vanished from the memory of her family.

Great Auntie lived on the outskirts of Itaewon, the section of city where the foreigners lived. The armpit of Seoul, American military men were frequently seen carousing in the streets with *juicy girls*, the prostitutes who served them juice in the bars. Great Auntie had agreed to meet the teacher out of a sense of obligation to her niece; she didn't like

Americans. She was quite fond of her niece and was accustomed to her extended family paying her visits when important matters came up. She had been consulted when her nephew took the most important exam in the country, and she regularly saw her niece about decisions pertaining to her professional and personal life. Great Auntie felt pity for the teacher when she saw her.

“The water surrounds her,” she says. “She is alone and the water comforts her and isolates her. Her husband is dead and she has several other children.” “She cannot find you.” “She lives by herself because her children do not live with her.” “She wants to see you before she dies.” “The water surrounded her,” she said. “She was alone and the water comforted her. Her husband died and she had several other children. She could not find you. She lived by herself because her children did not live with her. She wanted to see you before she died.” “The water will surround her,” she will say. “She will be alone and the water will comfort and isolate her. Her husband will die and she will have several other children. She will not find you. She will live by herself because her children will not live with her. She will want to see you before she dies.”

***The story of my brother (as told by the teacher)***

My brother grew up by the water on the sea port of Pusan. He must have loved the water because when he talks about his fondest memories, she sees him surrounded by water. When he first started working for the ship building company Daewoo, he took me on a tour of the island where they construct the large cargo vessels. He now designs cargo

ships for Daewoo and travels around the world to other sea port cities. My brother tells me stories, so many stories I never know which ones are real and which ones are false.

This is the story of my brother who shall remain nameless, but not without title. We were born in the same year in 1974, only a month apart, and while I was living in Seoul and I called him my brother. My brother was the youngest of three children and when he was still a young boy he was sent away to live with his grandparents, separated from his parents and brother and sister. It seems this was not uncommon at the time because many families struggled from poverty; hunger and scarcity dissolved otherwise strong families. Poverty was a collective blight and Korea sobbed as she rebuilt herself from the war, one concrete block at a time, labor driven by fierce survival, not by love. And as the laborers who lay concrete began to build modern cities, there was no desire to remember, none at all. Some mothers relinquished their children to orphanages and abroad, but my brother was sent away to live with his relatives. His memory is mine too and we are brother and sister through language and collective memory, memory that grows in the cracks of the concrete in Seoul where we now live.

It was at this time of separation, my brother began to have nightmares of a terrible sort. Fearful of sleep, my brother cried at night because as he slept a small man would come and sit on the edge of his bed and stare at him, until my brother awoke, sweaty and rubbing his eyes. The man had a disproportionately large head and a strange smile, it was the sort of smile where the lips naturally angled in an upward tilt, giving him the false appearance of smiling, despite the hardness in his eyes and wicked laughter. The

small man would tell him mean and nasty things, appear and then disappear and then reappear in the faces of strangers and people he loved, all the while taunting him and laughing. And so my brother came to know and dread and eventually tolerate the small man with no name. And then one day the little man disappeared from the dreams of my brother, rationalized out of existence.

I'm not sure when my brother stopped dreaming of the man with no name, but the man with no name's absence must have seemed more like a warning of something to come, rather than a respite from his once expected intrusions. My brother once showed me a photograph of his family. The photo was unremarkable, a day at the beach with his older brother, and his older sister, the sand warming their small feet and the ocean laughing behind them. What made the photograph remarkable was the slight shadow covering my brother, his body wrapped in a small towel, while his brother and sister remained unencumbered in the light. My brother grew up in Pusan, the largest port city in Korea and images of the water and ships in the water play in his imagination. Today, my brother is a shipbuilder for a large prominent company. His meticulously crafted ships are vessels of transportation; a triumphant symbol of global industrial leadership. Water, not the concrete jungle of Seoul comforts my brother.

***The teacher's fantasy of Ms. Jong***

In the teacher's fantasy, Ms. Jong had dared to ask her, "Meet your *oma*?" Dared to pry open the lid of her own empty well of desire. As an *oma* herself Ms. Jong had laid claim

to a right she felt she ought to have, but knew she had forfeited many years ago. She knew she had committed a great crime when she left her child at the orphanage. But in her mind, the crime that ate her up, shattered her into a thousand pieces and then had left her gnawing away at all the pieces until there was nothing left but a black empty well of desire, was what she *didn't* do. She did not look back. She only looked forward, placing one foot in front of the other. If she had looked back, she might have turned around and run back with her demands, demanding her child back. Instead, she did not look back, and only walked forward, frightened she might remember the past.

The baby girl must have wanted to come out, because she slid out in one momentous push, temporarily piercing the silence with her own wailing scream. The baby girl had split her into two halves when she came out, a clean invisible tear right up on up her middle from her pubic bone to the top of her head. At that moment, one half of Ms. Jong had floated; floated to the top of the room amid the rafters, disembodied and light. She had been raised by some force, separating herself from the body below. The body of Ms. Jong was still down there, while she was above, nowhere and looking down at the mess below. Looking down at her own body, at first she thought she might be dead. How else could this strange phenomenon of seeing a woman who looked so much like herself be explained, she had wondered. But the woman who seemed to resemble her, did in fact look eerily just like her. And even though the body below was silent, she was moving, although barely.

Puddles. She had bled during the birth, but had continued to bleed while she pushed out what was left. From above, the other Ms. Jong had watched: the baby's swift exit, and the subsequent flood, pooling into puddles on the white linens. The knot was thick, loosely cradling the baby girl's neck. The long cord nourishing the baby girl had resisted being cut, moving as if it had a life of its own. It took three attempts for the midwife to clamp down and break its resilience, before expiring and withering. The afterbirth produced so much blood. The midwife had felt inside for the spongy jelly organ, still bonded to the walls in two places. "It must come out," she said to Ms. Jong. "You must push harder." Ms. Jong witnessed the body below quiver and spasm, trying to dislodge what stayed stubbornly inside her. One last final push brought forth all that remained. "So much blood!" the midwife had exclaimed.

The other half of Ms. Jong, had stayed firmly in the bed, fully embodied and physically in pain from the birth, listless and only slightly moving. Her eyes were open, but she did not, could not bring herself to look at the baby who was crying to be nursed. The baby was hungry, and by instinct found her breast to nurse on, climbing across her chest with unknown strength and sucking on her ferociously. The one half of Ms. Jong who was lying in bed went in and out of consciousness. She heard words, but didn't listen to them, or even acknowledge them, they were still somewhere out in the room, waiting for the right moment to enter into her. But nothing could enter, because she was closed. Not even her other half could enter, to fall back into her other half and make herself whole.

There was no official burial for the baby girl who disappeared, relinquished from the arms of her mother, and vanished behind closed doors and never to be seen again. The remains had been left, the putrid smell of bloodied sheets and the withered cord and placenta mixed with the scent of new baby on the hands of Ms. Jong. She remembered only the smell of new life and the odor of expired blood and flesh. The rest she buried into the ground behind her house in the field.

It was the disembodied Ms. Jong who remembered her other half walking to the orphanage door; the half of her who remembered the social worker asking for the baby's name. "But certainly she must have a name," the social worker pressed. Ms. Jong's half, the one who stared at the social worker, comatose, had nothing to say. Instead, her eyes, looking at the floor spoke for her, "*How dare I? How dare I?*" The mourning had come much later, a lifetime too late when she realized something had been taken away, stolen from her, and had left her with an insatiable emptiness; something she had been robbed of without her even knowing what it was that was missing.

### ***The story of Littleman***

She named him "Littleman"; the man child who gestated in the empty walls of her stomach over the decades. She called him Little-man because in his full form his childish body, no larger than a three or four year old boy, flowered into the head of an old man. The deep crevices, like the etchings of cartographers, mapped out the rivers, streams and mountains across the contours of Littleman's ashen white face. And a patch of wild hair,

the color of buttercups, sprouted from his bulbous head. His eyes lacked pupils, so when he looked at Ms. Jong all she could see was her reflection in a wash of sapphire blue. Climbing up the lining of her esophagus, he would emerge from her mouth or nostrils in his full form and meet her while she was in a semi-conscious state of wakefulness and deep sleep before retreating back to the pit of her stomach.

Ms. Jong didn't like Littleman. Something about him made her uneasy. Although she found him bearable, she didn't like that he lived inside of her, warmed by the fluids in her stomach and perpetually in a dark place where no one else could see him. At first she had been quite frightened of him, his outward appearance was disconcerting because he was hideous to look at, but his boyish body made him also seem childishly vulnerable and defenseless. But as time passed, she became accustomed to his appearance and it no longer disgusted her. Her wariness stemmed from Littleman's behavior; his actions were volatile and unpredictable, vacillating wildly between benign tenderness and a dangerous temper. When he didn't get what he wanted, he might throw himself on the ground, banging his head against the floor, thumping it until it was bruised and wailing his arms and legs in frenzy. On several occasions he had threatened her by pointing guns much larger than himself at her while vulgarities spewed off his tongue, until eventually his outburst was assuaged. So Ms. Jong had trained herself to be vigilant. She always asked him when he would come out, "What are your intentions?" But, she never believed him because he told lies and liked to trick and deceive her.

Once, he had made himself so small so he could fit inside her mouth and had secretly crept in. At first, Ms. Jong felt something moving in her mouth and she had reached in and pulled out a thickly embedded molar. Reaching in again, she felt her gums turn in slush and she began to break off rows of her teeth, leaving only one or two teeth remaining. When she felt around again, she pulled out a black decayed tooth, and held it in the palm of her hand. The weight of the tooth felt heavy and as she inspected it closer she saw it was the little man in a black coat, growing and revealing himself, and taunting her horror. In another dream, she had been walking in the street and seen a little boy crying with his hands buried in his face. She reached in her pocket and pulled out a piece of candy and handed it to the boy to assuage his tears. But when she touched the boy's hand it fell off his body. Grabbing his arm, his arm detached from his body and she was left holding it. And when she placed her hands on the boys shoulders, his head rolled to the ground. "You've poisoned me, you've poisoned me!"

Ms. Jong was quite certain Littleman had been growing in her for many years, but he had begun to make his presence known to her around the time when the city and country was still abuzz from the 1987 protests. Ms. Jong had come down out of curiosity, but she observed from a safe distance in the hills of Yonsei University. She stopped to pick up a flyer that had landed beside her foot, "Democracy, not Dictatorship," she read. Ms. Jong didn't understand what the big fuss was about. The country had prospered over the last thirty years because of President Park and President Chun and now students, indignant, had armed themselves with the with rubble of Seoul and soda pop bottles filled with

linens and gasoline. The police forces stood ready with their helmets and shields, while tears from the gas they unleashed stained the streets with pepper, not salt. The students lined the streets, angry and marching, screaming “US Imperialists, Go Away!” Ms. Jong had never thought too much about politics, but she felt disturbed nonetheless. The Americans had made democracy in her country possible. “The youth have no shame,” her father had said to her, shaking his head. “The Americans helped us and fought beside us. We are grateful for the sacrifices they have made.” Ms. Jong watched the streets light on fire, the molotov cocktails exploding as they hit the ground as the mass of students rushed towards the police, not much older than themselves.

Shots had been fired, echoing through Ms. Jong’s body and bouncing off the mountain. She didn’t see him fall; didn’t see the bullet pierce through his fragile skin and leave a hole that had to be plugged. After the students had retreated, what she did see was a body lying on the ground, moving spasmodically as though still trying to hang on to the resemblance of life. The throng of people blurred in the eddy of dust below, making it impossible to discern who had fired the shot. But the shots had caused the students to back off and retreat back to their dorm rooms and homes, unsure of what steps to take next. The riots frightened her, as though she might have something, although she couldn’t name what exactly, drawn out of her from the chanting and mass of people converging on the streets. She hurried back to her house and closed the doors.

She had risen from bed, unable to sleep from the events she had witnessed that day, when she saw a figure lying on the ground, its face obscured by the darkness. Under normal circumstances she would have been frightened by the stranger in her room, but the outline of the figure was still and whimpering, pressing both its hands on its stomach. Miss Jong whispered, “Who are you? Why are you in my house?” The voice heaved. Ms. Jong pressed further, “But who are you? And why did you come here? What is your name?” There was no answer and she felt herself move closer the figure on the floor and knelt to the ground, taking its hand. “Are you hurt? Did the people in the uniforms do this to you?”

“Yes,” said a voice, barely audible.

She reached and placed the figure’s head in her lap and looked down. Moving the figure’s head into the light, she saw the outline of a familiar figure; it was Littleman, up close.

Ms. Jong held his hand. His skin was discolored, unevenly splotched with patches of purple, blue and brown. His paper-thin skin, although smooth, appeared translucent and fragile, as though even the smallest scrape or tear might permanently leave an open wound. His chest moved up and down and his eyes remained open, but unfocused. The cracked lines around his lips were both white and scabbed from his breath, and his mouth was slightly ajar, and his tongue limp.

Ms. Jong had taken Littleman into her lap and bent over to listen to his heartbeat. It was Littleman’s heart, strong and willful, that wouldn’t stop beating. The organ’s surrender

was long and drawn out, manifesting in its unwavering refusal to shut down, carrying the workload of the body's other expired organs that had already tendered their resignation. Ms. Jong wept, although her emotions seemed to come from forces deep within her own unconscious, but also from powerful collective forces that had been summoned from the outside and entered into her body, grieving through and with her. Forces that came from an accumulation of memories that had belonged to other generations, both older and younger that had become a part of her own experience as she held Littleman and listened to his unrelenting heart not yield to death. Ms. Jong thought it was her eyes playing tricks on her, but in the darkness, Littleman's form shifted shapes, taking on the appearance of soldiers her father's age, the young students in the riots, and abandoned children. Over the night, Littleman had gradually shrunken in her lap until he was small enough to for her to swallow. Parched, she craved water and her legs tingled, but she was frozen in her spot, unable to move. When she awoke she was drenched in sweat and disturbed by the dreams that haunted her that night.

***The story of the world cup:***

Even after many years, although the faint smell still clung to Ms. Jong, her own sense of smell gradually disappeared until there was nothing left but the taste of salt. Even when the city officials had come knocking on her door to inform her that the garbage landfills, not too far from her house, would have to be excavated to make a gigantic recreational park, nothing smelled any differently. For the city and the residents, it was a win-win situation, building a recreational park on top of the landfills not only helped contain the

waste that had been buried underground and was dangerously seeping into the water channels that led directly to the Han river. For the residents in Map-go and the city, it meant transforming a dilapidated neighborhood into a worthy and beautiful economic tourism zone; an economic boon to the neighborhood; a skating park; a Western movie theater and a large shopping mall, and to top it off a giant glimmering stadium showing off the wealth of the country. The officials told the residents, ““We aren’t removing the waste, we’re just containing it. Once the landfill is reclaimed the city will build a beautiful park and stadium. Good for the economy of Korea!”

Nobody complained, until smell of unearthed sewage and concrete unleashed itself in the neighborhood, making its way into the open windows of houses and restaurants, ruining appetites with the toxicity of its fumes. Having lost her sense of smell, the air smelled the same, her food tasted the same. And while all the other residents choked and held their breath, tying paper masks to make the intolerable smell more tolerable, Ms. Jong had gone about her business as usual.

What Ms. Jong did take notice of was the rapidity. She couldn’t count the number of months she remembered seeing the bulldozers and constructions crews that had become a familiar sight to her on her walks in the neighborhood because they had disappeared as quickly as they had come. The enormous structure of the pristine new stadium, the Carrefour shopping mall and the newly planted trees in the recreational park had everyone in the neighborhood excited. When the stadium was completed, no one in the

neighborhood complained about the smell anymore, because a new smell of fresh steel and concrete, freshly painted play structures, and fresh foliage of newly planted trees and flowers had managed to recover up the smell of the garbage. Watching the coverage of the World Cup on her television, she recognized some of the restaurants and corner grocery stores. But, the stadium and the park had seemed to her both foreign and familiar, as though it had been there for much longer than it actually had with only the enormity of its newness that suggested otherwise. “Built on a foundation of garbage,” Ms. Jong thought to herself as she watched the coverage of the World Cup on the television.

### ***The winter lesson***

The rainy season was far more of a nuisance for the city and lasted longer than the snowy season. The rare snowfalls were short lived and furious, but never long lasting and enduring like the relentless rainfalls that regularly besieged the city. Instead, the snowfalls provided a brief moment of forgetfulness by interrupting the mundane routines; people for the time being forgot their stress and peered out of their workplace to look at the falling snow; university students tromping through the snow to their classes might pause to take in their surroundings; and the small children might stay at home rather than go to their afternoon tutorials. Blanketing the city in a soft thin layer, the snow incited people to temporarily forget the accumulated grime that had settled in deep underneath the surfaces. And for a moment, everything ugly about the city was covered up by whiteness.

The *ajumas* came to class in spite of the snow, leaving their tracks at the GOA'L doorsteps. Instead they came with baskets of clementines, and watermelon, and indulged themselves by drinking sugared soda rather than coffee. Shaking off the wet flakes clinging to their coats and purses, they carefully placed their wrapped packages on the table, brushing off the excess snow that threatened to soak through their jackets. To the teacher the *ajumas* seemed different today, as though the snow flakes had somehow managed to find their way into the fine lines on their faces, making them appear twenty younger and more vibrant. They reminded the teacher of someone closer to her own age, less encumbered by the weightiness of life.

The teacher helped the *ajumas* remove their coats and hang them up. "I'm so glad you came." She said. She pointed to the window where the snow was coming down hard. "Because of the snow. It's so cold, isn't it?" She herself felt unusually giddy. The *ajumas* looked towards the window and nodded, smiling to themselves. "Yes, it very cold, but pretty outside," Ms. Jong said. She lingered at the window to fully take in the snow coming down hard, losing herself in a moment of reflection before Ms. Chang announced, "We brought you gift." Ms. Jong turned from the window and walked over to the table and picked up the package and gently presented the gift to the teacher, "We hope you like," she said.

The teacher carefully unwrapped the package and pulled out a long black woolen scarf. She placed the scarf next to her face and held it out to look carefully at the craftsmanship and then placed Ms. Chang's hands in her own. Ms. Chang's hands had roughened and become arthritic over the years, raising bluish veins to the surface. Old, but still skillful, Ms. Jong's hands felt strong and unwavering, she could not imagine they were the hands of someone who had let go. She thought carefully about how to respond, "Thank you. It is so beautiful," but she thought the phrase too vacuous. Instead she did what she rarely ever permitted herself to do, she responded in her broken Korean, "Kamsa-hamnida."

Their hands touched the teacher and the teacher allowed herself to be touched. Ms. Jong took the scarf from the teacher and began unwinding the long scarf. Together, they wrapped it around the teacher's neck, patting her arm brushing her hair away from her cheek. Their firm steady hands gave the impression of hands that would not let go. Ms. Chang responded by laughing, "So cute when you speak Korean." "We made ourselves," Ms. Jong said with a smile. "We didn't want you catch cold." She made a gesture of a cough to make sure her words were understood.

The teacher canceled the English lesson for the day, instead they peeled back the rinds of the clementines, warmed themselves with hot chocolate. They took off their shoes, pulled the table back and sat on the sofa with cushions on the floor, rubbing their feet and hands together for extra warmth. After the laughter, and the chewing, they sat together in their silences. Ms. Jong's silence was shaped like a large round hole that she could fill

with all the unspoken words. Things uttered in her mind ended up in the hole, and thoughts that went into the hole usually didn't come back out. Ms. Chang's silence circulated memory into the room. The teacher's silence didn't have a shape at all, only a presence. Nobody spoke for the rest of the lesson, but they each encountered one another's silence.

## CHAPTER 4

### Gathering Affect: Reorienting the National Shame of Korean Adoption

In this chapter and the next, I focus on two different, yet intersecting sites that locate returned Korean adoptees within the recent emergence of Korea's national initiatives towards tourism, globalization, and the Korean diaspora. In the first site, I explore the Korean adoptee Gathering, held in Seoul, South Korea in 2004. Organized by the International Korean Adoptee Association (IKAA), an international consortium of Korean adoptee organizations in both the United States and Europe, the intention of the Gathering was to provide a forum for adult Korean adoptees to explore issues related to adoption as well as bring together diverse communities of Korean adoptees.<sup>5</sup>

Approximately 400 adult adoptees, from fifteen different countries convened in downtown Seoul, Korea for a four day conference in early August. In this respect, the 2004 Gathering in Seoul provided Korean government officials, prominent organizations, and Korean adoption agencies unprecedented opportunities to publicly address a critical mass of Korean adoptees attending the conference.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Gatherings had previously taken place in Washington DC in 1999 and then later in Oslo, Norway in 2001. However, the 2004 Gathering was the first conference of its kind and scope to take place in Korea.

<sup>6</sup> Organized by Korea adoptees and for Korean adult adoptees, the Gathering also distinguished itself from other conferences subsequently held in Seoul, like the 2005 Korean American Adoptee Network (KAAN) conference whose participants consisted of Korean adoptees under the age of 18 as well as adoptive parents. The success of the 2004 Gathering resulted in subsequent Gatherings in Seoul in 2007, and 2010.

The second site is the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), a military zone separating North and South Korea, also a popular international tourism destination. By juxtaposing these two sites, I consider the ways in which Korean adoptees are simultaneously hailed as overseas Koreans and tourists within Korean national imaginaries. Contrasting high visibility at the Gatherings and peripheral visibility at the DMZ, I foreground the ways in which the presence of Korean adoptees in those two spaces both shamefully remembers and also collectively forgets Korean adoptees within national narratives of reunification and globalization.

### ***Gathering affect***

I would describe my first experience at the Gatherings as a sort of love affair, a powerful encounter with a force that took me off guard and swept me off my feet. The summer was unusually hot and humid, even by Seoul standards, with temperatures routinely rising above 100 degrees. At the time, I was living in an inexpensive roof top apartment in the northern part of Seoul and was nearly finished with a ten-week intensive Korean language course at Yonsei University. My experience at Yonsei had taken me by surprise. When I first arrived at Yonsei, I expected there to be more Korean adoptees in the program. I had not anticipated being a tiny minority in a sea of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Korean Americans, and the experience had left me feeling isolated. The 2004 Gathering was my first introduction to the critical mass of overseas Korean adoptees who had established themselves in Korea, many of them living there for several years.

While I was taken aback by the sheer number of Korean adoptees converging in Seoul, I had also not anticipated the emotional whirlwind and affective labor generated by the conference, which felt immaterial, corporeal, and intangible. The conference itself was structured by public ceremonies where prominent officials from sponsor agencies provided welcoming speeches to the participants. These spaces reflected and reproduced common performance structures and boundaries between the audience (conference participants and sponsors) and the performers (conference organizers and sponsors). For myself, an affect of belonging was produced through my individual and group interactions with other Korean adoptees, but it was also informed by the interactions between Korean officials and government organizations and how they addressed Korean adoptees through building ‘emotional’ attachments to the Korean nation. These affective connections to the Korean nation worked powerfully and often in contradictory ways, ranging from confessions of love, to shame about the past, to taking pride in Korean culture and heritage.

In Eleana Kim’s ethnographic analysis of the Gatherings, she argues that the Gatherings created a sense of public intimacy and were organized around a “collective sense of personhood and belonging” (“Adopted Territory” 141-142). She analyzes adoptee organizations’ planning strategies and intentions as well as thoughtfully interweaves interviews with adoptees who participated in the conference and self-reflexively locates her own outsider status as a non-adoptee moving through the space. In contrast, my

analysis of the Gathering is rooted in my experience of the Gathering as a Korean adoptee attending the event.

The first part of this chapter examines the speech by the Social Health and Welfare Minister, Kim Geun-tae. I argue that Kim's speech attaches Korean adoptees to an affect of national shame and love. Through the inclusion of Korean adoptees into Korea's greater national shame about the division of the country, I argue that this works not only to assuage Korea's national guilt for sending Korean adoptees away, but also powerfully works to create a sense of ethnic and national belonging. While the Gathering provided opportunities for Korean adoptees to identify with the ideals of the nation, I argue that this identification cannot be detached from the ways in which Korean adoptees are abject in relationship to the Korea nation. The second half of this essay chapter analyzes speeches by the Korean Tourism Organization and the Samsung corporation to illuminate the ways in which Korean adoptees fit into larger national paradigms of tourism and economic globalization. Because of these national agendas, I argue that Korean adoptees are ambivalently positioned as both (white) international tourists and as part of the Korean diaspora. I conclude by looking at how in the Gathering Korean adoptees are abject in relation to the Korean nation. Re-imagined as tourists, economic ambassadors, and as part of the Korea diaspora, these narratives only allow for Korean adoptees to have an ephemeral presence in the country of their birth, insisting that they return to their adoptive countries, ultimately re-abjectifying them.

While the Gathering consisted of many different public events and tourist outings, the Gathering also offered several breakout groups that could only be attended by adult Korean adoptees. In these sessions, sensitivity towards the personal experiences of Korean adoptees and respect for their privacy was facilitated by the organizers of the conference. While I did attend several of these sessions, I want to mark a textual silence and sensitivity to Korean adoptee experiences at the Gathering. In contrast to the private intimacy of the break out groups, this essay focuses on the public speeches addressed to Korean adoptees. As public speeches from prominent government organizations, they provide insight into various national responses to Korean adoptees.

Lastly, throughout the chapter, I have included several personal anecdotes that locate affect within my everyday experiences while I was at the conference as well as during my everyday life living in Korea. My rationale for their inclusion is that they illustrate how an affective national and individual shame showed up in a constellation of relationships and situations of everyday life and were not neatly confined to spaces more explicitly devoted to Korean adoptees, as in the Gathering. Instead, these anecdotes reflect moments that took me off guard, occurring in contexts where I least expected them, and in the context of mundane routines. They reflect what Kathleen Stewart describes as ordinary affects, “They’re things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams and encounters...that catch people up in something that feels like something” (2). I see these anecdotes capturing something unfinished, but

meaningfully contributing in some way to my own affective response to my experiences at the Gathering.

***The national shame of Korean international adoption***

The presence of the Korean adoptee returning to Korea invokes national shame through the birthmother who is also a social figure attached to international adoption from Korea. Like the Korean war orphan, Korean birthmothers are also reminders of Korea's national shame. As Hosu Kim argues, because of the increasing number of Korean adoptees who return to Korea to search for their biological families, the erasure of the birthmother as a key figure within international adoption has acquired new visibility (132). She argues, the figure of the Korean birth mother has undergone several different shifts in Korean post war history that are attached to an affect of shame and stigmatization. The first wave of Korean adoptees from the end of the war to the 1960's resulted primarily in mixed race children from military prostitutes and US servicemen, and these children were the first to be identified as eligible for adoption. Supported by the South Korean government through organizations such as the Child Placement Service (1954), mixed race children often were voluntarily relinquished. According to Dong Soo Kim, "These children experienced open and inhumane rejection, accompanied by others' cultural bias, shame, fear, and hostility from infancy" (11). At the same time, as "comfort women" to the US military, these birthmothers were shamed and their histories erased because of their illegitimate professions, despite the ways in which their sexual labor contributed to the provision of Korea's national security (H. Kim 131-134).

A more recent history of national shame around the issue of international adoption has played out for international audiences. Tobias Hübinette has convincingly argued that in the 1970's international adoption from Korea became a focus of North Korea to mobilize a critique against South Korea selling their children to the West for monetary gain ("Comforting" 82). Nearly two decades later, at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, as Korea displayed its status and wealth as a developed country, it was shamed by the Western and Korean media as exporters of its greatest resource, Korean babies. The Korean government responded by decreasing the number of children it allowed to be sent overseas.<sup>7</sup> Although new Korean government's pledges to end international adoption from Korea have decreased international adoptions substantially to approximately 2,000 per year, international adoptions continue to exceed the number of domestic adoptions (OKF "Stats").

Unlike previous periods in Korea's modern history in which women were motivated to place their children for adoption because of social attitudes towards mixed race children, or national poverty, these days, the majority children who are placed for international adoption are the result of unplanned teenage pregnancies. The illegitimate status of the birthmother and the shame she bears is partially abated by giving up the child to an "appropriate" family where she believes her child will have a "beautiful life" in Western

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<sup>7</sup> See Overseas Koreans Foundation, for more detailed statistics. According to the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the number of Korean children sent overseas for adoption fell from its high in 1985 of 8,8837 to in 2,962 in 1990.

countries.<sup>8</sup> Such logic has led many Korean birthmothers to give their children up for international adoption through the privacy and support offered by government-sponsored single mother homes. At the same time it underscores how many birthmothers, while domestically shamed, shore up national value in an era of global capitalism by giving up their children to become ambassadors and bridges to wealthy nations through international adoption.

### *The Gathering*

The Gathering participants ranged from the first generation of Korean adoptions, those in their late forties and early fifties, to Korean adoptees in their late teens and early 20's, who reflected the peak of adoption in the late eighties. The Seoul Gathering also combined a broad range of organizations representing different perspectives on issues of international adoption from Korea. While the Gathering was organized and spearheaded by the IKAA consortium of Korean adoptee organizations, a number of different Korean organizations also sponsored the event. These included leaders from the four international adoption agencies in Korea: the Eastern Social Welfare Society, the Social Welfare Society, Korean Social Service, and Holt International. These institutions continue to promote international adoption from Korea. However, sponsors of the event also included government organizations such as the Overseas Korea Foundation, the Korean Tourism Organization, and large corporations, such as Samsung. While not

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<sup>8</sup> See Sara Dorow's "I Wish For You a Beautiful Life". The book is a compilation of letters birthmothers wrote while in government sponsored single mother homes to their children when they were considering placing their children up of for adoption.

directly involved in international adoption, each of these organizations recognized Korean adoptees within national narratives of diaspora, tourism and economic globalization. Public officials also attended the event, including a key speech by Kim Geun-tae, then Minister of Health and Social Welfare.

The conference itself encouraged different kinds of social performance dimensions. In this chapter I use the notion of performance to understand the ways in which Korean adoptee identity was hailed by the Korean government through performances of national shame and love, but also bodily taken up by Korean adoptees. I consider my participation within the Gathering as part of an embodied memory. Diana Taylor's notion of the repertoire is useful here. She argues, "The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being part of the transmission" (20). My chapter considers how the Gathering acquired meaning through the physical presence of Korean adoptees "being there" in Korea as part of the meaningful interaction and transmission of affect.

The official speeches addressed to Korean adoptees crucially depended on the presence of Korean adoptees and their bodies being in close proximity to the nation. Sara Ahmed's articulation of affect and its relationship to the body suggests how "emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies....emotions are not 'in' either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as objects" (4). Ahmed's articulation of affect is provocative

because rather than understanding affects as residing within an individual, or collective, such as a nation, affect is generative and productive. At the Gathering, an affect of shame and love conditioned the relationships and the boundaries upon which Korean adoptees' identification with the Korean nation rested, either through paradigms of ethnic belonging or as foreign tourists.

Standing in a conference room at the Sofitel Hotel, I fumbled with my video recorder at the welcoming kickoff to the conference. Uncertain of why I had come, I aimed my camera directly at the podium and platform, alongside many other news media cameras. The conference room where the opening ceremony took place was large enough to accommodate the several hundred Korean adoptees sitting and chatting at round tables waiting for the program to begin. The tables in the front were reserved for conference organizers and officials from sponsor organizations. As the opening ceremony began, conference organizers welcomed the Korean adoptees to the conference. Tim Holm, a Korean American adoptee in his late 40's, and one of the main conference organizers, graciously welcomed all the participants who have come from many different countries. Scanning the room, I felt overwhelmed by the critical mass of Korean adoptees sitting in one room, gathered together from so many different parts of the world. Never before had I attended such a large international event where membership was defined by being a Korean adoptee.

At the opening ceremony of the 2004 Gathering, Kim Geun-tae, then Minister of Health and Welfare, stood before the 400 conference participants at a podium and uttered an unexpected and deeply affective speech. Bowing his head and averting his gaze from the participants he began with a confession:

First I would like to confess I was agonized about many things on the way here. As I prepared for this meeting I had many things to say. Yet as this meeting approached I did not know what to say. Honestly, I was afraid about what kind of reception I would receive. I wanted to say I love you, but I hesitated. I had to think about whether I had the right to say that or not. Since I understand to some extent your feelings of loss, it was not easy to say I love you.<sup>9</sup>

In Kim's opening, he vacillated between his desire to tell the Korean adoptees in the audience "I love you" and self-reflexively questioning the ethics of making such a statement. In situating an affect of love and "acting out of love" within the context of political discourse, Ahmed suggests that 'love' is mobilized in relationship to an active identification with the nation. She argues, "love becomes a way of bonding with others in relation to an ideal, which takes shape as an effect of such bonding...Love is crucial to how individuals become aligned with collectives through their identification with an ideal, an alignment that relies on the existence of others that have failed that ideal" (124). Ahmed's articulation of the relationship between the affect of love and attaching oneself to collectives, such as nation, suggests that collectives can only exist in relationship to those who have been excluded from the ideals of the nation. While Kim's tentative invocation of love to Korean adoptees attempted to mobilize Korean adoptees to identify

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<sup>9</sup> In this chapter, quotes used from the speeches at the Gathering were read in English by the official translator at the Gathering.

with the ideals of the Korean nation, his hesitation to do so, also tacitly acknowledged the exclusion of Korean adoptees from the ideals of the nation. In this respect, Korea adoptees move between exclusion from the nation and inclusion. On the one hand Korean, adoptee bodies have been “jettisoned” from the nation through their adoption. On the other hand, the returned bodies of Korean adoptees became an object of love as well as the “surface” upon which ideas of the nation are expressed through shared ethnicity and the Korean diaspora.

Blushing before his audience, Kim Geun-tae’s shame quickly moved from an individual expression of love to a collective expression of the national shame rooted in shared kinship and the Korean War:

After we sent you away, Korea experienced many painful things. Your parents, sisters, and brothers had to go through hardships also. In order to achieve economic development and to make democratic society...we had to follow our peers and sometimes spill blood. We tried our best to not repeat our shameful history and we made progress. ...today I would like to tell you on behalf of the Korean people that we have been trying hard to make a responsible country; however, as I step in front of you I feel uncomfortable.

Kim’s speech see-sawed between the “I”, his own individual confession of love and shame, to the collective “We” and “Korea” as an ideal nation into which Korean adoptee are still attached both through shared kinship (“your parents, sisters, and brothers”) and through the painful experience of the Korean war (“we spilled blood”). It is a love that tacitly acknowledges the shameful body of the Korean adoptee (“we sent you away”), and it is this abjection that unsettled Kim, rendering him uncomfortable. At

the same time, Kim's speech excludes more recent Korean adoptees whose origins are neither explicitly tied to the Korean war and the aftermath of poverty, nor the making of a democratic society, but rather the stigmatization of birthmothers and the lack of an adequate social welfare system.

*As I watched Kim Geun-tae delivering his speech, his burning shame registered on his body. His eyes looked downward, and tears welled in his eyes. His shame seemed heightened by a roomful of eyes locking their gazes on him. The presence of Korean adoptees in the room shamed him, but his proximity affected me too. His feelings of shame made me ashamed for being sent away.*

*My mom came to South Korea on two separate trips. The first was in 1999 when I first returned to Korea when I was 24. She, along with my partner, David, accompanied me to the Eastern Social Welfare Society, the Korean adoption agency that handled my adoption. We were given a tour of the agency and met with the aging founder, a highly educated Korean man who looked to be in his 80's. While I didn't think too much about it at the time, I do remember him raising himself from his chair and expressing gratitude to my mother for adopting me. In the context of visiting the adoption agency, his remark was unexpected. Why would he thank my mother for adopting me? The issue of my adoption came up again when my mother was visiting me on my second trip in 2006 when I introduced my mom to an older Korean professor. We met at Professor Shim's church across from the Olympic Park, one of the most prominent city parks in Seoul, and built*

*specifically for the 1988 Olympics. When I introduced my mother to Professor Shim, Ms. Shim politely said to my mother, "Thank you for adopting Maija."*

I bring up these moments as some of many moments in which an affect of national shame was mundanely interwoven into my experiences of living in Korea as a Korean adoptee. At the time of this experience, Ms. Shim's expression of gratitude towards my mom was unsettling to me. My body tensed and I felt prickly and hot waiting for my mom's response. Why would Ms. Shim, who had no relationship whatsoever to my adoption, feel compelled to express thanks to my adoptive mother. In retrospect, I can surmise that there was a complex articulation of shame and shaming between the three of us; an articulation not rooted in individual histories, but rather within national shame and shaming. In this encounter, Ms. Shim's expression of thanks to my mom, made me feel ashamed of being adopted; her statement was underscored by a historical narrative of US humanitarianism whereby Koreans abandoned their children and American families rescued them. At the same time, I felt ashamed witnessing Ms. Shim who, seemingly shamed by mom's presence, felt compelled to personally thank my mother on behalf of the Korean nation. Her expression of gratitude to my mother, a white American citizen, felt like part of a longer history of US-Korea relations, a historical narrative fully supporting an American military presence in Korea. In my mind, these experiences capture a moment where the circulation of shame operated at multiple levels, including individual and national levels. I understood shame not only as an embodied experience,

but as a situated cultural and social practice---not only in official public spaces, but in informal private spaces as well.

As Kim Geun-tae's speech continued, his affect of love and shame unexpectedly shifted to align with Korea's path to economic development as well as draws from narratives of the division of the nation and efforts towards peace and reunification:

I can say to you with confidence that you have a place in our hearts. I will try my best, very best, to make you proud to be our daughters and sons. I am proud of you. However, we have a lot of things to resolve on the Korean peninsula. The first thing is accomplishing peace here...Since the Korean War when peace was threatened, the Korean peninsula fell into deep poverty and pain. We could not overcome the chains of poverty and we had to send you away. Now we are at the road to peace. The second step is accomplishing unity...When peace and unity are achieved the ROK will come upon a hopeful new era. I strongly believe this is going to be a rebirth for Korea as a symbol of peace and hope...If possible I hope you will join us on this path. You all are the proud potential leaders of the countries where you grow up.

What was striking about the shift in Kim's speech was the way he positioned Korean adoptees within the national narrative of the division and potential reunification of the country. In this manner, Korean adoptees, separated from the nation because of the Korean War, are rhetorically invited to reunite with the Korean nation parallel to the desires for reunification between the two Koreas. In this respect, Korean adoptees were symbolically placed within the ideological space of the Demilitarized Zone, reflecting the kind tourism and economic globalization discourse found on the DMZ. Yet, as suggested in the next chapter, the figure of the Korean adoptee on the DMZ is absent. At the same time, Kim's speech also affectively displayed pride for Korean adoptees. Yet, his pride

in Korean adoptees could not be detached from Korean adoptees' status as citizens in advanced Western nations (E. Kim "Our Adoptee").

Behind Kim Geun-tae's avowal of pride in Korean adoptees is national shame. Tomkin's suggests that "shame is a negative affect which is not unassociated with love and identification" (134). Ahmed also writing about Australian national shame in the context of Aboriginal children being forcibly removed from their families and adopted into white families focuses more on what national shame conceals and forgets, namely how injustices framed in the past continue to loiter in the present (107-113). By looking at Kim Geun-tae's speech, I am reminded of the intimate relationship between shame and concealment. Shame hides behind Kim Geun-tae's declaration of pride and invitation for adoptees to identify with the nation. While Kim Geun-tae's speech directly points to dire economic poverty from the Korean War as the primary justification for international adoption, he also conceals the ways in which international adoption continues to persist and thrive, despite its economic achievements over the past fifty years. Attached to teleological narratives of Korea rebuilding itself after the Korean War, it also crucially conceals the present conditions informing international adoptions from Korea in the present day, such as social stigmatization against unwed mothers, and lack of a strong social welfare system.

*Overseas Korean adoptees as precious assets*

Literature provided by the Overseas Korea Foundation (OKF) at the Gathering are worthy of close analysis in order to situate the Korean adoptee within the government initiatives focused on the Korean diaspora. The Overseas Korea Foundation was established in during the Kim Dae Jung Administration (1997-2003) under the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Affairs. The organization's mission was to "utilize overseas Koreans as a national resource for national development in a global era." (qtd. in Shin 213). In this respect, overseas Koreans are central to the Korean national imaginary, as potential resources to be mined for the nation.

In particular, pamphlets distributed by OKF at the Gatherings explore the concept of *hanminjok* as a concept of shared identification in the nation, a 'surface' onto which feelings of pride are assigned and attached to bodies. According to Shin, the term *minjok* has multiple meanings, "nation" being one of the most common uses. *Minjok* also designates a conflation between 'race' and 'ethnicity' in defining the nation. Thus, the concept of the *hanminjok*, translated as "Korean people" implicitly invokes a shared racial, ethnic, and national history. Shin describes how Korean nationalism in different eras has strategically imagined *minjok* in different ways. The OKF pamphlet distributed at the Gathering, in particular call attention to the *minjok* in an era of globalization. In the opening passages of the pamphlet it states,

*Hanminjok* all over the world. You are precious assets to Korea. The boundaries between countries in the past were set by political philosophical ideology. However in these days countries are being regrouped into bloc-communities by history, culture, or nationality, etc. Nowadays the world map is being established not by geographical border but by ethnic ones. It is you, overseas

Koreans, who have expanded the realm of *hanminjok* and have planted the deep roots all over the world. You are the assets to your home country and the pride of *hanminjok*. (Overseas Koreans Foundation 2-3)

I quote this passage at length because it illustrates two important notions. On the one hand, it draws attention to a shift in how the ideal nation is imagined from the cold war ideology of the 1950s to the present conditions of globalization; nations and their borders are no longer delimited by political alignments and geography. Nation is instead imagined through shared culture, history and nationality, mobility and porous borders, while simultaneously rooted in ethnic kinship. On the other hand, it identifies overseas Koreans as “precious assets” to their home county. OKF establishes *hanminjok* as an object onto which feelings of “pride” can be secured by overseas Koreans, including Korean adoptees. Invitations for Korean adoptees to identify with the larger Korean diaspora illuminate the objectives of Korean state sponsored programs to “enter into your feelings” (Overseas Koreans Foundation 20).

In particular, the pamphlet draws attention to overseas Korean adoptees. On the one hand it states, “Adopted Koreans overseas have lived as model citizens in their host countries. They are, without a doubt, proud *hanminjok*” (Overseas Koreans Foundation 15). In this respect, overseas Korean adoptees are framed as “model citizens” fully assimilated to their adoptive cultures. On the other hand, it points to the vexed position Korean adoptees have as those who are “alienated” from the Korean nation, “The Overseas Koreans Foundation expresses a great interest in alienated *hanminjok* who had no choice

but to leave their homeland, including Koreans of international marriage and naturalized Korean-Japanese as well as adopted Koreans living overseas....We will embrace you with Motherhood” (Overseas Koreans Foundation 15). In this text, *hanminjok* becomes the object through which Korean adoptees can reestablish attachments from individual experiences of loss to the greater Korean nation. Indeed, the Korean nation here is gendered and laden with affect. Figured as the “mother”, pride in the Korean nation promises to both “nurture” and “embrace” the Korean adoptee whose familial and national ties have been severed (Overseas Koreans Foundation 15).

### ***Welcome Home!***

On December 12, 2011, The Korea National Tourism Organization celebrated its 9 millionth international visitor to South Korea. Since the early 1990’s, during the Kim Young Sam administration, the South Korean government has proactively buttressed the inbound tourism industry in Korea through its strategies to market South Korea as an international tourist destination, both through overseas campaigns as well as shifting policies to promote inbound tourism to Korea. In a 1994 speech addressed to the Pacific Asia Travel Association, Kim Young Sam boldly announced his vision for tourism as a way of promoting peace among nations in a new era of globalization.

In the “borderless” and “open” world imagined by Kim Young Sam, tourism and globalization intersect with the affective pull of “opening their hearts” by facilitating

peace and dissolving differences.<sup>10</sup> Since 1992, efforts by the Korean National Tourism Organization (KNTO) to market Korea as a “cultural capital of the world” have resulted in an increased promotion of cultural heritage as a way to increase inbound tourism to Korea, and can be seen as an illustration of “the confluence between economic and cultural geography” (Waitt 113). In this respect, I examine how tourism clips, corporate clips and speeches at the Gatherings hailed Korean adoptees as potential consumers of their lost cultural heritage and invited them to be ambassadors between Korean and their adoptive countries. In doing so, I consider how the shame of international adoption from Korea is sanitized and re-imagined in terms of Korea’s national interests, while paradoxically creating an ambivalent and racialized subject position for Korean adoptees.

After returning to the large conference room to wait for lunch, I had the opportunity to eat lunch with several other conference members. However, before our lunch could be served, all the conference participants in the room waited patiently while the sponsor, the Korean National Tourism Organization (KNTO), to give his welcoming address. I was sitting at a table with several other Korean adoptees who I had recently become acquainted with at the Gathering. During our conversations, I inquired where they had traveled from and I discovered that several of the people at the table shared Minnesota as a home. When I asked them if this was their first time in Korea, many of the people at the table responded affirmatively. Unlike the conference participants I was sitting with, I

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<sup>10</sup> See Kim, Young Sam. *Korea’s Reform and Globalization* for domestic and international speeches on the investment in tourism given by Kim Young Sam during his administration.

was filled with optimism about studying in Korea next year. Korea was less of a tourist destination for me than it was a place to work and live.

During the KNTTO ceremony, Lee Il-geun warmly welcomed a room full of Korean adoptees to Korea, wishing them pleasant “stays” and hopes they will be able to “discover the beauty of Korea and its people.” The speech characteristically invoked the hardships endured after the Korean war, but quickly moved forward to praise the lasting value of traditional Korean cultural heritage as well as to boast of the new “Korean wave” of popular music and film known as *Hanryu*. Lee’s speech touched on what Lie and Park identify as the new image of South Korea, namely that Korea is now synonymous with its cultural exports and has its cultural foundations in economic enrichment and political openness (61). Lee Il-Geun’s new image of Korea, distanced from the past, called upon overseas Korean adoptees to be both consumers of Korea’s new culture, as well as potential promoters. Addressing the room full of Korean adoptees, Lee stated, “All of you here are vital links between your countries and Korea. We look at you ambassadors and hope that you will promote mutual understanding and friendship.” Casting Korean adoptees in the role of “ambassadors” may generally be understood within the context of Korean efforts to globalize, and informs the emphasis on overseas Koreans as “precious objects” and “cultural assets.”

During the KNTTO ceremony, a clip from the promotional clip, *Tour2ROK*, was shown in the ballroom of the conference. The short clip visually established Korea as a tourist

destination, filled with images of the rich beauty of seasonal natural landscapes pertaining to new zones of ecological tourism, Korea's distinctive cultural heritage in new and traditional architecture, and embodied cultural performances. After the opening sequences paint Korea as a premium tourist destination, the tourist subject enters as a distinctly racialized white body. Without specific language to establish a nationality, the white tourist becomes the consumer of Seoul's distinctively modern pleasures. Images of white tourists proliferate throughout, using cell phones, shopping at Korea's traditional and modern markets, staying in luxury hotels, and eating Korean and Western cuisine.

Film theorist, Laura Mulvey considers the formation of the female viewing subject and the visual identification required by the gaze of the camera. She suggests that in order for the female subject to identify with the image she is forced to acquire a male subject position. In this respect, I suggest the KNTTO marketing of cultural heritage places its audience, a group of Korean adoptees, in an ambivalent position. On the one hand, through the KNTTO speech, Korean adoptees were designated as cultural ambassadors, a position articulated through the affective attachments of Korean adoptees being included within the Korean diaspora. On the other hand, by showing a group of Korean adoptees a clip that visually forced them to acquire a white subjectivity as tourists from the US and Europe created a racial dissonance/disidentification which paradoxically coincided with the condition of being welcomed back into the ethnic/racial/national "family."

*In 2005, I returned to Korea for the third time to live and study the language at Korea University. Despite having intensively studied the Korean language for several years, I feel I am not progressing in my abilities. Every time I open my mouth, I am reminded of my failed performance of Koreanness. I am ashamed because I cannot speak the language, and I am shamed daily by Koreans that I cannot speak better Korean. I remember the lesson clearly. We were learning the phrase "...is famous for". We each took turns using the phrase, filling in the blanks with appropriate subjects and objects. When my turn came, in my broken Korean I said, "Korea is famous for selling its children." My teacher looked publicly shamed and said "No, not sell."*

The final gala marking the end of the four day conference was at the Shilla Hotel, one of the most prestigious hotels in Seoul. Wearing a dress casual skirt and jacket, I felt as though I was a bit underdressed. Many of the female conference attendees were in formal evening dresses and many of the men were wearing black suits with ties. The final gala was hosted by Samsung, and was scheduled to last a couple of hours. While I was uncertain of my expectations, the final evening gala was how I imagined large corporate event dinners. Speeches, an emcee, and entertainment were part of the evening, including a five-course Western meal, featuring wine and steak. I was amused that the menu choices catered to a Western food palate, despite being held in Korea.

The Samsung promotional clip inundated the viewer with visual images of Korean bodies using and consuming Korean produced objects. A sequence of fast edited images

featuring cutting-edge Samsung products spinned out different social messages. The clip introduced: 1) the Korean body as a consumer of Korean products; 2) Korea as a competitive producer of high technology in a global market; 3) Korean solidarity within the global market, demonstrated through sentimental images of Koreans sharing collective national pride in the 2002 World Cup Games. In contradistinction to the KNTD commercial that addressed the Korean adoptee as a white tourist, the gaze established by Samsung's clip assumed its subject was Korean. In the context of the Gathering, the message was coded using the following logic of add-ons: Korea has claimed you as part of their national imaginary, (+) since Korea is a global competitor in the high tech industry, (+) since Koreans ethnically share a collective and national unity, = as a Korean adoptee consumer, in your adoptive country you should consume Korean products and in doing so participate in Korean national pride. The clips, juxtaposed against each other racialize the Korean adoptee in contradictory ways by asking the viewing subject to occupy positions of both the white tourist consumer, and the ethnic Korean consumer.

In the speech addressed to Korean adoptees given by a general manager of Samsung, Mr. Han stated, "Meet the people of Korea. You will experience a sense of comfort and belonging...when you go back home to the country where you live, I hope you will feel comfort when you see the Samsung name." Asking the Korean adoptee to take comfort in the global Samsung logo thus serves as reminder of the potential value afforded to the Korean adoptee consumer. Whether the adoptee is imaged as white tourist or as part of

the Korean diaspora, this logic shored up the value of Korean adoptees as loyal consumers of Korea products upon returning to their adoptive countries.

At the end of the program, everyone at the gala event was asked to perform, many a little tipsy. Along the circumference of the room we all stood, arms around our neighbors' shoulders and sang the song "Arirang", one of Korea's most emblematic national songs. I felt the circulation of affect, as everyone in the room collectively sang together as one group. My eyes teared up, and I surrendered to the pleasurable feeling Mr. Han described in his speech of feeling the comfort and belonging to Korea.

### *Korean adoptees as abject*

As the Gathering speeches and clips demonstrate, when Korean adoptees return to Korea, their presence ushers in a history of national shame around international adoption, whose origins are rooted in post Korean War. Shamed and shaming, Korean adoptees are positioned as abject in relationship to the Korean nation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the verb, "to abject" as "to cast off or away, to cast out, reject, exclude" ("Abject.") In this respect, international adoption from Korea renders the Korean adoptee body as quite literally abject in relationship to the Korean nation; it is a body that has been legally and culturally 'cast off' and 'excluded' from the Korean imaginary. Karen Shimakawa offers a paradigm of abjection as a national/cultural identity forming process (3). In particular, she focuses on the shifting relations between what she characterizes as "visibility and invisibility, foreignness and domestication/assimilation; it is the movement

between enacted by and on Asian Americans” (3). While Shimakawa addresses Asian Americanness in relationship to US Americanness, I suggest Korean adoptee identification with Korea undergoes a process of national abjection in relation to Koreanness. At the same time, as the number of Korean adoptees returning to Korea increases, their inclusion within the Korean nation also becomes clearly attached to broader national interests of tourism and the Korean diaspora.

While the Gathering illuminates the ways in which Korean adoptees are invited to participate as international tourists from their adoptive countries and are identified as part of the Korean diaspora, the cultural, national, and economic value assigned to the Korean adoptee is dependent on their presence in Korea being temporary and ephemeral. According to Shimakawa, the national abject “continually must be made present and jettisoned” (3). As the KNTTO and Samsung speech clearly demonstrated, although Korean adoptees are welcomed back to their native homeland, their value as transnational mobile subjects is dependent on them returning to their adoptive countries.

### ***The politics of shame***

Towards the end of the Gathering, there was a buzz about a meeting of adoptees that was not on the roster of planned events. Discreetly handed a postcard put out by an organization called Adoptee Solidarity Korea (ASK), I was encouraged to attend the meeting if I was interested in talking about the politics of international adoption. Visually provocative, the postcard features a drawing of a wailing baby being held upside

down. A flashlight illuminates the statement, “Made in Korea” and elicits an ethical response to the continuing practice of international adoption from Korea. The postcard boldly depicts Korean babies as national export commodities, intentionally invoking the controversial politics of international adoption. It recalls North Korea’s accusation of South Korea trafficking its children during the 1970s, and the criticism by the international community of Korea’s continued adoption policies during the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Rather than attaching international adoption to histories of the Korean War, the postcard instead is a call to political action, demanding an end to international adoption, advocating for sexual education, and providing support to birthmothers.

Writing about the Australian Reconciliation Convention, Probyn has suggested the circulation of shame allowed white Australians to own up to their own ignorance of past social injustices against aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, Probyn, in exploring the function of national shame points to the productive function of shame to be a “goad to action” (101). I question whether Korean adoptees who return to Korea emerge as subjects within a process of cultural and national abjections. Organizations such as ASK serve a valuable function because they help “negotiate the process of coming into visibility” (Shimakawa 18). In the context of the Gatherings when government officials made confession of love, issued apologies, and celebrated the cultural heritage of Korean adoptees, ASK’s postcard served to reorient shame, not temporally distanced in the past, but as an intervention into the present.

After the 2004 Gathering, I returned to Korea again to live in Seoul from 2004-2007. At that time, I submitted my application for an F-4 visa, the government-issued visa for overseas Koreans. On a practical level, the visa provided me the legal status to work in Korea for two years and beyond, easier access to employment from Korean companies, as well as legal rights to buy land and open a business. On a symbolic level, however, the F-4 visa marked the fact that I was setting up my life in Korea and was no longer designated by my legal status as a tourist. During that time I had occasion to attend two other Korean adoptee conferences in Seoul: the Korean American Adoptee Network in 2005, and another Gathering held in Seoul in 2007. Unlike the circulation of affect generated by my first Gathering, my experience of the second Gathering in 2007 was much different. Organized in a similar model, the national narratives around international adoption struck me as a formula that used affective scripts for the economic and ethnic objectives of the Korean nation. Rather than addressing the practical and quotidian experiences and challenges of Korean adoptees failing to assimilate into Korean culture, these scripts are predicated on the performance of reunions and double returns which insist that Korean adoptees return to their adoptive countries.

When I was preparing to return to the United States at the end of 2008, I ran into an acquaintance of mine. Similar to myself she had been living in Minneapolis for many years before she moved to Korea, but unlike me, she had no plans on returning. She asked me, "Why do you want to go and live where everyone is a ghost?" Her question took me off guard, but her question also prompted me to respond with a silent rebuttal,

“What makes you believe Korean adoptees are not ghosts in Korea?” Four years later, her question still nags at me.

I would describe my experience of the 2004 Gathering and returning to live in Korea in Lauren Berlant’s words as “cruelly optimistic” (2).

Whatever the experience of optimism is in particular, then, the affective structure of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to *return to the scene of fantasy* [my italics] that enables you to expect that this time the nearness to this thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way. Yet, optimism is cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or people risks striving; and double, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining...such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time profoundly confirming. (Berlant 2)

I quote Berlant at length because she accurately identifies the pleasures of belonging, but also points out the potential threat to the subject. In this chapter, I have attempted to articulate ways in which Korean adoptees who return to Korea participate in national affective structures which optimistically grants them a sense of belonging within the Korean imaginary through their inclusion with the Korean diaspora. While the Korean government invites Korean adoptees to participate within the Korean nation, the task of belonging cannot be seamlessly achieved by Korean adoptees who have grown up with divided national, cultural and familial identities. Instead, as I suggest in this chapter, when Korean adoptees return to Korea they are ambivalently positioned as both ethnic insiders and foreign tourists. Indeed, what is both haunting and threatening, is the very

impossibility to reconcile the cultural and national chasms caused by a fifty year history of Korean adoption.

## CHAPTER 5

### Displaying Korean National Memory & Desire on the Demilitarized Zone

The Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) is a national site marking the catastrophic event of the division of North and South Korea along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel at the end of the Korean War (1950-53). Jointly controlled by North Korea, South Korea and the United Nations Neutral Nations Committee, the DMZ cuts 246 kilometers across the peninsula from the Sea of Japan on the East coast, to the Yellow Sea on the West coast and is approximately 4 kilometers wide. It is one of the most heavily guarded borders in the world, with an estimated 1.7 million North Korean troops, and 700,000 South Korean, US, and UN troops stationed in the area around the DMZ. As a site of border conflict and imagined reunification, the Korean DMZ is also one of South Korea's most popular international tourist destinations.

This chapter attempts to illuminate the multiple narratives which play out on the Demilitarized Zone, including globalization and humanitarian issues pertaining to the division of families caused by the Korean War. While these conceptualizations of the DMZ do not have a one-to-one correspondence with the histories of Korean adoptees, I suggest that the Korean government's desires to globalize and invest in tourism as displayed on the DMZ follow a parallel trajectory for Korean adoptees. As the speeches by prominent politicians at the Gathering attest, official discourses provided to adoptees returning to Korea clearly attached an affect of shame about the origins of international

adoption as being deeply rooted in the division of the country and the trauma of war. At the same time, the speeches hail Korean adoptees as potential consumers of Korea's burgeoning tourism industry. Because Korean adoptees who return to Korea are ambivalently positioned between Korea's past history of war and Korea's present status in the world economy, I argue that Korean adoptees share an intimacy with the DMZ. The DMZ is a national site marking Korea's painful division, yet it is also a stage for mediating Korea's memories of the Korean War, its desires for reunification, and its prominence as a global economic force.

My first visit to the DMZ in South Korea occurred during the summer of 1999. At that time, I returned to Korea as a tourist, both figuratively and perhaps naively in the sense of wanting to "discover" the place of my birth and its culture that remained largely unknown to me. I was also officially designated as a tourist through my government issued tourist visa that allowed American passport holders to reside in the country for longer than 1 month. It was also at that time that I became aware of the existence of the DMZ as advertised in my *Lonely Planet Korea* tourism book as a "must see" attraction, and as a "cold war living museum" (Storey 161-164). What I vividly remember from my first visit to the DMZ were the particular ways the division between North Korea and South Korea was framed in terms of military threat and the division of political ideologies ranging from propaganda signs heralding the "freedom of democracy" to the "Anti-communist Museum". The vestiges of the Korean War and the Cold War ideology stand out in my memory as being out of place, fossilized relics of a former time and place that

seemed temporally out of sync with South Korea's modern shopping malls and the neon lights illuminating the streets of Seoul.

It was not until I returned to Korea during the summer of 2004 to study the language and attend the first International Korean Adoptee Association Gathering that I became more acutely aware of how Korean adoptee histories were tethered to national narratives of the Korean War, as well as the Korean diaspora. In the spring of 2006, while I was living and working in Korea, I decided it would be meaningful to revisit the DMZ. It became quickly apparent that the official narratives of memory on the DMZ had shifted considerably since my visit in 1999. This new almost corporate-like DMZ had thoroughly dispensed with its previous cold war narratives. Instead new tourism and economic development projects, such as Dorasan Station, and the Kaesong industrial complex became ways to re-conceptualize the DMZ as a site to imagine peace and reunification of the Korean nation. Because of these new inter-Korean tourist developments the DMZ had acquired new meanings: it was no longer one of the last remaining vestiges of the Cold War, but was framed more in terms of boldly re-imagined, re-narrativized desires for Korean national re-unification and globalization.

I consider the absence and presence of the Korean adoptee on the DMZ. While national narratives around the issue of international adoption are absent on the DMZ, the presence of Korean adoptees on the DMZ makes visible national narratives of kinship and belonging. Furthermore, Korean adoptees on the DMZ illuminate anxieties around

Korean globalization which clearly align with ways in which Korean adoptees are ambivalently positioned within Korean national trauma as international tourists. Yet despite these alignments and overlapping discourses, the memory and the histories of Korean adoptees are absent on the Demilitarized Zone. Indeed, this leads to the question: how does one write about the presence of the Korean adoptee on the DMZ when the Korean adoptee is attached, but ultimately absent and forgotten on the DMZ? Because of this absence of memory, I argue that the presence of the Korean adoptee on the DMZ creates an ephemeral and partial knowledge of trauma, especially for Korean American adoptees, through being and moving through the space. I consider what kinds of possibilities exist to meaningfully remember Korean American adoptees within the narratives of memory offered on the DMZ.

This chapter is organized into three sections. In the first section, I attempt to illuminate linkages between the origins of the Korean war, divided families, and reunification in terms of adoptee history, and show how these narratives are mediated on the DMZ. In the second part of the chapter, I analyze the different narratives offered on the DMZ concerning the division and reunification of Korea. Despite being ideologically attached to the DMZ, Korean adoptees and their histories are conspicuously absent in the mediation of Korean national memory on the DMZ. In this section therefore, I intentionally do not take into account the presence of the Korean adoptee in the space, but rather focus on how the DMZ is exhibited for international tourists. In the final section,

I reflect on the how the presence of the Korean adoptee on the DMZ reveals a kind of partial knowledge and trauma for Korean adoptees who are not remembered on the DMZ.

### ***Origins of the DMZ***

While the origins of the DMZ and international adoption from Korea are discrete histories, their origins are not mutually exclusive. As I briefly outline below, since the inception of the DMZ, the United States military has played a crucial role in determining the division of the Korean peninsula as well as waging an ideological war against communism. Conventional histories of international adoption from Korea tell a story about the devastation caused by the Korean War which led to US humanitarian efforts and American missionary efforts to rescue Korean orphans. More recent scholarship has correctively linked these efforts to American imperialism, occurring not only after the War, but at the time of the American military occupation of South Korea (Pate). At the same time, the first international adoptions from Korea to the United States began with the American military stationed in Korea and many of the first wave of Korean adoptees to the US were bi-racial children, fathered by US military men. In this respect, the origins of Korean adoption are intimately attached to the US involvement in the Korean War and the leading role of the US in dividing the peninsula.

While the Demilitarized Zone was not officially established until after the end the of the Korean War in 1953, the partitioning of the peninsula along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was first established in 1945 at the end of the World War II with the Allied victory and the

subsequent liberation of Korea from Japanese colonization (1910-1945). Furthermore, the decision to separate the peninsula along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was not initiated by Koreans themselves, but rather was brought about through an arbitrary agreement between the two super powers, the United States who would occupy the southern half, and the former Soviet Union who would control the area North of the parallel. This first division which was meant to be only be a provisional measure after the Korean liberation from Japan, serving to establish and solidify two opposing political regimes: communism in the North and democracy/capitalism in the South. Far from being temporary, the division has continued to endure to the present day.

The United States played a leading role in the events leading up to the outbreak of the Korean War by setting up a military government and politically supporting South Korea's first president. Following the liberation of Korea, under the directives of US president Roosevelt and command of General Hodge, the United States arrived at the ports of Inchon in 1945. Under the Cairo Declaration (1943), which outlined the basic tenets of a free and independent Korea "in due course", the US intention in Korea was supposedly to set up a trusteeship which would eventually be transferred to the Korea people. The United States established a military government in the South (USAMGIK) and backed political conservative Syngman Rhee. For the US, Rhee appeared to be a leader who would support US interests in the region. Educated in the US, Rhee had avowedly aggressive anti-communist sentiments; sentiments the US favored due to rising priorities of containing communism in the East Asian region. The Soviet Union chose Kim Il Sung

as the Northern leader. The establishment of a US military government was disturbing for the Korean people, because it was reminiscent of Japanese colonialism, merely shifting the power to the United States. Furthermore, Hodge failed to gain the trust of the Korean people due perhaps in part to his general lack of insight about Korean history and culture. His government placed conservative Koreans who had prospered under the Japanese colonial rule of Korea into positions of power, effectively limiting the power of left-leaning social and political groups who were thought to represent popular sentiments of the Korean people after liberation. Soviet troops would leave in 1948 establishing the Democratic People Republic of Korea (DPRK) while US military troops would leave in 1949 inaugurating the formation of the Republic of Korea (Cumings “Korea’s”).

While the origins of the Korean War have been debated by scholars, the common narrative in South Korean historiography identifies the Korean War as erupting on June 25, 1950 when North Korean military troops under the leadership of Kim Il Sung crossed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. It has also been debated whether the Korean War was actually a civil war between the Korean people or was an international ideological war played out by the super powers of the US, the Soviet Union, and the People’s Republic of China. In September 1950, less than one year after US military troops had left the ROK, the US military returned to intervene in the war, backing the Republic of Korea Army (ROKA) after gaining the approval of the United Nations. The People’s Republic of China came to the aid of the DPRK in November of 1950, effectively escalating the Korean war into a full blown international war over competing ideologies, with the US polices of

containment being fully complicit in the division of the Korean peninsula. While the Korean War has never officially ended, the Armistice Agreement of 1953 signed by the United Nations, the DPRK, and the United States marked the effective end to the Korean War.

As Korean historian Bruce Cumings has argued, while the Korean War and the military occupation of South Korea has largely been “forgotten” in the US collective conscious, the same cannot be said of the Korean people. Through strategic US aerial bombing and prolonged heavy combat, the three-year war not only devastated Korean infrastructure and the Korean landscape itself, but also incurred an overwhelming number of Korean civilian casualties. Official statistics estimate over 3 million Korean casualties, with millions more displaced from their homes. By contrast, there were about 40,000 US casualties and 1 million casualties from the PRC. The end of the Korean War further cemented the division between North and South, and a large US military presence in South Korea remains more than half a century later.

The presence of the Korean American adoptee, in particular, on the DMZ raises the specter of American imperialism in Korea, one that remembers the militarized violence of the American military both during the Korean War, but also the presence of 40,000 American soldiers currently based in South Korea. Several scholars have demonstrated how acts of violence against the Korean people by the American military continue to linger in the Korean national conscious, in stark contrast to historical images circulated in

both countries of American soldiers giving candy to orphaned children and current diplomatic ties celebrating South Korea and the United States. As a US citizen, the Korean American adoptee on the DMZ is nationally marked, and bears the history of US military violence and cultural imperialism that paradoxically helped to create the political conditions for international adoption, and US citizenship.

While the origins of the DMZ can be traced back to the US military and opposing political ideologies from the Cold War, recent tourism initiatives and national projects on the DMZ re-conceptualize the DMZ as a zone of peace and as a special economic zone to facilitate the reunification of Korea. At the same time, reunification is often posited as a shared national desire based on the logic of shared race and ethnicity and the unnatural division of families. Because of this phenomenon, I suggest the DMZ is a site where the desires of reunification are imagined and informed by different (and sometimes conflicting) perspectives around tourism, globalization, and ethnic nationalism. Following a parallel trajectory, the Korean adoptee acts as a site where issues of tourism, globalization, and ethnic nationalism coalesce.

### ***Reunification, ethnic nationalism, and divided families***

While the DMZ geographically separated North and South Korea into two ideologically opposed states, the discourses and the stark realities facing many Koreans concerning the effects of the division and the Korean War are firmly enmeshed in the forcible separation of families as a result. While sources differ over the number of families estimated to

have been affected by the division, ten million is a number provided by the Red Cross and cited most frequently in popular journals. The issue of divided families is informed by policy measures adopted by South Korea towards North Korea. According to the “sunshine policy” promoted by president Kim Dae Jung, humanitarian aid was not contingent upon political processes. The “sunshine policy” framed the separation of families as a “humanitarian” issue which left thousands of families without the possibility of knowing what happened to their families after the war. As such, the divided family issue has formed a central discourse within notions of reunification and is symbolically etched in the DMZ (Foley 61-91).

The national reunification of the two Koreas is underpinned by a logic of shared ethnicity. The concept of a shared Korean race, nation and ethnicity through direct bloodlines is often expressed in the Korean term, *minjok*. While notions of the Korean race may be defined as rooted in biological discourses, Korean ethnicity is often conceived of as a shared culture, history and language. Shin Gi-Wook argues that Korean race and ethnicity have often been conflated in the term, *minjok*. The commonly held conception of all Korean people originating from the mythic founder Tang’un through shared bloodlines has become naturalized in popular discourses and utilized to mobilize notions of nationalism within different periods of North and South Korea’s long history. Shin Gi-Wook frames the rise of ethnic nationalism as a historically rooted process that has been specifically mobilized and appropriated by the Korean people during the era of liberation from Japanese colonialism and continuing through modernization and

globalization across various South Korean regimes. From this viewpoint, as a historically constructed and contested term, the concept of ethnic nationalism is both fluid and has real consequences in how the Korean nation has negotiated itself.

The rise of ethnic nationalism as a dominant feature permeating Korean culture and society emerges in discourses of globalization and the Korean diaspora, but is also used when discussing issues of reunification. In writing about ethnic nationalism, Roy Grinker has suggested that the concept of *minjok* is socially constructed along notions of homogeneity through shared bloodlines and kinship. According to Grinker this “fantasy” of ethnic homogeneity plays a critical role in the discourses around reunification of the divided states as a shared assumption and rationale for reunification, but is imaginary because it negates any sense of heterogeneity manifested in the fifty years the two nations have been divided. According to Grinker, this effectively impedes any path to reunification, instead producing a discourse around which the nation is unable to mourn its own death.

In Grinker’s analysis of divided families, he describes an overlapping relationship between kinship and nation. He argues, “Many South Korean discourses on division and unification are framed within the idiom of family. Koreans often construe division not only as a separation of the nation but also as the separation of families, and as a result unification is construed as the reunion of separated family members” (“Korea and its Futures” 100). Here, kinship is imagined through shared bloodlines and the ethnic

homogeneity of the Korean people, and furthermore, the unnatural division of the state is posited as the unnatural division of families that the DMZ has come to represent. While Grinker suggests, the issues of *isan kajok* (divided families) extends beyond families divided on the Korean peninsula extending into the Korean diaspora of family separations affected by the Korean War. I would also like to include the Korean adoptee into aligning discourses around nation and kinship, as among those affected as the result of the American occupation as well as the discourses around the Korean War, which resonates within the space of the DMZ.

### ***Tourism roles on the DMZ***

While the origins of the DMZ have been well documented, the history of tourism on the DMZ has remained more elusive.<sup>11</sup> Recent studies in tourism have been concerned with the impact of “dark tourism,” including tourism at historic war and battlefield related sites as well as the study of tourism in contemporary nations still engaged in conflict (Ryan). In particular, several studies have examined the role of the tourism industry in negotiating and influencing zones of conflict in highly charged geopolitical landscapes, including the Demilitarized Zone in Korea (Bigley, et. al; Dallen and Prideaux; S. Kim, Y. Kim, and Crompton; S.Kim, H. Lee and Dallen) Other tourism researchers have looked at the motivations and perceptions of international visitors to the DMZ through

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<sup>11</sup> While my research contributes to the body of literature examining the DMZ as a tourist destination, it is also challenged by the absence of public records and research in the English language documenting the history of the tourism on the DMZ. In Roy Grinker’s 1995 journal article about the DMZ, he noted this absence, but in more recent tourism scholarship examining the DMZ, this information has also been missing. This leads me to believe that this information is not publicly available.

the distribution and empirical analysis of survey materials (C. Lee, Y. Yoon, and S. Lee; Shin “Perception differences”) and the ways in which political ideologies both inform and shape experiences and interpretations of the DMZ (Y. Shin) These studies suggest that the tourism industry can play a role in contributing to national political initiatives in peacemaking efforts and inter-Korean cooperation.

While the division of the Korean peninsula is symbolically a living wound in the collective consciousness of modern Korea, narratives which imagine movement across the border crossing, and the erasure of the border through tourism initiatives are also significant in the cultural production and imaginaries on the DMZ. As tourism scholars have suggested, national museums tend to either glorify the past or project images of advanced technology into the future. (qtd. in Grinker “The Real Enemy” 31) In Roy Grinker’s analysis of the DMZ he argues the classification of the DMZ into either of these projects is problematic because the DMZ itself is anti-national, existing precisely because the unified nation no longer exists. Instead he suggests that the DMZ represents “an ongoing tension between a series of oppositions” (33). While his analysis strongly resonates with experiences of my 1999 visit to the DMZ, by the time of my second visit to the DMZ in 2006, “oppositions” had been transformed into projected desires of the future, as my analyses of the Kaesong Complex at Dora Observatory as well as the Dorasan Station suggest.

Scholarship coming from tourism studies has focused on the role tourism can play in facilitating peace between divided and partitioned states, especially at the DMZ. Y. Kim and Crompton's research on tourism initiatives between North and South Korea explores the failures of a solely diplomatic track and politically-based approach to reunification and instead suggests that economics, including tourism-based initiatives, provide a non-threatening and mutually beneficial endeavor. More recent scholarship has suggested that tourism on the DMZ carries potential to reduce the economic asymmetries between North and South Korea through the cooperative development of ecotourism and trans-boundary parks and corridors. (Healy Jr.)

Despite tourism's role in facilitating peace, the limitations of tourism to substantially alleviate the political determinants creating hostilities at borders has also been explored. S. Kim, Lee and Dallen have argued that the lack of political will between North and South Korea surpasses economic and cultural cooperative projects, meaning that such projects have minimal effect in achieving reunification, especially tourism projects initiated only at the governmental level without citizen interaction. While my research intersects with the tourism literature on the DMZ, the objectives of this chapter are not concerned with the success or failure of tourism on the DMZ in actually actively facilitating peace.

The role of tourism in mediating the return of Korean adoptees to Korea is also relevant because many Korean adoptees are legally designated as tourists on their visas when they

return to Korea. Yet, as I argue in my previous chapter on the Gathering, Korean adoptees who return also are hailed as part of the Korean diaspora. While the DMZ is a site which mediates Korea's national memory to an international audience, the presence of Korean adoptees on the DMZ is significant because their presence is partially conditioned by their status as international tourists.<sup>12</sup> Because Korean adoptees and the history of international adoption from Korea share historical linkages, their presence on the DMZ meaningfully invokes a history of separation of kinship and nation. Furthermore, the hope that new tourism projects on the DMZ to facilitate peace and reconciliation also aligns with Korean adoptees who are designated as cultural ambassadors and economic bridges.

### ***Korean globalization***

During the Kim Young Sam administration (1993-1998), the concept of globalization was widely and aggressively pursued as a necessary paradigm shift in order for the South Korean nation to be competitive in an increasingly interconnected world. President Kim's use of the term *segzehwa*, designated the particular way the South Koreans would integrate and imagine globalization through their economic, social, and cultural policies. In examining the relationship between the *segzehwa* drive and ethnic nationalism, G. Shin has suggested instead that the state has appropriated *segzehwa* in order to advance national objectives (208). This appropriation is both historically embedded and follows a

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<sup>12</sup> At the time of my visit in 1999, South Korean national civilians did not have access to the DMZ. From my research, I have been unable to determine when South Koreans national civilians gained access the DMZ. However, I believe it most likely coincided with the opening of North Korean Mount Kumgang resort when South Korean civilians were first able to visit North Korea.

similar pattern to the ways in which South Korea strategically negotiated its ethnic national identity in previous periods of colonialization and modernization. Specifically, G. Shin further situates Northeast Asian regionalism as one response to globalization in efforts to distance itself from American hegemony in the Asian region (218).

The intersection between Korean ethnic nationalism, reunification and *seggyehwa* pertains to my research of the DMZ in several ways. On the first level, as an actual partition dividing the two Koreas, the DMZ is fully enmeshed in the historical and traumatic legacy of American occupation and an unresolved Korea War that continues to the present day. As such, the DMZ becomes a site which naturalizes the wished for reunification of the peninsula by drawing upon a shared national ethnicity that seeks to recover a lost whole. In this respect, the issue of divided families corresponds with the division of the Korean nation. On another level, as an international tourist destination, the DMZ becomes a space to exhibit and display inter-Korean initiatives and Northeast Asian regionalism as responses to economic globalization. As several of these projects are still in their early stages and encumbered by ongoing political conflict between the North and South, these become ways to imagine an uncertain future while bolstering the South's status to an international audience as a developed and economically globalized competitor. Both of these discourses, division of family/nation and reunion/reunification, on the one hand, and the ways in which Korea exhibits and manages its anxieties of globalization for an international audience come into play.

### *Touring the DMZ*

As a living border of national and political conflict, the DMZ is a tourism site which mediates narratives around conflict and division, but also a site which projects desires of reunification to an international audience. While earlier tourism literature focused on the DMZ as a “living museum” of cold war ideology, the official Korean Tourism Organization website, currently advertises the DMZ as a Zone of Peace, citing recent tourism development projects along the border of the DMZ. In South Korea’s National Sparkling campaign launched in 2009, the DMZ guidebook boldly advertises the DMZ as moving “From DMZ to PLZ (Peace and Life Zone)” (Korean National Tourism). Re-imagined as an ecological utopia, a zone of peace, and an international hub of commerce, the DMZ cannot be detached from the present reality of the DMZ being one of the most heavily armed borders in the world. This reconstitution of memory as events imagined not only in the past, but as desires within the future glosses over a history of military violence, transforming Korea’s past and present day military conflict with visions of mobility and tourism, viewed through the lens of economic development.

In my analysis, I examine four different sites offered on the DMZ tour: the DMZ film, the infiltration tunnel, Dora Observatory, and Dorasan Station. By looking at these different sites, I delineate different narratives of national memory and desires of reunification that become evident through the ways in which these sites are exhibited and displayed. Each of these sites imagines the division and calls upon the tourist to actively participate in imagining the South/North Korean border and the DMZ as a zone of conflict as well as a

zone of reunification. I argue that the DMZ is put in service of, not of remembering national history per se, but rather recasting the meaning attached to the Demilitarized Zone, from a zone demarcating the division of Korea, to a zone marking the possibilities of peace, tourism, and reunification through economic development projects.

The recent re-conceptualization of the Demilitarized Zone by the Korean government from a “living museum” of the Cold War to a zone of peace and tourist destination relies on what Lisa Yoneyama defines as temporal and spatial strategies, which remap the geographical topographies of how memory and history are conceived, not only represented, on the DMZ. By the same token, Yoneyama’s research on urban renewal and its relationship to the “taming the memoryscape,” within redefining peace tourism projects in the city of Hiroshima is instructive (46). As an ongoing military and international border between North and South Korea, the DMZ and its peripheral sites act in line with what Yoneyama defines as spaces that are “defined by dissonant temporalities” (46). In the case of the DMZ, “dissonant temporalities” engage with not only how the past events of the Korean War are reconciled with the present realities of conflict, but also how future desires of reunification through special economic zones are (re)presented.

My visit to the Demilitarized Zone in 2006 began from the lobby of the luxury hotel, Lotte Hotel, in Jamsil, a wealthy neighborhood in the South Eastern part of Seoul. Several days earlier, I had stopped at Lotte Hotel in order to look at the different DMZ

tours offered. Several private tour companies offered different packages of the DMZ, ranging from Chinese, Japanese, and English language guided tours, to different options of half day tours or full day tours. I chose a half day tour which included destination stops at the third tunnel, Dora observatory, the DMZ theater, and Dorasan Train Station. My decision was partially informed by the cost of the tour. While the half day tours were priced at around 50,000 won, approximately \$50, the full days tours were closer to 100,000 won, approximately \$100. Since I had already gone to the DMZ on the full day tour, I decided to go to on the shorter tour. The Jamsil pick-up was one of the first pick-up sites for the tour before also stopping in other neighborhoods in Seoul, including Itaewon, home of the American military base, and a neighborhood where many foreigners and expats live in Seoul. After picking up several more people for the tour in Itaewon, we began our 1 hour bus drive north to the DMZ. Our friendly tour guide appeared to be a Korean national who conducted the tour in English.

Prior to arriving at the gated checkpoint, the tour guide collected our passports. When we arrived at the main entrance, people were asked to stay seated. Looking out the bus window, I noticed the South Korean military soldiers, a dark reminder of the continuing status of the Demilitarized Zone as a militarized zone of conflict. Unlike many tourist sites in South Korea, when visiting the DMZ, tourists are required to bring their passports for entry and verification. This point of entry and marker of nationality was a reminder of how the DMZ was as much enmeshed in the enforcement of a military zone, but also

in how the tour was also concerned with how borders and possibilities or transgression in crossings the border are imagined.

As the paradoxical term “living museum” denotes, the DMZ, while actively remembering and interpreting its past, still remains alive in the present constructions of geopolitical and international borders. Yet, as the tour continues the tourist must also navigate not only between ways trauma is situated in the past and present, but is further directed by narratives and representations of unifications which project into the future. The experience of time on the DMZ is simultaneously a projection of the past, present, and future, speaking to the ways in which the dominant narratives offered on the DMZ constitute a sense of recovery, but also enact a forgetting and re-covering up of the past.

### ***Tunnels and military infiltration***

Once on the DMZ, the bus followed a winding road to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infiltration Tunnel. Our guide directed our attention to the unspoiled ecological habitat around the road; wooded areas where wildlife had flourished over the past fifty years, attracting rare birds, and providing an eden-like view of Korea before industrialization. At the same time, our guide reminded us of the potential dangers of military landmines which were buried underground. While many of the landmines had been deactivated, he cautioned many thousands more landmines were thought to exist. Paradoxically, he explained, the reason why the DMZ had become such a wildlife refuge was because of the landmines

preventing human development. Even before our arrival to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infiltration Tunnel, the presencing of North Korea as a current invisible threat and enemy was created.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Infiltration Tunnel was discovered in November 1974, with other tunnels subsequently discovered in 1975, 1978, and 1990. The tunnel was framed as a potential site to imagine the proximity of a North Korean military invasion into South Korea:

In particular, the 3<sup>rd</sup> tunnel was enormously and systematically designed to enable 30,000 North Korean soldiers to move within an hour so it was far more threatening than the first and second tunnels. The distance between the 3<sup>rd</sup> tunnel and Seoul was a mere 52 kilometers which left the whole of South Korea in shock. Before the scars left by the war disappeared South Korea was now seized with the darkness of a possibility of another war. (Korean Tourism Organization)

Upon entering into the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infiltration Tunnel tourists were provided with construction helmets for their “safety” and were ushered down a narrow metal stairway. The steep descent into the tunnel was physically demanding. Dimly lit with lights lining its side, the exposed bare rock tunnel was often so narrow that it didn’t allow an individual to stand fully upright. After reaching the depth of 78 meters, the tunnel leveled off and tourists were led a short distance to a door guarded by a South Korean soldier, where we were asked to turn around.

My experience of the Third Tunnel elicited a strong physical response. Being so far underground and in such a narrow passage made me claustrophobic and anxiously wanting to return to the natural air and light. The third tunnel as a main tourist

destination on the DMZ, exhibits the threat of North Korean military secretly invading South Korea through underground border crossing. Such a narrative conceptualizes North Korea by drawing upon the cold war ideology where North Korea is defined as the “enemy”. Because tourists are granted access to parts of the actual tunnel, and physically move through the space, tourists can draw from their embodied experiences of being in the space to imagine North Korean soldiers moving through the space. While the tunnel constructs an understanding of the North Korean military as perilous threat to South Korea, the underground tunnel also draws on fear of North Korean communism as an ideological threat to South Korea’s democracy. Finally, while the Third Tunnel locates the threat of North Korea in the present, it also creates a temporal dissonance through referencing cold war ideologies that seem distinctly of the past, not the present.

### ***Back to the future***

After coming out from the Third Tunnel, I returned to look for our tour bus, which was parked alongside several other tour buses in the designated parking spaces outside of the DMZ theater. Our tour guide informed me and the other people on the tour that we could go and visit the DMZ theater. From my memory of touring the DMZ and the third tunnel in 1999, I was expecting to see the “Anti Communist Museum”. I was surprised to discover that it had been rebuilt and renamed the “DMZ Theater”. Upon entering the building, I was ushered into a small room lined with four large viewing screens where a short eight minute film about the history of the DMZ was shown.<sup>13</sup> The film combined a

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<sup>13</sup> Since there were no credits for the film shown, it was unknown who produced the film. It was also prohibited for tourists to take photos or video recordings of the film.

rapid series of over one hundred visual images, ranging from archival footage of the Korean War and the DMZ, media representations of family reunions and significant political events, fictional acting, and computer-generated simulations. A scripted narration accompanied the visual imagery along with a shifting musical soundtrack. Experienced as a whole, the DMZ film provided a prescribed teleological history, which invited viewers to contemplate the DMZ as undergoing a series of political and humanitarian transformations, by looking into its past, its present, as well as projecting into the future. In this respect, it also framed for its viewer the ways in which the DMZ participates in and propagandizes discourses around past military conflict, opposing ideological differences between the North and South, current inter-Korean projects tied to the economic development of the peninsula, as well as future projections of a reunified and economically robust Northeast Asian hub.

### ***The past trauma of war and threat of invasion***

The opening sequence of images of the DMZ film establishes the DMZ as a highly militarized zone between two opposing forces and rooted in the Korean War. Images of contemporary South Korean soldiers in military uniform are rapidly sequenced and intermingled with shots of DMZ fencing and media footage of Kim Jong-il, military troops carrying the communist flag, and revolving shots of military tanks. The narration begins with an account of the origin of the Korean war and its ensuing devastation, accompanied by historical footage of the Korean War showing a series of images of ground missiles being fired, tanks advancing, explosions on the ground, and soldiers

advancing and retreating. It is followed by images of civilians displaced from their homes carrying their belongings and images of Korean children and of soldiers providing food for children. This section ends with more historic footage of the signing of the Armistice Agreement in Panmunjon and returns to the DMZ by showing images relating to the erection of borders on the DMZ, including archival footage of marking borders, military fences and gates, and signs establishing the DMZ territory. Forwarding twenty years later, the next section of the film introduces footage of the discovery of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tunnel and the imminent threat of military invasion by the North.

As Grinker suggests of his tour to the DMZ nearly a decade earlier, this narrative of the DMZ relies on exhibiting the North as an oppositional other and entertains visitors through a politics of “fear, risk, danger, power, aggression and enemies” (“Real Enemy” 32). In this film, the notion of division is reinforced through the images themselves, showing close up shots of half the face of a Korean soldier as well as frequently inverting the images of soldiers onto two split screens, so as to visually create a frame of opposition and division. The inverted images, in particular, visually underscore the division of Korea as a military assault waged against itself. Yet, while Grinker’s analysis suggests that the display of the threat of North Korea occurs within his present experience of the tour, the film’s narrative locates this threat clearly in the past, as a cold war relic that the present has moved beyond.

***Peace is coming to the DMZ***

While the earlier footage foregrounds the DMZ as a site of war and division, the next section of the film shifts from narratives of cold war opposition through war and military narratives to a chronology of diplomatic efforts between North and South Korea. In the film, the narrator boldly claims, “Peace is coming to the DMZ.” On the brink of peace, but not having fully arrived, the film narrativizes a history of the DMZ through the lens of reunification via humanitarian and economic development projects. Moving from the diplomacy of the Red Cross talks in 1971 to the historic summit in 2000 where the South Korean president Kim Dae Jung and Kim Jong-il inaugurated “The Basic Agreement”, the film conceptualizes the desire for reunification through a two pronged approach of economic development projects and humanitarianism. Showing footage of the Kaesong Industrial Complex followed by footage from televised media coverage of divided families, the film connects economic reunification with desires for reuniting families between North and South Korea. The narrator states: “The Kaesong Industrial Complex, established through cooperation between the two Koreas, drew the attention of the world as a symbol of economic cooperation between two Koreas to secure a fiscal base in the East Asian Region.” Here, Kim Young Sam’s state driven policies on Korean globalization become narrativized as the catalyst which enable the possibilities for “peace” and subsequently are enacted not only at a state level, but through the reunion of separated family members. An economically unified Korea that can compete in a globalized world becomes the main paradigm marketed on the DMZ to its international visitors.

### *Symbol of peace*

If peace had not yet fully materialized on the DMZ, in the final section of the film, the narrator boldly states, “The DMZ is now the symbol of peace and unification and no longer the symbol of partition.” With the Zone framed as an ecological utopia open for tourism, viewers are presented with images of wildlife and scenes of nature. Computer-generated images of park benches and trees growing on the DMZ are followed by images of Dorasan station and trains crossing the border and visitors looking across the border at Dora Observatory. Indeed, the film situates “peace” and “unification” as a present reality, rather than simply waiting on the brink. This imagination of porous borders which cross both the “natural” world and are imagined through travel and mobility, both hallmarks of the tourism industry, suggest the ways in which symbolic representations of the DMZ enact future desires of “peace” and “unification” which have yet to be fully realized.

Throughout the film, sequences of a little Korean girl connect the different parts of the film into a unified whole. As a fictional character in the film, the little girl embodies different figures culled from Korea’s history, from a sad hungry war orphan eating rice, to the film’s final image of the little girl dressed in a plaid skirt and beret dancing amidst the flowers in the DMZ. She, like the film’s projection of the DMZ, undergoes a series of transformations which reflect different narratives of desire for peace, which the child comes to symbolically represent. While I was watching the film, the foregrounding of

this little girl connecting the DMZ's transformations stood out to me because the narrative very closely aligned to the Korean adoptee as symbols of Korea's reunification.

### ***The Kaesong Industrial Complex***

The next site on the tour was Dora Observatory. Dora Observatory became available for tourism 1987 and is a frequent destination on many DMZ tours. Located on the ROK side of the DMZ, the observatory offers a panoramic view of North Korea through its glass façade of the lecture hall facing North Korea as well as from outside observation posts. Lined with telescopes, both inside the observatory in as well as from an outside platform, tourists had the opportunity to view from a distance various sites in North Korea, including the recent North/South economic cooperation project, the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC). Standing outside on the platform of Dora Observatory and viewing the KIC on the DMZ provided myself and the others on the tour with a way to envision and connect North Korea as part of South Korea's global economic vision. At the same time, Dora Observatory invited the tourist gaze to cast its meaning; looking at Kaesong became a way to spatialize the border between North and South Korea, but also imagined the possibilities of future reunification through the lens of global capitalism and Special Economic Zones (SEZ).

Located in the city of Kaesong in North Korea, the KIC is an industrial park that sits on 800 acres of North Korean land and is touted as a symbol of inter-cooperation between the two Koreas and possibilities of eventual reunification through economic, rather than

diplomatic channels. In 2006, at the time of my visit, the KIC had 15 medium to small sized companies and employed a North Korean workforce of 11,000 laborers, yet that number has continued to grow. In 2011, the complex housed over 50 small to medium sized businesses (mainly manufacturing and textile production) from the Republic of Korea (South Korea or ROK) and employed over 50,000 North Korean workers despite strong military conflicts and elevated political tensions between the North and South. (Nanto; Lim)

The inclusion of the KIC as a site which can imagine the unification of the peninsula might aptly be classified as a national projection. While the KIC was initially negotiated by the former Chairman Chung, Ju-yung of the Hyundai Group, one of large private corporate conglomerates, and Kim Jong-il in the North, the South Korean government has played an integral role in providing financial support and resources to help finance the large infrastructural costs to make the KIC feasible, as well as subsidize incentives for companies locating in the KIC. This included the development of transportation routes by connecting former railways, the Kyounggi line and constructing new roads to link the two Koreas, as well as providing energy support from the Korean Electric Power Company (Lim).

### *Spatializing time*

From the DMZ, the KIC comes into a field of visibility for the tourist by looking through a telescope to see the complex at a distance. The field of visibility shaping the

experience of the tourist establishes not only a spatial and sensory perception of crossing the border, enabled by the mechanical apparatus being able to look from a distance, but also coincides with a temporal proximity of the future reunification of the peninsula which has not yet fully materialized, but becomes imaginable through the act of looking. Here, I am also reminded of how the construction of difference and the borders which reify it relies on a temporal distancing and construction of an other, in this case, the way in which North Korea is framed as “static” and unchanging from when the Korean War ended, while South Korea has “progressed” through time, following the logic of global capitalism. In this respect, the tourist gaze becomes a way of spatializing time and visually articulating difference, one which ushers capitalism into the isolated North, while the tourist becomes the agent who facilitates and embodies these desires and tensions.

In thinking through the relationship between the tourist gaze and the ways in which economic capital is embedded in looking into North Korea, a closer examination of the KIC as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is worth elaborating on. According to Lee, Dalgon, SEZs are “an approach to enlarging the legal and geographic areas in which manufacturing, commercial, and financial activities take place under special conditions that are quite different from those of the central economy” (22). Established as a SEZ in North Korea in 2000, and modeled on the economic success of other SEZs in Shaungzu, China and Vietnam, the purpose of the KIC was to bring together the two Koreas through a preliminary level of economic engagement. These contained zones thus offer a way for

North Korea to experiment while not affecting the central economy of North Korea. By the same token, South Korean companies by establishing business in SEZs are provided access to cheap labor, as well as receive favorable status. While the KIC is popularly viewed as symbolic of inter-Korean initiatives, its function as an SEZ cannot be divorced from the global economy. As Lim, Eul-Chul has suggested, the different factors ensuring the success of the KIC do not only depend on the continuance of good relations between North and South Korea.

While the KIC becomes a spectacle of nationalist futurity of the reunification of the peninsula, it also exhibits the large economic disparities between North and South Korea. While touted as a win-win situation for South Korean businesses and North Korean workers, as a state sanctioned endeavor, the KIC underscores South Korea's position as a wealthy nation using the labor force from the impoverished North. In such a narrative, the KIC is only able to be economically sustainable and profitable because of the competitive low wages paid to North Korean workers. As a model of reunification between fraternal nations, it suggests that the economic inequalities between wealthy and poor nations, fostered by global capitalism, ensure that those nations remain separate and unequal. For international tourists called up to envision Korea's future, gazing at the KIC becomes less a way to envision reunification and fraternity, and more a way to display South Korea's position as a global competitor.

***Traveling in the future:***

Departing from the Dora Observatory, our next destination was Dorasan Train Station. Completed in 2002 as part of the inter-cooperative efforts between the two Koreas, the train station is the last train station before entering into North Korea and was disconnected after the Korean War. While gazing at the KIC from Dora Observatory allows the tourist to visualize the future at a distance, simulations of crossing the border also become embodied and performed at the train station. At the time of my visit in 2006, the train had yet to cross the border. It was not until the December of 2007, that the first South Korean train crossed, carrying cargo for the Kaesong Complex. Yet at the time, as the station is a tourist destination on the DMZ, the tourist actively participates in imagining the border crossing before it had occurred.

Similar to national museums which imagine the future through exhibits of technology (Steiner, 1995), Dorasan Station stands as living monument to South Korea's modernity and the future as envisioned through transportation and mobility as an international travel hub into North Korea and gateway that connects into the Greater Asia and European railway systems. As a living museum, Dorasan Station is difficult to classify because rather than re-enacting and re-writing histories from the past, Dorasan Station is project fully committed to projecting the tourist forward into the future. Positioned not as the "last stop in South Korea", but the "first stop towards the North", the train station is less a museum, and more a living monument to the possibilities of travel and mobility across the North/South Korea, poised on the cusp between the present and future.

As the last train station before crossing into North Korea, Dorasan Station provided the characteristics of a live display. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, “Live displays, whether re-creations of daily activities or staged as formal performances, also create the illusion that the activities you watch are being done, rather than represented, a practice that creates the effect of authenticity or realness” (55). This semiotic blurring between the real and the representational, she further suggests, is problematic because the performance appears as an unmediated encounter. The experience of being at Dorasan Station was mediated both by the signs around the train station, displaying imaginary train departures and arrivals into North Korea, as well as through staging the process of travel through mundane activities that would take place when the border opened for travel. Once inside the train station, tourists had the opportunity to simulate different acts required of crossing into North Korea: tourists waited in queues for departures into North Korea; tourists were asked to take out their passports; and upon reaching an official, passports were stamped with an emblem of departing South Korea and entering into North Korea. These staged acts in which the tourists participated, simulated future desires of crossing the border.

In this essay, I examined the different national narratives offered by the DMZ and how they exhibit anxieties and future desires of unification and peace as well as intersect with Korea’s economic drive for globalization for an international audience. As the DMZ is a highly marketed international tourist destination in South Korea, I analyzed how the tourist gaze is directed and asked to participate in these performances of desired

reunification as well as how the tourist gaze is constructed so as to exhibit South Korea as economically competitive in a globalized world.

***The lived experience of the Korean adoptee on the DMZ***

In my site analysis of the DMZ, I intentionally left out the presence of the Korean adoptee because of the way the DMZ was specifically staged for international tourists. In this final section I would like to reflect on how Korean adoptees being present on the DMZ makes visible a national trauma. I explore what tourism scholar Chris Ryan defines as “the relativities of lived-in spaces” (3). He argues,

There is of course, the experience of the tourist, who comes to the place with a set of mental constructions, born of their own past experience, and of expectations filtered through the presence of absence of significant other people...all of these companions make differences even though the landscape and physical constructions and professional interpretations and representations remain the same. Tourism is about the relativities of lived-in spaces. (3)

Ryan’s attention to the relativity of tourism points to the inherent fluidity that transpires between the static site and that of the visitor. Rather than cultural meaning being fixed in time and space, the partial meaning that is produced is the result of a dynamic and interactive relationship between the site and the visitor who comes to the site with their own set of cultural concerns and expectations. This chapter is concerned “with the lived-in space” that the transracial/transnational Korean inhabits and embodies on the DMZ; a space where her ambivalent status as an international tourist and as an overseas Korean generate affective force through her physical body moving through the space. In this respect, I am deeply interested in how national narratives on the DMZ align or fail to

align with the how the figure of the transnational Korea adoptee is situated within similar anxieties and desires around division, ethnic nationalism and economic globalization.

What possibilities are opened up as she choreographs her own movement through the DMZ, authors a counter-narrative to dominant narratives of remembering international adoption within the context of the Korean War, and ushers in her own memories and lived experiences into understandings of the DMZ?

In describing the traumatic experience, Cathy Caruth argues, “What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the violent event, but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known” (6). In thinking about this chapter, notions of psychic violence and how that becomes manifest have formed central parts of my inquiry. Caruth’s statement is powerful because she suggests that the violence of the traumatic event perhaps does not reside solely in the experience of the violent event itself, but perhaps in the way that the violence and trauma have yet to become known to the subject who experienced the trauma. Importantly, while her assertion does not foreclose the possibility that multiple violences can be known, her statement also raises the question of whether those multiple violences can really ever fully be known to the subject or perhaps at best only partially known.

One of the central questions which unfolded in the process of writing this essay was: how does the collective trauma represented on the DMZ (or lack thereof), one which is symbolically and geopolitically etched in the DMZ, make itself known for the Korean

American adoptee who returns to that space? As Ramsay Liem has demonstrated in his oral history project on survivors and generations who came after the Korean war and immigrated to the US, the social and political wounds of the Korean war are often revealed through being “forgotten” and through intergenerational silences. In this respect, his research suggests that the transmission of collective trauma, often caused by intense social and political conditions, not only can cross temporal thresholds between the past and the present, but also can migrate across bodies and geographical spaces. It is my contention that the ephemeral presence of the Korean adoptee on the DMZ illuminates a shared history of American military violence that helped to shape the origins of international adoption from Korea as well as the division of the country. To return to the DMZ is to return to the origins of international adoption. Furthermore, the presence of Korean on DMZ makes visible overlapping discourses around the division of the nation and division of the family. Reunification of the nation occurs on a political and geographic landscape which are also framed through humanitarian efforts to reunite North/South Korean families. These resonate with the ways in which Korean adoptees who return to Korea are positioned as reuniting with both nation and family.

At the same time, Korean adoptees return to the DMZ as international tourists. While the DMZ is a performative space that exhibits South Korea’s desires of economic advancement in an era of heightened globalization, these same desires become evident through events like the Gathering, which also positioned Korean adoptees as international tourists. Viewed together these constitute the different violences and erasures that

became partially known to me when I moved through the space of the DMZ. Despite these alignments and intersections that historically and discursively link the Korean adoptees to the DMZ, the DMZ is a place where the figure of the Korean adoptee is absent. Therefore, the partial trauma that became known for me was there was no desire for Korean adoptees to be remembered at all.

## EPILOGUE

When people inquire about the topic of my dissertation, I frequently have to offer a long winded explanation—that although I’m writing about the Korean adoptee diaspora my disciplinary “home” is in theater and dance. At the time when I first began researching Asian American choreographers and playwrights, nearly a decade ago, Rick Shiomi’s *The Walley Kid*, a family musical about a Korean adoptee growing up in Minnesota, was the only play I could find that explicitly dealt with Korean adoptee experiences. While I found Shiomi’s play delightful, representations of adult Korean adoptees in the theater were still scarce. Indeed, my inability to find a relevant theater/dance performance text about Korean adoptees was what initially led me to identify the absence of Korean adoptee voices and histories within Asian American performance. Finding a way to connect Korean adoptees more “traditionally” to the discipline of theater and dance has been one of the most challenging aspects of this endeavor; however, this fact is changing.

In October of 2011, I had the opportunity to go see Katie Hae Leo’s play “Four Destinies” produced by Theater Mu at the Mixed Blood Theater. I was interested in the play because I knew it addressed different issues around transracial adoption, but I was unsure of what to expect. What I discovered was a profound, and poignant work that explored the lives of four transracial adoptees and their experiences, questions and desires around their adoptions. At one point in the play, I was transported back to Korea when one of the characters returns to Korea and participates in a television show to reunite Korean adoptees with their families. Similar to Dorinne Kondo, a Japanese American, and her response to

watching the Asian American production of *Doughball, Four Destinies* made me laugh and cry out of a sense of recognition of the challenges many Korean adoptees experience with the Korean language and culture (103). More importantly, Leo's play, for the first time ever in my life, provided an opportunity for me to see the performance of transracial adoptee identity. Leo is not alone. Other recent works by and about Korean adoptees includes, the 2012 production and remount of *The Origin(s) Project: Memories in Motion*, an evening of two one act plays written by Sun Mee Chomet and Katie Hae Leo. Furthermore, Korean adoptee work emerging from Korean adoptees living in Korea can be seen in Jane Jeong Trenka's literary work *Fugitive Visions* (2009).

I view the emergence of adult Korean adoptees writing narratives of Korean adoptee identity and the aspect of return as being the result of the transnational movement of Korean adoptees between the US and Korea and allowing Korean adoptees to negotiate "our" process of coming into visibility. I am excited and encouraged that Korean adoptees who are writing themselves into existence are being produced and supported by Asian American theater companies in the Twin Cities, and that Korean adoptee playwrights, like Leo, are exploring alliances across racial divides that are rooted in the contradictions of adoptee experience.

Dorinne Kondo writes about the "urgent necessity for Asian Americans to write ourselves into existence...a sense that somehow my life, and the lives of others are at stake (110). Indeed, from my perspective, the need for Korean adoptees to write their histories into

existence has an urgency to it. Unlike other diasporas, the Korean adoptee diaspora as it exists today is a disappearing diaspora. As the Korean government begins to phase out international adoption and promote domestic adoption, over the next 50 or 60 years the attrition rate of Korean adoptees being sent overseas will result in the total disappearance of the Korean adoptee diaspora. I view my scholarship and the emergence of other adoptee performance as ways of writing adoptees into existence, but also as a way to remember and mark the presence of Korean adoptees, our lives, our memories, our histories, and our perspectives both within Korea, Asian America and beyond.

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