

Introduction

A HOUSE DIVIDED

A house divided against itself cannot stand.

BECOMING A SOLDIER

We stood on the dirt field, arms length apart. We formed imperfect rows and columns, which brought frantic scorn from the drill sergeants wearing red-capped black hats, uniforms in dark green digital camouflage, and shiny black boots. Our heads were all shaved, though we were still in our civilian clothes. At last, the national anthem played and we—the 1,200 newly conscripted men—saluted the South Korean flag. I felt a flurry of emotions, including nervous anxiety. I was anomalous, being in my thirties, and the drill sergeants failed to conceal their surprise upon seeing my mature face among mostly eighteen-year-olds. On this mid-September day in 2015, we had arrived at the 102nd Replacement Battalion in Gangwon Province in South Korea bordering the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone), a heavily fortified and militarized “no man’s land” filled with landmines dividing the two Koreas. The 102nd Battalion was established in 1953 in the aftermath of the Korean War (1950–1953), and it served as a transit point where new conscripts received their uniforms and supplies before being transferred to the more remote units scattered along the DMZ to protect the nation from its northern neighbor.

Family, friends, and colleagues expressed shock, and sometimes horror, at the news of my conscription into the South Korean Army. My family had left South Korea for Kenya when I was eight. I have lived in the United States since I came to attend college, though my parents continue to live in East Africa. My military conscription was also received with disbelief because I was supposed to start my new job as a professor in upstate New York. Just a few months before my conscription, I had obtained my doctorate from American University in Washington, DC. However, my academic career would now be put on hold and I would be a soldier for the next two years.

Prior to national division and war, the Korean Empire (previously the Joseon Dynasty, 1392–1897) was annexed by Japan in 1910, putting the nation under imperial occupation until the end of World War II. The United States and the Soviet Union, competing for influence in Asia, agreed to “temporarily” divide the Korean peninsula into two trusteeships to oversee its decolonization. As agreed upon at the Yalta Conference, Soviet troops marched into the northern half of the Korean peninsula and US troops took control over the southern half, with the peninsula divided along the 38th parallel. During these high-level negotiations, Korean leaders were not present. Two US officers were called to the White House and used a *National Geographic* map to hastily divide the peninsula along the 38th parallel line of latitude, ensuring that Seoul, the capital city, fell under US control.¹ However, disputes over leadership, government, and the future of Korea ensued, and the US-backed South proclaimed statehood in 1948 with Rhee Syngman as president. The North established its own state shortly thereafter, supported by the Soviet Union and led by Kim Il-sung, a guerilla leader who had fought against the Japanese Imperial Army.

Desiring to forcibly reunify the peninsula, Kim sought approval from Joseph Stalin to invade South Korea. With the assurance of support from both the Soviet Union and China, North Korean tanks and soldiers launched a surprise attack across the 38th parallel on the morning of June 25, 1950. It sparked a devastating war that brought destruction to the peninsula, nearly five million casualties, and the involvement of military troops from all over the world. The United Nations forces, led by the United States, came to the South’s defense and the sides battled back and forth. China eventually came to North Korea’s aid, and the war ended in a

stalemate after three long years. In 1953, an Armistice Agreement was signed to cease the fighting.

One consequence of the unresolved conflict—no peace treaty was ever signed, and the war continues to this day—was the establishment of compulsory military service in both Koreas.² In South Korea, the 1957 Military Service Act made military service mandatory for all able-bodied men, creating a gendered path towards full citizenship.³ Evading conscription is a crime punishable by imprisonment and permanent banishment.⁴ Since the 1950s, the Korean peninsula has become highly militarized, both sides fighting for the legitimacy of their statehood and employing large armies and amassing weapons in preparation for a future war. For example, North Korea has defied international norms and endured sanctions and condemnation to develop nuclear weapons. South Korea has built up its armed forces to become a top-ten military power, conducts annual war exercises with the US military, and has developed and deployed various missile defense systems.

The peninsula has been on the brink of reengaged war several times when North Korea attempted to assassinate two South Korean presidents (1968 and 1983), bombed a Korean Air flight from Baghdad to Seoul in 1987, and torpedoed the South Korean Cheonan naval vessel and fired artillery on Yeonpyeong Island in 2010, among countless other conflicts between the two countries. Furthermore, between 1974 and 1990, South Korea discovered four incursion tunnels beneath the DMZ. In preparation for a new war, North Korea had secretly dug tunnels deep underground (several kilometers in length from the north to the south) that would have allowed 30,000 of its soldiers to pass through each tunnel in a single hour.

When I was growing up in East Africa, my father used to tell me stories about the bitter cold nights in the DMZ and the intensive military training at his “White Skull” Division. Men were conscripted for three years at the time, and he half-jokingly advised me to find consolation in the fact that I would serve one year less than he had. My grandfather used to tell us stories about the Korean War at family gatherings. North Korean soldiers imprisoned and killed our great-grandfather (a civilian), and my grandfather would show us his father’s shirt with the bullet holes as a vivid reminder. The question of division, therefore, interested me even from afar: what divisions would remain if the Koreas reunified? The two Koreas

have both assumed reunification as a main objective, and have engaged in inter-Korean summits, family reunions, and economic collaborations. Recently, they sent a united ice-hockey team to the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics. Though the Koreas are far from national reunification, it started to look more tangible as North Korean defectors, refugees, and migrants began to resettle in South Korea at the turn of the century, raising questions and hope about what a reunified Korea might look like.

RESETTLED NORTH KOREANS IN A DIVIDED KOREA

“None of you look like you’re from North Korea!” a South Korean college student cheerfully exclaimed to her North Korean peers. The small room was dimly lit by fluorescent lights, warm and stuffy from the forty of us sitting behind the light brown rectangular tables arranged in a U-shape. Our bodies and clothes reeked of the smell of *samgyupsal* (grilled pork belly) we’d had for dinner. It was our evening coffee break after sitting through an hour-long lecture about pro-North Korean forces in South Korean society. The professor’s first slide had read “Who is our enemy?” in big bold red characters, and he lectured us about the history of Korean communism, Kim Il-sung’s efforts to bolster pro-North Korean groups within South Korea, the dangers of communist ideology, and the risks these forces posed to South Korea.

This Unification Workshop brought together two groups of college students: South Korean students and resettled North Korean students pursuing higher education in Seoul. Its purpose was for these students to get to know one another beyond cultural stereotypes and to discuss the challenges of reunification. It was 2013, two years before my military conscription, and a bus picked up the students in Gangnam on a Friday afternoon to escort them to a *pensyeon* (a rental house) in Gapyeong, a small city about an hour east of Seoul. The organizing NGO had received money from the South Korean government to host this two-day event, and the director of the fledgling NGO, Mr. Bak, had invited me to the workshop. A resettled North Korean living in South Korea, Mr. Bak regularly organized a variety of workshops addressing the themes of reunification and human rights. What made his workshops special, he emphasized to

me, was that his participants always included both North and South Korean students.

The female South Korean student followed up her statement: “And you all have a great sense of humor too,” which brought the participants to laughter.

“What did you expect?” asked Kichul, a North Korean student, showing no sign of amusement.

“I don’t know, but you look no different from *hanguk* (South Korean) college students,” she replied. She admitted that this was her first time meeting anyone from North Korea and that she was happy to have given up her precious weekend to come to the workshop.

Her seemingly innocent statement upset Kichul, though. The next morning, he told me it was something he had heard countless times while living in Seoul. “Do we only have one eye? No ears?” he asked me sarcastically. He was frustrated because South Koreans held a predetermined image of North Koreans, and it was always an image that depicted them as different and inferior.

North Koreans began arriving in South Korea in significant numbers following the heavy rainfall and floods of 1995, and the subsequent severe famines that led to mass starvation in North Korea. The natural disasters combined with North Korea’s failed state plans and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc—North Korea’s main trading partners—contributed to the collapse of its Public Distribution System (PDS). The PDS, responsible for distributing food and resources to North Korea’s citizens, proved much too inadequate. Approximately two to three million people died from hunger.⁵ No longer able to rely on the state, ordinary North Koreans scavenged for food, engaged in black markets, and even fled the country. An estimated 200,000 to 300,000 North Koreans illegally crossed over to China between 1995 and 1999.⁶ Some resettled in China permanently while others had more temporary plans, intending to return to North Korea when conditions improved. Although many humanitarian narratives frame this migration as a “search for freedom,” it was predominantly hunger-driven and many became migrant laborers to “keep their families at home alive by taking on the role of breadwinner.”⁷

Situated within a divided peninsula surrounded by oceans to the east and west, and with the highly militarized and securitized DMZ blocking

direct entrance to South Korea, many North Koreans fled to China by crossing the Yalu and Tumen Rivers that serve as territorial boundaries between the two countries.⁸ The majority of these border-crossers were from the poorer provinces with proximity to the Chinese border, while those in the core regions of North Korea near Pyongyang had less access to escape.⁹ The familiarity of the cultural borderlands in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in China, with approximately two million ethnic Koreans residing and speaking the Korean language, provided a viable option. However, the borderland had always been a space of passage and it was the intensity in the number of crossings that marked this period as distinct from the past. Historically, migrants from both sides crossed over, formed families, conducted trades, and filled labor shortages despite the securitization of national borders.¹⁰ The borderland was a place of fluidity, a space of constant crossings and maneuverings.

The Chinese policy in response to the influx of North Korean border-crossers has been to forcibly return these “economic migrants” to their home country. Pleas from human rights activists to protect North Korean refugees have had no success in preventing their forced repatriation. Kichul and his family secretly crossed the Tumen River to China in 2000, having little hope for survival in North Korea, but his parents were arrested by Chinese authorities and sent back to North Korea. Kichul was running errands in town when the Chinese police raided the apartment. He has since lost contact with his family and believes they are likely dead, as leaving North Korea without authorization is considered an act of defection and a political crime.¹¹ While many North Korean border-crossers have secretly and quietly settled in China, others, like Kichul, have eventually sought resettlement in South Korea due to the absence of legal status in China. The South Korean government grants citizenship to North Koreans and provides them with resettlement money, housing, job training, and education subsidies based on its 1997 Act on the Protection and Settlement Support for Residents Escaping from North Korea, in addition to claims about ethnic homogeneity of North and South Koreans sharing the “same” blood, history, and culture. Furthermore, Article 3 in its Constitution states that the “territory of the Republic of Korea shall consist of the Korean *peninsula* and its adjacent islands,” allowing the country to assert itself as the sole and legitimate governing body of the

entire Korean peninsula.¹² Using this framing, North Koreans constitutionally fall under the governing umbrella of South Korean territory, and are thus considered deserving of citizenship.

The journey from China to South Korea, however, is not simple. Without proper documentation, North Koreans in China have had to enter foreign embassies in Beijing to claim asylum, or cross the Gobi Desert into Mongolia. Others pay brokers or rely on NGOs and religious organizations to help them traverse the Chinese mainland to reach a country like Thailand in Southeast Asia.¹³ In contrast to the Chinese, Thai authorities do not forcibly repatriate North Koreans and instead transfer custody to South Korean officials. North Koreans are then flown to South Korea for resettlement.¹⁴

Over 33,000 North Koreans have resettled in South Korea, with approximately 70 percent being women (see chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of this gendered migration). Following interrogation and security clearance, newly arrived North Koreans receive mandatory cultural orientation at Hanawon, the government resettlement center, for three months. Literally meaning “One Center” or “House of Unity” to symbolize the reunification of the Koreas, North Koreans receive various trainings for cultural adaptation to South Korea, assistance for their psychological well-being, and career counseling sessions. Upon completion, the government provides them with apartment housing and resettlement money.¹⁵ There are over twenty-five regional adaptation centers in South Korea for the purpose of assisting North Koreans to get settled into their new homes. North Koreans also receive tuition waivers and vocational support.

Yet despite the shared history, culture, and language between the two Koreas and despite this assistance, North Koreans continue to face many obstacles during their resettlement in South Korea.¹⁶ As the students at the Unification Workshop highlight, resettled North Koreans are often stigmatized, treated as outsiders, and perceived to be inherently different. A South Korean professional who has worked for decades in the field of North Korean human rights once told me that resettled North Koreans are *gatjanhda* (not the same) as South Koreans, a phrase used pejoratively in South Korea.¹⁷ She claimed that North Koreans only know socialism, and that their behaviors—stemming from the lack of a capitalistic mindset, responsibility, and self-sufficiency—are hard to change. These kinds of

stereotypes and prejudice have led many resettled North Koreans, like the college students at the workshop, to erase traces of their North Koreanness through grooming, fashion, and adopting a South Korean accent. While conducting ethnographic fieldwork, one of the things that stood out to me was that in public settings such as a restaurant, café, or on the subway many would lower their voices to speak about their identities, their origin, and their experiences in South Korea. They would speak at a near inaudible level and use semantic replacers such as “our people” or “our northern neighbors” to refer to North Korea.

Another obstacle for resettled North Koreans has been a sense of alienation. A community has been difficult to establish, as the South Korean government provides housing in random locations throughout the country (though many North Koreans desire to relocate to the Seoul metropolitan area after their first housing assignment). The availability of apartments is one reason for the dispersed settlement, but a concentration of resettled North Koreans and the potential for political dissent also weigh heavily on the government’s resettlement plan.¹⁸ And in areas with some concentration of resettled North Koreans, many choose to conceal their identities as Cold War politics and anti-communist rhetoric are still very much prevalent in South Korea.

An additional barrier to the formation of community has been the culture of fear and suspicion. Resettled North Koreans worry that there could be spies disguised as *talbukja* (a person who has fled North Korea, commonly translated as “defector”). This is one of the lessons that newly arrived North Koreans are taught at the Hanawon Resettlement Center. North Korean interlocutors have told me that they are cautioned to be wary—a North Korean spy could be your friend or your neighbor in the disguise of a *talbukja*. As a result, many North Koreans in South Korea live in social isolation, seldom communicating or networking with one another. One limited form of community for many North Koreans in South Korea has been through religious organizations, particularly Protestant churches—one of the sites of my participant observation, as I will explain later in this chapter.¹⁹

Recent findings show that North Koreans’ suicide rate in South Korea is three times higher than that of South Korean citizens.²⁰ This is particularly alarming given that South Korea has the highest suicide rate among

all countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD).²¹ Furthermore, North Koreans drop out of school at twice the rate of their South Korean counterparts.²² What forms of violence contribute to such disparities? How do past experiences of violence contribute to an ongoing experience of alienation, othering, and discrimination? What social and structural forces hinder successful resettlement? Do North Koreans feel a sense of belonging in South Korea? These are some of the questions at the heart of *Belonging in a House Divided*.

This book's main concern is how violence operates in and contributes to the experiences of citizenship and belonging for North Koreans resettled in South Korea. A central argument is that the North Korean embodiment of South Korean citizenship is often a violent process of belonging, becoming, and self-making, illuminating ongoing invisible forms of violence upon resettlement in South Korea. This ethnography reveals the structural obstacles complicating North Koreans' sense of belonging within South Korean society despite the seeming advantages of shared history, culture, ethnicity, and language. While most other cases of refugee resettlement around the world present the challenges of the host country's acceptance of refugees who are dissimilar to the larger citizen body (ethnically or culturally), I direct attention towards the various types of violence that occur even despite shared heritage, providing important insights into the interrelationship between violence and postwar citizenship.

CITIZENSHIP AND THE VIOLENCE CONTINUUM

The concept of citizenship has gone through many transformations—from the earliest Athenian model based on the Greek polis, to the expansion of the concept in the French Revolution, and to citizenship based on the nation-state system. With the emergence of modern citizenship based on the nation-state, citizenship meant belonging in one single polity, that status providing membership within the political community and the endowment of (theoretically equal) rights and entitlements coupled with that membership. This inclusion meant the exclusion of other individuals and groups, and the denial of their citizenship status and rights. However, during the 1990s scholars addressing issues of multiculturalism, transnational

migration, and social exclusion expanded notions of citizenship beyond political-legal status.²³ During this “cultural turn” of citizenship studies, Will Kymlicka, for example, argued for a multicultural citizenship.²⁴ He emphasized the right to culture—an effort to include immigrants and people of color within the bounds of citizenship without requiring them to assimilate or erase their culture. Similarly, Renato Rosaldo defined cultural citizenship as the “right to be different and to belong in a participatory democratic sense.”²⁵ Both Kymlicka and Rosaldo raised questions about how states should accommodate cultural diversity and how groups of different backgrounds could obtain equality within the polity. They viewed citizenship as a demand for full status and rights despite differences in culture, race and ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Further developing the notion of citizenship, social scientists have focused on the transnational, border-crossing, and boundary-transgressing phenomena that have characterized late modernity.²⁶ Studies emphasize the decoupling of citizenship from the state, detaching citizenship from classic territorial frameworks.²⁷ The global and the transnational are the new sites where citizenship is said to be embedded, and citizenship framed and conceptualized in universal notions. For example, Yasemin Soysal suggests the need to conceptualize citizenship based on “universal personhood,” a post-national citizenship where membership is based on notions of universality instead of membership fixed in a state-based model.²⁸ Aihwa Ong frames “flexible” citizenship, with traditional elements normally associated with citizenship (such as rights and entitlements) disarticulated from each other and re-articulated with new practices and strategies of transnational mobility and flexible accumulation of capital.²⁹ However, while neoliberalism and the hegemony of capitalism are transforming citizenship, detaching it from the state, and exerting extra-territorial and extra-state configurations onto citizenship categories, nation-states will continue to exist and be significant in world politics in the foreseeable future. Most importantly, getting rid of nation-states and citizenship altogether is not what refugees and migrants in resettlement seek. On the contrary, the goal of asylum is the opposite—it is a pursuit of citizenship and belonging tethered to the host nation-state. *Belonging in a House Divided* contributes to these ongoing citizenship debates by examining the current and localized complexities of the still-relevant classic for-

mulation of citizenship bound within national territories, the very form of citizenship and belonging for which North Koreans (and other refugees and migrants) are striving.

Citizenship is generally conceptualized in the dimensions of *status* within the state and the political, social, and civil *rights* coupled with membership. Based on this framework, many scholars suggest that citizenship is claim-making.³⁰ Ample ethnographic research documents practices, negotiations, and claims to citizenship status and rights in everyday life among people in various parts of the world such as Azerbaijani refugees in Armenia, Turkish Kurd refugees in Japan, or the urban poor in India.³¹ However, conceiving citizenship as claim-making reduces it to a form of emancipation conferred by the state as compromise in response to the demands by marginalized subjects. While studies have revealed how citizenship is negotiated and claimed, citizenship is much more than status and rights bestowed by the state.³² North Koreans in South Korea are already granted citizenship status and rights without explicit claim-making. Citizenship status for resettled North Koreans entitles them to the full political, social, and civil rights that South Korean citizens enjoy, in addition to other asylum benefits specifically for North Koreans. Their struggle is not about legal status and claims to certain rights, but rather their embeddedness within the overlapping layers of violence that constitute citizenship—despite the South Korean government's master narrative of ethnic homogeneity. Where both status and rights are granted to North Koreans in their resettlement processes without claim-making, citizenship confined to the juridical-political possessions of and claims to status and rights is inadequate.

This book decenters the notion of citizenship to further theorize it in relation to violence and debates on refugee resettlement around the globe. Refugees are central figures in the international system of nation-states,³³ and this book's main concern is how violence operates in and contributes to how citizenship is experienced. Citizenship also includes people's sense of belonging in the political entity and social body. In this ethnography, I examine the lived experiences of citizenship as belonging, which involves processes of embodiment, self-making, and becoming.³⁴ In other words, citizenship for resettled North Koreans is a complex process of becoming South Korean through self-making, which includes embodying,

practicing, and performing a particular postwar Koreanness. For many North Koreans, embodying South Korean citizenship is a violent process in relation to power and inequality. Violence—visible and invisible, public and private, intentional and unintentional—permeates the experience of North Korean migration, shaping and defining every phase of their resettlement processes.

At the root of refugee policies is the fundamental presumption of the naturalness of the geographically partitioned nation-states from which refugees originate. In this contemporary “national order of things,” refugees symbolize the failure of citizenship—the deterioration of the territory-state-subject relationship.³⁵ Refugees are approached as disquieting figures in the international nation-state system, problematic and displaced persons who disrupt the stability and security of that national order. Liisa Malkki writes that “our sedentarist assumptions about attachment to place lead us to define displacement not as a fact about sociopolitical context, but rather as an inner, pathological conditions of the displaced.”³⁶ Refugees are further defined negatively by what they lack—without a political identity that is citizenship and belonging to a political community that is the nation-state, they are characterized by emptiness, incompleteness, and suffering having lost their identities by being uprooted from their homes.³⁷

As a consequence of such bleak representations, methods to resolve refugee crises stem from problem-solving, short-term-fix point of views aimed at restoring order, maintaining peace and security, and reinstating persons “out of place.”³⁸ These methods aim to resolve this “emergency” which challenges the concepts of nation-state and citizenship. The prevailing approaches instill the false notion that regaining citizenship through resettlement is emancipation from violence. For example, many ordinary North Koreans encounter various forms of violence living under their repressive regime. They face discrimination based on family history, preferential redistribution of resources to the elite class and the military, and a shortage of food and hunger for the ordinary populace.³⁹ In prisons, human rights organizations cite evidence of inhumane treatment, torture, and public executions.⁴⁰ When North Koreans cross the border to China, many are confronted with obstacles related to their vulnerable status such as labor exploitation, human trafficking, and living in hiding from the

Chinese police.⁴¹ Therefore, granting new citizenship status and rights, according to the narratives of human rights activists, supposedly gives resettled North Koreans “freedom” and “liberation.”

Belonging in a House Divided challenges the idea that violence is finished or over when North Koreans are provided asylum, or that they are newborn citizens, their lives restored to start afresh. This book provides a different perspective from the predominant narrative of North Korean migration, which tells a story of oppression, violence, and suffering in North Korea while freedom and liberation characterize South Korea. Complicating this narrative, I show that for resettled North Koreans violence is not just in the moment of brute force, or when personhood is assaulted by poverty, fear, repression, and state surveillance in North Korea. Violence is rather embedded in their everyday experiences of displacement and resettlement—it becomes routinized, unrecognized, and rendered invisible. I argue that a continuum of violence permeates North Koreans’ migration experience and feeds into itself with multiple, overlapping layers to shape and define their experiences with citizenship and belonging. Following Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, I use the concept of the violence continuum to close the distinctions and blur the boundaries between wartime and peacetime violence.⁴² Violence is most commonly understood in discrete terms of physicality and visibility. We immediately think of wars and conflict, genocide, state repression, or revolutions because the assaults, inflictions of physical force, and brutalities we see are the most noticeable and easily traceable forms of violence many people experience. However, understanding violence as occurring along a continuum allows us to recognize invisible forms of violence including structural, symbolic, and everyday violence, and to see how they often produce, translate into, and reinforce other forms of violence.

Structural violence is the configuration of the large-scale forces, institutions, and social matrix—often historically driven—that produce inequalities, limit life chances, and lead to harm and suffering for the vulnerable.⁴³ It is a political-economic oppression manifested through poverty, health disparities, and exclusion, and experienced along the lines of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, or other social categories. This violence can stem from methods of institutional policies, responses, and practices of engagement. In the words of Paul Farmer, pathologies of power “crystallize into

the sharp, hard surfaces of individual suffering” to damage bodies and moral experiences.⁴⁴ These include moments in everyday life where personhood is assaulted by insecurity, fear, and disease and illness. For example, prior to arriving in South Korea, both political and structural violence produce suffering and vulnerability for North Koreans. Many of my research participants faced hunger while the government redistributed resources to its elite and the military. Upon resettlement in South Korea, their stunted stature from malnutrition became an embodied mark of stigma, causing some to take growth hormones or contemplate limb-lengthening operations to increase their stature. Others turned to plastic surgery to erase traces of their “North Koreanness,” or changed their accents, grooming, and fashion to meet gendered and classed expectations about the (South) Korean body. The internalization of such stigma, then, can lead to symbolic violence.

Symbolic violence, as theorized by Pierre Bourdieu, describes the inequalities of class and power in social relations and the normalization, naturalization, and internalization of that stratification.⁴⁵ Symbolic violence can be as simple as when a Korean man unconsciously hands a knife on the table to a woman to peel an apple, and the woman proceeds because she views it as the proper and right thing to do in Korean culture, thereby contributing to the reproduction of gender hierarchy. The key in this process is the subjects’ complicity in the violence based on their habitus: “the structural and cultural environment internalized in the form of dispositions to act, think, and feel in certain ways.”⁴⁶ Habitus—one’s disposition and deportment, taste and desire—is acquired and embodied throughout one’s lifetime of experiences and through family, education, and other social institutions.

The symbolic violence of postwar Koreanness in South Korea maintains social dominance and hierarchy through the legitimization of certain conditions that North Koreans misrecognize as natural or deserved. A common insult directed at resettled North Koreans is that they are selfish and cold-blooded for having escaped their country alone, leaving behind family members who are likely to be punished for their escape because, in North Korea, defection is considered a political crime. When resettled North Koreans begin to embody these Cold War ideologies as an accurate and deserved representation, and blame themselves—feeling guilt, shame,

or grief—this insult becomes symbolically violent. Hoping to compensate for the guilt of having left behind family members in their home country, resettled North Koreans send remittances to family through an underground broker system. These transnational activities help sustain kinship and rebuild social ties, but in return create complex relationships of solidarity, demands and burdens, and obligations that are embodied violently. These types of sufferings become routinized into everyday violence, or the normalization of violence in everyday life and especially during times of seeming peace.⁴⁷ For the vulnerable, the everyday experience of violence, terror, or death often become routinized to the point of indifference.

Recovering from, overcoming, or undoing violence might be possible, but so is the opposite; despite resettlement, reconciliation, and peace, ongoing forms of violence blur the temporal boundaries between wartime and peacetime. Violence is not just in the very moment when it is enacted.⁴⁸ Experiences of violence and their legacies often extend into the present, and are reproductive and overlapping, challenging normative views of the temporality of violence. Past experiences in China, for example marriage to Chinese men or human rights activists' emphasis on human trafficking, lead to sexualizations of the female body in South Korea and become stereotypes that amount to a continuum of violence. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois write that the "very idea that individuals and nations can heal and ultimately recover from violence falls prey to inappropriate and impoverished medical and psychological metaphors."⁴⁹ As in the case of the North Koreans in South Korea, and for many other refugee populations around the globe, the remembrance of violence in the places from where they have traveled remains vivid and manifests itself through embodied forms including but not limited to dreams, shame, grief, and insecurities. Fear and dread come to be felt inside the body. While not all North Koreans share all these experiences of violence along their journey, the pressures present at every juncture illustrate how violence impacts their resettlement.

Many studies on North Korean defectors, refugees, and migrants come from the frameworks of international security and human rights that document violations of human rights, the effects of famine, the trafficking of North Korean women, and the issue of statelessness in China.⁵⁰ Consequently, studies on resettled North Koreans in South Korea,

particularly in scholarship published in the Korean language, focus overwhelmingly on their psychological health and the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorders.⁵¹ Because these people have reached a “safe haven” characterized as a land of freedom in direct opposition to oppressive North Korea, the central preoccupation in many of these studies is to make sense of the struggles of North Koreans to successfully integrate into South Korea despite hospitable conditions.⁵²

In the Korean context, language operates to enforce the continuum of violence through its failure to communicate the violence. The words for violence in the Korean language are *pokryeok* and *pokhaeng*, both words describing the power (*ryeok*) and act (*haeng*) of brute force (*pok*). The language does not grasp invisible violence. Therefore, it is outside of what Koreans consider to be legitimate, normative categories and conceptions of violence. Linguistically, the types of invisible violence I describe in this book are not easy to grasp, but it is my hope that this ethnography provides a nuanced analysis of the ways that the continuum of violence operates on the Korean peninsula. But I want to be clear that my intention is not to reify North Koreans as tragic, suffering victims who only experience violence, but to use these stories and the theme of violence as a point of departure to explore and understand how they experience citizenship and belonging. These conditions, combined with South Korea’s process of granting citizenship status and rights, the established government support system, and the discourse of shared ethnicity, make this an interesting case to explore the role of violence in the processes of belonging.

CATEGORIES OF IDENTITY

The official South Korean descriptor for North Koreans has undergone changes that have been political in nature.⁵³ In 1997, in response to the North Korean famine and increasing number of North Koreans seeking resettlement, South Korea passed the Act on the Protection and Settlement Support for Residents Escaping from North Korea, using the Korean word *bukhanitaljumin* (resident who escaped North Korea) to emphasize their escape. In 2005, the government changed the official label to *saeteomin* (new settlers), coinciding with South Korea’s engagement policy towards

North Korea (that is, the Sunshine Policy). This new depoliticized label emphasized North Koreans' migration and settlement in a new country. North Koreans living in South Korea have had mixed reactions to the labels of *saeteomin* (new settlers) or *ijuja* (migrant) because they see the migrant label as putting them on the same footing as other, non-Korean, migrant workers in South Korea. In addition, they have argued that the migrant label only aids the Chinese policy of regarding North Korean border-crossers as economic migrants rather than providing them asylum as refugees.

The South Korean government has reversed course and now once again officially uses *bukhanitaljumin* (resident who escaped North Korea) even though the more informal word *talbukja* (North Korean escapee) continues to be widely used in the South Korean public sphere. However, because the syllable *ja* in the Korean language can often be used in negative ways—for example *nosukja* (homeless) or *dokjaeja* (dictator)—many have instead encouraged the use of the word *talbukmin*. The ending syllable *min* carries a more positive meaning and is used in many inclusive words such as *simin* (citizen) and *gukmin* (national).

“Defector,” the most commonly used descriptor in English, is an imperfect translation of the words *bukhanitaljumin*, *talbukja*, or *talbukmin*, carrying problematic Cold War connotations of betrayal and political dissent. Labeling North Koreans as defectors grows increasingly inaccurate when the majority of them are fleeing their country due to conditions of poverty and material deprivation. On the other hand, though many North Koreans are indeed refugees in need of protection—some have been granted refugee status in various countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom—the South Korean government grants citizenship to North Koreans because its Constitution declares North Korea its sovereign territory. Thus, the Korean word for refugee—*nanmin*—is not publicly used to describe resettled North Koreans in South Korea.

As a result of this sensitive linguistic situation, throughout this book I am conscious of my use of labels such as defector, refugee, or migrant as a *sole* category of identity to describe North Koreans who leave their country. Identity, when used as a category of analysis, can have reifying consequences, flattening the multitude of people's experiences.⁵⁴ Others have warned that categories often have a sticky tendency, with the labels having

a lasting impact on individuals.⁵⁵ Despite good intentions, labels can reorder experiences, disenfranchise the vulnerable, and reduce people to passive objects.⁵⁶ Accordingly, I refrain from using defector, refugee, or migrant as a singular identifying category to define the North Korean experience. For clarity, I often use “resettled North Koreans” or “North Koreans in South Korea” to refer to those that have gained South Korean citizenship and live in the country, as well as other descriptors to try to best describe the contextual circumstances.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF HOME

The film *Paris Is Burning* chronicles the members of the several Houses—likened to the fashion industry houses such as Chanel, Gucci, Prada, etc.—who “walked” and competed in the drag balls of New York City in the 1980s. The documentary explores the themes of gender, sexuality, class, and race by closely following the lives of the individuals involved and their desires, expressions of identities, struggles within their homes, material hardships, and future aspirations. These individuals were rejected from their familial homes for their gendered and sexual orientations, expelled from circles of kinship and the physical dwellings that make up the home, and the Houses of the ball circuit provided them with alternative forms of inclusion and belonging. However, these Houses did not replace the domestic, intimate sphere of the home, and Chandan Reddy writes that they were instead “the site from which to remember the constitutive violence of the home, and the location from which to perform the pleasures and demands of alternative living, while at the same time functioning as an ‘interlocutionary device’ between homes and queer subjects.”⁵⁷ The Houses served as liminal entities, in Victor Turner’s classic definition “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”⁵⁸

I use this metaphor of the house to frame the political and national division of the Korean peninsula and the resettlement experiences of North Koreans. The Korean imagination contains a yearning for a whole home that is no longer divided. The divided Korea—believed to be in a temporary and liminal condition awaiting reunion—is a place from which we can

reflect on the violence of citizenship and belonging. Whether one views the idea of the unity of the Korean ethnicity as “natural” or as a product of modernity, there is undeniably a strong belief in ethnic homogeneity that still pervades the Korean peninsula.⁵⁹ State and non-state actors in the two Koreas hold steadfast to the ideology of the “unity of Korean ethnicity” (*han minjok*), a people sharing the “same” blood as brothers and sisters, and a yearning for political reunion. Therefore, arguably the single most important issue for Koreans has been the question of reunification. When North Koreans resettle in South Korea, they are granted juridical citizenship status and rights. However, despite gaining paperwork and physical dwellings, they constantly search for home and a sense of belonging in South Korea.⁶⁰ They navigate the paradox of claims to ethnic homogeneity, all the while being treated as second-class citizens. Resettled North Koreans thus embody a liminal belonging in this divided peninsula.

As a Korean, I was conducting an ethnography of home. Yet, having spent the majority of my upbringing as a diasporic subject outside Korea, I found that my North Korean friends often knew South Korea better than I did, were more familiar with pop culture, and could navigate city life with far more ease than I could. At the same time, my particular experience growing up in East Africa provided me a connection to my North Korean interlocutors. Although we were all ethnically Korean, we felt like outsiders in South Korean society, and we shared similar longings for belonging, imaginations of home, and questions regarding our national identity—who we were and where we belonged (even though our background experiences differed greatly).

The site of this ethnography is in Seoul, the capital city of South Korea, and I travelled to various satellite cities in the neighboring Incheon and Gyeonggi Provinces to visit North Korean interlocutors and friends I came to know through my fieldwork. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork during the summer months of 2010 and 2011, long-term fieldwork from 2012–2014, and have continued sustained research over the years since. It is important to note, as a result, that this research should not be taken as a generalization of the experiences of *all* resettled North Koreans; my research participants left North Korea during a particular historical period following the 1990s famine and arrived in South Korea in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The primary data come from participant observation in the day-to-day lives of resettled North Koreans and life-history interviews with them. I conducted participant observation in three main spaces in which the continuum of violence was made manifest, although I also spent a lot of time with my interlocutors outside of these sites and met other members within their social networks. First, language provided me privilege that granted me access to many spaces and relationships. I was an English teacher and tutor for North Korean students. I taught English to high school seniors in an after-school program at a North Korean alternative school in Seoul. Many of the students' education had been disrupted due to the North Korean famine and their migration to China. Thus, when I met them, they were many years older than the traditional high school student. I also became a tutor to these students and their friends once they entered college in subsequent years. I later came to realize that, by teaching English, I was participating in a larger violent system that requires resettled North Koreans to become South Korean by learning English—a form of cultural capital—to help them attend universities, obtain jobs, and achieve upward social mobility in South Korea.⁶¹

With some of the students I came to know, I also attended and participated in a church in Seoul. The members of the congregation included predominantly resettled North Koreans and a few South Koreans. Aside from the government, churches and religious organizations provide some of the most substantial resources and support to North Koreans resettling to South Korea. Churches are important spaces because they provide economic support, scholarships, and social services to North Koreans as incentives to attend their services and fellowships. Additionally, the evangelical mission of these churches is to bring Christianity to North Koreans.⁶² There is no freedom of religion in North Korea and religious organizations are considered enemies of the state. It is often said that the official “religion” in North Korea is *Kimilsung-ism* (worshipping Kim Il-sung and allegiance to the Kim Dynasty). It is through religious conversion that South Korean evangelicals consider North Koreans saved, healed, and ultimately freed from the sins and evils of North Korea and communism.⁶³

Thirdly, from 2012–2013, I was a researcher with the Seoul-based Database Center for North Korean Human Rights (NKDB) and partici-