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Permalink

Journal
Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review, 1(29)

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Publication Date
2018-12-01

Performing in the "Cultural Borderlands": Gender, Trauma, and Performance Practices of a North Korean Women's Musical Troupe in South Korea

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Abstract

North Korean women encounter traumatic experiences escaping from North Korea. Upon arriving in South Korea, despite being officially welcomed as co-ethnics, many North Korean migrants find that their hopes for a better life are not realized. On the one hand, women arriving from the North are ethnic Koreans and speak the same language as South Koreans. On the other hand, they are in a territory whose culture and society are entirely foreign to them. Against this background, women from North Korea experience considerable trauma in South Korea as they struggle to negotiate new identities as gendered, liminal subjects in a cultural borderland. This article discusses a dance performance by an all-female performing arts troupe, P'yŏngyang Minsok Yesultan, to answer the following questions: How does the performance articulate traumatic and gendered migration experiences? To what extent might performance restore agency for North Korean trauma subjects? By closely engaging with North Korean women's migration experiences and their performance practices in South Korea, the author shows that performance practices represent potentially empowering, affective sites that may open a space for restoration of North Korean women's agency.

Keywords: North Korean migrants, South Korea, gender, trauma, performativity, affect, performing arts

Introduction

In the heart of Seoul, South Korea, a lively audience applauds as an emcee announces a dance performance. A huge overhead screen flickers and shows an enormous, magnified image of the stage. Thirteen brightly dressed North Korean women enter the stage, and their giant images gesture in unison above their heads on the screen as they form two rows. Just as they take their positions on stage, the women in the front row raise their right arms and wave their hands while calling out

to the audience in a high-pitched timbre with the greeting, *"Pan'gapsŭmnida!"* (Pleased to meet you).[1]

Together, they start to sing. They are performing perhaps the best-known North Korean popular song outside North Korea—"Pan'gapsŭmnida." As they sway and gesture, the lyrics welcome and connect ethnic Koreans across the national division.[2] The song's narrative imagines a future day when all Koreans will be reunited, when the natural order on the Korean peninsula will be restored to its rightful state, and when North and South Koreans will join hands, hug, and feast together in celebration.[3]

The performers are part of the musical troupe P'yŏngyang Minsok Yesultan (hereafter, PMY), a group of female North Korean performers that regularly stages North Korean-style performances of music and dance for South Korean audiences (see fig. 1). PMY is one of several Seoul-based performing arts groups composed of women from North Korea, some of whom trained and worked as professional state-supported dancers and musicians in North Korea before migrating.

At first glance, the musical performance offers a hopeful and optimistic vision of a future unified Korea where co-ethnics from North and South live happily together again as one people. However, the reality of life in South Korea for North Korean women casts a long shadow as they grapple with settlement issues, including inequitable social status, a high unemployment rate, depression and anxiety, and prejudice and discrimination.

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[1] In this article, I use the McCune-Reischauer Korean romanization system, except for names spelled differently by the person, publication, entity, or organization. For place names, I use the commonly known spelling—for example, Seoul, rather than Sŏul.

[2] Composed by Lee Jong-o, leader of the North Korean popular band P'ochŏnbo Electronic Ensemble, the song shot to fame in South Korea after it was associated with the commencement of South Korean tour visits to Mt. Kŭmgang in 1998 and subsequently the historic Inter-Korean Summit in 2000 where then-President Kim Dae-jung met the former North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in P'yŏngyang.

[3] Lyrics of "Pan'gapsŭmnida":

Tongp'o yŏrŏbun, hyŏngje yŏrŏbun	Dear brethren, dear brothers
Irŏke mannani pan'gapsŭmnida	Pleased to meet you
Ŏlssa an'go choa usŭmiyo	Let's hug each other and laugh together
Chŏlssa an'go choa nunmurilse	Let's hug each other and cry together
Ŏ hŏhŏ ŏ hŏhŏ hŏhŏ nilliliya	*O hoho o hoho hoho nilliliya*
Pan'gapsŭmnida!	Pleased to meet you!
Tongp'o yŏrŏbun, hyŏngje yŏrŏbun	Dear brethren, dear brothers
Chŏngdaun kŭ sonmok chababopsida	Let's hold each other's hands
Choguk wihan maŭm ttŭgŏuni	Our love for the homeland is strong
T'ongil chanch'inaldo mŏljianne	We will soon be celebrating unification
Ŏ hŏhŏ ŏ hŏhŏ hŏhŏ nilliliya	*O hoho o hoho hoho nilliliya*
Pan'gapsŭmnida!	Pleased to meet you!

Figure 1. P'yŏngyang Minsok Yesultan, a group of female North Korean performers perform "Pan'gapsŭmnida" for a South Korean audience at Seoul Plaza on 19 October, 2015. *Source*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fM2Q-KE3AlM&t=10159s.

Trauma adds further complexity to the lived experiences of North Korean women in South Korea. For many, the journey from North Korea to China and through a third country before settling in South Korea involves deeply traumatic experiences. Anxiety and guilt over loved ones left behind, threats of physical injury and death, abuses at the hands of authoritarian states, inability to access basic services such as health care and education, and traumatic family separations are common. Subsequently, arriving in the South can inflict a second traumatization. Settling in South Korea demands adjusting to an unfamiliar capitalistic system and often brings homesickness, loneliness, and social stigmatization (Chung 2004, 2009; Hong 2005; Cho et al. 2005; Chung, Jeon, and Chung 2006; Jung 2011, 2015; Ryang 2012). Few make it to the South without incurring significant trauma.

In light of these experiences, this article considers the North Korean community in South Korea as a traumatized community. It considers female North Korean refugees' migration experiences and their settlement process in South Korea by focusing on the PMY members and their performance of "Pan'gapsŭmnida" through which they actively negotiate their social position. It places PMY's performance in the context of performance history on the Korean peninsula in order to characterize its presence in the history. The close discussion of the performance of PMY's "Pan'gapsŭmnida" articulates how performance acts connect and transfer affect between performers and the audience. It argues that the PMY members channel their experiences of collective memory and individual trauma through their performances. The performance thus not only reflects the gendered position of the PMY members in both North and South Korea but also becomes an important

cultural site where the members exercise their agency in the given socioeconomic and political conditions.

This study uses an analysis of a video clip of one of the troupe's public performances of "Pan'gapsŭmnida."[4] In addition, I rely upon primary sources such as ethnographic interviews, field notes, participant observation, and discussions with North Korean music and dance performers who are living in South Korea. I collected the data from research trips to South Korea in February 2017, February–March 2018, and October–November 2018. I also draw on data gathered from interviews with North Korean individuals during previous fieldwork trips to South Korea in 2006 and 2007.[5]

I closely analyze one of PMY's performances as a way to explore the multi-coded and complex layers of culture, feeling, meaning, and memory, all of which are grounded in the women's performance and their process of navigating and negotiating with their new living environment. To facilitate a process-focused reading, I locate this analysis conceptually at the intersection of performance theory, gender theory, and trauma theory. I draw on the thinking of leading scholars in these fields including gender theorist Judith Butler, trauma theorists Dominick La Capra and Laura Di Prete, and performance theorists Peggy Phelan, Diana Taylor, Richard Schechner, and Ann Cvetkovich. I also call upon the English and Korean-language texts of Korean scholars who are specialists in the settlement issues of North Koreans in South Korea, including Jung Jin-Heon, Chung Byung-Ho, Choo Hye-Yeon, Kim Yoonyoung, and Sonia Ryang.

After providing some contextualizing background and acknowledging the embeddedness of this particular performance of "Pan'gapsŭmnida" by PMY in the historical and cultural terrain of Korea, I will move on to analyze the performance itself, discussing ways in which it connects and transfers cultural memory and affect between the performers and the audience. Specifically, I investigate how North Korean women's marginalized and gendered experience of collective memory and

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[4] The video clip used for this analysis was removed from YouTube in 2018. However, another recording of the event at which PMY gave this performance is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fM2Q-KE3AlM&t=10159s. PMY's performance begins at 2:46. Regarding this article's use of a video clip as its source, it is worth noting the ongoing dialogue among performance scholars around issues of "authenticity" in analyzing live performance over mediated performance. Philip Auslander (1999) critiques as "sentimental" the notion that contemporary performance exists in the form of liveness. He identifies a "false binary" between live and mediated performance, and asserts that in the age of technology the intimacy and immediacy of performances are equally accessible through formats as video and TV. Jill Dolan (2005), however, prefers live performance over mediated performance, as she still believes in the "energy" and "magic" of being present in the performance space. Whichever viewpoint one subscribes to, neither approach can be said to be "right" or "wrong," since there are theoretical bases that support different viewpoints.

[5] For unknown reasons, PMY has recently been declining to meet with researchers, so I have not yet been able to interview PMY members. Therefore, lack of PMY performers' voices is a deficiency of this article. My analysis of this performance of PMY was, however, enriched by insights gained through spending time with other North Korean performing artists in Seoul, and with South Korean individuals who work with North Korean performers.

trauma both merge and emerge through the affective, embodied practices of PMY's performers on stage, which may empower their social positions.[6]

The Transborder Migration of Women from North to South Korea

North Korean Women's Experiences in North Korea and China

North Korean women who journey to South Korea usually cross at least three national borders.[7] The first leg of the journey involves covert travel within North Korea to get to the Chinese border area, and a perilous crossing of the Tumen or the Yalu river. This trip is typically followed by a lengthy sojourn in China before the women make the arduous journey overland across the Chinese border to a third country, such as Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, or Mongolia, to seek asylum at a South Korean diplomatic mission. After crossing the border into China, North Korean women are criminalized, as China does not recognize them as prima facie refugees as required by the 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees to which the country is a signatory.[8] Considering North Koreans as illegal economic migrants, China forcibly repatriates any who are caught to the North, where they face a period of imprisonment. Reports of deprivation, torture, and even executions abound (see Human Rights Watch 2002, 16-27; Seymour 2005, 26; Kim 2015, 1017; Do et al. 2015; Database Center for North Korean Human Rights 2016).

Ko, Chung, and Oh (2004) posit numerous factors that may contribute to the larger number of women than men who arrive in South Korea. First, according to that study, women are more likely to endure living as illegal migrants in China by marrying Chinese men who have paid marriage brokers to find North Korean brides for them. This phenomenon is, in turn, largely explained by the gender imbalance in China, where men considerably outnumber women. Second, women are more likely to survive in China through doing jobs considered unsuitable for men, such as domestic work or working in markets. Third, North Korean women may be more likely than men to survive in China by participating in the sex industry.[9] By whatever means, North Korean women must find a way to remain hidden in China for long periods of time while waiting for an opportunity to go to South Korea. Among my

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[6] For Diana Taylor, cultural memory is "a practice, an act of imagination and interconnection. … Memory is embodied and sensual, that is, conjured through the senses; it links the deeply private with social, even official practices … memory, like the heart, beats beyond our capacity to control it, a lifeline between past and future" (2003, chap. 3).

[7] Although article focuses on the migration experiences of women, it is important to bear in mind that many men also make this journey.

[8] The convention provides that "No Contracting State shall expel or return [*refouler*] a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UN General Assembly 1951, 137).

[9] As illegal undocumented migrants in China, North Korean women may be duped into incurring debt to brothels, and then forced into paying off the "debt" against their own will through sex work (Ko, Chung, and Oh 2004, 85–91).

research participants, one woman explained that she stayed hidden indoors for two years in China:[10]

We knew someone in Hailong [Jilin Province, China]. I stayed hidden there for two years. Luckily, the rest of my family also made it to Hailong, so we were together at that time. However, we lived in constant fear that, if we went out sometime, we would be caught. So, we couldn't go out, and just waited, waited there. It was a long and stifling two years.

Another North Korean woman shared her story of how Chinese police forcibly separated her from her son:

The armed guards burst in through the door, carrying guns. I grabbed my [newborn] baby and ran...but Hyŏn-Ch'ŏl and another boy were studying in the next room.... I didn't have time to help them.... My heart was pounding and I could hardly breathe.... I asked a man to go inside and get Hyŏn-Ch'ŏl, but it was too late; he had already been taken.

Hyŏn-Ch'ŏl spent three months in a Chinese prison until his aunt, after a weeklong journey from North Korea on foot, was finally able to locate and identify him and bribed a prison guard to have him released.

Around the turn of the twenty-first century, channels of migration from North to the South Korea became more organized. Networks of paid Korean-Chinese or North Korean brokers and Christian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) established themselves in China. They provided assistance such as protection from Chinese authorities, help in gaining a safer passage out of China, and facilitating the reunions of family members with relatives in the South. These networks became known as the "underground railway" (Jung 2011).[11]

The underground railway assists mainly North Korean women to gain passage from China to the third country, and onward to South Korea. As these women enter third countries illegally, they may again face imprisonment or be forced return to China and North Korea. Nevertheless, many successfully complete the journey to the South. Currently, about 32,000 North Koreans are living in South Korea, and 23,000 of them are women (Ministry of Unification 2018).

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[10] Translations of excerpts from interview transcripts are my own.

[11] It should be noted not that all the effects of the underground railway system are positive. North Korean individuals sometimes incur large debts to brokers, which they need to pay off after arriving in South Korea using the living allowance provided by the South Korean government. Also, although churches provide assistance, they also put pressure on North Koreans to convert to Christianity.

Arriving in South Korea: Re-Traumatization

After arriving in South Korea, many North Korean women find themselves traumatized again as they attempt to settle in an unfamiliar social environment while encountering a stigmatizing, patriarchal, and ambivalent gaze from South Korean society (Chung 2004, 2009; Hong 2005; Cho et al. 2005; Chung, Jeon, and Chung 2006; Jung 2011; Ryang 2012). North Korean women have the right to South Korean citizenship after arriving in South Korea, but before officially joining South Korean society they face a long series of stages that comprise the settlement system administered by the South Korean government. As soon as they arrive, North Korean women face a security assessment by the National Intelligence Service at its Joint Interrogation Center, where they can be held for up to six months. The government claims that this procedure is necessary for the protection of the North Korean migrants themselves. Once released, each individual is assigned to one of the government's gender-segregated residential resettlement facilities, known as *Hanawŏn*. Entering the women's facility, newly arrived North Korean women undergo a program to equip them with basic skills and knowledge to live and work in South Korea.

After completion of the *Hanawŏn* stage, these women's lives in South Korean society begin, although there are a number of other processes—assignation of a personal police minder, provision of an apartment and living allowance, counseling services, and education and employment assistance for the next five years. The completion of arrival formalities represents just the beginning of North Korean women's struggles to find a place in South Korean society for North Korean women, partly due to a lack of understanding by the new compatriots.

During my fieldwork, I met and interviewed a number of South Korean women, asking them about their perceptions of North Koreans who have come to the South. Generally, the South Korean interviewees displayed a lack of general knowledge about the North Korean community in South Korea and the issues that North Korean women face in settling into their society. When asked to explain her impressions of North Koreans in South Korea, one South Korean woman (who had never met a North Korean) responded with the following answer:

When I think of North Koreans, I associate them with prison. And [I think of] the Korean War—of Communists, even though they are supposedly screened [on arrival in South Korea]. But because they are from North Korea, I—even though I have never met a North Korean—for some reason I am a bit afraid of them. I think it's because they... they seem a little dangerous. Because they are not from our culture, they are a bit shunned. To speak frankly, I think a lot of [South Koreans] think this way.

North Korean women's position in South Korean society is distinctive, as they exist within the context of a supposedly ethnically homogeneous, yet divided, land—a factor that complicates the acculturation process. They are ostensibly welcomed as co-ethnics under an official ideology of unification and at the same

time paradoxically rejected as polluting outsiders.[12] South Korea discursively constructs itself and its people as a modern, free, powerful, and sophisticated nation by setting up an oppositional binary that constructs North Korea and its people as its polar opposite—anachronistic, totalitarian, weak, and uncultured—while sustaining a myth of being one nation.

As North Koreans lack phenotypic markers that distinguish them physically from South Koreans, discursive tropes are projected onto the bodies of North Koreans with the consequence of othering the community (Choo 2006). North Korean men are presented as patriarchal and authoritarian, and North Korean women are seen as victims, in opposition to affluent and sophisticated South Koreans. The way to be accepted into South Korean society is to lose the markers of North Korean-ness (for example, accent, dress, and mannerisms) and adopt markers of South Korean modernity. The more thoroughly a North Korean body makes itself culturally readable by performing South Korean social norms, the more readily social approval may be granted to the individual, thus bestowing "ethnicized citizenship" (Choo 2006).[13] Sonia Ryang writes of a "process of de-humanization" of North Koreans in South Korea, as subjects are rendered Other through unequal and hegemonic structures of power (2012, 15).

One of the ways such discursive constructions are disseminated is through mainstream media, and we need look no further than the popular South Korean TV program *Now on My Way to Meet You* (*Ije mannarŏ gamnida*), which showcases North Korean women being interviewed on screen, to see examples of how South Korean popular media represents North Korean women. The program adopts the popular *namnambungnyŏ* trope (in the South, it is the men who are attractive; in the North, it is the women) (Koo 2016, 396). This perspective is seen in the program's constant framing of North Korean women as *t'albuk minyŏ* (defector beauties) Yet, at the same time, the program frames North Korean women as struggling, damaged, and helpless victims, broadcasting the tears of North Korean women and interpellating the show's North Korean female stars into the role of exoticized Other (Epstein and Green 2013). Eun Ah Cho critiques this TV program's problematic representations of North Korean women. According to Cho, the program enforces South Korean patriarchal power over its female North Korean stars by compelling them to act out pre-formed ideas of North Korean women's characteristics "in the absence of the 'real' North Korea" (2018, 26).

Ontological and taxonomical uncertainties are illustrated in the opaqueness of the official terminology used to name North Korean individuals in the South. Until

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[12] The fear of outsiders as "polluting" is bound up in anxieties that an influx of outsiders will dilute national identity and purity. That is, ideas of original "pure" race, ethnicity, or culture are polluted by inward migration of outsiders (see Douglas 1966).

[13] For North Koreans in South Korea, social acceptance or rejection is predicated on earning what Hae-Yeon Choo (2006) terms "ethnicized citizenship." This concept is based on ethnic markers, rather than phenotypic difference. Earning "ethnicized citizenship" requires subjects to erase markers of North Korean-ness and successfully adopt markers of South Korean norms; accent, dress, self-presentation, and other signs of capitalist modernity are rewarded through "cultural citizenship."

the early 1990s, the term *kwisunyongsa* (heroic returnees) was officially used. The term connoted the superiority of the South over the North during the Cold War. When larger numbers started arriving and the Cold War ended, the nomenclature changed to *pukhan it'alchumin* (escapees from North Korea) as the government started seeing them as financial burdens on society. After the turn of the twenty-first century, they were referred to as *saet'ŏmin*, (new settlers), which removed perceived negative connotations implicit within the character *t'al* (escape). [14] Perhaps the most widely used colloquial term for North Koreans living in the South has been *t'albukcha*, which is still popularly used today. However, this term has been criticized not only because of *t'al*, but also because of the word's use of *cha*, which implies disrespect (Chung 2014, 337; Jung 2015, 120). The English terms for North Koreans in South Korea have changed in parallel with the Korean terms. Lately, "migrants" and "settlers" are commonly used in preference over "defectors."

During my fieldwork, I asked North Korean interviewees what they thought of these terms. All of them expressed reservations about the terminology used to name them. Several expressed strong negative reactions to certain terms. Some participants asserted a preference for the colloquial (but still problematic) term *t'albukcha* over the official terminology. Consider the following comments by two participants:

I hate the term *it'alchumin.* It sounds like we are foreign migrants. We are Korean, not some kind of foreigners. *T'albukcha* is preferable to *it'alchumin*.

The term *saet'ŏmin* was invented by the government.... The best term to use is *t'albukcha*, because we are in fact people who escaped from North Korea.

As it navigates ever-shifting sociopolitical landscapes, the North Korean community in South Korea continues to resist signification. South Korea constructs its North Korean community in highly ambivalent terms as it simultaneously welcomes them (as co-ethnics) and rejects them (as "polluting outsiders"). I assert that North Korean women in South Korea exist in a borderland in both literal and figurative senses. Not only do North Korean women physically cross at least three national borders during their arduous journey to the South, but after arrival they are assigned a marginal status on the borders of society, with the possibilities for political agency suppressed. [15]

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[14] These are just three examples of varied terminology that has been used over the years by changing governments in official discourse. As of December 2018, the Ministry of Unification's website uses *pukhan it'alchumin*. For a more comprehensive exposition of this issue, see Chung (2014) and Jung (2015).

[15] Providing and adequate exposition on agency in this article is not possible, as defining "agency" is complex, difficult, and highly contested in continuing debates. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) suggest three elements as constitutive of agency: (1) the iterational element (selective reactivation by actors of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity, thereby giving stability and order to social universes and

Marked and Unmarked Bodies

For feminist scholar Peggy Phelan, the politics of difference is inscribed on the body, exposing the "marked body" as "Other" and incurring censure from the forces upholding hegemonic norms. Removing these markers permits subjects to pass unnoticed by regulative forces of national identity (Phelan 1993). Markers of North Korean identity expose North Korean women's bodies as different. The way of adopting South Korean cultural norms is through the body, in corporeal enactments. North Korean origin can be revealed through perceived non-normative modes of behavior, appearance, accent and speech, and dress. As mentioned earlier, adopting South Korean cultural markers (such as cultivating Seoul accents or dressing in South Korean fashion) allows some North Koreans in South Korea to pass as "unmarked bodies."

Seeking to pass as unmarked, some North Korean women seek to erase markers of North Korean-ness and adopt markers of South Korean-ness, such as normative accent, dress, and self-presentation. Those who do not or cannot adopt such South Korean cultural markers find that South Korean society assigns them to the very lowest social status (Sands 2008). Some women may attempt to avoid stigmatization by hiding their North Korean identity in other ways, such as practicing identity switching and claiming to be ethnic Korean-Chinese in order to account for their non-normative accents and appearance (Sands 2008).[16]

One North Korean woman described to me her experiences of encountering discrimination after arriving in the South, and of her preference to try to pass as ethnic Korean-Chinese:

North Korea has been perceived as the enemy.… If you say you are North Korean, they think of you as being "reds"—Communists [*ppalgaengi*]—and worry that you might be under surveillance or something and they often won't hire you. Personally, it was more comfortable for me to say I was from China. Also, if you say you are from North Korea, people ask questions like, "What do North Koreans eat?" … Of course we just eat food just like people here do. But South Koreans seem to be really curious about what we eat, and think that we eat something different. Say I meet ten people in one day.… They all say the same things to me. Their curiosity about us

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helping to sustain identities, interactions, and institutions over time; (2) the projective element (the imaginative generation by actors of possible future trajectories of action); and (3) the practical-evaluative element (the capacity of actors to make practical judgments among alternative possible trajectories of action). Of course, as soon as concepts are arranged into essentialized categories, other problems emerge, keeping the meaning of "agency" ever-elusive. For the purposes of this analysis only, I use the concept of "agency" to refer to the power and ability of an individual or community to freely determine their own identity, life choices, and actions.

[16] Although ethnic Korean-Chinese also occupy low social status, this group is perceived as having relatively higher social status than North Koreans.

creates a gap—a "them and us" mentality. People say we shouldn't judge others, but privately people do judge us. They respond, "Oh, I see…. Is that so?" but I know that behind my back… So I just say I am Chinese.

Such general prejudice toward the North Korean community is compounded by the problematic status of women in South Korean society. In both Koreas, neo-Confucian tradition still affects the social status of women. In South Korea, regulative power structures project ideals of desired femininity and purity onto the bodies of women. The existence of this construction however, is necessarily contingent on the co-construction of a binary opposite—a counter-construction of women subjects as sexualized and promiscuous. Modern South Korean discourse around North Korean women invokes positions on reductive subjects that include helpless victims (Choo 2006), idealized beauties (Epstein and Green 2013), sexual objects (Park 2016), potential carriers of disease (Ma 2006), economic failures (Sands 2008), and potential criminals. Imagined South Korean projections of North Korean women's beauty and inner traits are generalized, publicly mediated, and inscribed on North Korean women's bodies.

P'yŏngyang Minsok Yesultan and Performativity

P'yŏngyang Minsok Yesultan, a performing arts troupe of female North Korean performers based in Seoul, was established in 2002 with fewer than ten members. The troupe's director, Ch'u Myŏng-Shin, had worked as a music teacher in the North Korean city of Wŏnsan before arriving in South Korea. Settling in South Chŏlla Province, he established a small performing arts group on the encouragement of a church elder. After completing his settlement process in Chŏlla, C'hu moved to Seoul and established a new troupe with a different name, merging with another troupe in 2007 under the name P'yŏngyang Minsok Yesultan.

Currently, the troupe has about twenty-five performers. As a listed social enterprise whose mission is to "reduce the cultural differences between South and North" and "create a culture for unification,"[17] it receives funding from several sources including private companies, the South Korean Ministry of Sports and Tourism, and the Seoul Municipal Government. The group stages about ninety performances per year. Its repertoire is a mixture of North Korean songs, South Korean popular songs and old folk songs that originated before national division, and dance performances and instrumental music played on the guitar, accordion, or drums (Koo 2016).

Some members of PMY worked in North Korea as pofessional musicians and dancers. In North Korea, children as young as five years old who show potential are selected from schools to receive accelerated training in performing arts. According to Hyeŭn Sin (2015), the majority of PMY performers received this form of training, going on to join government-run performing arts troupes as professional performers before leaving the North. The artists have to retrain quite extensively after joining

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[17] See P'yŏngyang Minsok Yesultan website at http://www.bhp.or.kr/new/intro.bak.php.

PMY in South Korea, in order to transition from the previous state-controlled propaganda-based performance model to the commercial model under which PMY operates.

One of the major reasons artists sign up with PMY is to generate extra income. Performers receive payment for their work, but not in the form of regular salaries. They are paid per performance, meaning that much of their annual income is earned during the peak season, which runs from May to October (Sin 2015). Therefore, rather than being a primary source of income, payment from PMY performances supplements allowances already received from the government, churches, or both. Sin (2015) notes that there is a considerable turnover of artists in the field, as they often switch between competing troupes if offered higher pay. Sin also points out that some performers regard their work with PMY as a temporary stage while they plan and save for their future goals.

PMY performs traditional Korean dance and modern North Korean-style dance, with choreography influenced by the renowned choreographer Ch'oe Sŭng-Hŭi.[18] The troupe also performs traditional dance pieces such as the knife dance (*k'alch'um*) and numerous North Korean songs. The troupe selects its North Korean musical repertoire quite freely (Sin 2015). However, the South Korean National Security Law proscribes the performing of songs with lyrics promoting the North Korean leadership and ideology. When necessary, PMY gets around this by changing the lyrics; it performs the same music while removing any content that promotes the North Korean political system (Sin 2015).

Other repertoire is taken from North Korean popular music or film soundtracks that are already well known by South Korean audiences. Examples include songs such as "Hwitparam" (Whistle), "Yŏsŏngŭn kkotch'irane" (Women are flowers), and "Simjange namŭn saram" (The person who remains in my heart). The vocal repertoire also includes prewar pan-Korean classics such as "Arirang" (Arirang), "Toraji" (Bellflower), and "Kohyangŭi pom" (Hometown spring). To appeal to their South Korean audiences, some of the repertoire is selected from popular twentieth-century South Korean music, or K-pop. PMY performances reach wider audiences by catering to the different tastes and age groups.

Generally, though, the North Korean repertoire is dominant (Sin 2015), as PMY's image of being a troupe of "North Korean" performers is an important way of marketing itself to South Korean audiences. For example, the performers sing in a distinct vocal style that is unfamiliar to South Korean listeners. *Chuch'e ch'angpŏp* (self-reliance singing method) is a stylized, shrill, and mannered style of singing with a rapid vibrato that was developed in the 1970s as a national singing style in line with Social Realist aesthetics and North Korean *Chuch'e* (self-reliance) ideology (Koo 2016).

On the surface, the PMY performance of "Pan'gapsŭmnida" analyzed in this article celebrates the most optimistic vision of a future unified Korea, where

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[18] Ch'oe Sŭng-Hŭi (1911–1969) was an eminent Korean dancer and choreographer. Born in Seoul, she first studied dance in Japan. After liberation from Japanese colonial rule, she moved to North Korea with her family. There, she established a dance school and developed a style of dancing that had a major impact on North Korean dance.

co-ethnics from North and South greet one another with *"Pan'gapsŭmnida!"* and live happily together. South Korean public policy is still framed around long-term hopes of unification. However, many young South Koreans feel highly ambivalent about the prospect of unification, seeing North Korea as more and more disconnected from their own lives and unification as a threat to South Korean standards of living (Pak 2018; Wong 2018). Moreover, recent reports indicate that more than half the North Koreans in South Korea are pessimistic about unification ("More Than Half of North Korean Defectors" 2017). Thus the question of whether PMY's performance of hope for unification in "Pan'gapsŭmnida" is based on anachronistic fantasy. Is it simply maintaining a sentimental artifice that clashes with a bleak reality? To explore such questions, I next consider how affect and performativity function to transfer and share cultural memory between PMY performers and viewers.

Trauma and "Performance Scenarios"

Trauma theorists maintain that trauma has significant implications for a given community's well-being. Trauma is an overpowering force that shatters subjects' understandings of the world and leaves them haunted by intrusive memories, dreams, and other trauma-related symptoms. Moreover, the effects are strongly corporeal, and are worn inside the trauma subject's very flesh (Di Prete 2006). Neil J. Smelser (2004, 41) describes trauma as being "embedded" and "indelible" in the personality.

For Dominick La Capra, traumatic events numb the senses at the moment of impact—the body is only concerned with dealing with the immediate situation. Only after a period of latency or initial denial is the true impact felt, at which time "it is immediately repressed, split off, or disavowed," until traumatic memory can be adequately "worked through" (La Capra 1996, 174). According to Patrick Duggan and Mick Wallis, trauma subjects can become trapped in an iterative cycle of reliving their disturbing experiences, "repeatedly … acting out words, situations, and actions from the trauma event" (2011, 6).

For these theorists, trauma silences those who experience it, as it lies so far out of what one knows about the world that it cannot be adequately described through language. Trauma thus creates a "crisis of representation" (Leys 2000, 266) because one's narrative self is ruptured by the terrible traumatic event. The structures on which one usually depends— such as seeking the counsel of others, psychotherapy, witnessing practices, or expressing feelings—collapse and lead trauma subjects to carry the unresolved pain locked within themselves.

However, the fact that North Korean women experience considerable trauma during and after their migration to South Korea leaves us with a question: If so-called unresolved trauma is silencing, then what should we make of PMY's performance of "Pan'gapsŭmnida"? An initial viewing may support interpretations of it as an emotionally empty performance; the performers do not seem free to express signs of individual or collective emotional expression, improvisation, or political positionality. But what if we approach "Pan'gapsŭmnida" through Richard Schechner's theorization of theater as "is performance" and "as performance?" "Is

performance" refers to theater as it is perceived at its surface level—a rehearsed and staged production of a certain genre of theater, song, or dance. "As performance," however, allows us to approach theater as a highly political, multi-coded social drama—replete with corporeal articulations of culture, politics, history, gender, identity, race, class, emotion, and feelings as they intersect and play out in a performance (Schechner 2013, 38–40).

Considering "Pan'gapsŭmnida" "as performance," I borrow from performance scholar Diana Taylor's concept of "performance scenarios" as defined in her book, *The Archive and the Repertoire*. At the core of Taylor's theorization of performance is a shift in focus from the dominant, textual, empirical, and archival tradition within Western academia. She demonstrates the performance *scenario* as a conceptual tool that allows researchers to move beyond seeing all the work as text and concentrate on decoding the transfer of knowledge through bodily signs and codes (Taylor 2003, 1–52). The idea of the performance scenario is linked to Butlerian gender performativity, in which subjects reflexively perform or act out iterated copies of socially prescribed (and punitively enforced) gender norms in embodied ways—what Butler calls "doing gender" (Butler 1990, 43). In Taylor's conceptualization of bodily performance, Butlerian performativity takes on a meta-form, extending beyond gender to encompass reflexively performed iterations of a wide range of prescribed and regulated historical social and cultural norms. These norms manifest themselves in scenarios that compel individuals to act out subject positions corporeally—through both public artistic performances and quotidian social performances (Gindt 2007).

Like Butler's concept of gender, the performance scenario is a tool of regulative power. It is a socially regulated and enforced construction that is structured in a predictable, formulaic, and iterable fashion. A performance scenario can be repeated anywhere by anybody—but only within a socially restricted specific historical, cultural, and political context. Stretching back through time, histories, and cultures, there is no one simple, easily traceable origin for each scenario. With every iteration, the scenario changes slightly in terms of its form and content.[19]

As gender can be performed, so, too, can ethnicity, race, history, identity and cultural memory, and the body is central to the transmission of all of these. Cultural memory is shaped by ethnicity and gender, and bodies are "mapped by racialized and gendered practices of individual and collective identity" (Taylor 2003, 86).

I suggest that politics of gender and identity are implicit in the performance scenarios—in the archival "DNA" (Taylor 2003, 171) coded within and expressed

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[19] One useful example of a performance scenario given by Taylor is the "scenario of discovery"—the colonial encounter between colonizer and colonized, which has been continuously repeated in different contexts throughout human history. Taylor delves into Columbus's "discovery" of South America, with the arrival of the fleet on the land, hoisting of the Spanish flag, unfurling of banners, and reciting of the official declaration comprising the performance through which the colonizers enacted power over the colonized (Taylor 2003, 55–62). Scenarios have application across different cultures and historical trajectories, as we can see from the scenario of discovery that has played out over again in the Americas, Australia and New Zealand, Africa, Europe, and Asia.

through the bodies of the PMY troupe members. I posit that two scenarios play out in their performance of *"Pan'gapsŭmnida."* Based on Taylor's theory and my own previous research on North Koreans living in South Korea, I suggest the following scenarios:

1) Purity and sexualization of women's bodies: Dual construction of North Korean women's bodies as representing a pure untouched beauty from a lost and better past of Korea juxtaposed with their commodification as being sexually available.

2) Ambivalent acceptance and rejection: Paradoxical social acceptance of North Korean women by South Koreans (as "co-ethnics") juxtaposed with rejection of them as "polluting outsiders."

As mentioned earlier, South Korean discourse constructs North Korean women as simultaneously pure and corrupt. Through this binary, North Korean women are on one hand interpellated as pure and innocent reminders of a lost past, but on the other hand they are fetishized as an exotic Others (Koo 2016). In the video of "Pan'gapsŭmnida," we can see this binary construction performatively cited. The singers in the front row cite tropes of purity and innocence, swaying very gently and barely moving their bodies. They take up as little space as possible, and look almost identical to one another in terms of hair, makeup, and color. Covered neck to toe in the same red *hanbok* (traditional-style Korean dresses), they show hardly any bare skin, portraying an idealized image of North Korean femininity. Their gestures and movements are very limited, giving a two-dimensional quality to their bodily movements rather than a feeling of three-dimensional wholeness.

By contrast, the dancers in the second row dance vigorously, using their whole bodies. They too are dressed uniformly, but in contrast to their singing counterparts, they wear short, sleeveless, tasseled cabaret-style dresses with fringes that twirl and bounce to the rhythmical twisting of their bodies. Their outfits expose bare skin, in juxtaposition with the reserved presentation of the singers. In their hands, the dancers clutch bunches of flowers that they use as props when they circle their arms in the air above their heads. Showing flashes of skin behind the placid movements of the singers, their arms, shoulders, and legs become hyper-visible, attracting the audience's attention as the camera magnifies their images on the huge screen.

Here we can see a double-codedness within the performance scenario as the artists cite purity on the one hand—with the conservative dress and movements of the first row appealing to mythical notions of North Korean women's purity—and sexuality on the other, with the movements of the dancers in the second row appealing to less "chaste" expectations of North Korean women's sexuality.[20]

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[20] Performativity helps to explain seemingly conflicting forces within the performance, such as PMY dancers iterating sexuality while they are associated with the church in South Korea (see Jung 2015, 94). Acting out of hegemonic norms is performative—and therefore largely situated at a preconscious level (see Butler 1993, 20).

The second scenario, that of ambivalent acceptance and rejection, is also located within the performance. To navigate this scenario, it is useful to take a small diversion to some personal communications I had with South Korean individuals who had viewed a video clip of the performance. The performance elicited an emotional response from some of the viewers, who expressed revulsion at seeing "vulnerable" North Korean women being commodified for South Koreans' pleasure on the stage. Some seemed to see the performance as ridiculous—a distasteful display of bodies, garish colors, and tasteless dance moves to bad music. A number of viewers openly laughed at the performance.[21]

What elicited these uncomfortable reactions? I posit that the performance triggered affective responses in the viewers as they witnessed North Korean women's bodies performing on stage. The viewers subliminally recognized or misrecognized themselves in the performance. Phelan asserts that "seeing the other is a form of self-representation, for in looking at/for the Other, we seek to represent ourselves to ourselves" (1993, 21). The performers' significations did not produce a wholly recognizable Korean "self," but rather an imitation of it—a pastiche of self (see Butler 1990, 188). The viewers were, I suggest, reacting to North Korean women's bodies on display as "cultural artifact, sexual object, as threatening alterity, as scientific specimen, as living proof of radical difference" (Taylor 2003, 67).

Are the performers therefore trapped in endless repetition of regulated social tropes, deprived of human agency? Judith Butler, Ann Cvetkovich, and bell hooks offer clues to answering this question. Butler (1990) illuminates the insidious mechanism of regulative power over bodies, but she also complicates assumptions that this power is universal and absolute. She reminds us that hegemonic power has weaknesses at its boundaries. As such, bodies are not necessarily trapped in absolute disempowerment—subjects can and do find spaces for resisting. Cvetkovich (1993) has questioned the received understandings of trauma as a pathology that must be resolved by "working through." She suggests that affective sites of trauma may afford an alternative, melancholic space in which collective voices can form. hooks (1990) agrees, asserting that an existence at the margins—in cultural borderlands—can potentially open affective sites of resistance.

Utopian Performatives

In conducting a performance reading of PMY's "Pan'gapsŭmnida," we must acknowledge that the transfer of cultural knowledge and memory through PMY's performances flows in more than one direction. While PMY performances transmit embodied gendered cultural memory from the performers to South Korean audience members, the audience itself is complicit and actively participates in the exchange.

South Koreans, too, carry the weight of cultural traumas experienced through war and national division, passed on through generations. As they listen, dance, sing along, and clap, the audience participates in the performance and

[21] Laughter can manifest as a cultural reaction in social situations in Korea in which subjects feel unexpected embarrassment or awkwardness.

positions itself politically in relation to the performers. While PMY's North Korean members perform from a position of otherness, South Korean viewers gaze at them from a position of relative privilege. Yet both the performers and the spectators alike are affectively implicated within the performance's expression of shared ethnic and cultural identity.

Appreciating this moment of affective sharing between performers and viewers is, I suggest, key to exploring the restorative potential of agency for the performers. For it is in these moments of performative, shared intersubjectivity, or what Jill Dolan terms "utopian performatives" (2005), that a community might find hope for transformation. As Dolan maintains, utopian performatives produce moments of "*communitas*" (see also Turner 1969) that emotionally bind the performers and the spectators together, creating an affective space where collective emotion and vision for a different, promising, and better future can emerge.

The collective cultural memories resonating within the performance generate a parallel epistemology; at this point, it does not matter that the popular discourse of shared ethnicity may be an imagined one, or that people feel ambivalent about unification. The level of intentionality on the part of the artists is neither here nor there because this is an immanent enactment, a collective and embodied affect. The audience's perceptions are difficult to know, because many individual spectators' responses to a given performance cannot be easily identified, pinned down, and archived (Dolan 2005).

Through such ambivalence, the performance resists any easy decipherability, as it reveals multiple unravelings of signified meaning. This quality of resistance speaks to performativity's multi-codedness, located under the surface—preconscious sites of affect, of marked/unmarked bodies, of class and social status, and of gender, trauma, and collective cultural memory. This very deconstruction of meaning implicit in the performance shifts the locus of power to the interstices—the in-between spaces of cultural borderlands. It is in these ephemeral intersections, infoldings, and unfoldings that the participants in the performance may find emancipatory potential (see Butler 1988; Cvetkovich 2003; hooks 1990).

The utopian moment is ephemeral, a fleeting and shimmering momentary process that appears and disappears and is never finished. Nevertheless it is very real, for, according to Angelika Bammer, "The utopian is powerfully real in the sense that hope and desire (and even fantasies) are real, never 'merely' fantasy. It is a force that moves and shapes history" (quoted in Dolan 2005, 7). I posit that a utopian performative unfolds in PMY's performance of "Pan'gapsǔmnida"—in its invocation of togetherness, traumatic history, and grieving, in its yearning for long-awaited unification of divided peoples. For example, when the performers dance and sing, "Let's hug each other and laugh together / Let's hug each other and cry together /… Our love for the homeland is strong / We will soon be celebrating unification," they produce and transmit affective resonance.

The connection between the performers and the audience interrupts and momentarily ruptures matrices of hegemonic power. It suggests a symbolic bridging of Korean political, historical, and cultural antagonisms. It collectively illuminates a utopian vision of a better future, calling up ghosts of shared mourning and longing.

Through invoking a utopian moment, the performers and audience briefly *re-script* the received narratives of nation and division to glimpse another narrative.

Conclusion

Gendered and traumatic experiences are key factors that shape the life trajectories of North Korean women in South Korea. Not only have North Korean women in South Korea incurred substantial trauma during their migration journey, but after arrival in the South they are re-traumatized as they are simultaneously welcomed and rejected, discursively interpellated into subaltern subject positions and allocated to the borderlands of society. These dynamics are contained within PMY's performance of "Pan'gapsŭmnida," which functions on a multiplicity of levels.

On one level, traumatic experience silences and removes channels for expression of political agency by North Korean women in South Korea. We can perceive such a dynamic playing out in PMY's multi-coded performance of "Pan'gapsŭmnida" where, throughout the performance, PMY performers corporeally iterate two performance scenarios, which are grounded in binary hegemonic social norms projected onto the bodies of North Korean women. The first scenario constructs North Korean women in South Korea simultaneously as pure and clean "defector beauties," and as sexually available objects for the patriarchal gaze. The second scenario paradoxically constructs North Koreans in South Korea as welcomed co-ethnics and simultaneously rejects them as polluting outsiders. At this level, the PMY performers seem trapped into performatively citing these scenarios, removing political agency for these women.

On another level, the performance unlocks space for affective restoration of agency for the performers that is located in the interstices between essentialized subject categories. PMY performers draw on embodied cultural and historical memory of North Korean identity, which they combine by performing South Korean social norms to create a hybridized and liminal performance that holds empowering potential. The artists create a momentary, yet real, utopian performative through building moments of *communitas* between North Korean performers and South Korean viewers. Based on collective longing for unification, this intersubjective, ephemeral, and multi-coded moment of utopian performativity brings symbolic restorative potential as it articulates an expression of feelings—of shared pain and trauma, longing, love, and hope for a better future.

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Iain Sands is a PhD candidate in Korean Studies at Stockholm University. The research for this article was supported by an Academy of Korean Studies [KSPS] Grant funded by the South Korean government [MOE] [AKS 2015-INC-2230003].