



Gendered Migration and Labor of Female Refugees before and after the Korean War

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Abstract

This study investigates North Korean refugees' experiences and their implications as part of a process of reconstructing the destruction and loss caused by the Korean War. In particular, this study focuses on women who migrated from North Korea to South Korea and labored in the settlement projects. Migration between North and South in a divided political system was a path by which the aims of the two newly founded nations and the choices of individual agents interlinked and crisscrossed. The refugees' reasons for migration were complicated and involved oppression by the socialist system in the North as well as familial and personal motivations. Furthermore, many were involuntarily evacuated due to military operations. After the war, resettlement projects were carried out in South Korea to incorporate refugees into society. During this time, women from North Korea struggled to survive and, in particular, to protect their families formed after marriage. They also worked hard to earn a living in resettlement areas after the war, laboring out of a will to survive, devotion to their families, and in an effort to overcome obstacles.

Keywords: Korean War, North Korean refugee, 38th parallel, Jeju Island, resettlement project, self-support

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Introduction

Currently in South Korea, acceptance of refugees from outside the country is an important social issue. Although many people think it has never been a major social issue, there have in fact been millions of refugees to South Korea going back to before the Korean War. After liberation from Japan at the end of World War II, Korea was divided into two separate governments and then experienced the Korean War (1950–1953). After liberation in 1945, many Koreans who had gone abroad during the colonial period returned to Korea, and their return was the starting point for building an independent nation. Particularly during the initial period of national division and then war, there was much migration between the two Koreas, but the number of North Koreans who migrated to South Korea was much higher than those from the South who went North. There were approximately 2,860,000 internal refugees after the Korean War armistice of June 1953.¹ Among these, 830,000 refugees were refugees to the South from North Korea, which accounts for the second highest wave of migration following the refugees from Seoul during the Korean War. During the Cold War, in ideological confrontation with communist North Korea, South Korea emphasized that communist oppression and North Korea's provocation of the Korean War had caused refugees to migrate to South Korea. However, many of these refugees moved from North to South for familial and personal reasons. Over the course of the Korean War, moreover, many people unwillingly vacated their hometowns and fled due to military operations by the United Nations and orders by the South Korean government.

Previous studies have focused on the journeys of North Korean refugees and their subsequent lives in South Korea (Cha 2015; Cha and Kong 2010; G. Kim 1999; Soo Ja Kim 2009; A. Kim 2016; Yoon 2016). These studies have pointed out how North Korean refugees faced different circumstances from South Koreans, and their lives and experiences after the war were different as well. Among North Korean refugees, people whose hometowns

1. UN Command, Civil Assistance and Economic Affairs-Korea 1952.7.1.–1953.6.30, p. 9, REFUGEES IN REPUBLIC OF KOREA 30 JUNE 1953 (source: UNCACK).

were in northern regions above the armistice line were under the political system of the North during the period between independence and the Korean War (1945–1950). But unlike other internal refugees in the South, they could not return to their homes even after the armistice. The Korean government called these people “non-returnable refugees” (*bokgwi bulneung nanmin*) (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 1961, 304–409). In society and amongst themselves, they were also referred to as “displaced persons” (*silhyangmin*), an indication that they had been cut off from their hometowns.

In many cases, North Korean refugees formed villages with fellow refugees from the same hometown or region through two different processes. In one, refugee villages naturally formed in certain areas where the refugees had settled, such as in Busan or Sokcho. In the other, new villages for refugees were formed when the South Korean government, with assistance from US aid organizations, carried out resettlement projects. During the Korean War, the South Korean government and US aid organizations established the Resettlement Project for North Korean refugees. The project began in 1952 in the countryside and provided refugees with food relief and housing materials. They were given opportunities to reclaim wasteland and mudflats to form into farmland. The purpose of the project was reconstruction and development through self-support.² This project, which continued into the early 1960s, was an essential aid measure in South Korean society.³

In line with previous studies, this article focuses specifically on female refugees. In particular, it investigates why and how female refugees migrated from North to South Korea. Secondly, it examines those refugees’ lives in South Korea after the end of the Korean War. Women refugees had different experiences from men in terms of reasons for abandoning their hometowns,

2. RG 554, AGENDA Joint ROK-UNCACK Resettlement Committee, 1952.3.15; AGENDA Joint ROK-UNCACK Resettlement Committee, 1953.3.29; Minutes of Sub-Committee Meeting on Tax Exemption for Resettling Farmers, 1952.4.2.-4.3; Report of the Seventh Meeting of the Joint ROK-UNCACK Resettlement Committee, 1952.4.25.

3. For further details on the planning and implementation process of the refugee settlement project, regional cases, and participants, see A Ram Kim (2017).

their specific journeys, and their lives in South Korea. Of course, their main reason for migrating was systematic conflict between the North and the South, and the military operations of the two Koreas. However, other issues, including concepts of family, culture, and gender, were also important. These women's experiences shed light on the social, familial, and individual tensions created by the formation of the two Koreas. The process of female refugees settling in South Korea through government projects carries great historical significance. For example, the value of women's labor was different because their goals focused on survival, while the public goal of the government was to create farmland. Also, though they lived among the existing locals in their neighborhood, refugee women required constant solidarity with other refugee women.

Research on post-war female refugees deals with important historiographical points surrounding the Korean War. The main topics of research on the Korean War have changed over the years, from studies of its origins and causes to its social impact and damage. Recent studies are more interested in how people lived through the war in Korea, which was a battlefield, and how they endeavored to rebuild their lives. Various refugees were engaged in these trying experiences, but the experiences of female refugees were especially complicated because they faced both the destruction caused by the war and the contradictions of the existing patriarchal order.

Second, in terms of methodologies, some realities of the Korean division and war can only be revealed through women's voices. For this study, an oral life history research method was used in which participants discussed their memories and talked about their entire lives. In the present study, the older women frankly related their private stories during interviews with a researcher. As Aleksievich (2015) pointed out, narratives about war told by women are different because men usually boast about and exaggerate their experiences. Women's stories are not simply personal, but reflect structural and social causes and processes.

Finally, men serving in the army still tend to be emphasized as the subjects and victims of the Korean War because national division persists on the peninsula. Thus, a military culture in which hierarchical classes and

violence are accepted has long continued (Kwon 2005). For this reason, research on female refugees makes it possible to understand the historical context of gender discrimination in society and to help overcome it.

More specifically, this study focuses on refugee women who wound up in Jangheung-gun (county) in Jeollanam-do (South Jeolla province) and on Jeju Island. In the early 1960s, the largest resettlement area was in Jangheung, making the city an important locus of this study. The furthest location for refugee evacuation was Jeju Island, where the rebuilding of villages after the April 3 Incident and its outcome and recovery operations from the Korean War were necessary at the same time. Field investigations were conducted in these two places, and five female refugees and a woman whose husband was a refugee were interviewed. All materials from the field investigations and interviews are kept at Yonsei University’s Institute of History and Space (Yeonse daehakgyo gukhak yeonguwon yeoksa-wa gonggan yeonguso) and the National Institute of Korean History (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe) in South Korea.

Table 1. Biographical Information on the Women Subjects

Name	Year of birth	Birthplace	Year of migration to South Korea	Resettlement area
Manja Kim	1927	Cheongjin, Hamgyeongbuk-do	1947	Jeju Island
Saenggeum Kim	1928	Gimhwa, Gangwon-do	1947	Jeju Island
Okseon Oh	1934	Ongjin, Hwanghae-do	1951	Jangheung
Ilyeo Byun	1925	Bongcheon, Manchuria	1946	Jeju Island
Jungsoon Yi	1939	Jangheung, Jeollanam-do		Jangheung

Gendered Reasons for Leaving Hometowns

In general, the movement from North to South Korea is divided into two time periods: (1) after independence but before the Korean War (1945–1950); and (2) during the Korean War (1950–1953). Regarding motivations

for migration from North Korea to South Korea, the South Korean government has emphasized political and ideological reasons before and during the Korean War. According to statistical data and research, however, the reasons for such migration were diverse and included living difficulties and the search for work (G. Kim 1999). Starting from the war, moreover, the motivations for migration became significantly different. People who migrated to South Korea before the Korean War (period 1) are not called refugees (*pinanmin*), but defectors (*wolnammin*).⁴ In terms of women's experiences, there were gendered reasons for migrating from North to South. The women may have felt compelled to leave their hometowns in North Korea due to a patriarchal family structure and gender discrimination. Even if women had the opportunity to choose whether to migrate, married women had no choice but to follow their husbands; it was almost impossible for a woman to choose differently from her husband.

For instance, one participant, Manja Kim, left with her baby for South Korea to find her husband. One of the reasons she had such a strong will to find her husband was she had been chastised by her natal family members. Since she frequently visited her natal family without her husband, they criticized her.

Whenever I visited my biological family, my uncle [her father's older brother] and my grandmother criticized me. They said that there had never been a person who could not endure married life with her husband's family, nor a person who got kicked out by her husband's family. They even asked me, "How could you visit here so frequently right after you married and had a baby?" People in my hometown also talked behind my back, so I felt so ashamed in the village.⁵

4. As pointed out by one reviewer of this paper, the boundaries of this distinction may be ambiguous depending on the case. However, the extreme situation of war and the resulting threat of survival from the background to forced migration. In addition, I would like to emphasize that it was very difficult to move arbitrarily because human movement was restricted during the war.

5. Manja Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015. Interview record now stored in the Institute of History and Space, Yonsei University. AKS_2015_KFR_1230004_032_Manja Kim.

As the above passage suggests, Manja Kim felt pressured to stay at her in-laws' house even though her husband was absent, yet her husband was not blamed for leaving even though he had left his family behind. Because returning to her parents' home was considered the same as being evicted from one's in-laws' home, a woman could only be free from shame if she continued living at her in-laws' house without her husband or if she found her husband. Manja Kim was forced to seek her husband and eventually left for South Korea.

To escape sexual violence was another reason women migrated from North to South. Ilnyeong Byun, who migrated in 1946, said she could no longer live "in the toilet," hiding from Soviet soldiers who were looking for women. Similarly, Saenggeum Kim noted that all young women had to hide because the soldiers went door to door looking for women.⁶

Contrary to the men, women could not move of their own free will. They were perceived as naturally following the decisions of their families. Migration from North Korea during the Korean War was definitely enforced by US military plans. Women migrated with their natal family, which included male members. Okseon Oh, who came from Ongjin in Hwanghae-do, eventually arrived in Mokpo in Jeollanam-do after crossing through many islands in the West Sea. She had migrated with her family because she was not only young but also a woman. Amid the violence and dangers of division and war, it was perceived that women needed to be protected by their families.

Other reasons for migration included changes in the war and the presence of US troops. Many people who had already taken refuge in South Korea before the war were forced to move again after the war. In these cases, women had to continuously move from residence to residence. The reason they had to leave was that their husbands worked for the US military forces. Saenggeum Kim lived in Gyeonggi-do after the first migration, but she had

6. Some sexual violence cases by the US soldiers were reported, but there were likely more cases than reported, especially in areas immediately surrounding military units. In 1946, four soldiers were sentenced to life imprisonment for rape, but they escaped before being apprehended and then escorted under arrest to the United States (*Dong-A Ilbo*, March 13, 1946; March 15, 1946).

to leave for Jeju Island during the wartime retreat of January 4, 1951. She said that she would have lived comfortably had she not been forced to flee.

In the January 4 retreat, if we had not moved, our lives might have been much better now. My husband worked for the US military at that time. One day, American soldiers came to us and said we had to move, and they gave us a ride. It was a very hard time for us. I can't even express how hard of a time it was for us.⁷

Because of the war, Saenggeum Kim had no choice but to follow the orders of the US military. Because her husband was working in a US military unit, she was compelled to flee her home even though she had judged that she did not need to move.

All North Korean women who moved to the South and took refuge there shared one experience: they lost their hometowns forever. As the phrase "joining the husband's family" indicates, marriage for women at that time meant leaving their natal family for their new affinal family. However, moving from North to South was considered an irrevocable farewell to one's natal family. When Saenggeum Kim, who had tried to move to the South, returned one day, her mother was sad. Her brother-in-law escorted her back to her husband's family, while her mother could only watch. Similarly, when Manja Kim left with her baby, her mother provided her with a baby blanket. Although she left her mother 70 years ago, she still feels tremendous sadness when she thinks of her.

I came to mom's house, and my mom was so happy, even though she cried a lot when I left. And then my brother-in-law came and took me back, but she did not say anything.⁸

When I went to my mom's house, my mom gave me a cotton blanket for

7. Saenggeum Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015. Interview record now stored in the Institute of History and Space, Yonsei University. AKS_2015_KFR_1230004_033_Saenggeum Kim.

8. Saenggeum Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015.

my baby. She gave it to me. I am an only daughter—no sons. We cried a lot, and then I came to South Korea. I never saw her again after that [weeping].⁹

Patriarchal family structure, gender discrimination, and sexual violence mainly influenced women's decisions to move to the South. Most who left North Korea were following their husbands and husbands' families. In addition, most were afraid of the Soviet soldiers. Not only did they have to leave their hometowns, but had to say painful and permanent farewells, which means women's experiences of relocation differed from the experiences of men. Soo Ja Kim (2009, 200) concluded that the decision to migrate would have been made around men because the decision to leave home was not simply a private issue but a major familial one.

Crossing the Border and Gender Differences

For women, crossing the 38th parallel was difficult. Before the war, people often crossed the 38th parallel by land, but because they usually did not know the route, women had difficulty traveling by themselves. Moreover, women were economically and physically weaker, making it particularly difficult to move long distances.

Manja Kim came to Seoul via Hamheung and Cheorwon. During her journey, she had to walk across ice at Cheorwon, where she crossed the 38th parallel. Since she was alone with her baby, she had to reduce her load to a minimum and spread sand on the ice to cross a frozen stream. Notably, she had to cross the border multiple times because she did not know the exact direction to go in. From her experience, we know that before the Korean War the 38th parallel was not physically closed off and the boundary between North and South was not always clear.

I took a train to Hamheung, slept at my sister-in-law's house one night,

9. Manja Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015.

and then took the train to Gangwon-do. I then went to Cheorwon. In Cheorwon, the icy road was very slippery. I brought sand in my long skirt. The baby was on my back, and my bag was on my head. I couldn't take a lot in my package because the baby was too heavy for me. I simply brought one winter outfit, one summer outfit, one autumn and spring outfit, and diapers for my baby. In the past, all diapers were made from cotton. I moved my package, including the cotton diapers, onto my head. But the icy road was so slippery that I put sand in my skirt and scattered the sand like this.¹⁰

What is notable about the women's experiences in crossing the 38th parallel is that the US soldiers who stood on guard were less vigilant with regards to women. The United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) established refugee camps at the 38th parallel and there managed people who came from North to the South (Yi 2016, 140–150).

In the case of Manja Kim, she might have been relatively freer than men from ideological and military control. When she arrived in South Korea after enduring so much hardship crossing the border, a stranger guided her and said she was able to receive help from US soldiers. She then went to a US military location, where the soldiers provided her with translators and food for her and her baby. At that time, the soldiers who helped her reassured her and said, "American soldiers are different from those Soviet bastards."¹¹ In fact, however, it cannot be said that there was a difference between the US and Soviet forces in their treatment of women. For example, it is already known how sex crimes were committed by US soldiers and how the US military established and operated "comfort centers" during the Korean War (Park 2019).

For Manja Kim, because she had a baby, it was much easier to obtain help from soldiers. As her comments suggest, the US soldiers contrasted themselves with their Soviet counterparts and exhibited a friendly attitude toward refugees from North Korea. Previous studies have noted that US

10. Manja Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015.

11. Manja Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015.

soldiers accepted refugees from North Korea for political reasons.¹² In particular, they actively helped women cross the border and explained to them the differences between the ideologies and political systems of the two Koreas. The US military's monitoring was not strict toward women, and their plans to utilize North Korean refugees were not activated for women because they were not recognized as politically independent subjects. Additionally, as these women had babies, they would not have been regarded as a threat.

The division of the two Koreas also brought about a major change in marital relationships. The migration of married women was greatly influenced by their husbands and the husbands' double-marriages. Most often, men crossed the 38th parallel by themselves, and when they settled down in South Korea, they were still of a young age and usually remarried. After the armistice, the two Koreas were completely divided, and most men regarded remarriage as a natural step because they did not think they would see their own families again.

Manja Kim traveled to Seoul in order to find her husband, who had crossed the 38th parallel earlier. Her husband had planned to "get another woman and live with her," and his neighbors said he had planned to separate from the new woman after Manja Kim arrived. People from her hometown in the North helped her, and she eventually met up with her husband. At first, her husband could not believe she had come to him. After he found her, he was surprised by her arrival, rather than welcoming her and the baby.

I guess my husband thought he couldn't live alone—he was thinking about living with another woman. He lived with her, and he thought that he would break up with her when I came. That's what he said. Another woman had begged him not to do it [take up with another woman other than his wife]. Women live alone for decades, so she questioned why he

12. The USAMGIK collected real-time information in North Korea and Manchuria by investigating the reasons refugees moved to South Korea, their lives in North Korea, their living standards, their educational backgrounds, and their ideological orientations. The USAMGIK thought refugees were sources of information, and they considered refugees as subjects for vigilance and ideological censorship (Yi 2016).

couldn't live alone for even a few months. She told him not to get another woman. ... Even though I came, he could not see me because he stood behind a tree. He did not believe that I had come. One woman told me to come out, and he found me. He was very surprised. He was really surprised.¹³

Manja Kim's experience reveal that her husband thought it would be possible to see her again but had chosen to live with a new wife regardless. Despite this complicated situation, Manja Kim did not say that she was angry or that she resented her husband. After Manja Kim arrived, her husband left his new wife and lived with Manja Kim for the rest of his life.

Unlike in the prewar situations above, the Korean War changed circumstances. During the war, all people, regardless of gender, sought refuge and felt extreme fear and anxiety, but the reasons for the women's anxiety were different. Men were anxious about military conscription, while women prepared for the possibility that their husbands would not be able to stay with them. Women had to maintain their households while the men had to participate in military service. Moreover, there were cases in which women had to financially support their husbands who were in the military. Saenggeum Kim took refuge on Jeju Island, and her husband was conscripted three times. During the war, Army Training Center 1 was established on Jeju Island, and the Second National Soldiers, who were called the National Defense Corps,¹⁴ arrived on Jeju Island (A. Kim 2018). Saenggeum Kim said her husband looked like a "skeleton" because he had lacked food for a long period, so she took food to him.

13. Manja Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015.

14. During the January 4, 1951 retreat, high-ranking officers of the National Defense Corps caused fraudulent incidents. The National Defense Corps was disbanded and five people, including Kim Yoon-geun, the general commander of the defense force, and Yoon Ik-heon, a deputy commander, were executed. See "Gungmin bangwigun sageon" (National Defense Corps Incident) in Gungnip gugeowon (National Institute of the Korean Language), *Pyojun gugeo daesajeon* (Standard Korean Dictionary), <https://stdict.korean.go.kr/search/searchView.do?pageSize=10&searchKeyword=%EA%B5%AD%EB%AF%BC%EB%B0%A9%EC%9C%84%EA%B5%B0%EC%82%AC%EA%B1%B4> (accessed February 24, 2022).

During their life as refugees, the stability of the patriarchs influenced the women's lives. Saenggeum Kim married a fellow refugee who served as an executive at a refugee organization. Her husband died many years ago, but she has lived with her son, who is the head of the village, without issue. Similarly, when Okseon Oh arrived in Mokpo, her father took on an important role as a leader in the refugee camps, so she did not have hard experiences there.

Overall, before the war, husbands and families were important motivations for married women in the North to leave for South Korea. It was socially looked down upon to remain alone without a husband. However, though the men often remarried in the South, the first wives accepted these husbands again. Sexual violence was also one reason that women migrated. Both soldiers from the USSR and the United States perceived Korean women as sexual targets. In this section, the harsh experiences of women, who migrated from the North to avoid the Soviet soldiers, were discussed. Also, gender differences were involved in the process of crossing the 38th parallel. Although the US soldiers were politically less vigilant concerning women, it was obviously rough for women to cross the border. During the war, men were conscripted several times, and women had to endure the situation caused by the men's absence, sometimes even supporting their husbands. Depending on the positions held by family patriarchs, the lives of women refugees were different. Because refugees did not have housing in their new places, they often ran into trouble with the local residents and the women experienced exclusion.

Women's Labor and Reconstruction in the Resettlement Sites

Husbands' Wandering and Women's Decision-making

What was life like for women refugees from the North living in South Korea? How were their experiences gendered? To illustrate the women refugees' gendered experiences, cases from the refugee settlement sites are discussed in this section. In the 1950s, there were over 1,700 resettlement

sites in South Korea (USOM 1961, quoted in Song [1961, 21]). On Jeju Island, a resettlement location was established in Beopochon—an area in the central part of the island rising from the shores of Southern Jeju to Halla Mountain. Local residents who had lost their homes due to the April 3 Incident as well as refugees from North Korea participated in these resettlement projects.

Through documentary sources alone, it is not possible to understand fully how refugees came to know about the resettlement locations in Beopochon. According to oral sources, however, these resettlement projects were advertised in the newspaper. Manja Kim saw an advertisement and volunteered to go to the resettlement project by herself. Although she was living with her husband, she was more motivated to overcome their difficulties as refugees. She eventually arrived on Jeju Island after a long journey through Gangwon-do, Gyeongsangbuk-do, and Busan, and she hoped to find a way to successfully make a living on Jeju Island. In North Korea, her husband had been so well off that he had even studied in Japan, and he had not been able to adapt to the tough life of a refugee. Manja Kim said that she participated in the resettlement project to stop her husband from drinking too much. Unlike her husband, who had difficulty adapting to their postwar life, Manja Kim quickly embraced reality. Because churches ran the resettlement project, she believed that her husband might stop drinking.

There was an advertisement in the newspaper. So I read it and volunteered to participate in the project. ... When I volunteered, it was a church-related institution. My children and I thought that my husband would stop drinking. I volunteered only for that purpose.¹⁵

When the resettlement project began, the locations on Jeju Island became well-known in other regions of South Korea. Ilnyeo Byun moved to Jeju Island after a leader of one of the refugee organization introduced her to its resettlement locations. Refugees played an important role in the resettlement

15. Manja Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015.

process because, to obtain approval for government projects, refugees needed representation, so the refugees themselves became the main members of the organization. Even people who were from North Korea who did not participate in the project were listed as members of the resettlement project (A. Kim 2016).

When I came to Jeju Island, the servant, Ha, was there to pick me up. He said that land would be converted and provided to the refugees, and then he took me there himself.¹⁶

This excerpt suggests women from North Korea voluntarily participated in the resettlement project. Im Ha Lee (2006) has analyzed how Korean War widows lived and the meaning of their labor and lives. There are many cases of wives who worked more actively than their husbands, and even playing a key role in supporting them. As their husbands wandered in yearning for their hometowns, women actively sought ways to survive as refugees. However, aid from the mainland did not arrive at the Jeju resettlement locations. Although housing materials and food supplies were supposed to reach the resettlement areas on Jeju Island during the reclamation period, only some food from private organizations was provided. Refugees struggled to make a living and usually worked by felling trees and selling the wood. Some women cut down trees on the slopes of Halla Mountain, then going downtown, to the city of Seogwipo, to sell the wood. They were able to buy only a little food, but it helped them maintain a livelihood. Women would go up the mountain in the dark and were sometimes caught by forest managers, but they continued this work for several years.

I heard the government would save us and provide us with a house. So I came here. But there was nothing to eat, and I tried to work, but there was nothing to do. ... Everyone in Seogwipo and Daejeong used wood for

16. Illyeo Byun, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015. Interview record now stored in the Institute of History and Space, Yonsei University. AKS_2015_KFR_1230004_034_Illyeo Byun.

fuel. So, women climbed Halla Mountain to get wood. The first time, it was really difficult because I did not know how to carry wood on my back, but later I got used to it. So I brought wood, split it, and then went to Seogwipo. I walked to Seogwipo even though it was really far away. At that time, my hope was to have enough sleep. I sold wood, but I made just a little bit of money—maybe about a parcel of barley rice. ... When I went to cut wood, a forest manager came out and caught me. I hid and came back in the dark of the night to cut wood. I did this for many years. All the others [refugees] went to the shore, but I did not go and experienced this hard time instead.¹⁷

Meanwhile, some refugee women helped to harvest tangerines, a special product of Jeju Island. Tangerine farming on the island began in the 1960s and grew into an active industry. Refugee women worked for a daily wage at the tangerine farms, which were run by local residents. They said they worked without a break from morning.

Many mainlanders planted tangerines to survive at that time. So I went to the tangerine orchards and worked. The first time, I got 5,000 *won* per day, but as the daily wage increased, I got 10,000 *won* per day, and then 15,000 *won* per day. But we could not get more than 15,000 *won*. Nowadays, the daily wage is very good, so it is possible to survive [but that was not the case in the past]. When I got there in the morning, I was told to work only as a helper. The owners were bad people, so they said that I had to work only as an assistant. I was assigned to work on tangerine orchards over 2 ha (7,000 *pyeong*). I did not even have time to pee from the morning. Other people did other jobs, but I was just scared, so I just lived this hard life.¹⁸

Refugee women did not own land or property, and their weak social networks were of little help. Thus, it was relatively easy to earn money from daily labor on locally owned farms rather than start a new job.

In fact, female refugees from North Korea occupied the lowest position

17. Manja Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015.

18. Manja Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015.

in South Korean society before and after the Korean War. However, they actively participated in what national projects they could, meaning these women went beyond living their individual and familiar lives and became active subjects of postwar reconstruction in Korean society. Meanwhile, refugees who had arrived at Mokpo were scattered in many different regions across Jeollanam-do. Okseon Oh, originally assigned to Yeongam-gun, had lived in Mokpo and Yeongam and eventually moved to Jangheung, where resettlement sites were established. Refugees were the ones who successfully led the resettlement project in Jangheung.

They said like, "Go to this village, go to that village." Like soldiers assigned to army areas, people were assigned to villages to live. So my family came here.¹⁹

Jungsoon Yi was from Yongsan-myeon (township) in Jangheung, but her husband was a refugee. Her husband had been assigned to Mokpo and then to Gangjin-gun, and eventually arrived in Gwansan-eup (township) in Jangheung. She married her husband and participated in the resettlement project with him.

I heard that he was deployed from Mokpo to Gangjin. In Gangjin, his uncle was working at the township office. Thanks to his uncle, he was able to work as an errand boy at the township office and then he came to Gwansan. At that time, he met me and lived with me. Houses, called the refugee's houses, were built. The government built those houses and gave one to us. So we lived there.²⁰

Reclamation work to fill the mudflats was the main project at the resettlement sites in Jangheung. The embankment was built with wood and

19. Okseon Oh, interview by author, Jangheung, May 4, 2013. Interview record now stored in the National Institute of Korean History (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe). OH_13_007_Okseon Oh.

20. Jungsoon Yi, interview by author, Jangheung, May 4, 2013. Interview record now stored in the National Institute of Korean History (Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe). OH_13_007_Jungsoon Yi.

large stones to stop sea water and the inside of the embankment was filled with mud. This work was done by human labor without machines, so the intensity of the work was very high. Local residents of Jangheung, homeless people, and refugees from North Korea were involved in this project. Women were also involved in the work. Jungsoon Yi, who had carried heavy stones on her head or back, confessed that she was still feeling pain in her neck in 2013, when she participated in this interview. She passed away in 2015.

It was very difficult because people carried big stones [holding her arms wide open] by themselves. You know there were no cars at that time. Men bound straw together and tied it around their waists. Women carried stones as big as this [holding her arms wide open] on their heads. So, my neck hurts. I feel severe pain in my rear, other parts, and particularly my neck. ... It is because I carried a lot of heavy stones in the past. In the past, I was okay because I was young, but now I am sick.²¹

The purpose of the resettlement project could be achieved by creating farmland, and women worked faithfully toward this purpose. As a result, large-scale farms were created at the resettlement locations and contributed to increased agricultural production, which was the goal of the Korean government.

Women Who Changed Their Identity from Refugee to Resident

Refugee women from North Korea encountered many different difficulties during their resettlement in South Korea. At Beopochon on Jeju Island, Manja Kim participated in the resettlement project to stop her husband from drinking, but his homesickness seemed to last for a long time. Also, for some refugees, it was not easy to adapt to farming because they had no experience in farming before leaving for South Korea. When women made a living, tight budgets prevented them from educating their children, though

21. Jungsoon Yi, interview by author, Jangheung, May 4, 2013.

they had a sense of responsibility for their education. Nonetheless, women who lived in the resettlement areas found ways to overcome difficulties and adapt to their new lives, and eventually were able to move away from refugee status.

Three of the participants from Jeju Island who participated in the study formed a tight bond, bonding through their shared grief over their tough lives and the absence of their husbands. Many refugees on Jeju Island left for the mainland after the war. The people who remained had regrets for a long time. The refugee women participated in social activities in churches and markets and conveyed a wholehearted friendliness. However, although they had lived in the same village for over 60 years, they still did not consider themselves close with the local residents.

Interviewer: Do you feel better about the people in your hometown?

Saenggeum Kim: Of course. We can go anywhere we want. Anyway, we go to church and the market together. When we go to see things, we go together. People here [local residents] are good, and especially people in the church are good. But I am not close to them, although I do not have any problems with them. I do not feel close to them.²²

Relationships with local residents were important for refugees to successfully settle down in their new homes. Manja Kim joined a traditional rotating credit association (*gye*) with people in the village. In the late 1970s, she urgently needed money for surgery for her husband, so she asked the group for her investment. However, they refused, and she had a hard time raising money for his surgery. She said that this memory still remains painful.

A group of 17 people created a *gye* to buy rice. One day I asked for my money back for the surgery. Actually, I said that it would be useless to get the money back after my husband and I die, and I hoped to get the money back while I was still alive. But people said no. ... I asked again, but they said no. Indeed, I needed to go to the hospital for my husband with that

22. Saenggeum Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015.

money. He needed to stay at the hospital for 10 days, so I thought that I could add some more from that fund. My daughter underwent surgery three times in the past [silent and whimpering], and even then, local residents did not take care of my situation. So I gave up trying to persuade them.²³

In Beopochon, many different kinds of credit associations were created and operated among many people, regardless of where they came from. However, members would distinguish local residents from refugees. People may have ignored Manja Kim's requests because of the group's rules, but local residents also treated members based on the region they were from.

For these women, relationships in the village accounted for a large part of their daily lives. Refugee women shared their difficulties with the local women but felt discriminated against during critical moments when they truly needed help. Because of this, they had long harbored a deep sadness. Refugee women from North Korea were war survivors and had become settlers in South Korean society through a harsh process. Their memories of their daily lives are not trivial anecdotes but serious scars left by the war and the division of Korea.

Conclusion

There were many refugees in Korean society after national independence and the Korean War. Many people moved from North Korea to South Korea across the 38th parallel, and later the armistice line. Female refugees were motivated to migrate by the transitions of their husbands and families. As women who had already moved to South Korea encountered the war, they had to move from place to place many times. When married women moved to South Korea, they expected they would be separated from their natal family members forever. Additionally, sexual violence by soldiers was another reason women migrated to South Korea.

23. Manja Kim, interview by author, Jeju Island, June 3, 2015.

The process of migration was arduous and dangerous for women. When women traveled by themselves, it was difficult for them to find the route to South Korea. When they had infants, it was physically harder to move. However, women were considered to be less of a threat by the US forces along the border. The division of Korea caused couples to be split up, and the men often remarried. Women who left the North to find their husbands in the South had to accept such situations as their husband wanting to live with another woman. During the Korean War, men were conscripted; therefore women became responsible for household income. In the case of the National Defense Force, women supported their husbands with food. In the new locations, refugees often had conflicts with local residents because of their origin, causing female refugees to have negative impressions of locals.

The South Korean government and aid organizations from the United States conducted the resettlement project for refugees from North Korea to settle in South Korea. However, in the case of Beopochon on Jeju Island, the promised aid supplies did not arrive, and female refugees had to undertake difficult labor, such as collecting wood and working on tangerine farms. At Jangheung-gun in Jeollanam-do, refugees transformed salt flats into farmland while leading the resettlement project. Female refugees also participated in this project and were engaged in intense labor.

The women who appear in this study lived in rural villages that were established after the resettlement projects of the 1950s. While settling down in the villages, these women struggled to make a living and felt deep grief from the absence of their husbands, but they made efforts to form good relationships with the local people. They remained in the countryside even after many people had left for the cities, hoping to live the rest of their lives there. In fact, the rural settlement projects of the 1960s failed because of city-centered industrialization and farmers leaving for the urban centers. The female refugees remained in the rural villages, contributing to the reconstruction of Korea while struggling to overcome tremendous hardship.

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