Interview with Heejung Cha

Susan Comfort

Susan Comfort: Issues of militarization and globalization figure prominently in your research. In what ways do you understand the interconnections of these issues with gender and feminism? Do you see them as intertwined in significant ways? And, if so, in what specific ways, both globally and in South Korea, do you see globalization and militarization as processes that shape even the most seemingly mundane routines or things?

Heejung Cha: Yes, absolutely. I think that militarization and globalization are all about power and money, which constrain women's lives around the world. While delving into the interlocked system of militarization and globalization, I came to understand more about myself as a woman, a woman of color, a Korean woman, and a global citizen. Also, as a new assistant professor at Chosun University in Gwangju, South Korea, these are the concerns I bring to my classes and research. As an English professor, I strive to motivate students to (re)construct a critically self-reflective way of seeing, understanding, and acting and to perceive a positive concept of human relationship without presupposed hierarchy in the undeniably globalizing world.

As you may know, Korea (both south and north) is one of the most heavily militarized countries in the world. Korea was under the control of imperial Japanese from 1910 to 1945. In the aftermath of the Japanese occupation, almost all Koreans opposed a United Nations arrangement that the Soviet Union and the United States temporarily administer the country as a trusteeship with the zone of control demarcated along the 38th Parallel. Under the arrangement, U.S. troops landed in Korea to occupy the area south of the 38th Parallel, while troops from the Soviet Union entered the northern part of the country. Due to the ideological conflict caused by the Soviet Union and the United States, in 1948 the separate governments—the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea)—were established. In the end, the division led to full scale civil war (the Korean War) in June 1950. Even though the war was officially ended with an armistice signed by the United States, North Korea, and China in July 1953, the cease-fire failed to bring about a permanent peace. The Korean War resulted in the loss of more than two million civilians and soldiers from both sides. To date, South Korea and North Korea have not signed a peace treaty.

In the aftermath of the Korean War, by accepting U.S. aid, South Korea became politically, economically, and militarily dependent on the United States. Under the pretext of national security and pros-

perity, the South Korean public has been domestically and internationally conditioned to feel fear that the war would resume any minute. Needless to say, South Koreans have been living in a culture of fear in which the country transformed itself into a modern industrial and militarized nation. Under the dominant assumption that national security was being threatened by social unrest, human rights movements were severely suppressed, and their civil and labor leaders were often arrested. What is worse, under the military regimes, the abuse of presidential power has brought about the conglutination between political power and the *chaebol,* or big business network organizations. The *chaebol* refers to a unique conglomerate of large, diversified family-run companies with extensive networks of subsidiaries and political connections. There are about thirty large *chaebol* including well-known global multinationals like Samsung and Hyundai. The *chaebol* have played a major role in the South Korean economy since the 1960s and are the driving force behind South Korean economic policy. After General Park Chung Hee led a military coup d'etat and seized power in 1961, his authoritarian regime nationalized the banks of South Korea and then manipulated the source of capital and the success of entrepreneurs. Indeed, South Korea's tremendous economic growth and industrialization over the past three decades are attributed to its *chaebol*, which have relied upon political support.

As the result of the rapid economic development and politico-economic conglutination, capital has taken precedence over labor, which has increased the disparities between the rich and the poor. Not surprisingly, the issue of military duty in response to the priorities of national defense demonstrates how militarization, more generally, creates disparities between the rich and the poor and between men and women. Until recently, the issue of military duty has been a hot potato in South Korea. As mentioned, the Korean War ended in a cease-fire, not a peace treaty, so that the two Koreas are still technically at war. As a result, South Korea has adopted the draft system and imposed the duty of national defense on all Korean citizens. Even though the Korean constitution stipulates that all able-bodied men between the age of 18 and 35 must serve a mandatory military duty for two years, there are always those who claim exceptions. In Korean society those who fully serve their military duty are called "the bastards of the Darkness," but those whose parents pay off and use connections to get them out of the duty are called "the sons of God." Literally, the cultural jargon sends a message to young men at the peak of their youth that the power of money works everywhere.

As for another controversial social issue, Korean feminists and women's groups are sternly against the incentive system for discharged soldiers in which they are given additional job points when they take state-run exams to become public officials, openings for which are extremely competitive. During the two-year-long compulsory military service, most young men must suspend their studies in colleges or quit jobs. By citing examples of the United States, Germany, and Thailand, some Korean scholars and lawmakers support the additional points system as an effective and realistic way to compensate the discharged soldiers for their sacrifice. Korean women and disabled groups are against the system as detrimental to the disabled and women because such advantages would be in violation of equal rights and harm women's increasingly public role. As this heated debate over the issue has been underway in recent months, the mutual hostility between men and women facing a highly competitive job market is worsening.

However, what I think is the most serious impact is that young Korean men's uniformed military experiences make Korean society and culture more heterosexually masculinized and hierarchically militarized. It is common for Korean men who do serve to talk proudly or even to brag about their military experience and feel superior to women in their everyday lives. Korean men tend to think that military experience completes their masculinity, which in turn reinforces preexisting social norms of patriarchy. In such a rugged men-oriented social milieu and deeply-rooted Confucian patriarchal culture, Korean women are more exposed to oppressive situations, and, needless to mention, they are also exposed to a higher incidence of violence against women.

With her brother on her back, a war weary Korean girl tiredly trudges by a stalled tank at Haengju, Korea, Jun 9, 1951. Maj. R. V. Spencer, UAF. (Navy)

SC: A primary motivation for this volume is to bring feminist focus on "invisible battlegrounds" where feminist struggles are ongoing over the consequences of neoliberal privatization schemes and draconian cuts to education and social services. Now those battles are made even more desperate as the world enters into a massive economic crisis of global capitalism. The Indian writer Arundhati Roy has called these struggles an "unacknowledged war." She argues that "for most people in the world, peace is war—a daily battle against hunger, thirst, and the violation of their dignity. . . . And it is the flaws, the systemic flaws in what is normally considered to be 'peace,' that we ought to be writing about. . . . We have to lose our terror of the mundane. We have to use our skills and imagination . . . to recreate the rhythms of the endless crisis of normality, and in doing so, expose the policies and processes that make ordinary things—food, water, shelter, and dignity—such a distant dream for ordinary people."

In what ways do you consider the economic policies of neoliberal globalization an "unacknowledged war"? What do you think of Roy's implied suggestion that these daily battles are invisible because they

are perpetuated in slowly unfolding "ordinary" registers of time and space rather than in extraordinary or spectacular events?

HC: In the case of South Korea, as Arundhati Roy argues, there are almost always invisible and lonely struggles behind seemingly peaceful national glories in the name of the successful industrialization and globalization. Especially, in South Korea, urban redevelopment projects are essentially profit-oriented and regard housing as a commodity in the open market. Since the 1970s under the excuse of beautifying or improving the city, government-patronized construction companies have demolished substandard housing in areas where the urban poor were concentrated. As the old houses were often bulldozed, poor tenants were violently evicted without any compensation. To date, under the name of redevelopment and neoliberal progress, many Koreans are being forcefully evicted from their homes in which new skyscrapers are being built. As for a recent exemplary case of urban redevelopment, in collaboration with the Samsung group (one of the most powerful *chaebol*), the Seoul city government proposed the "dream hub" project, which is a redevelopment plan in Yongsan, Seoul as a new international business area in 2008. Not surprisingly, tragedy followed.

In the chilly but peaceful morning on January, 20, 2009, I was driving to school and listening to the radio that reported about a fire incident in which six people were killed and a number of people injured in Yongsan neighborhood. At first I thought it was just a tragic but common fire incident. Later on, I came to understand that it happened on the slated roof of a building to be demolished during the police crackdown against the people who vehemently fought against the forced removal of residents from an area under redevelopment. According to the Seoul Central Prosecutors' Office, the fire was started right after the protesters poured paint thinner on the makeshift rooftop tower and threw Molotov cocktails[1] to prevent police from approaching the site. In contrast, the protesters criticized that the fire was caused by riot teams and even the police commandos and demanded that the police be prosecuted for police brutality. To my shame, I didn't know that people in Yongsan resisted evictions and demolitions. Obviously, they lost their homes and stores due to the redevelopment plan and were offered compensation, which was much too little to ensure a good quality of living. They started demonstrating to keep their living ground. However, their voices were never heard before. After the tragic incident, the government and conservative media mainly focused on the protesters' violent resistance and unreasonable demand for more compensation by tainting portrayals of them as greedy. But little is said about the violence the construction companies used to intimidate and force the people to leave their homes.

What is more tragic is that even though the real causes of the fire are still unknown, and many police agents and private guards employed by the building's owners and construction companies were aggressively involved in the Yongsan tragedy, in October 2009, a court sentenced seven of the nine protesters to up to six years in prison for involuntary manslaughter. They are relatives or friends of the victims. Redevelopment projects are in progress in the Yongsan area and in other places across the country. Poor tenants are still being evicted with little or no assistance for resettlement. In a neoliberal globalizing era, the government seems to govern only the poor and weak citizens, not the rich and the corporations who have

access to power.

I am sure that the Yongsan tragedy which resulted in the deaths of five civilians and one police officer is not the first human-made tragedy or the last one in South Korea whose government tries to promote the economy and the reputation of a clean and modern city. Who is to blame? How could the tragedy have been avoided? What action could we have taken?

As you know, along with neoliberalism, which emphasizes free competition, deregulation, and flexible labor markets, the serious effects of globalization worsen labor and living conditions for most people. In fact, no matter whether we notice or not, lonely and silent struggles have been ongoing every day. The Yongsan tragedy reminds me of millions of poor people in Seoul called squatters who were violently evicted and disappeared under the military dictatorship of Chun Doo Hwan. In the rapid urbanization and the preparation of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, many older homes were razed as part of the modernization effort because the government considered that these older houses blemished the Olympic torch route which was documented in Kim Dong-won's *Sanggye-dong Olympic* (1988). Moreover, the military government was eager to show off a modern and westernized Seoul to foreigners and boisterously celebrate the successful running of the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Likewise, as in Seoul, the forced evictions happened in Beijing under the Olympic spotlight in 2008. According to CBS news, as Chinese authorities rushed to spit-shine the image of the capital city, an estimated 1.5 million people were evicted from their homes to make way for redevelopment in Beijing. The former residential area was rebuilt into a commercial strip with businesses such as Nike, Starbucks, and Rolex.

Roy is right that most ordinary people are struggling in invisible daily battles to make lives with dignity in a neoliberal capitalistic globalizing era; however, I think that people seem unaware that their "ordinary" lives are on the verge of degradation or collapse until they are faced with forced evictions, layoffs, pay cuts, and so on. As in many cities in South Korea, neoliberal policies, which attempt privatization of state-owned corporations, leading to downsizing of private sector and job losses, make it possible that a pro-growth coalition between local governments and multinational real estate developers demolish people's homes under the name of urban redevelopment. Ironically, even though South Koreans experienced nationally and internationally celebrated economic growth, which did not bring about fair and equitable improvement for the general populace, ordinary Koreans are vulnerable to a false promise that neoliberal modernization and multinational development eventually make their lives prosperous. More seriously, they are unwilling to see their vulnerability and harsh reality behind a showy modern skyscraper-filled city.

SC: In South Korean factories in the 1980s, women workers fought oppressive and exploitative conditions. Especially through labor organizations such as the Korean Women Workers Association, they confronted the military police who were sent in to suppress organizing activities and thus posed a profound challenge to the then military government of South Korea. How would you describe popular memories of their activism in South Korea today? In what ways do they inspire feminist activists in particular? And, does their legacy live on in struggles against neoliberalism?

HC: As one of the emerging developing countries in the aftermath of the World War II, South Korea experienced rapid economic growth in export-oriented but labor-intensive light industries with the help of foreign loans in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, during the dictator Park Chung Hee's military regime in the 1970s and the military dictatorship of Chun Doo Hwan in the 1980s following U.S.-style capitalism emphasized national prosperity to reduce the Koreans' political antagonism and gain public popularity, South Korea was developed and industrialized at the expense of workers who endured low pay and long working hours, which were unacknowledged. Also, it should not be missed that the United States and Japanese multinational companies searching for cheaper labor invested and earned huge profits in South Korea. Under the direct scrutiny of the South Korean military governments, which needed foreign investments and multinational capital, Korean workers had fallen prey to the political and economic exploitation.

As state and corporate interests began to work more closely together, Korean workers' conditions became more devastated without basic labor laws. Under the pretense of national security, South Korean workers were often accused of being communists or pro-North Korea, and their right to unionize was prohibited under the military regimes. Also, women workers had to endure extremely hard work and gendered humiliation. They were often characterized as being powerless, poor, undereducated, rural, and young. It must be stated that in South Korea, state-driven capitalist industrialization—called the miracle on the Han River—entailed various human rights violations, political harassment, imprisonment, and torture of dissidents, and it was a gendered process. As is widely known, export-oriented industrialization needed a cheap and skilled labor force, and women filled the need. Especially in light industries like textile and garment factories in the 1970s, Korean women provided the majority of the work force but received less pay.

Along with South Korea's phenomenal economic miracle, which aggravated inequitable distribution of wealth, Korean labor movements were budding in the 1970s, and so were women's labor resistance movements. As Enloe and Spivak describe, the socially and culturally marginalized women workers in South Korea were at the forefront of labor strikes by organizing unions and crossing over the rigid gender norm of the deeply-rooted Confucian patriarchal culture. The strikes of South Korean women workers at Dongil Textiles (1978), Y.H. Textile (1979), Control Data (1982), and Daewoo (1984) were among the most acclaimed and significant in those years. These women workers stood up to military-like systemized bullying, beating, and sexual assaults by their male supervisors and even male colleagues.

Eventually, women workers' strikes and resistance touched off widespread labor rallies throughout South Korea and resulted in the 1987 workers' mass uprising and "the Gender Equalization Employment Law," even though it was a political attempt to mobilize female voters during the 1987 presidential election. Also, in 2001, the Ministry of Gender Equality was founded as one of the central state institutions, which handles women's issues. Overall, it cannot be denied that women workers' resistance was in great congruence with the country's social change. Moreover, the intensity of South Korean women workers' labor resistance was in sharp contrast to stereotypical images of submissive women. As a result, their experiences and courage under the authoritarian regime and patriarchal capitalistic

industrialization have still inspired Korean women to organize women solidarity unions and associations and to speak up for themselves against class and gender-based oppression and discrimination.

However, with the collapse of socialism in 1990, South Korean women refaced the double jeopardy of patriarchy and capitalism in the milieu of global economic restructuring with neoliberalism. In particular, since South Korea's foreign currency crisis in 1997, women have suffered insecure employment, low wages, and a lack of career mobility. During the financial crisis, by following IMF's structural adjustment programs to create a flexible labor market, South Korean government and companies went through painful downsizing. In order to minimize the aggressive reaction of the workers, they revived the patriarchal logic of men as breadwinners and women as a caring nurturer for home and family and then justified making women workers the first scapegoat for mass layoffs.

After the financial crisis, in South Korea, the number of irregular workers such as contract-based, part-time, and dispatched workers increased sharply. In the beginning of 1999, the official rate of irregular workers exceeds half of total employees marking up to 52.4 percent. They receive lower wages and less in benefits and also are excluded from social insurances such as national pension, national medical insurance, and employment insurance. By hiring irregular employees, companies reduce expenses and make personnel management more flexible. In turn, irregular workers often suffer job insecurity, low wage, and even a feeling of disparity. About 70% of South Korean woman workforce is contingent and flexible on short-term contracts or subcontracted through dispatch labor agencies.

I am sure that many South Korean feminists and activists must be feeling déjà vu—the horrible 1970s are returning. As the women workers led the most militant part of the struggle in the 1970s, once again, contingent women workers are at the forefront of irregular labor movements to seek equal treatment. In 2006, over 380 female train attendants who were contingent workers in the Korea Railroad Corporation (KORAIL) went on strike to demand the end of gender discrimination and labor abuse as well as to gain job security. The KTX (Korean train express) female attendants were subject to lower wages, harsh working conditions, and job insecurity. More seriously, the company's treatment of these women workers called "Flowers of KTX" is a clear example of gender discrimination. In spite of the court decision that firing the KTX female attendants was null and void in 2007, they were not immediately reinstated. Even though constantly arrested and threatened, the KTX female attendants kept holding rallies, marches, fasts, tent protests, and even hunger strikes over five hundred days, which drew public attention to controversial issues over irregular workers as a whole. South Korean women's groups and workers' unions were urged to stand in solidarity with the KTX women workers.

Unfortunately, to date, it is commonly considered that women are the primary source of cheap and easily exploitable labor; women workers as part-time and seasonal laborers are supplementary and easy to dismiss in global reconstructing. In South Korea, it is still true that the female wages are always lower than the male ones. In 2009 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report showed that the median wage for South Korean men was 38 percent higher than that for South Korean women. Indeed, South Korean women have been exposed to unstable and oppres-

sive situations under the slogan of globalization and neoliberalization. South Korean women workers' protests in the 1970s have had a significant impact on women's lives, and their courageous spirit and stories are the crucial sources for the 21st century women to shape their critical consciousness. I think, South Korean women workers and feminists have come a long way but still have a long way to go as capitalism is expanding on a global scale, which mutually reinforces patriarchal social norms.

Hundreds of dismissed female attendants of South Korea's KTX bind themselves with iron chains as symbolic 'slaves' and demand their reinstatement, regular employment, and improvements in working condition.

SC: Under President Bush, during some of the more perilous moments of his "war on terror," North Korea was identified as a member of the "Axis of Evil." Language like this, which characterized U.S. foreign policy in the Bush era, is based on ideologies of race and nationalism of the most extreme kind. At the same time, this language constructs an ideology of militarization by positing war as an unquestionable necessity against a mythic enemy cast in an unchanging, unhistorical role. What were some of the prominent responses to this rhetoric across the political spectrum in South Korea? Were there differences, in particular, among feminist organizations connected with unions, universities, or in civil society in their responses?

HC: As South Korean critics and scholars have suggested, the phrase "anti-American demonstration" coined by students in the 1970s and 1980s was applauded during those decades as political rhetoric that promoted the philosophical bent of freedom and democracy against the authoritarian-military regimes that the United States endorsed in accordance with its political, military, and economic interests. However, today's anti-American sentiment is more likely to be economically oriented, refusing to follow the rise of neoliberalism or globalization led by the United States. In addition, anti-Americanism seems to have become a symbol for Korean nationalism, national pride, and a united Korea. With a growing na-

tionalism, South Koreans have perceived that their government has played a minor role in its bilateral relation with the United States. Also, in a certain sense, South Koreans psychologically and culturally have suffered from lingering feelings of inadequacy and dependency stemming from a long and bitter Japanese colonial legacy.

As mentioned, since 1945, U.S. troops have been stationed in the Korean peninsula, and after the Korean War (1950-53), the U.S. military presence has been justified to act as a deterrent against communist North Korea. It is true that anti-communist and anti-North Korea sentiment still remain in South Korea today, and many South Koreans are against the North Korean Kim Jung Il regime. Especially, the older generation, who has experienced the terrible Korean War, strongly supports the United States-South Korean alliance. While the war generation views the United States as a guardian angel of democracy, the United States needs South Korea as a fortress of anti-communism to promote peace and stability in Asia. Without a doubt, the United States and South Korea have long-shared political, military, and economic interests.

On the other hand, anti-American sentiment in South Korea was fueled by the U.S. occupation and support for authoritarian military regimes over years. In the 1970s and the 1980s, anti-American sentiment in South Korea was limited to radical students and leftist intellectuals angry at the United States for supporting authoritarian regimes and facilitating economic disparities. As the country has undergone profound political, economic, and social transformation throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, with the growing nationalism, South Koreans have been increasingly critical of the United States and its unilateralism in foreign policy. As the Gwangju massacre now known as the 1980 pro-democracy uprising or the Gwangju Democratization Movement[2] under the dictatorial regime of Chun Doo Hwan supported by the American government was known to the Korean public, anti-American sentiment has flared up. Moreover, there are numerous high-profile incidents and crimes including rapes, assaults, and murders involving uniformed U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) soldiers through the years.[3] Indeed, anti-American sentiment is aggravated by American injustice and arrogant behavior of American military personnel toward the country and people.

When George W. Bush took office, the Korean public's dissatisfaction with and negative views on the role the United States plays in South Korea have become more widespread. As many social activists and critics pointed out, the Bush administration should have assured South Koreans that America fully shares their security interests and sincerely desires reconciliation on the Korean peninsula. While the Bush administration viewed North Korea as an enemy to defeat, the Korean public began to perceive North Koreans as poor, starving, and weak brethren, which in part resulted from the Kim Dae Jung administration's "Sunshine Policy." South Koreans blamed President Bush, who publicly condemned North Korea as one of the "Axis of Evil," for creating military tension in the Korean peninsula. Further, some elites and civil activists seriously suspected that the Bush administration schemed to keep the peninsula tense and divided. In fact, unlike the war generation sympathetic to pro-American values, the postwar generation tends to see the Bush administration as an obstacle to the inter-Korean rapprochement and reunification.

In this social and political milieu, in 2002, two 14-year-old girls were killed under the wheels of a U.S. Army vehicle as they walked beside a country road near approximately 18 miles south of the Ko-

rean DMZ. The incident intensified anti-American sentiment. Even though recently it has been modified to limit full protection to the U.S. soldiers stationed in the South, the Status of Forces Agreement between Korea and the United States (SOFA) provides privileges and an almost blanket protection to the U.S. soldiers performing duties in South Korea. Also, under the SOFA, the U.S. soldiers are exempt from prosecution even if they commit crimes against the Korean people. Carrying candles and signs with pictures of the schoolgirls in mourning, thousands of South Koreans gathered to demand accountability for the death of the two girls. On the other hand, it must be noted that some feminists and activists were concerned about the nationalist political and ideological orientations of such citizens' movements. After the subsequent acquittal of two involved American soldiers by a U.S .Military Tribunal, South Korea's liberal civic organizations began to protest more loudly against the U.S. Army's continued presence. Indeed, under the Bush administration, the massive wave of anti-American feelings in South Korea reached high levels.

In a way, politicization of anti-American and anti-Bush sentiment resulted in human rights lawyer Roh Moo Hyun's victory in the 2002 presidential election in which a pro-American candidate was defeated for the first time in Korean history. Roh's victory also opened the political door for women. Despite strong opposition from conservative media and nationalists but with the support of women's organizations, four women were appointed in the first Cabinet of the Roh administration. Furthermore, President Roh also appointed a feminist legislator and social activist who was imprisoned under the former military dictatorship for leading women's groups to be South Korea's first female prime minister.

Once again, today's anti-American sentiment was refueled by mishandling U.S. beef imports by the current pro-American Lee administration and U.S. neoliberal policies. Unlike the former reformist leader Roh's administration, Lee surrounded by pro-American aides was more eager to strengthen Korea-U.S. military alliance. As a result, South Korean citizens including academic figures, religious leaders, and students have staged a continuous parade of candlelit demonstrations against the Lee administration and accused them of undermining the nation's hard-won democracy and causing the military tensions on the peninsula by taking a tough stance against North Korea. Even outraged radicals called for the President's resignation. In turn, the Lee administration called the protesters pro-North Korean supporters.

Ironically, the more the Lee and Bush administrations emphasize the seriousness of the North Korean threat, the less the South Korean public becomes sensitive to it. Perhaps it is because South Koreans are well aware of a military and political strategy. Over the years, the pro-American authoritarian regimes eliminated all their rivals and opponents by branding them as commies (the red) and terrorizing the ordinary people with hypothetical North Korean invasions under the pretext of national security. South Koreans become fed up with manipulative rhetorical tactics as well as the U.S. interference in the domestic political and economic process over the half of the century. I am not saying that South Koreans consider the United States-Korean alliance unnecessary, but instead, they feel more confident about their nation and hopeful for peaceful coexistence with North Koreans. However, there are also many South Korean veterans and Christians who participate in a rally to support President Lee

and Bush. Indeed, with their realistic pro-Americanism, the conservatives and middle class do not agree that South Korea is ready to grapple with the challenge of self-reliant defense. Today, South Koreans—whether they are leftists or conservatives and feminists or chauvinist—are faced to come to terms with their security problem.

Anti-American sentiment has mounted since a U.S. military vehicle crushed the two 14-year-old school girls to death in 2002.

SC: For over sixty years now, the militarized border between North and South has divided the Korean peninsula. Can you describe some of the feminist research and activism that have focused on the so-called Demilitarized Zone?

HC: As far as I know, a heavily guarded demilitarized zone (DMZ) on the 38th parallel is a strictly controlled and exclusively male territory (no women allowed). Even though there have been numerous incidents on the DMZ, under the name of national security, the incidents have been kept secret from the Korean public until recently. The late president Kim Dae Jung's "Sunshine Policy" toward North Korea encourages interaction and economic assistance between two nations. As a result, recent negotiations between the two sides have allowed for some roads and railroads running through the DMZ to be reconnected. Also, the Korean public began to pay attention to the DMZ. Environmentalists and scholars have noticed that the lack of human development within the Korean DMZ provides opportunities for life to endangered species even as, ironically, the DMZ has been a deadly place for human habitation.

As mentioned earlier, due to the unique security situation on the Korean peninsula, South Koreans have been taught to be uniformed and militarized in their everyday lives. Thus, it is not surprising that South Korean feminists and activists have been concerned with peace and security and expanded international women's peace-making networks in that Korean women are well aware of how women

have been treated during and after the wartime, and technically the Koreas are still at war. As for the female role in the DMZ, I found interesting the nationally and international acclaimed film *Joint Security Area* (2000). The film describes the political and military sensitivity and the fragile relationship between South and North Korea soldiers inside the DMZ. What interests me most in the film is that a main female character symbolically functions as a mediator or conciliator to solve "the problem" between two Koreas. Likewise, South Korean feminists and activists realize that it can be possible that the DMZ as a symbol of ideological dispute between North and South Korea may also function as a symbolic road toward unrequited reconciliation and unification between two Koreas.

With regard to the DMZ, specialized movement organizations such as Women Making Peace and Korea Campaign to Ban Landmines founded in the 1990s are worthy of notice. Even though both Koreas have not joined the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty, Korea Campaign to Ban Landmines initiated a groundbreaking move in 2002 that clearance of the one million mines in the DMZ got underway. Likewise, Women Making Peace aims to realize reunification and peace on the Korean peninsula and to make peace in Asia and the world. They have conducted research on the conditions and methods necessary for the peaceful reunification of Korea and have presented policies toward that goal from a feminist perspective.

In addition, I would like to point out that feminists and activists have raised their critical voices in support of anti-militarization and for peaceful reunification of Korea as a whole. There are several women's organizations and NGOs, including Korean Women's Associations United, Korea Women's Hot Line, and more to improve women's political, economic, and social status and to bring about reunification of Korea. In particular, Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan actively advocates and raises awareness of the general public in regard to "the so-called comfort women" and sexual violence during wartime. As a matter of fact, the unsolved issue over the sexual enslavement of Korean women by the Japanese has won widespread public sympathy and has also led not only South Korean feminist scholars but also ordinary people to look into the issue of women and prostitution in military camp communities—especially in U.S. base camptown (also called GI town or Americatown).

As Enloe describes in *Maneuvers*, because the South Korean government was motivated in part by fears of an American military pull-out, illegal prostitution has been thriving in areas near bases of U.S. Forces Korea soldiers (95-6). Currently there are about 38,000 U.S. soldiers stationed in South Korea. Along with the ongoing issue of the Comfort Women, the violent murder of a prostitute by a U.S. soldier in Dongducheon in 1992 inflamed South Korean feminists and the Korean public. Many scholars have criticized that the South Korean government viewed prostitution as a necessity and used women by calling them dollar-earning patriots. Needless to say, as long as national security is the basic principle of state politics, women are trapped to be the biggest sacrifice for the nation's alliance with the United States. Furthermore, Korean feminists and NGOs critically articulate that instead of Korean women, in spite of anti-prostitution laws, women from Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines work as prostitutes these days. And Russian, Uzbek, and Kazakh women are known for being trafficked as sex workers into South Korea. As a result, by being aware of the importance of international solidarity, South Korean feminists and women work with interna-

tional peace groups to facilitate the equal participation of women in the settlement of conflicts and disputes and to promote women's leadership in peace-making at home and abroad.

Joint Security Area (2000) directed by Park Chan-wook is a political thriller revolving around shooting at the politically and militarily sensitive DMZ separating North and South Korea and reavealing the war zone's tension between hate and humanity.

SC: The focus of your research has been on U.S. multicultural women's literature, especially in the neoliberal era of globalization. Can you explain how your scholarship seeks to connect issues of war, imperialism and economic globalization to reading literature, notably specific women's texts that you consider significant statements on war and militarization?

HC: My scholarship began with my "feminist curiosity," as Enloe might say, and led to the questions: How does globalization affect women's lives for better or worse? How does globalization revise our understanding of women of color as a racially and ethnically gendered category? How can globalization help society to recognize despair and anger voiced by women of color and make a global political alliance to resolve women's problems in home and workplaces where women experience sexual violence and exploitation?

As a woman of color myself in a patriarchal and militarized culture, I have been fascinated by the women writers of color who primarily deal with the developmental narratives of daughters of color and problematize predefined concepts of femininity and female body in a cultural context in which gender and race are intertwined, and global capitalism is tangled with a local patriarchy. While reading the developmental narratives of daughters of color in different ethnic communities that are geographically, historically, culturally, and politically grounded, I have come to realize the unequivocally continuing marginalization of women of color in masculinized or militarized cultures of the globalizing world. At the same time, I have understood the ongoing transformations and the creative articulations of women of color in struggling and resisting the politics of

race, class, gender, and sexuality that limit their opportunities for self-development to be active speaking subjects in a feminist sense.

As for war and militarization which almost always entail sexual violence, Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* has inspired me to delve into the Japanese imperial military comfort system during World War II and the current transnational sex trafficking as the forms of sexual objectification and exploitation of women. As a Korean woman, I was very shocked and ashamed in that I didn't know much about our foremothers' history and experiences. After reading Keller's *Comfort Woman* and *Fox Girl*, I have further explored the anti-war narratives by women writers of color and became aware of the meaning of the female body characterized and valued under male gazes and ideological whiteness. Unlike typical male narratives in which the male body is not a major issue, female narratives of color focus on the redefining process of the female body without cultural shame and stigma attached to it. While the traditional notion of the female body is strictly conceptualized in an interlocking cultural context of race, gender, class, and sexuality, the female body in the narratives by women writers of color, which I call the transcultural body, is multifaceted and transformative.

Generally, women's texts give rise to feminist debates on gender and violence by demonstrating the interweaving of nationalist and gendered practices in modern wars in which the female body with reproductive capacity frequently features as symbol and markers of the nation. Thus, the female body is viewed as an object of worship and protection and also becomes a target of violent attacks. Throughout my research, I analyze a general argument about the nature of relationships between ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in terms of the transcultural female body in the women's texts involved in individual and collective memories of women's struggles. For example, Keller's *Comfort Woman* calls into question not only a national and cultural ideology of the female body, but also Akiko's violated body embodies a collective memory of sexual violence and exploitation numerous women experienced as military sex slaves during World War II. Likewise, in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, Naomi's mother's deformed body represents the inhumane horror of war in Japan, and in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Martine's tested and raped body expresses cultural and political violence in Haiti.

By reading the narratives by women writers of color, I hope that readers come to realize that we are all living in different ways and different communities, which are all interconnected and interdependent, nonetheless. We are living in the so-called globalizing world immeasurably molded by multicultural encounters, colonial slavery, imperial capitalism, and cross-national migration for better or worse. And I hope that we, members of a global community, come to realize a new way of rethinking the world system and perceiving a positive concept of human relationship in dynamic contexts of cultural shifts and political economic changes.

As a woman of color, feminist, and member of a global community, I have pursued and will continue to pursue scholarship that is deeply engaged in anti-imperialist, antiracist, antixenophobic, antimilitarizing, and feminist collectives. Also, as an English professor, I firmly believe that we can make our global society better by encouraging students to question the self in relation to others and to negotiate differences such as genders, races, and sexualities.

Notes

[1]As an incendiary device, the Molotov cocktail, also known as the petrol bomb, gasoline bomb, Molotov bomb, or simply Molotov, was a common feature of the pro-democracy protests in South Korea in the 1980s but rearely are used against police today.

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