

# ***GENDERED MODERNITY AND ETHNICIZED CITIZENSHIP North Korean Settlers in Contemporary South Korea***

**HAE YEON CHOO**

*University of Wisconsin–Madison*

*This article explores the gendered construction of South Korean citizenship through the lens of North Korean settlers' experiences in South Korea. Drawing on ethnographic research, the author delves into the citizen-making process, critically examining the impact of gendered modernizing projects on North Korean settlers' daily lives. North Korean settlers are expected to get rid of their ethnic markers and transform themselves into modern citizen-subjects of South Korea. The author demonstrates that the overall frame of perception of North Korean settlers is deeply gendered, with modernity as a powerful ethnic marker. The notion of ethnicized citizenship in the context of two Koreas offers a concrete account of how ethnicities are created and employed in stratified structure of citizenship.*

**Keywords:** *gender; citizenship; modernity; ethnicity; migration; intersectionality; Korea*

**I**t is only a seven-hour drive from her small rural village at the northern end of the Korean peninsula to the metropolis of Seoul. But for Hae Sun, a woman of 36, the journey took seven years—years filled with multiple border crossings, a forced marriage in China, repatriation to North

---

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** *The author thanks Myra Marx Ferree for her invaluable insights and support throughout this project and multiple drafts of this article. Many thanks to Cameron Macdonald, Jane Collins, Leann Tigges, and Gay Seidman for their comments on earlier versions of this work, as well as Chaitanya Lakkimsetti, Wendy Christensen, and Kristy Kelly for countless conversations and helpful suggestions. The author is also grateful to Christine Williams and the anonymous Gender & Society reviewers for their insightful comments. Special thanks to Soon-Kyung Cho and Erica Kang who inspired this project, to the North Korean and South Korean people the author met and interviewed in Seoul who made this research possible, and to the financial support of the Fulbright Commission for her summer research in Korea.*

GENDER & SOCIETY, Vol. 20 No. 5, October 2006 576-604

DOI: 10.1177/0891243206291412

© 2006 Sociologists for Women in Society

Korea and subsequent incarceration, and finally a life-threatening journey across the Mongolian desert. While she was recalling the moment she first arrived at the Seoul airport, her voice grew stronger and more determined as if telling the climax of an adventure movie, one that she knew would have a happy ending. Yet for thousands of North Korean settlers like Hae Sun, arrival in South Korea and attainment of South Korean legal citizenship is only another step on a continuing journey of remaking oneself as a South Korean citizen.

This article explores the gendered construction of South Korean citizenship through the lens of North Korean settlers' experiences in contemporary South Korea. Based on ethnographic research, I delve into the citizen-making process in the capital city of South Korea, critically examining the impact of gendered modernizing projects on North Korean settlers' daily lives from a postcolonial feminist perspective. Grounding this analysis in Aihwa Ong's (2003) research on Cambodian refugees in the United States, I take citizenship not merely as a legal status but, in a Foucauldian sense, "as a social process of mediated production of values concerning freedom, autonomy, and security" (xvii). Through an analysis of the ways in which North Korean settlers' citizenship experiences shape and are shaped by the gendered modernizing projects of South Korea, I examine the various modes and strategies by which individuals and groups are incorporated into and become deserving members of South Korea.

I argue that as North Korean settlers navigate their lives in South Korea, they expose the invisible underlying code of South Korean society, demonstrating what constitutes a South Korean nation-state as opposed to North Korea. While most states represent, however imperfectly, some sort of imagined national community, the reverse happened in the political partitioning of Korea during the cold war. In the absence of concrete ethnic differences between North and South Korea, two postwar states of North and South produced state-based nationhood, a pseudo-ethnicity, in which North Korean settlers in contemporary South Korea are regarded as a distinct ethnic-like group that represents the North Korean nation-state, and thus "other" to South Koreaness. North Korean settlers are expected to get rid of ethnic markers as North Koreans and transform themselves into modern citizen-subjects of South Korea. The problematic portrayal of North Korea as backward and underdeveloped is particularly salient in regard to their gender relations, as reflected in South Koreans' description of North Korean men as patriarchal and authoritarian and of North Korean women as victims. These images are opposed—sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly—to the rhetoric of gender equality in South Korea, which is described as a developed, modern society. I also pay close attention to the

ways in which North Korean settler men and women negotiate the expectations and stigma from South Korean society as they create their own sense of citizenship. As I follow the journey of North Korean settlers in South Korea, I uncover how citizenship relates to the overall gendered project of modernity.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To understand the experiences of North Korean settlers in South Korea, I first draw from postcolonial feminist scholarship on gendered modernity, particularly with respect to understanding the ways in which gender relations are used as a measure of a society's modernity. Second, I draw on studies of migration and citizenship to illuminate the creation of ethnic minority status with changing gender relations. By bringing these two literatures in dialogue, I attempt to shed light on the processes of citizen making in South Korea, where gender relations serve as an ethnic marker for othering North Korean settlers and for reconstituting South Korea as a modern nation.

### **Gendered Modernity and the Victim Subject**

Modernity has a long history of being taken up in a nationalistic manner and used not to construct universal norms of equal rights but rather to enforce difference and status competition among nations. Beyond the national level, modernity has also worked to impose disparate power relations based on social factors including gender, ethnicity, and class. In this appropriation of the rhetoric of modernity, women's aspirations to be "modern" have been exploited and betrayed (Yuval-Davis 1997a).

Gender relations often became a litmus test of the modernity and progress of a nation or ethnic group (Gal and Kligman 2000; Lutz and Collins 1993; Radcliff 2002; Yuval-Davis 1997a). The colonial gaze has portrayed people in the Third World as "the other" through the use of ethnic markers, while equating the West with civilization and modernity (Lutz and Collins 1993). It is not ethnically marked difference per se that is at stake in such "othering" processes but rather that "racial and cultural difference become coded ways of talking about other differences that matter, differences in power and in interests" (Lutz and Collins 1993, 156). This is especially clear when no differences exist prior to the division, as in the case of partitioned states like Korea. Women's status as well as their bodies become the terrain where the ideology of modernity and progress take material form, representing the success or failure of modernization and nation building (Yuval-Davis 1997a).

Postcolonial feminist scholarship offers critiques of the Western depiction of Third World women as victims of barbaric patriarchy or as an archetype fixed in premodern history, pointing out that such views ignore women's agency and the social and economic contexts of their struggles (Burton 1992; Mohanty 2003; Teng 1996). Mohanty (2003, 23) criticizes the way that specific Western feminists' texts portray and label women in the Third World as "powerless," "universal dependents," or "victims of the male violence." The positioning of First World women as an absolute criterion and source of good makes the gendered modernity in the West unquestionable and thus not subject to criticism or open to the possibility of change. Burton (1992) discusses what she calls the rescue ideology in the British feminist campaign against the Contagious Disease Act in India in the late Victorian period. She notes how British Victorian feminists portrayed Indian women as helpless victims of patriarchy, "as a foil against which to gauge their own progress," which she terms the "white women's burden" (Burton 1992, 137). Through this intersection of imperial and feminist projects, Burton argues that British feminists silenced Indian women's voices, allowing Indian women to only speak in the "controlled textual spaces" within the victim framework that British feminists were constructing in the name of imagined global sisterhood (Burton 1992, 148).

Such rescue ideology and making of the victim-subject continue in the contemporary context. For example, Hughes (2005) describes North Korean women in China as helpless victims wanting to be saved: "The women are raped by sellers and buyers. . . . Once a woman is sold she is completely powerless." Hughes's account fails to represent North Korean women in their own terms and instead constructs North Korean women as victim-subjects for whom she and other Western feminists are responsible. The problem of the victim-subject is that "the person designated a victim tends to take on an *identity* as victim that reduces her to a passive object of others' actions" (Agustin 2005, 107), and she is thus deprived of her agency. Such depictions of North Korean women as victims, particularly utilized by North Korean human rights advocates with politically right-wing and religiously evangelical Protestant leanings, is part of a larger gendered politics that has taken center stage after September 11. In a similar vein, Afghan women's human rights were used to justify American military intervention (Alexander 2005; Enloe 2004).

Representation of Third World women as victim-subjects not only ignores the heterogeneities among them but also further marginalizes them by essentializing their victimhood. In my research, I offer an alternative framework for looking at gendered modernity beginning from the lived experiences of North Korean men and women settling in South

Korea. I hope thereby to contribute to ongoing postcolonial feminist projects by countering the misappropriation of these men and women by neo-colonial discourses and offering a more nuanced picture of the complex ways in which North Korean settler men and women exercise their agency within constraints as they pursue South Korean citizenship.

### **Migration and Ethnicized Citizenship**

Migration produces a context where uneven power relations and stratification reveal themselves and affect the practice of citizenship (Basok 2003; Espiritu 2000; Parrenas 2001). Legal citizenship is formal and abstract and has to be translated into practices, not all of which are directly regulated by law or involve the state. How one practices citizenship is a form of claiming membership in a social body, a claim that is understood and regulated by the other members, not merely by the state (Shafir and Peled 1998; Soysal 1994; Yuval-Davis 1997b). By looking at North Korean settlers' claims of citizenship as newcomers, I critically examine the nexus of power, gender, and ethnicity being constructed in South Korean society.

Drawing on Foucault's notion of regulative power, Aihwa Ong's (2003) study of Cambodian refugees in the United States vividly documents the process of citizen making. Ong sees citizenship as "a cultural process of 'subject-ification,' in the Foucauldian sense of self-making and being-made by power relations that produce consent through schemes of surveillance, discipline, control, and administrations" (Ong 1996, 737). Ong examines the daily work of the helping professionals surrounding Cambodian refugees, such as health care providers, social workers, and welfare agents, and frames them as a central apparatus of an incorporation regime in America. Her study demonstrates how aspects of the everyday lives of Cambodian refugees, such as conjugal and parental relationships, become the terrain of discipline and contestation between the Khmer Buddhist way and the American way. By similarly looking at the terrain contested among North Korean settler men and women and South Korean intervention groups, I explore how notions of South Korean citizenship are constituted through processes of interaction.

To explore the regime of incorporation for North Korean settlers in South Korea, I look at gender and ethnicity as "ongoing, methodical, and situated accomplishments" that are experienced through interaction among social members (West and Fenstermaker 1995, 30). By doing so, I do not intend to undermine the importance of the material power structure in which gender and ethnicity are located. Rather, examining the interactive process in which gender and ethnicity are produced among multiple actors allows for a close look at the workings of such power. This ethnomethodological approach is

particularly useful in the context of North Korean settlers in South Korea, given that so much effort is made to turn North Koreans into proper South Korean citizens. Although no tangible ethnic or linguistic differences between the two Koreas exist, settlers from the North are ascribed certain pseudo-ethnic characteristics, which both sides then attempt to eliminate. The ethnic markers that are ascribed to North Koreans are understood in deeply gendered ways. Analyzing the work that makes these categories and gives them meaning from a critical perspective may also encourage efforts to dismantle these multiple imposed binaries.

Cold war politics, and particularly the case of East and West Germany, help to understand the ethnicized citizenship construction of North settlers in South Korea. Like the division of Germany, the parallel division of a single Korean nation into two opposing states led to a specific type of nationhood and state building in each, with the other state and its people serving as a mirror image (Ferree 1995; Moon 2005). This cold war opposition led to the creation of state-based pseudo-ethnicities, with personalities and cultures attributed to members of the nation-state. East Germans were portrayed as backward and lazy, and embodied "ethnic markers" such as accent and clothing as well as behavioral characteristics were used to differentiate them from West Germans (Berdahl 1999). In all the Eastern European post-socialist countries, a well-groomed and sexualized body, particularly in regard to women, gained importance as a symbol of modernity and progress (Gal and Kligman 2000). In a similar vein, North Korean settlers in South Korea were made into a socially marginalized minority group, on the basis of their pseudo-ethnicity, often written on the bodies of women. In this research, I invoke a notion of state-based ethnicity, drawing on North Korean settlers' own experiences to make sense of the seemingly random attribution of ethnic markers to North Korean settlers and how this attribution relates to the construction of South Korean ethnicized citizenship at the end of the cold war.

Questions of modernity that guide this project are as follows: To what extent is feminism itself part of the project of modernity? What is modernity used for, and how does it relate to tradition that is also constructed as an oppositional idea in the process? If some feminist agendas, for instance, stopping domestic violence and creating equal partnerships between heterosexual couples, become the measure of how modern a society or an ethnic group is, how should postcolonial feminist politics engage with them? I use these questions regarding gender and modernity to critically examine how gender relations become a terrain to ethnicize North Korean settlers and produce otherness in them and at the same time reconstitute South Korean nationhood and citizenship.

## NORTH KOREAN SETTLERS IN SOCIOHISTORIC CONTEXT

Looking at South Korean citizenship through the eyes of North Korean settlers is particularly meaningful because the national division and conflict between the two Koreas have been central to the nation-building project of South Korea (Moon 2005). Since the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule in 1945 and the national division following the civil war of 1950-1953, the process of South Korean citizen making began with North Korea as an enemy and a mirror image. Under the logic of the cold war, what it means to be a South Korean has been defined as anything that is not North Korean, just as East and West Germany formed their self-images as nations conversely mirroring each other (Berdahl 1999; Gal and Kligman 2000; Moon 2005). Since the two Koreas have shared a common language, ethnicity, history, and culture until the past 60 years, both countries in the postwar period strive for legitimacy based on separation and imposed differentiation.

This dynamic of tension and competition took a significant turn in the mid 1990s after the end of the cold war. North Korea went through a severe food crisis, resulting in thousands of deaths and a massive refugee movement into China. Thousands of North Koreans in China were made vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. As 70 to 80 percent of the refugee population in China was female, this refugee migration was clearly a gendered one, in which women were relatively in demand to provide cheap labor for the expanding service sector in China, to be marriage partners in Chinese rural villages, and in some cases for sex trafficking (Kim and Roh 2003). While about 300,000 North Korean refugees were living in China, only a small number of people who had resources made their way into South Korea. The total number of North Korean settlers in South Korea at the time of my fieldwork was 6,870, according to the Ministry of Unification in South Korea during my interview in June 2005.

Most North Korean settlers left North Korea not for political reasons but simply for survival. The immediate family members of many of my informants died from famine, leaving survivors haunted by feelings of guilt, grief, and pain. When explaining their motivations for coming to South Korea, many North Korean settlers also expressed a yearning for citizenship that they developed during their refugee years in China. It was not until they were caught by the Chinese police and repatriated to North Korea that they decided to migrate to South Korea. Through the repatriation, they realized that all that they had built could be taken away at any time if they stayed in China without proper documents. At the same time, they heard about the

possibility of going to South Korea. Such connections were made through South Korean missionaries active in the Chinese–North Korean border area or with Chinese people with Korean ancestry who had been to South Korea to find jobs, often as undocumented workers. The fact that legal citizenship is granted to North Korean nationals on arrival on South Korean territory became the most important pull factor. Although they knew that they would have to risk their lives and those of their family members to attempt the journey to South Korea, these men and women tried and succeeded.<sup>1</sup>

North Korean settlers fulfill their desire to gain legal citizenship immediately on arrival to South Korea, but once they arrive in South Korea, they are required to stay for three months at the governmental educational facility of Hanawon. There they learn how to live in South Korea, studying South Korean politics and capitalist economics as well as gaining practical training in computer usage, basic English, the South Korean accent, driving, and shopping. After the completion of Hanawon training, they are also granted certain special provisions and benefits including financial subsidies for settlement, health care, and public housing to which other migrants and refugees do not have access. These provisions are possible because of a national consensus that North Korean settlers are of the same Korean nation (“of the same blood”), and therefore should be treated differently from other migrants who come to South Korea for economic or political reasons. This makes the North Korean settlers an ideal case to investigate the construction of South Korean citizenship, as many actors in the state and the civil society work to transform them into South Korean citizens. In this process, identifying and working to remove ethnic markers of difference is crucial, and indicators of participating in gender relations that are defined as backward are especially targeted. Given that citizenship in a modern nation is the goal, the centrality of having appropriately gendered bodies and behavior as signs of South Koreanness reveals how modernity itself is gendered.

## METHOD

This study is based on ethnography of North Korean settlers in Greater Seoul, the capital city of South Korea, from May to August 2005. During this period, I also conducted 41 semistructured and in-depth interviews with North Korean settlers and South Korean social agents. The first group of the interviewees was 21 North Korean settlers, 11 women and 10 men, ranging in age from 19 to 61. I had previous contact with a few interviewees from my prior work experience at a nongovernmental organization for North

Korean settlers. To diversify my sample, I made new contacts in various sites where I did participant observation, and I also used snowball sampling.

Most of my interviewees are from northern parts of North Korea, which were more impoverished than central areas and struck hard by the food crisis of the mid 1990s. Although they held various jobs in North Korea (e.g., school teacher, factory worker, farmer), their lives took a common, drastic turn after the food crisis. In the face of life-threatening famine and years living as refugees in China, each settler made a difficult and hazardous, but ultimately successful, trip to South Korea. Although differences in their previous lives in North Korea may have some effects on their citizenship experiences in South Korea, my focus in this article is the migration itself and the settlers' efforts to make a new life, as well as how citizens of the South respond to them.

The time of settlement in South Korea varied in the sample, from 2 months to 10 years, yet most commonly they arrived in the late 1990s and early 2000s and spent an average of 4 years in South Korea. About half of them were in school, both formal school and vocational training centers, and the other half had full- and part-time employment. In the interviews, I asked North Korean settlers about their motives and their migration to South Korea, their experiences in the governmental educational facility for North Korean settlers, and their daily lives in South Korea, including experiences in school, employment, religion, friendship, family lives, and dating. (See Table 1 for descriptive data on this sample.)

The second group of interviewees consisted of 21 social agents involved in governmental agencies and civil, educational, and religious organizations that work with North Korean settlers. Since these people meet North Korean settlers on a daily basis and become the concrete representation of South Korea in the eyes of North Korean settlers, interviewing this group was crucial to understanding how North Korean settlers' lives are shaped and influenced by them. I interviewed various groups of people including governmental officials, social workers, non-governmental organization activists, teachers, preachers, and psychologists (see Table 2).

To find the organizations that are active and influential in North Korean settler's lives, I first made a preliminary list of organizations by checking through several main organizations' Web sites and adding the organizations that had postings of their events from the year 2004 through May 2005. Also, as I met with the North Korean settlers for interviews and conversations, I added the names of organizations that they mentioned were helpful or influential. The questions for the South Korean social agents focused on the goals and objectives of their programs, the difficulties that they faced in their work, their perceptions of North Korean settlers, and

**TABLE 1: Interview Sample of North Korean Settlers**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Year of Arrival</i>	<i>Job</i>	<i>Family</i>
Eun Sim	Female	19	2004	Preparing to enter college	Living with her mother and North Korean settler stepfather
Hae Sun	Female	36	2005	Store clerk	Living by herself
Hyang Sun	Female	21	2000	College student	Living with her mother and brother
Hyun Ae	Female	38	2002	Going to nursing institute	Married to a North Korean settler man and has a daughter
Hyun Mi	Female	41	2002	Preacher	Single mother of three children
Hyun Sook	Female	55	2001	Housewife	Married to Jung Hun and has three children
Jung Hee	Female	44	2001	Graduate student	Single mother of a daughter
Su Young	Female	61	2002	House cleaner	Single mother with two daughters
Sun Hyang	Female	25	2005	Preparing to enter divinity school	Living by herself
Young Hee	Female	32	2004	Factory worker	Single mother with a young son
Young Hwa	Female	32	2000	Waitress	Married to a North Korean settler man and has one daughter
Byung Suk	Male	19	2002	Junior, high school student	Living with his mother and North Korean settler stepfather
Hyuk Chul	Male	30	2002	Staff member at a Protestant organization	Single and living by himself
Jae Hyuk	Male	33	2002	College student	Single and living with his mother
Jung Ho	Male	38	1998	Preacher	Married to a South Korean woman and has a daughter

*(continued)*

**TABLE 1: (continued)**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Year of Arrival</i>	<i>Job</i>	<i>Family</i>
Jung Hun	Male	61	2001	Janitor	Living with wife (Hyun Sook) and three children, all came together from North Korea
Sang Chul	Male	22	1999	College student	Living with his mother and brother
Seok	Male	30	2004	Going to a computer learning center	Single and living by himself
Su Hyuk	Male	43	1999	Owns a small business	Married to a South Korean woman, no children
Sung Chul	Male	35	2000	College student	Married to a North Korean settler woman, no children
Young Jin	Male	45	1996	Owns a small business	Married to a South Korean woman and has children

the values and morals that they would like to teach to North Korean settlers to make them into deserving South Korean citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Besides both sets of interviews, I did participant observation in various sites to meet with North Korean settlers in natural settings and to look at how the citizen-making process works in practice. I taught English as a volunteer teacher in an alternative school for North Korean young adults and in a community learning center for North Korean children. In addition, I participated in church services, fellowships, and Bible study groups in two Protestant churches. One was a South Korean church that offered special services for North Korean settlers, and the other was a North Korean ethnic church where I served as a piano player. During my research, I also attended several forums and conferences on North Korean settlers, took part in a volunteer training camp for assistance of North Korean settlers, tutored English, and participated in various events organized for North Korean settlers.

As a native ethnographer, I constantly traversed the boundary between insider and outsider during the course of my fieldwork. For South Korean

**TABLE 2: Social Agents for North Korean Settlers in South Korea**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Position</i>
Governmental agency	Ministry of Unification	Sung Tae (Male, 55)	Director of North Korean settler division
	Hanawon	Keun Tae (Male, 58)	Director of education program
	Hanawon	Jung Sun (Female, 30)	Sex education instructor
	Office for Assistance of North Korean Settlers	Jun Bum (Male, 48)	Coordinator
Religious organization	Local District Office	Han Su (Male, 41)	Staff member at North Korean Settler division
	Church Mission Church	Jae Suk (Male, 33)	Preacher
		Pastor Kim (Male, 55)	Director
Civil organization		Hyun Young (Female, 45)	Director of educational division for North Korean settlers
	Red Cross	Ju Hyun (Female, 33)	Director of North Korean settler division
	Citizen's Alliance	Young Ae (Female, 45)	Director
	Good Friends	Sung Hee (Female, 42)	Director
	People for Unification	Hye Jin (Female, 34)	Women's program volunteer/instructor
	North Korean Settlers Advocacy Group	Myung Hee (Female, 41)	Vice-director
	North Korean Settlers Association	Chul Hwan (Male, 61)	Director
	Doctors without Borders-Seoul Office	Andre (Male, 51)	Director
Educational organization	Regional Welfare Center	Michelle (Female, 60)	Clinical psychologist
		Yong Jun (Male, 43)	Director of North Korean settlers assistance division
	Community learning center	Ho Jun (Male, 35)	Teacher (main staff)
		Sun Young (Female, 22)	Volunteer teacher
	Hee Kyung (Female, 33)	Teacher (main staff)	
	Yoo Sun (Female, 32)	Sexuality education teacher for North Korean settlers	

social agents, I played the role of insider who was born and raised in South Korea and had previous work experience with North Korean settlers, which put the interviewees at ease. For North Korean settlers, I was an outsider for the most part, yet this did not create the kind of distance I expected. North Korean settlers worked hard to minimize differences between us. For instance, many times, North Korean settlers referred to South Korea as “our country” during the interview. Also, when I was asking for access to the North Korean ethnic church and volunteered to be a piano player, Hyun Mi, the preacher of the church, welcomed me and said, “There is no separate South Korean God or North Korean God. We are the same people in God’s eyes.”<sup>3</sup> As the analysis will show, this sentiment that there was “no difference” was a specifically North Korean point of view; those who thought there was a difference were working to reduce or eliminate it. By contrast, South Koreans were eager to identify difference and discussed the settlers from the North as a separate, distinctive group, which is what I term “ethnicizing” them.

Although there is no concrete difference in appearance (I was taken as a North Korean settler many times by South Koreans and North Korean settlers alike), my standard Seoulite accent betrayed that I was not of North Korean origin when I opened my mouth. My English fluency was also a great advantage for gaining access as a volunteer English teacher and worked as a signifier of a person well grounded in South Korean middle-class culture in North Korean settlers’ eyes. This might have caused a bias in the interview sample since I was able to interview more people who aim to actively assimilate to South Korean society than those who do not want such interaction or those who are more isolated. My sample of 21 North Korean settlers and 21 South Korean social agents is not intended to represent all North Korean settlers in South Korea and all of South Korean society. These stories of active participation in the daily struggle of claiming and remaking citizenship in South Korea may nonetheless shed light on the working of power and citizenship in this contemporary society.

### ACHIEVING CITIZENSHIP

Through their journey to South Korea, North Korean settlers realize from their lived experiences that citizenship is “a powerful instrument of social closure and profoundly illiberal determinant of life chances” (Brubaker 1996, 230). Below, I continue with Hae Sun’s story since it

represents the experiences of many North Korean settlers and demonstrates that citizenship is not only discursive but also in itself a source of material power.

While Hae Sun was seeking refuge in China, people in the village where she was hiding and making money threatened that if she did not marry a certain man in the village, they would report her undocumented status to the police. Hae Sun's sister, who had been hiding in the same village with her, was abducted by traffickers, which left Hae Sun feeling she had no choice but to comply. Fearful of repatriation, she "married"<sup>4</sup> a Chinese man with Korean ancestry. After two years living with him, in constant fear and insecurity about being caught, Hae Sun was determined to risk going to South Korea. Although Hae Sun tried to persuade her husband that when she gained South Korean citizenship, she would legally marry him and bring him to South Korea, her husband was adamant in his disapproval. He dragged Hae Sun to the local police station several times as a threat. Finally, after two abortive attempts and repatriation to North Korea, Hae Sun made it to South Korea and fulfilled her desire for legal citizenship.

H: One day, I got a phone call, and gosh, it was my ex husband. He was in Seoul! He said he wanted to get back with me. "No," I said, "no way!" You know, after what he did to me, dragging me to the police station not even once but several times, knowing how terrified and scared I was, you know? It's so inhumane, I wouldn't want to live with that man ever again. . . . So I told him, "Stay away from me. Don't ever call me or anything, ever again."

HYC: Did it work? He didn't contact you after that?

H: Well, he had to do what I said, because I told him, "Now I am a South Korean citizen. Don't you dare mess up with me. I know that you are living here illegally." He was in a fake marriage with a South Korean woman to work here. I said, "You came here to make money, so do it and go back. If you ever call me again, I will report to the police that you are illegal. I am not like before." He hasn't called me since.

For Hae Sun, this was a story of triumph as well as retaliation. Her smile when she was telling the story reflected the pride she felt after having successfully used the logic of citizenship to her own advantage. Although she is now working part-time in a job that she does not find satisfactory, and is coping with the economic and social uncertainty of South Korean life, she firmly believes that her journey was worthwhile.

Such strong yearnings and the sense of victory that comes with South Korean citizenship are shared by most of the North Korean settlers I interviewed. This should be kept in mind as a cornerstone in identity transformation, since it signifies that North Korean settlers are not responding passively within the South Korean citizen-making process but participating actively as agents with zeal and desire. That is, the production of new citizen-subjects is an interactive process between North Korean settlers and South Korean society.

Yet when North Korean settlers claim their membership in South Korea, they are deemed to belong to a certain ethnic group that is different from South Koreans not only by South Korean governmental policies but in their daily lives with South Koreans. Because of the hostility between the two Koreas during the past half century and the anticommunist doctrine constructed in South Korea, many differences have been artificially created. North Koreans are depicted with negative stereotypes, such as cold-blooded communists who would report their own family members to the government, as unfeminine women workers, and, since the food crisis in the mid 1990s, as starving and helpless refugees.

The cosmetic differences associated with being North Korean—such as accent, dress, and self-presentation—have become symbolic markers of these stigmatizing stereotypes, which are then used as a type of ethnic marker to characterize North Korean settlers. Such ethnic markers serve as barriers to the successful pursuit of their daily lives as new South Korean citizens. This process reveals the construction of ethnicized citizenship in South Korea, where in the absence of underlying ethnic distinctions, such personal and behavioral markers have been created and used in the practices of othering throughout 60 years of national division.

A common way that North Korean settlers try to erase ethnic markers is by getting rid of their North Korean accents. Young Hwa (32) told me how important it is to try to pass as South Korean:

I once met this North Korean guy, who was now successful and had a good job. It was even hard for me to tell that he was from North Korea. He had a perfect Seoulite accent! Later people told me that he worked really, really hard to get rid of the accent. He even went to a special institute for pronunciation correction and practiced for six months, holding a pen between his lips. When I heard that story, I regretted so much that I didn't do it. As soon as I came to South Korea, I should have done that, and make my accent perfect. You know, that's what they should teach at Hanawon.

As Young Hwa claims, many North Korean settlers expressed the need for South Korean accent lessons at Hanawon, and consequently it was incorporated into the curriculum. Besides the South Korean accent class, Hye Jin, a volunteer teacher at Hanawon, told me that in their weekly program, all the North Korean settler participants were required to use South Korean accents and expressions. When the participants used North Korean expressions, the team leader would correct them. Although Hye Jin was not comfortable with this practice because she thought that the North Korean settlers should be respected on their own terms, she could not object to the team leader because the leader was a more experienced person, and many participants wanted to practice South Korean accents as well.

Ethnic markers, as analyzed in Berdahl (1999), not only involve accent but also encompass a wide range of characteristics—the way people dress, how they behave, and how their bodies are groomed. For Young Hwa, getting rid of a North Korean accent was only the first step in becoming a South Korean. She also paid special attention to her dress and makeup. Wearing a white T-shirt and dark blue shorts with a baseball cap, she looked casual and outdoorsy. Pointing to her T-shirt, she said,

I think it's really important to buy good clothing. This shirt is from Fila. It costs about three times more than T-shirts in the marketplace, but I think it's totally worth it. It looks better. When I buy clothing, I only buy those with brand names, so I buy less, but good ones. I have a friend who only buys cheap stuff, and I always tell her not to do so. She hasn't cleansed herself of North Korean dust. You can tell. Really. By looking at people's clothing, shoes, makeup, I can tell that they are from North Korea. Look at South Korean women—they dress much more nicely.

In Young Hwa's statement, conflation of status and of personal self-representation is clearly articulated. Being able to purchase expensive clothing is closely related to one's class, yet Young Hwa frames it as exorcising ethnicity, removing the "North Korean dust" that clings to and distinguishes the body's appearance. Young Hwa's effort to change her dressing style is not only a reaction to the pressure of South Korean society to get rid of her ethnic markers. As Huisman and Hondagneu-Sotelo show in the study of the dress practices of Bosnian women in Vermont, Young Hwa is in the "agentic processes" of remaking herself and planning her future life in South Korea (2005, 47). Through her effort to adapt herself to South Korean style of living and self-representation, she is claiming membership in the South Korean nation-state and society. Yet Young Hwa's effort

might be in vain if South Korean society does not acknowledge her claim and continues to treat her as other, despite her best efforts to pass.

In addition to clothing, modern gender relations are themselves used as a powerful ethnic marker. Here, too, North Korean settlers respond to this labeling as agents, not only as victims of discrimination.

### **GENDER AS A TERRAIN FOR PRODUCING OTHERNESS**

“These North Korean men are just untamed. North Korean men are feudal and patriarchal. They don’t listen to women at all. They think of them as their servants or something. And they batter their wives, you know. We don’t do that here in South Korea, do we?”

After my interview with Keun Tae, a government official at Hanawon, and after I accepted his gracious offer to give me a ride to a nearby bus terminal, his comment came as a shock. Born and raised in South Korea all my life, I was not expecting to hear a man in his late 50s address domestic violence so critically or advocate for equal relationships between men and women. As a feminist, I should have felt delighted and celebrated his observation as evidence that a feminist consciousness was becoming widespread in South Korean society. Yet rather than delight, his comment caused me puzzlement, raising a question that has become central to this research: How do gender and ethnicity intersect and co-constitute South Korean citizenship and marginalize certain groups? In this section, I examine the ways in which gender relations become a terrain to ethnicize North Korean settlers and produce otherness in them.

#### **North Korean Patriarchy as an Ethnic Marker**

Gender relations among North Korean settlers are often used as a symbol of difference between North and South Korea. Jung Sun, a 30-year-old woman who worked as a sex education instructor at Hanawon, described North Korean men this way:

North Korean men are like Confucian emperors. . . . North Korean men now seem to be similar to South Korean men in their 60s and 70s. Young men in their 20s, no matter what they think inside their mind, they at least try to look like they are considerate to women. A lot of North Korean women easily fall for this. [laughs] They think that South Korean men are so soft and thoughtful to women. They have their reasons to think so, because North Korean men are quite

stubborn, conservative, and patriarchal. So in North Korea, when men say something, like when husbands give an order, then women would obey. It's stronger there than here. What people think about domestic violence is the same way. Here, it's now legally punishable, but there [it is not.] Still some South Korean people think of it as just fights inside the family and trivialize it. Such tendency seems to be stronger there.

Jung Sun's perception of North Korean men and women stems from her hands-on experience with North Korean settlers for the past five years, first as a volunteer, and then as a sex education instructor at Hanawon. Her description of North Korean men as "Confucian emperors" who are "quite stubborn, conservative, and patriarchal" was offered when she was emphasizing the difficulties of North Korean women she met. These women not only went through the struggle of adjusting to South Korean society but also suffered male violence from fellow North Korean settlers, including sexual violence and domestic abuse.

Although Keun Tae, the government official at Hanawon, and Jung Sun offer similar descriptions of North Korean men, their comments are not identical. Keun Tae constructs South Korean modernization as full and unquestionable, as if all forms of patriarchy and abuse are gone completely. In comparison, Jung Sun uses comparative terms instead of a black and white dichotomy when describing North and South Korean gender relations, and she also acknowledges that the law and actual practices in South Korea are not equivalent. Yet they share a notion that South Korea has achieved progress compared to North Korea, and both use gender relations as a marker for the modernization process.

Depictions of North Korean settler men and women deploy two oppositional concepts for modernity—that is, backward (bad) and traditional (good). Whereas North Korean men are depicted as patriarchal and authoritarian—as backward—North Korean women are usually described in a more complex way. On one hand, they are viewed as traditional, more used to patriarchy and more obedient to their husbands, and this is considered a positive trait for being a good wife and mother in the South Korean lexicon. On the other hand, North Korean women also carry the image of backwardness by being described as victims of patriarchy or victims of sex trafficking. In another example of North Korean women's being depicted as brave victims who suffer yet survive with strength, Young Ae (45), a female staff member in a nongovernmental organization for North Korean settlers, describes North Korean men and women as follows:

When married couples come, it is difficult, because men in North Korea are not like here in South Korea. They are patriarchal and violent. . . . They should move on from these things, but it's not easy, so that becomes a problem. . . . North Korean women are so pathetic. In North Korea, women carry a lot of burdens, and here it continues. They suffer from male violence and economic hardships, and raising children is also difficult. So it's a tough life for them. Their health is also not good . . . but they are strong, very strong, so they keep on with their lives all right. They sacrifice more.

After Young Ae described North Korean women as "pathetic," she brought up their plight in China as victims of human trafficking and sex trafficking. Several of my female interviewees shared with me their experiences of being forced into marriage and being sold, and all of them acknowledged trafficking in women targeted North Korean women in China. What I problematize is not the fact that people are talking about North Korean women as victims of trafficking but the particular way that this victim image becomes a symbol of the failure of North Korea as a nation-state and used to produce otherness in North Korean settlers. This is an example of rescue ideology, situating South Korean modernity unproblematically as the source of good and the other as both depraved and deprived. Such depictions of North Korean women, along with those of North Korean men as feudal and authoritarian, complete the image of North Korean patriarchy that is "other" to modern South Korean society.

This approach of othering North Korean settlers by blaming patriarchal North Korean men for North Korean women's hardships ignores the structural condition of their lives in South Korea, particularly regarding labor market structure and social discrimination. As a marginalized group, North Korean settlers confront the secondary labor market where "disadvantaged women seemed to have more employment options than men" (Espiritu 2000, 73). In fact, North Korean settlers and South Korean social agents acknowledge North Korean men's relative disadvantage in getting a job. One after another, they used the same phrase: "[North Korean] women adjust far faster than men do because they can work at least in a restaurant or clean houses." The issue of gender queues—that bad jobs are not just "leftover" after the top jobs are filled by "the best workers" but are actively held for and targeted to the "appropriate" workers at the bottom of the social hierarchy—is seen in the construction of this particularly gendered labor market (Reskin and Roos 1990). In the case of the South Korean labor market, the bad jobs are mainly targeted to women (e.g., dishwashing, cleaning). In contrast, men's jobs in South Korea call for skills that North Korean men lack, such as computer

experience and English proficiency. Yet instead of addressing this structure of job discrimination by both gender and ethnic marker, the difficulties that these North Korean men and women face finding jobs in South Korea is attributed to North Korean patriarchy as something the settlers brought with them. In this way, the inequality in gender relations that is firmly established in the labor market of South Korea can be made to seem inconsequential, and South Korean modernity is therefore idealized.

### **Dealing with North Korean Patriarchy**

Although the notion of North Korean patriarchy is shared by various groups, the intervention groups deal with it in various ways. I examine contrasting examples of how this issue is addressed in two separate learning centers for North Korean young adults. Although these two institutions belong to the same umbrella organization and share its philosophy and goals as well as human resources, how gender relations are taught and produced differs. This more nuanced picture of the working of intervention groups demonstrates that the transition from North Korean patriarchy into a modern South Korean patriarchy is multidimensional and complex. This is an interactive process, illustrated by the different ways that North Korean men and women respond to the stereotypes.

The first learning center puts a high emphasis on teaching gender equity based on the belief that the gender relations in North Korea are backward. During the course of my fieldwork, I encountered several instances where the headmaster of the center scolded the male students for not participating in cleaning up. They shared a communal meal during the day, and cleaning up usually became the responsibility of female students despite his many efforts to balance. The headmaster, a man in his 40s, ended up shouting to the students, "Why is it only women who do the dishes? Don't you guys [male students] have hands? Are women your servants? No, you guys all should share the work."

The headmaster's emphasis on gender equity led him to incorporate sexuality education into the curriculum once a week. He believed that North Korean men need to be changed to adjust in South Korea, where he thought gender relations should be more egalitarian. Intended to teach gender equality, the sexuality education class became a place to equip North Korean young adults with appropriate skills in dating, relationships, and social interaction between men and women. The sexuality education instructor, Yoo Sun, a woman in her early 30s, told me that North Korean young adults have stronger tendencies to fixed gender roles:

We had this question: If there is a married couple, both working outside the home, who should prepare breakfast? South Korean kids usually know what the right answer is, and they would say, "Well, anyone who has more time, whoever gets up early, and if it doesn't work out, skip breakfast." But these [North Korean] kids say, "Women should do it." One girl said, "Women should make breakfast, and she would be so happy if the husband is just there with her when she fixes breakfast." That was So Hee after one year of education! That nearly killed me. [laughs]

When asked why she thinks the fixed gender assignment of family roles is so problematic, she responded with an answer that resonates with the gendered stereotype of North Korean settlers, which portrays North Korean men as backward but women as traditional: "I think, for these girls, whoever they meet, unless they meet people who don't like women to obey them, they might not have much problem for their whole lives even if they don't change. But in the case of boys, if they keep their ways, they might only be able to meet other North Korean settler women. Because meeting South Korean women might be problematic. That is one concern."

The other learning center had quite a different response to teaching gender equality. Unlike the active attempt to teach gender equality in the other center, this center's response is passively accepting. Ho Jun, a teacher in his mid 30s, proudly proclaims his upbringing in a Confucian household and understands North Korean young adults as Confucian. Ho Jun puts it this way: "They [North Korean settler young adults] have very strong Confucian beliefs and cannot accept something like gender equality well. They think that men are superior to women, so when girls talk and a boy argues against them, girls become silent. Girls themselves accept it. When doing dishes, girls voluntarily go and help the lady who cooks. I don't think shaking their roots is possible. Shaking their viewpoints might be harmful for the children. And South Korean society is still Confucian as well, so I don't try to change it that much."

He acknowledges that gender equality is a value not shared by North Korean settlers yet sees it as unproblematic and even positive by linking it to Confucian values and tradition. He also makes an interesting argument that gender inequity, as he understands its being Confucian, is part of North Koreans' "roots" that should not be shaken. When talking about domestic violence, he also keeps this stance: "When there is domestic violence, we just listen to them. Many children accept it after they get beaten. In many cases, when I hear it, what they did deserves a beating. There are some serious domestic violence cases where a father beats up

the children pretty bad, but there is nothing we can do. It might become worse when a South Korean says something. . . . We tried parental education, but these parents didn't attend. They don't think those things are problems."

Although he says "they" don't think domestic violence is problematic, referring to the North Korean settlers, he also is making a distinction between "serious domestic violence" and nonserious violence where "what [the children] did deserves a beating." Such an arbitrary distinction is a typical way of trivializing domestic violence and clearly shows that the government official's claim in the beginning of the article that domestic violence does not exist in South Korea is far from the reality.

Among many South Korean actors involved in the citizen-making process of North Korean settlers, how they frame North Korean settlers as opposed to modern South Korea—either as backward or traditional—affects how they engage with North Korean settlers and what they teach, as shown in the contrasting examples of dealing with gender relations. Next, I will show how North Korean settler men and women respond to this meaning structure surrounding them.

### **Navigating South Korean Gender Relations**

Although both North Korean men and North Korean women are regarded as different from South Korean modern subjects, North Korean men have to respond to the dominant discourse describing them as backward in a negative sense, while North Korean women are subject to two contradictory framings of them as traditional (good) and backward (bad). This difference in the gendered portrayal of men and women affects the ways in which they adapt to and resist such framing.

Responding to the image of being backward in the patriarchal and feudal sense, some North Korean men try to adapt themselves to what they perceive to be modern gender relations. Seok, a 30-year-old man, told me that in North Korea, smoking and drinking among women is unimaginable as he was explaining backwardness of North Korean customs. He seemed to have internalized South Korean standards now, and he distanced himself from such extreme prohibitions: "Now that I came to South Korea, I have to adapt to here, right? I don't really care when women smoke. It's fine. About drinking, I haven't thought that women's drinking is a problem, unless it's too much. I even think a little bit of drinking is better, for the family, you know. If a husband and wife sit together and have some drinks together, wouldn't that be nice." After presenting himself as a tolerant modern subject, he added with hesitation, "But frankly . . . I think every man will feel the same way;

that is, I am not against women's smoking, but I hope my woman wouldn't do that."

For Seok, acquiring new skills for interacting with women was an important part of becoming a South Korean. Seok perceived being a gentleman as an advanced/modern custom in his interactions with women, which he studied through the media. When he and I were taking an escalator together, he suddenly asked me, "Wouldn't South Korean men let women go first, like when taking an escalator or a bus?" He said he saw this on TV. I quickly reflected and replied that perhaps it is a Western custom, and I saw it in the States, but I had not seen it much in South Korea. He seemed to be surprised and said,

Ah, yes, it might be Western. I remember when I was in North Korea, there was this professor who studied abroad in the Czech Republic. He once lamented, "You know, North Korea has long way to go. In the Czech Republic, when the bus comes, men would wait until the ladies go first. We can see how developed a society is by looking at how they treat their women. How do we do here? When a bus comes, all the people would just run to it, and even without queuing. That's how uncivilized we are." Women should be protected because they are weak, right? I guess South Korea still has some way to go.

Setting up his standard of a Western gentleman, he was making a big effort to get rid of the patriarchal North Korean way and to learn a fresh way of how to treat the women, one that reframes gender inequality in terms of different protection ("weak") rather than domination by right. Saying that he would like to have a South Korean girlfriend, because he "cannot connect to uneducated North Korean women," Seok also expressed his concern about whether meeting South Korean women would be feasible:

When I surf the Web, I see what South Korean women are like, and I wonder whether I can date them. They say that their hobbies are practicing yoga, watching a movie, traveling, something like that, and I am afraid that I don't have anything in common with them and wonder whether I can communicate with them, because I am not there yet. I can't afford to think about these leisurely things at least for now. With men, even if I am poor and he is rich, I can say, "Brother, let's go and have a drink at the peddler over there." But when dating women, you cannot do that, right?

By learning images of dating as related to leisure activities through popular media such as TV and the Internet, Seok is examining the code of South Korean society and testing his potential to fit in. While acknowledging that he is a newcomer in South Korean society without much cultural or economic capital, he is still experimenting and absorbing the South Korean script for heterosexual relationships. At the same time, he also makes a claim on tradition to express his discomfort with modern women in a defensive statement: "Sometimes it seems like women's rights are just too much. We are still Korean, and I think sometimes it is good to do it traditional way."

Such claims on tradition and resistance to social pressure to change their patriarchal ways are more vivid in the example of Young Chul. One hot summer day, when I was returning with students from the sexuality education class back to the learning center for North Korean settlers, we passed by a group of labor union protestors where a woman was holding a microphone and making a statement. Young Chul, a 20-year-old male student, instantly remarked in a loud voice, "See? Education is no good for women. They are just making loud noises like that. Women should just stay at home like before." Young Chul's comment seemed to me intended as a provocation. Since we just had their weekly sexuality education class where gender equality is taught and breaking fixed gender stereotypes is encouraged, and this class has been meeting for the past year, Young Chul knew his comment was wrong by the learning center's standard and was asserting himself against what is taught.

Whereas North Korean men's response largely falls into adoption of or resistance to South Korean modern gender relations, North Korean women's response is more complex since they are reacting to multiple strands of framing them, from being a victim of sex trafficking to being an ideally obedient wife. In short, North Korean women work hard to claim their positive stereotype as a good wife by criticizing aggressive South Korean women and attempting to distance themselves from the victim image.

To claim a positive framing of North Korean women as good wives, the women compare themselves with South Korean women, who in their eyes, are "too aggressive toward men" and "sexually too loose and liberal." They portray North Korean women as those who listen to and respect men and who are sexually conservative. Many North Korean women emphasize, "South Korea is such a great place for women to live." Su Young, a woman in her early 60s, told me how easy housework is in South Korea, where the machines do all the work, in contrast to North

Korea, where she had to climb the mountain to collect wood for the fire or wash clothing with her hands. By accepting housework as women's work but being grateful for its relatively light workload, North Korean women present themselves as traditional wives.

Yet this does not mean that North Korean women take housework as a natural duty that they have to do as women. In South Korea, they learn that although housework mostly falls on women, it is a field of contestation at the level of discourse. Affirming an obligation to take care of all the housework without complaining fits the positive stereotype of North Korean women. Hyun Ae, a 38-year-old woman with a baby, discussing why she does all the housework in the family, puts it this way: "Well, my husband, he's a North Korean settler, and you know, he is feudal. He doesn't do housework at all. I do cooking, cleaning, taking care of the baby, and all that. But that's okay. I am fine with it. He works so hard outside for long hours, and I want him to rest at home comfortably." Although she herself has outside employment, and this second shift has been especially physically demanding for her since the baby was born, Hyun Ae seems to be content with such an arrangement. Yet she acknowledges that her arrangement is not the taken-for-granted duty of women but rather frames it as a favor to her husband. This in turn can be a source of bargaining power for North Korean women in decision making within the family or for single women in choosing their partners.

All the unmarried North Korean women I interviewed said that they would like to find South Korean men as their marriage partners. Some of them had practical reasons for their preference: Marrying South Korean men would help them settle in South Korean society faster and offer them a more solid economic base for living. Others thought South Korean men were better for women because they help out with housework and are less patriarchal than North Korean men. Su Young, a mother of two adult daughters, was adamant that North Korean men are not good marriage partners for that reason: "When my daughter began dating that [North Korean] guy in Hanawon and told me that they would get married, I totally persuaded my daughter not to marry that guy. North Korean men are no good. They have bad habits in treating women. You might wonder why I say this when I am also a North Korean. I don't want to say bad things about North Koreans, but this is what I think. North Korean men, they think of women as servants or cows. They are used to that way. It's hard to change old habits."

Yet this image that they try to promote as good wives conflicts with another persistent stereotype of North Korean women as victims of sex

trafficking. For this reason, many North Korean women I met felt the need to differentiate themselves from victims by underscoring that they worked in other occupations in China and that they were so lucky that they did not fall into “the trap.” Hyang Sun, a 21-year-old woman, told me repeatedly how lucky she was in China compared to other North Korean women:

When we first arrived in the airport in Seoul, the CIA agents who picked us up said that they were very surprised. Our team was me, my mom, and three other young girls, so it was four of us in late teens, and we were all, I am embarrassed to say this myself, but really pretty, slim, and well-dressed. The agents said, “How can pretty girls like you remain safe and unharmed? It’s really lucky that you were safe.” Because he said, he was so used to see young North Korean women in China, like 14 years old or so, pregnant and abused by husband, but couldn’t bring her because the husband paid for her.

Ignoring and denying the victim image altogether is not enough to avoid the stigma because such image has been widely publicized. Thus, North Korean women like Hyang Sun try to distance themselves with it as she does by contrasting her fortune with the misfortune of other North Korean women and emphasizing that she is not one of them.

With these strategies, North Korean men and women respond to the gendered framing of them as “other” in opposition to South Korean modernity and actually participate in constructing South Korean citizenship. North Korean settlers’ experiences as individual citizens in South Korea are gendered, and the process of incorporation of North Korean settlers as a group is also a gendered process, operated within the frame that produces ethnic markers based on their perceived backward gender relations.

## CONCLUSION

This research on North Korean settlers’ experiences in South Korea illuminates the significance of a postcolonial feminist framework for understanding the ethnicized and gendered nature of citizenship. North Korean settlers face the constructed barrier of ethnic markers that characterize them as North Koreans and deny them full citizenship. Ethnicized citizenship has to be constructed actively in South Korea, where in the absence of underlying ethnic distinctions, these markers are created and used in the practices of othering. By proposing the notion of ethnicized citizenship in the context

of two Koreas, I offer a concrete account of how ethnicities are created and employed in stratified structure of social membership.

Gender relations as a measure of modernity are employed as a strong ethnic marker for North Korean settlers, depicting North Korean men as patriarchal and women as victim-subjects and as opposed to egalitarian and modern gender relations that supposedly characterize South Korea. Through looking at the citizen-making process of North Korean settler men and women, I demonstrate that not only is the incorporation of individual North Korean settlers gendered but also the overall frame of perception of North Korean settlers itself is deeply gendered, with modernity as a powerful ethnic marker. This process of citizen making is not a unilateral one between the South Korean nation-state and North Korean settlers but operates in a complex web of power relations. This study strengthens the ethnomethodological argument that gender and ethnicity are ongoing societal accomplishments that intersect with each other and illustrates the multiple and complex ways that the newcomers claim their citizenship as agents through negotiation, resistance, and interaction. Although this research is country specific, the notion of state-based ethnicized citizenship has a potential to be further developed with comparative case studies where the creation of ethnicities has been constituted in the partitions of the nation-building process itself, such as in Germany, India and Pakistan, and the former Soviet Union.

Locating my research in a continuum of postcolonial feminist scholarship, I attempt to complicate the ways in which gender, nation, and citizenship intersect in the constitution of a North Korean settler's subjectivities. By moving beyond the victim/rescue framework, I show how North Korean settlers exercise their agency within constraints in their zealous pursuit of South Korean citizenship. By beginning with the lived experiences of North Korean settler men and women, I illustrate the complexities of their lives that the preconstructed victim-subject fails to capture. Reconceptualizing citizenship in a way that accounts for the intersection of gender and ethnicity, while not losing sight of the power relations in which it operates and the agency of the people involved, is an ongoing project for postcolonial research.

## NOTES

1. If North Koreans are caught and repatriated to North Korea while residing in the border areas, they usually face relatively light sentences such as several days or weeks in the labor camp, since the need for survival under the food crisis

is understood in North Korea. Yet when they are caught on the way to South Korea, and their association with South Korean missionaries is revealed, it is considered a political act, and the sentence far exceeds several weeks in the labor camp and might put their family members in North Korea in danger as well.

2. All taped interviews were fully transcribed verbatim and coded. Four interviewees expressed discomfort with tape recording, and notes were used to reconstruct the interview as close as possible to the original conversation, within 12 hours. All but two interviews were conducted in Korean, these two being in English.

3. All names used in this research are pseudonyms, and some details of interviewees' lives have been changed to protect confidentiality. All the quotes used in the article were translated into English by the researcher.

4. Because of North Koreans' undocumented status in China, this "marriage" is not legally or socially protected, which makes the North Korean woman vulnerable.

## REFERENCES

- Agustin, Laura. 2005. Migrants in the mistress's house: Other voices in the "trafficking" debate. *Social Politics* 12:96-117.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui. 2005. *Pedagogies of crossing: Meditations on feminism, sexual politics, memory, and the sacred*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Basok, Tanya. 2003. *Human rights and citizenship: The case of Mexican migrants in Canada*. San Diego, CA: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies.
- Berdahl, Daphne. 1999. *Where the world ended: Re-unification and identity in the German borderland*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism reframed*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Burton, Antoinette. 1992. The white woman's burden: British feminists and "the Indian woman" 1865-1915. In *Western women and imperialism*, edited by M. Strobel and N. Chaudhuri. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Enloe, Cynthia. 2004. *The curious feminist: Searching for women in a new age of empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Espiritu, Yen L. 2000. *Asian American women and men*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Ferree, Myra M. 1995. Patriarchies and feminisms: Two women's movements of unified Germany. *Social Politics* 2:10-24.
- Gal, Susan, and Gail Kligman. 2000. *The politics of gender after socialism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hughes, Donna M. 2005. How can I be sold like this? Trafficking of North Korean women refugees. *National Review Online*, 19 July.
- Huisman, Kimberly, and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo. 2005. Dress matters: Change and continuity in the dress practices of Bosnian Muslim refugee women. *Gender & Society* 19:44-65.

- Kim, Tae Hyun, and Chi Young Roh. 2003. *The lives of North Korean escapee women in China*. Seoul, Korea: Haewoo Press.
- Lutz, Catherine A., and Jane L. Collins. 1993. *Reading "National Geographic."* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mohanty, Chandra T. 2003. *Feminist without borders*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Moon, Seungsook. 2005. *Militarized modernity and gendered citizenship in South Korea*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ong, Aihwa. 1996. Cultural citizenship as subject-making: Immigrants negotiate racial and cultural boundaries in the United States. *Current Anthropology* 37:737-62.
- . 2003. *Buddha is hiding*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Parrenas, Rhacel. 2001. *Servants of globalization: Women, migration, and domestic work*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Radcliff, Pamela B. 2002. Imagining female citizenship in the "New Spain": Gendering the democratic transition, 1975-1978. In *Gender, citizenship, and subjectivities*, edited by K. Canning and S. Rose. London: Blackwell.
- Reskin, Barbara F., and Patricia A. Roos. 1990. *Job queues, gender queues*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Shafir, Gershon, and Yoav Peled. 1998. The dynamics of citizenship in Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In *The citizenship debates*, edited by G. Shafir. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Soysal, Yasemin N. 1994. *Limits of citizenship: Migrants and postnational membership in Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Teng, Jinhua E. 1996. The construction of the "traditional Chinese woman" in the Western academy: A critical review. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 22:115-51.
- West, Candace, and Sarah Fenstermaker. 1995. Doing difference. *Gender & Society* 9:8-37.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. 1997a. *Gender and nation*. London: Sage.
- . 1997b. Women, citizenship and difference. *Feminist Review* 57:4-27.

*Hae Yeon Choo is a doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Her research focuses on gender, migration, modernity, and citizenship. This article grew out of her master's thesis, which was an ethnographic study of gender and ethnicity among North Korean settlers in South Korea. She is currently developing her dissertation project, which comparatively examines citizenship and nationhood in Korea and Germany during the cold war and under globalization.*