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Abstract:

Patriotic Revolutionaries and Imperial Sympathizers:
Identity and selfhood of Korean-Japanese migrants from Japan to North Korea

While the outward migration of North Korean refugees has received a growing interest in scholarly circles, little has been said about emigration to North Korea. Drawing on ethnographic and archival research, this article considers the changing political subjectivities of migrants from Japan to the DPRK, from 1959 to the 1980s, and their relationship to both the ethnic homeland and the former colonizer. I suggest that the North Korean state's effort to contain the imagined threat posed by arrivals from Japan was undermined by transnational exchange between divided families. Specifically, women on both sides of the East Sea/Sea of Japan engaged in kin work (di Leonardo 1987) that alerted ethnic Korean immigrants to their ambiguous status as both fraternal comrade and outsider in North Korea. My research illustrates how mobility provided opportunities for new subjectivities to emerge, as individuals who considered themselves Korean patriots developed identifications that translocally connected them to kin and communities in Japan.

Key words: identity; migration; selfhood; transnational kinship; North Korea; Japan

Patriotic Revolutionaries and Imperial Sympathizers:
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We were told that Kim Il-song cares deeply about Koreans in Japan. That he gives our schools money and welcomes patriots who desire to return to the homeland. I was told that *Ch'ongryŏn*ⁱ was impressed with my hard work and was offering me the chance to go to university for free in North Korea. Our family was so poor, my father worked in a factory and my mother was a housewife, so it sounded like a great opportunity. I started studying harder. I didn't want to miss this chance.

(Tanaka Sazuka, arrived in Japan from North Korea in 2003).

There are so many rules [in North Korea] and I could never adjust. Every week we had self-criticism sessions and struggle sessionsⁱⁱ. I always found it so stressful. [After finishing high school] I went to film school but we spent an unbelievable amount of time just reading about the Kims. When we weren't doing that we had to practice our dance moves for the mass gamesⁱⁱⁱ. This was all instead of actually learning about plays and movies. These government enforced group meetings were meant to promote unity, 'one mind', but I couldn't see the point in it. I hated being told what to do and never felt like I fitted in North Korea. It happened gradually, but one day I decided that I'd had enough and I wanted to leave.

(Ko Hye-rim, arrived in Japan from North Korea in the early 2000s).

While the outward migration of North Korean refugees into China and on to the Republic of Korea (hereafter South Korea) and Japan has received a growing interest in scholarly circles (Lankov 2006; Bell 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2016; Jung 2013; Kim 2013; Song 2013; Koo 2016), very little has been said about emigration to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter DPRK or North Korea), the motivations for moving to one of the most closed societies in the world, and what happens to the people who move there. In the post-colonial, cold war world, competing ideological blocs used the movement of individuals from one side to the other for propaganda purposes. Beyond strengthening claims of state superiority and political legitimacy, the migration of displaced persons that resulted from the redrawing of national boundaries also had a profound effect on how those who moved identified themselves. The 1945 division of the Korean Peninsula at the 38th parallel impacted on already complex ideological and kinship alliances, rupturing communities and shaping new subjectivities for those who moved and the people they left behind.

In this paper, I look at the ways in which the mass movement of former subjects of the Japanese empire – *Zainichi* Koreans^{iv} – from Japan to the DPRK, from 1959 to the early 1980s, influenced immigrants' political subjectivities and their relationship to both the ethnic homeland and Korean communities in Japan^v. I suggest that the North Korean state's effort to contain the imagined threat to the national body posed by new arrivals from Japan was undermined by transnational exchange between divided families^{vi}. Women on both sides of the East Sea/Sea of Japan carried out 'kin work' (di Leonardo 1987) that acted as a reminder to repatriates of their ambiguous status in North Korea – as both fraternal comrade and untrustworthy representative of Japan.

This article addresses the reshaping of migrant subjectivities through micro and macro political forces. The micro politics primarily comprise of intra-ethnic relationships, the development of transnational migrant networks, and family life. The macro-politics consist of developing inter-state relations and post-colonial ideology in the cold war world. The feelings of rejection and alienation that emerged for repatriates in response to their fraught relationship with representatives of the North Korean state and citizenry provoked a transformation in repatriated Koreans' sense of self and belonging. The experiences of repatriates to North Korea serve to illustrate that people who experienced the bifurcating politics of the cold war first hand often internalized these ruptures in complex, contradictory ways that shaped their understanding of themselves and their communities.

In the sections that follow I interrogate the concepts of identity and belonging in relation to broader debates of selfhood and migration. I explain the motivations of individuals who migrated to North Korea and consider how the idea of North Korea as home changed over time. My research illustrates that the responses of repatriate families to North Korean state imperatives and social exclusion provoked repatriates to carve out transnational spaces that connected them to people and places they had left behind. Mobility provided opportunities for new subjectivities to emerge as individuals who considered themselves Korean patriots developed 'translocal' identifications (Conradson and McKay 2007, 168) that connected them not to the nation of Japan, but to communities where they had strong emotional attachments within Japan. My findings underline the significance of kin work and 'multi-sensorial engagements' for nurturing transnational relationships with the sending country (Svašek 2010, 868). I argue that these factors contributed to the emergence of what Edward Said described as a 'plurality of vision' (2001, 172), in which the new arrivals from Japan identified with aspects of both the old and the new, the sending country and the host country, at the same time.

The North Korean state attempted, with varying successes, to discipline repatriates from Japan using political education and the threat of violence. Repatriates responded ambivalently towards the ethnic-nationalist ideology promoted by the North Korean state, experiencing a heightened sense of difference to the indigenous North Koreans. Subsequently, many were moved to reexamine their understanding of home, and to reimagine their relationship with Japan in a more positive light. In considering how repatriates responded to the technologies of state power and the stigma of association with Japan, my analysis illustrates that life in North Korea unravelled repatriates' conception of a post-colonial Korean identity that rested on the individual's ethnic and political identification with revolutionary North Korea.

How did the self-identification of individuals who migrated from Japan to North Korea shift in response to the symbolic and actual violence of the state, and subsequent feelings of social alienation? The quotes that open this article illustrate two prominent tropes that emerged in conversations with interviewees who repatriated to North Korea: hope that life in North Korea would offer Korean patriots upward social and economic mobility unavailable in Japan, and disappointment when it became clear that it would offer neither improved opportunities in education and employment, nor a homeland in which to develop a sense of belonging. I examine what happened to migrant identity at the intersection of hope and disappointment. Specifically, I reveal how the reality of living in North Korea as a politically low-status migrant provoked a renegotiation of repatriates' sense of self and their relationship to both the communities from which they left and those in which they were received. Examining the discourses of returnees from North Korea, this paper

focuses on an ambivalent sense of identification, and how that identity was performed in public and in private. For example, many individuals I spoke with recalled a pre-repatriation patriotic fervour. They recalled the desire to be part of an independent state built by and for Koreans – ethno-nationalist, revolutionary, and anti-imperial in character. Emotions of longing and belonging shifted in North Korea, as tensions between the native population and the newcomers became more salient.

Drawing on the life narratives of my key interlocutors^{vii}, this article illustrates how the self-identification of immigrants from Japan shifted through living in North Korea, how these individuals identified before the repatriation movement and why this later changed; how concepts such as home, the self, and belonging become destabilized, and the role of the North Korean state in this process. The feelings expressed by Hye-rim, quoted above, exemplify feelings of distrust, anxiety, and displacement that often emerged between local North Koreans and immigrants from Japan. Such contradictory emotions, from ethnic pride and political loyalty to the state, to feeling like a foreigner in the ethnic homeland, now motivates some repatriates to escape North Korea and return to Japan.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is part of a broader, ongoing project on the migration of North Koreans throughout Asia and Europe that I started in 2010 in Seoul, South Korea. I use qualitative methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews to investigate the experiences of migration and resettlement for North Koreans in South Korea, Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom. The data for this paper came from research I carried out in Japan. In order to understand the complex motivations behind the mass migration to North Korea, life in North Korea for repatriates, and the transformation in ethnic identification and political selfhood that took place, I draw on interlocutor responses from semi structured interviews and conversations with 30 returnees from North Korea in Osaka and Tokyo from 2014-2015.

During my research in Japan I spent eight months living in Korea town in Tsuruhashi, Osaka. I chose this location for my field research because it is home to a large ethnic Korean population. It is also a space in which many returnees from North Korea work and live immediately following their arrival in Japan. I interacted with returnees from North Korea on a daily basis, through studying at a Japanese language school in which most returnees study Japanese after their arrival, volunteering at a non-governmental organization (NGO) involved with the resettlement of returnees, attending social events held by the *Chae-Ilbon Taehan Min'guk Mindan* (Korean Residents Union in Japan/Mindan)^{viii}, and eating and drinking with returnees on a social basis. Interviews lasted between one and two hours and were conducted in Korean, although many of my interlocutors mixed Korean and Japanese as we spoke. My participant observation and interviews contributed to my understanding of how multiple migrations, across several generations, shapes the migrant's self-understanding and his/her relationship to the sending community and the host society. I coded the results of my interviews and conversations using a 'superindex', in which each interaction was tagged with 5-6 keywords, for example: *gender roles; transnational exchange; famine and survival; NGO support; intra-ethnic friction*. Following my fieldwork in Japan I spent a month in the archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in Geneva, Switzerland, searching through official state and ICRC documents pertaining to the repatriation movement. This period of research helped to historically contextualize the voices of the individuals I

had worked with in Japan, and to understand the macro level, structural forces that led to and sustained the mass movement of Koreans, and some Japanese, to North Korea.

MIGRATION, THE SELF, AND IDENTITY

From 1959 to the early 1980s, 93,340 individuals, approximately 6,000 Japanese and 87,000 Koreans, migrated from Japan to North Korea as part of a post-colonial repatriation project^{ix}. The ICRC, the Japanese government and the DPRK government organized the mass emigration of Japan's largest ethnic minority at that time^x. Since the early 2000s, some 300 repatriates have returned to Japan. This number continues to grow, as more repatriated Koreans and Japanese return to Japan. Research into the lives of this group of forced migrants offers a window into the everyday lived experiences of post-colonial nation-state building in Northeast Asia and also presents clues as to how countries in the region might respond to crisis driven migration in the event of the collapse of the North Korean regime.

Migration and self-identification

Migration shapes emotional processes^{xi} and understandings of the self for the person who moves, those who remain behind, and members of the receiving community. In this article I take as a starting point studies concerned with the relationship of migration to emotions (Baldassar 2007, 2008; Gray 2008; Skrbiš 2008; Svašek 2008, 2010; Andits 2015), identity (Ahmed 1999; Brubaker and Cooper 2000), and the self (Whittaker 1992; Walkerdine 2006; Conradson and McKay 2007; Biehl et al. 2007; Andits 2010). These studies underline the significance of inner life processes for reflecting moments of both crisis and the everyday (cf. Biehl et al 2007) and note that the self is “a multiple, relational being-in-the-world”, embedded within its surroundings and engaging with the past, present and future (Svasek 2010, 868).

Self and identity are often used synonymously to describe an innate character that exists out of sight, but is nevertheless foundational to a person's being in the world. The self, as a ‘relational being-in-the-world’, is not the same as ‘identity’. While the self shares ‘hidden qualities with such concepts as mind, ego, soul, spirit, and psyche’ (Whittaker 1992, 200), ‘identity’ is commonly referred to as something multiple (people may have an infinite number of identities), that they deploy to their advantage, and that is vulnerable to structures of power. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue that the prevailing understandings of identity have led to a crisis in the social sciences in which identity is used so commonly as an analytic category that it has lost all meaning. Consequently, identity can mean too much, too little, or nothing at all. ‘If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere’, claim Brubaker and Cooper (2000, 1). Although Brubaker and Cooper concede that powerful entities, for example the state, are ‘identifiers’, with the capacity to impose categories and classificatory schemes, they argue that the state is far from the only identifier that matters (2000, 16).

Consequently, the self is not an atemporal, bounded repository for a person's understanding of the world, into which experiences are passively accumulated, but rather is in an ongoing relationship with the world, continuously shaped through interactions with others, with the material environment, with memories of the past, and with imagined futures. Transnational trends remake our inner processes: emotion, cognitive style, memory, and our deepest sense of self (Kleinman and Fitz-Henry 2007, 55). The person also does not have to exist in one place or time for an experience to profoundly impact a person's self. Interlocutors I spoke with, for

instance, often recalled family they had lost during the North Korean famine. Deceased family continued to exercise a strong pull on their living kin after they left North Korea. Such recollections were associated with of a mixture of emotions, including a nostalgia for the simple life in North Korea, guilt for leaving family behind, fond memories of family gatherings and ‘making do’ with whatever resources were available, and betrayal by a state that failed to protect them from the effects of the 1990s economic collapse.

With these considerations, this article posits that identity is better understood as a process of ongoing social interaction in which people are agents in shaping their identification through a dialectic process with other actors and with the material world around them. Shifting the focus from a bounded, static, analytic category of ‘identity’ to an action of identification underlines the agentive, communal, and processual elements involved. The process of identification demands a temporal and spatial contextualization, shaped through individual and collective actions.

Ethnic identification and political self-understanding of repatriated Koreans

Migration complicates the concept of home for those who move, for communities affected by migration, and for family members who both benefit from and struggle with the social and economic consequences of human mobility. Issues of gender and class crosscut the relationship to home(s) for those who move and those who stay put. The experience of leaving home threatens to generate a perpetual feeling of being out of place, out of time, and out of the skin. Shaping the self is an ongoing, ‘hybrid achievement’ (Conradson and McKay 2007, 167) that involves multiple influences and connects the migrant to people, localities, historical changes, and emotional states. The narratives of multiple migrants moving between Japan and North Korea span several generations and create overlapping identifications between localities in both the sending and receiving countries.

In 1951, the Allied Powers and Japan signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty. This agreement returned control of Japan to the Japanese government. For minorities in Japan, this was a defining moment in their relationship with the former colonial master. Previously, as part of the Japanese Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere, minorities in the Metropole were afforded basic privileges, such as access to public services, and social security. Once the Japanese government was reinstated, however, it rescinded these rights^{xii}. Koreans, Taiwanese, Chinese and other former colonial subjects officially became aliens in Japan^{xiii}. Koreans were no longer able to access benefits provided by the central government. Discriminatory practices against former colonial subjects were also common, with loans only available at higher rates than Japanese, unequal employment opportunities, and constraints on wages, education, and housing^{xiv}. Institutionally discriminated against in terms of employment and welfare, the number of ‘needy Koreans’ grew from 74,911 in September 1952, to 138,972 in December 1955. This marked a rise from 13.12% to 24.06% of the Korean population classified by the Japanese government as, ‘persons in need of special state economic assistance’^{xv}.

In the years leading up to the mass migration to North Korea, members of *Chae Ilbon Chosŏnin Ch'ongryŏn haphoe* (*Ch'ongryŏn*), the DPRK’s representation in Japan, disseminated North Korean propaganda at public events and door to door in areas of Osaka and Tokyo home to Koreans. *Ch'ongryŏn* printed fliers and pamphlets called on Korean compatriots to return to the homeland, and *Ch'ongryŏn* supporters drove around Korean populated areas of Osaka, projecting greetings from Kim Il-

song and promising a better life across the sea^{xvi}. Constant messages from powerful sources fostered an imagining of North Korea as a place in which patriotic Koreans would exist free from the marginalizing practices in Japan.

Prospective repatriates arrived at Niigata port from all over Japan. Whole families prepared for interviews with ICRC staff with suitcases stuffed full of clothes and personal belongings^{xvii}. The journey to North Korea took three days and two nights. Once the ship docked at Ch'ongjin port, North Korea, the call to disembark sounded through the ship's loudspeakers. Passengers crowded the deck for their first view of North Korea. They raised their hands in celebration, crying out "hurrah!"^{xviii} But not everyone was excited to see the new home. Standing on the deck of the passenger ship, some stared in a mixture of wonder and horror at the state-organized greeting party. Kim Hyön-chae recalled his parents' first impressions, "My mother told me how distressed she was by their appearance. Their skin was black and worn...their clothes were drab and unkempt. They looked like they'd had very hard lives." Hyön-chae's mother's reaction to seeing the locals for the first time accords with others who recounted their arrival stories to me. Their first impressions unsettled the zealous ethno-nationalist identity that had emerged amongst many Koreans in Japan. In the eyes of the new arrivals, the people gathered together at the end of the gangway, lackadaisically waving DPRK flags and holding flowers, appeared vastly different from the passionate, healthy young patriots they had seen in North Korean propaganda leaflets.

Repatriates' experiences varied according to their loyalty to the state, age, gender, and transnational relationships to Japan. Some of the new arrivals had been educated in *Ch'ongryŏn* schools in Japan, studying DPRK revolutionary history and the Korean language. Others possessed little knowledge of either. A small number had been offered the choice between time in a Japanese jail or exile to North Korea. As they disembarked the ship, state officials herded them into a large warehouse. Cadres handed out food and ordered people filing into the building to find a place to wait. Each new arrival was recorded – place of origin in Japan, occupation, age, special skills, and family composition^{xix}. The wait in the processing centre took up to four days, depending on how prepared officials were for each new batch of arrivals. On the day of their onward journey, state officials directed them out of the warehouse and onto trains. Those who knew the right people, who had political connections through *Ch'ongryŏn*, or money to bribe the officials, were sent to the capital, Pyongyang, a favourable location in terms of infrastructure, employment, and proximity to power. Those individuals who lacked the desired revolutionary credentials, who had no connection to *Ch'ongryŏn* or were known to have family in South Korea were processed by state officials and boarded trains bound for the northern provinces of the country. Among the predominantly Korean repatriates were around 6,000 Japanese wives. Women and children followed the instructions of their husband or father, even if this meant uprooting their lives entirely and against their will. Yamamoto Hiroko, a Japanese woman who migrated to North Korea in 1961, recounted her experiences in the Niigata ICRC screening centre^{xx}, prior to departure. On the day she was due to be interviewed, ICRC staff invited her whole family into the interview room and asked them, as a group, if they wanted to leave for North Korea. "The only person that could answer, however, was my father in law. He replied, "Yes, we want to go." He was the head of the family, so we had to follow him."

For most new arrivals, their hope for a prosperous life in the ethnic homeland quickly turned to disappointment. Although many were unaware at the time of their

arrival, their association with the former colonizer, Japan, marked them as symbolically polluted individuals, embodied representations of Korea's subjugation under Japanese rule. Although they were initially received enthusiastically by the North Korean state, the propaganda value of immigrants from Japan and their usefulness as an economic conduit connecting North Korea with Japan did not compensate for state fears that the returning comrades were little different from the Japanese colonizers. With the exception of a select few, the treatment repatriates received from the North Korean state and the local populations provoked a distinct shift in how they identified themselves, from patriotic revolutionaries to Koreans from Japan.

LIFE IN NORTH KOREA

The majority of repatriates arrived in North Korea between 1959 and 1964^{xxi}, but a one-way movement of Zainichi Koreans and some Japanese continued, with the occasional pause, until the early 1980s^{xxii}. New arrivals' everyday experiences in North Korea were affected by political and economic changes taking place at the global and regional levels. Two epoch-making events in particular impacted on the experiences of immigrants from Japan: the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent famine in North Korea^{xxiii}, and the political fallout that emerged during the 2002 Japan-North Korea summit as a result of the abduction revelations.

In North Korea, the state organized the population into three main groups (*sŏngbun*): "hostile forces," "neutral forces," and "friendly forces". These categories were hereditary and prevented the upward mobility of most individuals^{xxiv}. New arrivals from Japan were organized according to the government's assessment of their family background, political contributions, and their value to the state. Association with the former coloniser and the southern origins of many new arrivals tainted repatriates. Their "hostile forces" status constrained their prospects for social advancement within North Korean society and defined their broader relationships to the state and the native population. For many repatriates, these categorizations limited their prospects for marriage or of advancing their careers. As Lee Sun-hyŏng, who returned to Japan from North Korea in the early 2000s lamented, "Because of our low political status there was no chance of improving our lives."

Throughout the country, cadres of the Korean Workers' Party attempted to discipline the new arrivals using political meetings and self-criticism sessions, state directed surveillance^{xxv} through a vast network of informants, and the threat of state-sanctioned violence in the form of extra political education, exile to the northern provinces of the country and, in extreme cases, corporal punishment. Throughout the 1960s, Kim Il-song carried out a series of purges of political opponents as part of a broader effort to secure a monolithic ideological system and strengthen the solidarity of the Party (Buzo 1999, 59). Although Party purges largely ceased during the 1970s, disappearances of politically suspect individuals continued. During the 1970s,^{xxvi} the state confiscated the wealth of many repatriate families before sending them into labour camps^{xxvii}.

The efforts of Party cadres to shape the new arrivals into compliant citizens included discouraging them from acting in ways that might be considered Japanese. Many repatriates had spent their entire lives in Japan. They arrived in a society that was still in a war-ready mentality and hostile to outsiders. Consequently, the response of North Koreans to individuals who, in their eyes, were little different from imperial sympathizers was an aggressive targeting of their Japanese characteristics: clothes,

behaviour, and language were all cause for concern as they highlighted the newcomers' difference from native North Koreans. Even the comportment of repatriates set them apart from the locals. Kim Hyön-chae told me that in Pyongyang it was possible to spot new arrivals by the way a person walked: locals walked quickly, bent over at the waist and staring straight ahead. "There was no way of getting around, so they all had to powerwalk. And no one wanted to risk attracting the attention of state security, so they'd focus on the ground ahead of them." In contrast, repatriates walked in a relaxed fashion, as they had done in Japan.

Prior to arrival in North Korea, repatriation was considered by many as the ultimate act of loyalty to the North Korean state and its leader, Kim Il-song. By no means were all those who migrated to North Korea staunch revolutionaries, but for many prospective emigrants, repatriation meant giving up life in Japan and taking a risk in an unknown land. Individuals who had been made painfully aware of their Korean status in Japan were now considered to be too Japanese in the ethnic homeland. State authorities directed repatriates to send their children to local schools. Japanese was not permitted in schools, in workplaces, or in public. Talking of Japan was forbidden. Children who attended ethnic Korean schools prior to leaving Japan could often speak a modicum of Korean. Other young repatriates, however, spoke little or no Korean and struggled to understand what was happening in class. Chang Mi-chöng told me that, when she arrived in North Korea at 17 years old, she did not speak any Korean. She was sent to a local school and stayed in the dormitory. "If we spoke Japanese, we'd be disciplined. They'd hit us. This was good to learn because later, if we spoke Japanese as adults, we'd have been seriously punished," she explained, making a throat-slitting gesture with her hand.

Repatriates often suspected local North Koreans of being agents of the state and, when possible, kept a distance from them. People who arrived in the DPRK as adults learned from experience that the public sphere was for Korean behaviour and the private was for Japanese. On the surface, indigenous North Koreans and repatriates were divided by language and day-to-day practices. These differences were emphasized by the expressions used to refer to the other in each case^{xxviii}. Those who arrived from Japan referred to Korean born people as 'Apache'. This expression echoed the use of the term they had seen in American television shows and Japanese history books. It reflected their perceptions of North Koreans' "savage manners and dress" which they equated to North American depictions of the Native Americans. The native North Koreans employed the term "Pig's Trotters" for the newcomers, referencing a Japanese style of footwear^{xxix} that, in their eyes, resembled cloven hooves^{xxx}. But the DPRK's citizen-making project, however encompassing it may have seemed, was undermined by its reliance on goods and capital from Japan. The products of transnational exchange, largely developed and maintained by Korean-Japanese women, acted as a reminder to repatriates of life in Japan and their outsider status in their new home.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 meant an end to the economic assistance the DPRK had previously enjoyed. Unable to borrow money from the global credit markets, the North Korean economy crumbled^{xxxi}. As the Public Distribution System ground to a halt, food shortages emerged across the country^{xxxii}. The North Korean government was slow to respond to the crisis. When it did, it encouraged citizens to embody the *Juche*^{xxxiii} spirit and fend for themselves. The result was mass starvation, large internal migration, and the exodus of tens of thousands of people across the Sino-Korean border in search of food and employment. Repatriates who had lost contact with family in Japan, or whose family

was too poor to continuously furnish them with parcels were, in the words of one interlocutor, “The first to die during the famine.” The North Korean state recognized that repatriated Koreans had a distinct pecuniary value during periods of dearth: the state put enormous pressure on immigrants from Japan to extract as much from their overseas kin as possible. *Ch'ongryŏn*, the DPRK’s representation in Japan, organized capital and goods that contributed to sustaining the struggling North Korean economy and, in some cases, were used to line the pockets of the Korean Workers’ Party elite. Although migrants from Japan were politically untrustworthy, local North Koreans coveted the products they imported. As a reward for contributing to the economy of the DPRK, the state allocated some repatriated Koreans high status employment as skilled labour and in national sports teams^{xxxiv}. A select few were even able to join the Korean Workers’ Party, moving into the inner circles of the ruling elite.

The economic hardship experienced by most repatriated North Korean was compounded in 2002 when Kim Jong-il declared that North Korean agents, ostensibly operating without his knowledge, had abducted 13 Japanese, five from Europe and the remaining eight from the shores of Japan. Encouraged by a furious public, the immediate impact was the imposition of sanctions that blocked the economic exchange that had been a lifeline for many repatriated families in North Korea. Although informally it was still possible to send money and everyday items to family in North Korea, the days of bulk-sending automobiles, bicycles, refrigerators, washing machines, stereos, and pianos were over^{xxxv}.

Transnational kin work

Prior to migrating to North Korea, some families tried to spread the risk of migrating to North Korea by sending only one or two family members. For those cautious of what awaited them, dividing family was also a financial gambit, individuals hoping to benefit from the trade that they imagined would emerge once Japan and North Korea normalized relations. In such cases, selected family stayed in Japan and waited to hear about conditions before deciding to follow. Interviewees told me of secret messages, composed on the back of stamps or encoded into the text of letters home that warned remaining family not to follow. “I let my parents know I was well and that I would see them when my brother was ready to get married. My brother was a still a child, however, and they understood that I was actually warning them not to follow me to North Korea,” one interlocutor told me. The family ties connecting those who moved to those who stayed could be the difference between life and death when food was scarce.

Wealthy and politically connected families had a greater access to goods imported from Japan. Families with connections to the pachinko business, for example, had access to regular remittances, sent by those who had stayed behind^{xxxvi}. But for the majority of repatriate families, those without political or economic capital, relationships to family in Japan were created and maintained by the kin work of women. Micaela di Leonardo argues that understanding kin work requires fusing domestic work and labor perspectives to recognize that maintaining broad kinship networks is also a socially necessary and economically pertinent form of labor. Kin work, and its role in the maintenance of kinship systems, can act as “vehicles for actual survival and/or political resistance” (di Leonardo 1987: 441), and neither legal nor political borders limit the significance of this work. The long distance kin work of families divided by the repatriation project was gendered because Korean men and women regarded these duties as ‘women’s work’, alongside other life nurturing duties

that fused activities inside and outside the home^{xxxvii}. Existing outside the formal structures of state diplomatic relations, kin-based long distance relationships, and the flow of goods they facilitated, continued in spite of trade sanctions.

In ordinary times, the emotional longing for loved ones left behind is enough of an impetus to encourage transnational practices that contribute to the emergence of long distance relationships. These circumstances are magnified during times of crisis, for example when the support of family and friends in the homeland is required as a means of survival. The most common practices include making phone calls, sending letters and packages, sending text messages and emails, and using web technology (such as Skype) to establish a feeling of co-presence (Baldassar 2008, 256). Repatriated families, however, had limited options at the time of their resettlement in North Korea. Families living in urban areas could send and receive mail, including parcels, and make telephone calls from the workplace or the local calling centre, but the state attempted to monitor correspondence; letters were censored and, according to interlocutors, packages sometimes arrived missing items. However, state control was always partial, undermined by officials' susceptibility to bribes and the state's inability to oversee all communication between North Korea and Japan^{xxxviii}. Those wishing to communicate without arousing the state's interest had to do so clandestinely. The most common means of doing so would be to wait for family to visit from Japan and orchestrate a moment out of the earshot of state cadres. But, for most repatriates, reunions were infrequent, largely due to the difficulty of traveling to meet family in North Korea^{xxxix}. Consequently, letters and parcels took on a heightened significance as a lifeline for families divided between Japan and North Korea.

Since the 1990s, Zainichi film director, Yang Yǒng-hǔi has made multiple visits to visit her family in Pyongyang, each time taking armloads of items with her. Since her brothers migrated to North Korea, in 1971, Yǒng-hǔi's mother regularly speaks with her sons over the telephone and sends them packages with food, clothes, and other supplies^{xl}. Her mother's indefatigable attitude helped her brothers and their family survive the 1990s famine that had such disastrous consequences for so many repatriates. Speaking to me in Osaka, Yǒng-hǔi explained that her mother sends money via the local post office. Once the money is registered as arrived, the post office in Pyongyang calls the registered recipients and they go to pick it up. Recipients are required to open the packages in front of postal officials, who check for illicit materials. "If we send money, the process costs ten per cent of the money sent. In the early days, sending things this way wasn't reliable. The boxes would arrive with things missing. But, it's gradually improved"^{xli}.

Letters and parcels, largely exchanged by women in North Korea and Japan were the primary means of communication for divided families. For families who were able to maintain them, letter writing and phone calls, the technologies of long distance kin work, fostered a co-presence with family in Japan, reminding those who had stayed behind of their obligation to kin in need in North Korea. In exchange, money, books and stationary, clothes and luxury goods^{xlii} provided repatriates with items for personal use and with which to bribe officials when required. Food products were particularly useful, in terms of both their symbolic value for trading with local North Koreans, and as multi-sensory reminders of life before North Korea. Svašek and Skrbiš note that items sent from home increase migrants' sense of belonging and emotional wellbeing (2007, 377). Such items take on a heightened meaning for individuals in a state of exile or unable to return to the sending country. Culinary products are also efficacious in producing feelings of divergent belonging from host

society. The tastes, smells and the action of cooking foods imported from Japan reminded the immigrant of the life before North Korea. Curry-rice flavouring, for example, along with other quintessentially Japanese food items was an item popular with both repatriate families and with the local North Koreans. Versions of Japanese curried dishes followed repatriating Koreans to North Korea, packed into the parcels sent by family members who stayed in Japan. Once in North Korea, repatriate families might trade imported foodstuffs for local products, or gave it away to strategically gain favour with persons in power. Curried foods were not the only cuisine to accompany repatriates. *Ramen* and *udon* noodles were also a common item for family in Japan to send. One unintended effect of the goods exchanged between Japan and North Korea was that they contributed to cultivating favourable associations to Japan. Interlocutors told me that Japanese food, foreign music records, and eye-catching clothes had an exotic allure. Further, the quality of the products was considered as higher than North Korean made goods. These items contributed to fostering a positive imagining of Japan for the generations of Zainichi Koreans born in North Korea.

Yet though these letters connected families across time and space, they also weighed heavy on the relationships of divided families. With the help of an informant in Osaka, I gained access to a cache of letters written between 1981 and 2014, sent from Ch'ongjin and Pyongyang to family in Japan. The letters were affixed with North Korean stamps showing they were sent through official channels. A feeling of barely maintained restraint permeated the lines of each page, most written in Korean and punctuated with the occasional Japanese and Chinese characters. Several themes recur across the 70 letters: Death, the weather, and health concerns fill up many pages. Many request financial support for medical expenses, weddings, funerals, and ancestor worship ceremonies. Repatriate women request very specific amounts of money, promising to, "meet again someday," and to repay all that has been taken. "My husband is dying," one woman pleads, before requesting Japanese yen from her kin. "I cry everyday at the thought of losing him. We sold everything we own to pay for his treatment." Divided families sent letters narrating their hardships and requesting support over many years. Under the weight of the ongoing emotional and financial burden, some families in Japan broke off contact with those in the DPRK. Even after family in Japan ceased replying, many women in North Korea continued to write, hoping the letters would find their intended recipient.

The family as the locus of ambiguous identification

Behind closed doors, in intimate spaces, repatriates embarked on a divergent kind of identity making. In their homes, families nurtured their own particular self-understanding that hinged upon long-distance relationships to kin and friends in localities in Japan, a country in which they had also been foreigners. "We'd get together with other returnees, eat Japanese food and speak Japanese, talking about the life we'd left behind. We had to be careful though, because if any of the natives heard us we'd be reported and punished" Chang Mi-ch'ong told me, making a gesture to demonstrate her wrists being bound together. During social gatherings with other repatriates they defied the state's insistence that they rid themselves of their Japanese cultural markers.

Repatriate families' home life filled a lacuna of knowledge regarding experiences in Japan. Following traditional child rearing practices, children in North

Korea were usually raised under the watchful eye of grandparents. Most frequently, it was the grandmother's duty to supervise the household and its inhabitants while one or both parents were at work. The elderly thus became instrumental in nurturing group cohesion and maintaining emotional connections to the past. With mother and father working in a state factory or on a collective farm, returnees I spoke with recalled that it was grandmother who cooked for the family and disciplined the children. Many repatriates used imported ingredients and cooked food in the style they had learned in Japan. While cooking and in times of celebration, grandparents sang Japanese songs and retold folktales from southern Korea and Japan to their grandchildren. Park Ok-cha recalled that her parents and grandparents sang Japanese songs to help her fall asleep. "And when there was a power shortage, which was often, my father would get his guitar and we would all sing together. I didn't always understand the meaning of the songs, but the sound was beautiful."

The child rearing methods transmitted memories of an alternative time and space to the places repatriates had resettled in North Korea. The memories acted like a bridge, stirring desire and connecting younger individuals to a life they had not themselves lived, yet to which they felt an intense pull. Nostalgia for life in Japan emerged amongst repatriate families. Elderly repatriates who yearned for life in Japan transmitted memories inflected with regret for leaving and nostalgia for the past to their grandchildren. 'Heaven on earth'^{xliii}, as state propaganda had fostered the imagining of North Korea in the minds of prospective repatriates, shifted from symbolising North Korea to representing Korean community life in Japan.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have examined the mass migration of Koreans displaced by the demands of the Japanese empire to discuss how former colonial subjects internalized the ruptures of post-colonial citizen making and cold war ideologies in complex, contradictory ways that shaped their understanding of themselves and their communities. The frictions that emerged between repatriated Koreans and the North Korean state and society provided opportunities for new subjectivities to emerge amongst repatriates. Individuals who identified with the DPRK's ethnic nationalism developed translocal identifications to kin and community in Japan. These long-distance relationships sustained them for many years following their arrival in North Korea. The transnational relationships between divided families offered a means to survive the sporadic food shortages that characterized life outside the urban centres of North Korea, but these relationships were vulnerable to the decline in DPRK-Japan relations. Until the severing of the ties that connected family divided between Japan and North Korea, these relationships had largely been sustained by the kin work of women on both sides of the East Sea/Sea of Japan. Through mnemonic devices: songs, stories, and commensality with others from Japan, repatriates fostered a different kind of belonging, divergent from the DPRK citizen-making project. In building a communal repository of counter memories from which they could draw when in each other's company, repatriates shaped alternative identifications to those propagated by the state. But transnational kinship networks also marked these families as having divided loyalties. The success and comparable material wealth of some immigrants from Japan invoked envy among local Koreans, who claimed their influence as subversive to North Korean socialism. The socio-political tensions underlying the relationship between the host society and the newcomers' body and self destabilized the subjectivities of individuals who, in many cases, had previously

considered themselves patriots of the fatherland. Being Korean and being loyal to Kim Il-song's DPRK, two things that many repatriates had previously conceived of as inseparable, now diverged; it was possible to be Korean without being a patriotic revolutionary.

The kin work of women in North Korea and in Japan sustained repatriate families and contributed to the emergence of repatriates' translocal identification with the sights, sounds, and smells of Korean communities in Japan. In speaking Japanese at home; cooking Japanese dishes; wearing clothes imported from Japan; singing songs and telling stories that recalled life prior to arriving in North Korea, repatriate families created spaces in which nostalgic memories connected them to friends, family, and Korean communities in Osaka, Tokyo, Kobe and beyond. Many families migrated to North Korea with hopes that it would provide them and their family with opportunities that had eluded them as marginalized former subjects of the Japanese empire. But, in North Korea, the host society regarded Zainichi Koreans from Japan as little different from the former Japanese colonizers. The reality of life at the bottom of the DPRK's socio-political hierarchy provoked a shift in how repatriates identified with the host society and with communities they had left behind. Further, the flow of letters, capital, and goods contributed to a desire to return to Japan amongst some young repatriates. In escaping North Korea and remigrating to Japan, returnees are again required to re-negotiate their ethnic and political selves, this time in the face of Japanese prejudice towards Koreans. Many now ask similar questions to the ones their parents and grandparents asked after seeing the natives on the docks of Ch'ongjin for the first time: "Who are you? Who am I? Is this home?"

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NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

Pseudonyms have been used for the names of North Korean research participants. The McCune-Reischauer System of Romanization has been used, except for familiar names and places, such as Kim Il-song, Pyongyang, and Seoul.

ⁱ The General Association of Korean Residents in Japan, 'Chae-Ilbon Chosŏnin Ch'ongryŏn haphoe' (*Ch'ongryŏn*) in Korean, is one of two main organisations formed by Zainichi Koreans in Japan and has close ties to North Korea. *Ch'ongryŏn* functions as North Korea's de facto embassy in Japan.

ⁱⁱ Ideological training that all North Koreans must undertake to demonstrate loyalty to the state and Party.

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Arirang' is the name of a traditional Korean folksong popular in both North and South Korea. It is also the name of North Korea's mass gymnastics performance.

^{iv} I use the term 'Zainichi Korean' to refer to Koreans who migrated to Japan from start of the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) until the Korean War (1950-1953). In Japanese 'Zainichi' means 'foreigner residing in Japan.' However, the expression 'Zainichi Korean' has been appropriated by long-term ethnic Korean citizens of Japan, to distinguish them from the Japanese population and from Koreans who migrated from South Korea in the years that followed.

^v Japan colonized the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945.

^{vi} Most Koreans who migrated to North Korea as part of the so-called repatriation movement were originally from the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. Subsequently, they were not, technically, repatriates at all. For simplification, in this paper I refer to these people as either 'repatriates' or 'Zainichi Koreans'. For more on this topic see Tessa Morris-Suzuki (2007), *Exodus to North Korea: Shadow's from Japan's Cold War*.

^{vii} I categorize my interlocutors into 'natal returnees' and 'imagined returnees'. Natal returnees were born in Japan and emigrated to North Korea. These individuals return to the land of their birth. Imagined returnees are individuals who were born in North Korea, to migrant parents from Japan. Imagined returnees return to a place that previously only existed in their imagination.

^{viii} The 'Korean Residents Union in Japan' or Mindan, as it's commonly known ('Chae-Ilbon Taehan Min'guk Mindan' in Korean), was established in 1946 in Tokyo, Japan. This organisation is loosely affiliated with the Republic of Korea.

^{ix} Records show, as of December 1964, 76,273 Koreans, 6,385 Japanese, and 7 Chinese had emigrated to North Korea. Two Indonesians had also applied for 'repatriation', although their applications were later cancelled (Monthly reports on the repatriation to North Korea, 31/03/1961-31/12/1964, pp. 2-5).

^x See Sonia Ryang (1997; 2000 (ed.)) for a ground-breaking treatment of ideology and identity for Koreans in Japan.

^{xi} For a thorough treatment of the anthropology of emotions, see John Leavitt's (1996) 'Meaning and Feeling in the Anthropology of Emotions,' in *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 23 (3), pp. 514-539.

^{xii} See ‘Fundamental Conditions of Livelihood of Certain Koreans Residing in Japan’. Written by Masutaro Inoue, Japanese Red Cross Society, November 1956. B AG 232 105-002 *Probleme du rapatriement des Coreens du Japon, dossier I: generalities: 27/02/1953- 11/10/1957*.

^{xiii} For a detailed account on how Koreans in post-war Japan were both aliens in Japan and unwanted in the South Korea, see Caprio’s (2008) ‘The Forging of Alien Status in American Occupied Japan,’ *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 6 (1).

^{xiv} B AG 232 105-025 “An analysis and appraisal of the problems of Koreans in Japan and the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross and other agencies in their solution” by Hallam C. Shorrock, Jr. July 15, 1959, Seoul, Korea, p.20.

^{xv} ‘Fundamental Conditions of Livelihood of Certain Koreans Residing in Japan’, B AG 232 105-002.

^{xvi} According to returnees from North Korea who recalled the events leading up to the repatriation movement.

^{xvii} For more on the difficulties of the ICRC to establish the free will of repatriates see Morris-Suzuki (2007), pp. 188-189.

^{xviii} “*Manse*”

^{xix} ICRC records on the first 51 ships to leave Japan to North Korea (up until December 16, 1960) illustrate the range of occupations of the 12,021 adult males on board: 2,800 were classified as ‘day laborers’, 1,016 as ‘factory workers’, 469 as ‘chauffeurs’, 432 as ‘farmers/fishers’, 424 as ‘clerks’, 731 in ‘commerce & industry’, and 4,476 as ‘non-occupation’ (B AG 232 105-019.01 Monthly reports on the repatriation to North Korea, by the Immigration Bureau, Ministry of Justice, 18/03/1960-31/12/1960).

^{xx} ICRC employed translators were tasked with establishing the free will of prospective repatriates. In reality, however, there was little guarantee of a fair assessment (see Morris-Suzuki 2007: 192).

^{xxi} Monthly reports by the Japanese Immigration Control Bureau of the Justice Ministry recorded applications, detainees, and successful repatriates to North Korea. 189 individuals left for North Korea on board the 121st ship on December 1964. This figure included 166 Koreans and 23 Japanese. In total, by the end of 1964, 82,665 people had ‘repatriated’ to the DPRK, this constituted 88.6% of the total 93,340 who emigrated to North Korea before the repatriation project was officially discontinued, in 1984 (B AG 232 105-019.01 Monthly reports on the repatriation to North Korea, 31/03/1961-31/12/1964, p.5)

^{xxii} A report by the Japanese Immigration Control Bureau of the Ministry of Justice posits that numbers decreased due to the reluctance of prospective repatriates to go to North Korea during, ‘the severe cold season’ (B AG 232 105-019.01). It is also significance that, according to my interviewees, reports were coming out of North Korea that conditions were much harder than expected. Further, at this time the Japanese economy was noticeably starting to improve. These factors likely deterred some individuals from emigrating to North Korea.

^{xxiii} For more on the North Korean food crises see Haggard and Noland’s (2007) *Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform*, and Fahy’s (2015) *Marching Through Suffering: Loss and Survival in North Korea*.

^{xxiv} Andrei Lankov further explains that the status a person is attributed is dependent on their family background, with those individuals who can trace their family to revolutionary fighters or former poor peasants in the “friendly forces” category; those “hostile forces” include former landholders, those whose family were pro-American or pro-Japanese, Chinese-Koreans and Zainichi Koreans who returned in the 1960s (2007: 68).

^{xxv} State agents continuously monitor citizens suspected of having divided loyalties.

^{xxvi} Morris-Suzuki notes that repatriates from Japan were disproportionately represented among the victims of the North Korean political purges. Large numbers of repatriates were sent to Yodök prison camp (2007: 239).

^{xxvii} Ch’öl-hwan Kang, author of the (2001) *Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten years in the North Korean gulag*, writes, “In the early 1970s, the North Korean regime purged those who did not restrain from speaking freely and who led a life against the ideology of socialism. In the late 1970s opponents of *Ch’ongryön* Chairman Han Dök Su were purged and sent to detention camps. Out of around 5,000 detained in No. 15 detention camp in Yodök-gun, a third were family members of the former upper echelon of *Ch’ongryön*” (Kang, in *The DailyNK*).

^{xxviii} It is important to note that, according to my interlocutors, in many cases relations improved between local North Koreans and the second and third generation of repatriated Koreans. Interviewees in Seoul informed me that they had friends whose parents had migrated from Japan.

^{xxix} The strap on *Zori* (草履) sandals and *geta* (下駄) clogs divide the big toe from the second toe, similar in appearance to the hooves of a pig.

^{xxx} This is not only an insult used in North Korea. It is also used in South Korea to refer to Japanese or ostensibly Japanese individuals.

^{xxxi} For more on the impact of the North Korean economic collapse see Hazel Smith's (2015) *North Korea: Markets and Military Rule*, pp. 136-164.

^{xxxii} The Public Distribution System is the means by which the DPRK state distributes food to citizens, according to a quota system in which food allocation is determined by age, gender, occupation, and political status.

^{xxxiii} *Juche* is the official political ideology of the DPRK. It emphasizes self-reliance for the North Korean people and independence for the DPRK from the influence of foreign nation-states.

^{xxxiv} During my fieldwork I met North Koreans who had represented the DPRK in a variety of sports including ice hockey, football, and baseball.

^{xxxv} A report submitted by the Japanese Red Cross lists the following cargo on board the 108th ship to leave Niigata for North Korea, in July 1963: 244 tons of baggage; 4 vehicles (2 small sized cars, 1 light van, 1 Nissan Cedric, all used); 124 bicycles; 31 refrigerators; 42 washing machines; 12 stereos; 14 television sets; 83 electric lighting fixtures (B AG 105-030.01 Monthly reports on the repatriation to North Korea, 31/03/1961-31/12/1964, p. 5).

^{xxxvi} For a fictional account that highlights the significance of the pachinko industry to Zainichi Korean families see Min Jin Lee's (2017) *Pachinko*.

^{xxxvii} Di Leonardo makes this point explicit, saying that kin work is similar to housework and child care, "men in the aggregate do not do it" (1987, 443).

^{xxxviii} My thanks to the anonymous reviewer for pointing out that in North Korea, as in other postcolonial systems, state control and propaganda are real, but always partial.

^{xxxix} Interlocutors told me that it could take up to five days to get from Niigata port to the home of family in North Korea. This included three days crossing the East Sea/Sea of Japan and 1-2 days on the trains in North Korea.

^{xl} Over the years, her mother also sent items such as stationary, warm clothes, hand warmers, instant noodles, and money to family friends (see Yang Yǒng-hŭi's (2005) documentary, *Dear Pyongyang*).

^{xli} See Yang Yǒng-hŭi's (2005, 2009) documentaries for a detailed and touching exposition of life for families divided between Japan and North Korea.

^{xlii} A report by the Immigration Bureau of the Japanese Ministry of Justice lists the following items on board the 121st ship to leave for North Korea in December, 1964: 160 bottles of ginseng wine; 47 kg of dried sea cucumber; 100kg of eggs; 26 cases of sugar; 338 cases of cigarettes; 7 cigarette cases; 26 cases of candies and 29 cans of canned fish (B AG 105 030.01 Monthly report on Repatriation to North Korea, p.6).

^{xliiii} According to one interviewee, North Korea was referred to as 'Heaven on Earth' in *Ch'ongryŏn* propaganda used to recruit repatriates.