

# Crossing Borders: a feminist history of Women Cross DMZ

Suzy Kim



**Women Cross DMZ international delegation with South Korean organizers (May 24, 2015)**

On May 24, 2015, thirty women peacemakers from fifteen nations, including American feminist activist Gloria Steinem and two Nobel Peace laureates, Mairead Maguire from Northern Ireland and Leymah Gbowee from Liberia, walked with Korean women of the North and South to call for an end to the Korean War and the peaceful reunification of Korea on the seventieth anniversary of its division. The arbitrary division of the peninsula in 1945 by the United States and the Soviet Union led to the creation of two separate states, setting the stage for an all-out civil war in 1950 that became an international conflict. After nearly 4 million people were killed, mostly Korean civilians, fighting was halted when North Korea, China, and the United States representing the UN Command signed a ceasefire agreement in 1953, which called for a political conference within three months to reach a peace settlement. Over 60 years later, we are still waiting. To renew the call for a peace settlement by offering a model of

international engagement, Women Cross DMZ organized peace symposiums in Pyongyang and Seoul where women shared experiences of mobilizing to bring an end to violent conflict, and crossed the two-mile wide Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) that separates millions of Korean families as a reminder that division can be overcome. As one of the members of the organizing committee of Women Cross DMZ, I travelled with other international women peacemakers to meet face-to-face with Korean women on both sides of the DMZ and cross the military demarcation line that divides Korea. On the seventieth anniversary of Korea's partition this August 2015, I write as a historian of modern Korea to reflect upon the experience specifically from a feminist standpoint.

One constructive definition of feminism defines it as:

1. The belief that women and men are, and have been, treated differently by our society, and that women have frequently and systematically been unable to participate fully in all social arenas and institutions;
2. A desire to change that situation; and
3. That this gives a 'new' point-of-view on society, when eliminating old assumptions about why things are the way they are, and looking at it from the perspective that women are not inferior and men are not 'the norm'.<sup>1</sup>

On all these counts, I am a feminist and so was the explicit goal of the Women's Peace Walk: to call attention to the need to formally end the Korean War through the full participation of

women in the peace process so that long-separated families may be reunited.<sup>2</sup> While peace is not solely a feminist agenda, the UN Security Council adopted [Resolution 1325](#) fifteen years ago, confirming that women, who comprise half of humanity, must rightfully be part of any peace process. In the case of Korea, the divided state of the peninsula heightens militarization and masculinization of society, abetting everyday forms of sexism as well as overt misogynist violence against women. Politically, priority is given to the military and national security over that of social welfare and human security, which affects both women and men. In order to share these concerns and the many different struggles women have engaged in to challenge war-making and militarization, we met with women of both Koreas on formal occasions such as the peace symposiums planned in the months leading up to the crossing, but also through informal interactions during bus rides and mealtimes.

It is a historical fact that modern warfare has increasingly come to target civilians with an inordinate impact on women and children. One striking example of the impact of the current division system on Korean women can be seen from the disproportionately large number of women among North Korean refugees, topping at [80 percent](#) this year.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, according to estimates by aid workers, 80 to 90 percent of female refugees from North Korea are [trafficking victims](#).<sup>4</sup> Such gendered analysis brings into greater focus the experience of women and girls in armed conflict and militarized societies, providing crucial insights into the day-to-day consequences of the ongoing war on women's lives. To be clear, women are neither "natural" victims nor peacemakers; we are no better suited than men to work for peace despite consistent misunderstanding that advocating women's participation in the peace process must rely on a belief in essentialized gender roles that see women as "natural-born" pacifists. Women have become iconic peacemakers insofar as the vast

majority of caretakers in contemporary times are women.<sup>5</sup> The everyday reproductive labor consigned to many women has become the basis for women's call for the "valorization of everyday life" so that the disruption and violence caused by war and militarism are not accepted as given, but problematized and challenged.<sup>6</sup>

In this essay, I begin by exposing the subtle forms of sexism embedded in the critical reaction to our Peace Walk while debunking the specific arguments made against Women Cross DMZ and the women of both Koreas who supported and co-organized the walk. Then, I situate the Peace Walk within the broader history of the global women's peace movement, and finally go on to share some of my experiences behind-the-scenes of both organizing and participating in the Peace Walk that illustrate a feminist history of Women Cross DMZ.

## Debunking Sexism

Thanks to the persistent work of the women's movement, it has become increasingly unacceptable to overtly belittle or discriminate against women, but subtle forms of gender discrimination (and more overt forms such as the wage gap) continue and seem to manifest in some of the vocal reactions against Women Cross DMZ. Often coming from men, we were painted as naïve do-gooders whose hearts might be in the right place, but certainly could not understand the complexities of the Korean situation. Unfortunately, such attitudes came from the right, left, and those in between. For example, [Stephan Haggard](#) couched his own support for the walk as "soft and fuzzy" even while acknowledging that the group consisted of "high-powered women," warning that "We need to be clear-eyed. The poverty, malnutrition and even starvation of the North Korean population are not the result of sanctions; they are attributable to the nuclear ambitions, bloated military and ideological

absurdities of the regime."<sup>7</sup> Numerous scholars, such as [Rudiger Frank](#),<sup>8</sup> have shown how sanctions have comprehensive detrimental effects on a population, but somehow women's opposition to sanctions is labeled naïve. Worse still, in a follow-up blog post evaluating the Peace Walk, Haggard writes that "[the main question is simple: how badly did they get played?](#)"<sup>9</sup> As I will describe below, this was no game or walk in the park, and we were not "played".

Another sympathetic critic, [Tae Yang Kwak](#), aired his disappointment this way: "Despite their laudable goals and inspirational vision, Women Cross DMZ failed in their execution. They failed to collaborate with South Korean women and a broad spectrum of NGOs. They failed to overcome the innate, postcolonial apprehension against foreign paternalism. They even failed to demonstrate a clear understanding of Korean history."<sup>10</sup> Regrettably, Kwak's critique bordered on contempt, too quick to pass judgment without having all the facts. In a nutshell, his critique is that we didn't cross at Panmunjom as we set out to do and were bused across the DMZ with celebrity women at the center without the genuine involvement of Korean women – North or South – and of all days on May 24, the International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament, which happened to coincide with the date that South Korea imposed sanctions on North Korea for the alleged sinking of the South Korean corvette Cheonan in 2010. He tells us that the real problem is South Korea's lack of interest in acknowledging North Korea as a genuine partner in brokering a peace treaty, as evidenced by the fact that South Korea was never party to the armistice agreement in the first place.

While I am in agreement with the last point under the current political climate, one should not forget that there have been major breakthroughs between the North and South, where concrete agreements, particularly

during the Sunshine Policy years (1998-2008), recognized and acknowledged each other as equal partners toward eventual reunification.<sup>11</sup> What is left out of these formulae for reunification is the role of the international community in supporting such initiatives for peace and reconciliation. As we were made painfully aware in the back-and-forth between the South Korean government and the UN Command over who could give the final approval of the DMZ crossing, the unending war is not just a North-South problem, but very much an international issue as the war was an international war even while it was a civil war, and the UN Command has jurisdiction over the southern side of the DMZ today. But Kwak proceeds to write that "even a basic understanding of Korean history would reveal that the Korean War can have no formal end, because it had no formal beginning." Here, he is likely referencing Bruce Cumings' nuanced argument that "civil wars do not start; they come" because of the complicated origins beyond the first shot fired.<sup>12</sup> But Cumings would disagree that there can be no formal end. A formal end, and one that enables a political settlement that embraces the other side, is absolutely imperative if the core problems of the Korean peninsula are to be resolved. Even with Abraham Lincoln's magnanimity toward the Confederacy at the end of the American Civil War, the divisive history of that conflict continues to haunt contemporary American society as indicated by the recent killing of nine people on June 17, 2015 at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The shooting spree was carried out by a 21-year-old white supremacist, donning the Confederate flag as seen in photos that surfaced later. [Fires at several predominantly black churches](#) in southern states were reported in subsequent weeks, at least three of them attributed to arson, in reaction against efforts to remove the Confederate flag from public buildings. This is the state of affairs in a country where there was a formal end to a civil

war that ended 150 years ago. Needless to say, the two Koreas have a very long road ahead to begin to heal the history of division and war, but a formal end to the war is an essential starting point.

Moreover, it is of course not just the South Koreans who need to be convinced of the need to sign a peace treaty. The Korean War was more than a civil war; it was an international conflict with the US leading the UN Command made up of sixteen nations, fighting on behalf of the South, and China and the Soviet Union directly engaged in support of the North. Twenty countries fought in the Korean War; it was – and continues to be – a global conflict. The impasse in normalizing relations between the US and North Korea over the last six decades only serves to underscore the importance of people-to-people engagement, particularly the role of American citizen diplomacy to break the deadlock. Since the so-called end of the Cold War and the breakup of the bipolar world, North Korea has justified its nuclear weapons development to counter the American nuclear umbrella and the maintenance of US military bases for its allies in the Asia Pacific, including South Korea. Such effects of the unresolved Korean War are ongoing with the continued division of the peninsula, mutual demonization, and military build-up at the expense of human security. The absence of a peace treaty and the ongoing militarization of Korea and other countries in northeast Asia are global threats.<sup>13</sup> A [peace settlement](#) to officially end the Korean War will be an important step toward building peace and stability in East Asia and beyond. The international community and the UN which took part in the Korean War have a responsibility to close this tragic chapter in Cold War history through a process leading toward true reconciliation. But with international negotiations involving the two Koreas, the United States, China and other powers stalled, citizen initiatives can play a vital role in moving forward.

Our group of seasoned women peacemakers was aware from the very beginning that we could model international engagement between women, an approach that is far from "dictating" what happens to Korea. In fact, there was a major internal debate about whether to even include the word reunification in our statements and the eventual peace declaration (see Appendix 1), because reunification by definition is something that would have to be decided upon by the two Koreas. In the end, we decided to do so given the history of North-South efforts to move toward reunification in the first decade of the twenty first century and to reflect the views of the diverse composition of the delegation that included a sizable Korean diaspora and in agreement with our North and South Korean partners, who argued that the division of the Korean peninsula was carried out by foreign forces and the international community must therefore be a productive force for its reunification.

We were hardly "uninformed outsiders." Of the 30 women, five are South Korean emigrants with experiences of the 1970s-80s student movement and other social justice movements, two are Korean adoptees (part of a system of international adoption that was put in place as a direct consequence of the Korean War) engaged in transnational adoption and historical justice issues, and three are Korean Americans with knowledge of Korean issues (myself included). Of the 30 women, four hail from the Asia Pacific, two from Latin America, and another two from Africa, long having worked on various peace initiatives. Of the 30 women, at least seven are 70 or over with a lifetime experience of peace activism, and despite fatigue, sickness, and disorientation at being kept guessing by South Korean and UN authorities about the crossing, the group practiced direct participatory democracy and consensus decision-making with candid and open discussions everyday into the late night over how best to handle the crossing. Our delegation of women peacemakers included



academic scholars some with expertise on Korea (myself included), church-based leaders, former diplomats, feminist activists, humanitarian and human rights workers, artists, and filmmakers from a broad range of professional and institutional settings with experience in conflict resolution, peacemaking, and peacebuilding in many contexts. All of the women were fully engaged as principled peacemakers, at times boisterous but always with a sense of humor. For example, Code Pink co-founders, [Jodie Evans](#) and [Medea Benjamin](#), wore pink throughout the trip with giant pink hats, pink sunglasses, and pink signs that they displayed wherever they went; yet they were always earnest to learn more about Korea, to open up to honest conversations with our guides and hosts, and at times challenged what they heard while sharing their own experiences of struggling against militarism.<sup>14</sup> Undoubtedly, such spontaneous displays of citizen activism could not have gone unnoticed in a strictly regimented society such as North Korea, offering an alternative window into American society from official state discourse.



**Code Pink co-founders, Jodie Evans and Medea Benjamin, at the entrance to Myohyang Mountain (May 22, 2015)**

Appreciating the long history of Korean women's efforts for peace and reunification,

our group also reached out to a broad base of partners in Korea. In North Korea without the existence of a comparable civil society, we were of course limited in the variety of women's groups to approach so that our main partner was the Korean Democratic Women's Union, the oldest women's organization in North Korea that was founded in November 1945, shortly after liberation from Japanese colonial rule before any other mass organization.<sup>15</sup> In South Korea, we partnered with religious women's groups such as the YWCA, grass-roots local networks such as the Gyeonggi Women's Network, as well as cultural groups like Iftopia, in addition to long-established women's groups such as Women Making Peace and Korean Women's Association United, as explained in our final closing statement (see Appendix 2).

Although some critics of the walk have claimed that South Koreans do not favor reunification, the data is quite mixed on this depending on the way the question is couched, and a [February 2015 report](#) shows that there have been steady high levels of interest in reunification among the vast majority of South Koreans averaging at 70 to 84 percent of those surveyed, even recognizing lower levels of interest among the younger generation.<sup>16</sup> More to the point, we know, based on the history of social movements, that mass opinion should not be the determining factor in what is ultimately the right course of action. The recent landmark ruling on marriage equality in the United States would not have happened if gay rights activists stopped their work because they were told that the majority opinion did not support their cause just a few decades ago.

In a vibrant democracy with open debate facilitated by online forums, there is bound to be diversity of opinion and analysis, but with so much disrespect toward women in the way such criticisms were framed, [Katharine Moon](#), senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and professor of political science at Wellesley,

interjected: "The women's journey sheds a light beyond the inter-Korean conflict: the multiple ways women are left out of formal foreign policy processes and the creative politics in which women engage to draw attention to difficult policy issues. Imagine this: If male Nobel laureates such as Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin (1978), Lech Walesa (1983), Elie Wiesel (1986), Mikhail Gorbachev (1990), Nelson Mandela (1993), and Kofi Annan (2001) had joined forces to walk for peace across the DMZ, might they have been lambasted by critics and members of the media for their political naïveté? Would they have been so disrespectfully treated and insulted as know-nothings about the reconciliation of divided peoples?"<sup>17</sup> Indeed, she more than anyone understood the long list of credentials that the international delegation of women brought to highlight the need for a peace process in Korea. The thirty women with direct experience of conflicts in Korea, Liberia, Northern Ireland, Colombia, Mexico, the Philippines, Guam, and Okinawa, as well as those who have opposed the military policies of the United States, collectively bring at least 600 years of experience with some women having spent more than 50 years of their lives, advocating for peace and justice. It was through this collective tenacity and wisdom that we accomplished what many thought impossible, the details of which will be shared in the second half of the essay.

### History of Women Crossing Borders

Just a couple of weeks before embarking on the Peace Walk as the semester was coming to an end, I was asked to give the opening remarks at the Rutgers University Fifth Annual Asian/Asian American Studies Undergraduate Symposium on April 28 titled "Crossing Borders, Border Crossings," from which I have borrowed the title for this essay. The organizer of the event knew of my involvement with Women Cross DMZ and thought I could speak to the theme of the symposium through my own work.

Reflecting upon "border crossings" within academe in the burgeoning of transnational and interdisciplinary studies and my own path that had led me to that point, I thought about the many ways in which my own life had been about crossing borders. Not only had I crossed linguistic and cultural barriers to study Korean history as an American-born Korean American, but to become the Korean American that I am, my family had crossed the Pacific to immigrate to the US. In short, my family history has been all about border crossings of various kinds as we moved from South Korea to South America, and finally to the United States. Crossing borders in my adult life has been productive too, and my most recent crossing of the DMZ was yet another border crossing that has turned out to be both thought-provoking and inspiring.

The 2015 Peace Walk stands in a long history of women crossing borders to challenge militarism and war. This year is the 100th anniversary of the 1915 Congress of Women in The Hague, which called for an end to World War I. The meeting led to the creation of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the oldest women's peace organization today, currently active in over thirty countries. One of our delegation members, [Kozue Akibayashi](#), was recently appointed its international president.<sup>18</sup> And [Christine Ahn](#), our lead organizer, was invited to the celebration of the 100 year anniversary this past April.<sup>19</sup> Closer to the issue at hand, it was thanks to women who were willing to take risks crossing borders that an international delegation of women intervened during the Korean War to investigate war crimes and demand a stop to the fighting. At the request of Pak Chŏng-ae, chair of the (North) Korean Democratic Women's Union, and Hŏ Chŏng-suk, feminist activist since the Japanese colonial period (1910-45) and newly minted Minister of Culture in North Korea, the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in 1951 sent an international delegation

of women to investigate war crimes during the Korean War, representing women from the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa.<sup>20</sup>

Founded in Paris in November 1945 in the aftermath of World War II, WIDF was formed at the World Congress of Women with some 850 women from forty countries in attendance.<sup>21</sup> The group expressly critiqued imperialism and racism as responsible for the latest war, and thus laid its main emphasis on peace, anti-colonialism, and anti-racism as directly related to, and indeed, preconditions for the protection of women's rights. Soon after its founding, however, the US House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) labeled the organization a "Soviet tool" and "front organization" in a 1949 report that charged the organization of being "a specialized arm of Soviet political warfare in the current 'peace' campaign to disarm and demobilize the United States."<sup>22</sup> As a result, the American affiliate of WIDF, Congress of American Women, was forced to disband in 1950. Although the WIDF had strong connections to the communist world with Soviet-sponsored conferences, publications, and festivals, and one of its most influential member organizations was the Soviet Women's Committee, the organization's overall membership grew to include a diverse array of organizations from the Third World.<sup>24</sup>

True to its peace mission, the organization campaigned early on against the French colonial war in Vietnam, and in May 1951 it undertook the investigation of war atrocities committed in the Korean War by sending a fact-finding delegation of 21 women from 17 countries to North Korea.<sup>25</sup> The international women's commission, not all of whom were WIDF members, consisted of:

Chair: Nora K. Rodd (Canada)

Vice-Chairs: Liu Chin-yang (China),  
Ida Bachmann (Denmark)

Secretaries: Miluse Svatosova  
(Czechoslovakia), Trees Soenito-  
Heyligers (Netherlands)

Members: Monica Felton (Great  
Britain), Maria Ovsyannikova  
(USSR), Bai Lang (China), Li K'eng  
(China), Gilette Ziegler (France),  
Elisabeth Gallo (Italy), Eva Priester  
(Austria), Germaine Hannevard  
(Belgium), Hilde Cahn (German  
Democratic Republic), Lilly  
Waechter (West Germany), Li-thi-  
Quê (Viet-Nam), Candelaria  
Rodriguez (Cuba), Fatma ben  
Sliman (Tunisia), Abassia Fodil  
(Algeria), Leonor Aguiar Vazquez  
(Argentina), Kate Fleron Jacobsen,  
(Denmark - observer)

Compiled in five languages - English, French, Russian, Chinese, and Korean - their report titled *We Accuse!* provided a harrowing account of death and devastation from city to village, painting a ghastly picture of the war. According to the report, "every page of this document is a grim indictment. Every fact speaks of the mass exterminating character of this war. More homes have been destroyed than military objectives, more grain than ammunition, more women, children and aged than soldiers. This war is war on life itself."<sup>26</sup> The report concluded that war crimes had been committed in Korea by the "American occupants" in contravention of the Hague and the Geneva Conventions "by the systematic destruction of food, food-stores and food factories ... by incendiary bombs," "by the systematic destruction of town after town, of village after village ... [including] dwellings, hospitals, schools," "by systematically employing ... weapons banned by international convention i.e., incendiaries, petrol bombs, napalm bombs, time-bombs, and by constantly machine-gunning civilians from low-flying planes," and "by atrociously exterminating the



Korean population ... tortured, beaten to death, burned and buried alive."<sup>27</sup>



From the number of farm animals, schools, houses, and hospitals destroyed to the number of women raped and children killed, the report was a scathing account of the effects of the war, particularly on women and children. The report ended with a letter to the President of the UN General Assembly and Security Council, and Secretariat of the UN, demanding that the "Report of the Women's International Commission for the Investigation of Atrocities

committed by U.S.A. and Syngman Rhee Troops in Korea" be examined with the utmost urgency, demanding that the UN stop the bombings in Korea to reach a peaceful settlement according to the principle of self-determination for the Korean people without interference from foreign troops.<sup>28</sup>

The delegation's investigations covered the worst affected areas in northern Korea: Sinŭiju, P'yŏngyang, Anak, Sinch'ŏn, Namp'o, Kangse, Wŏnsan, Ch'ŏrwŏn, Hŭich'ŏn, and Kanggye. As evident in the limited geographic reach of the delegation's visit, however, the Cold War divide was already inscribed into the scope of the commission's investigations, as well as in the reception of its work. The delegation had attempted to visit the South without success, and consequently the report makes no mention of possible crimes committed by northern forces (or by any others) in the South. Consequently, the report was criticized in the United States as a one-sided propaganda ploy. Despite the diversity of nationalities, religious beliefs, and political views represented in the commission, the US tried to discredit the report by red-baiting its members in order to deflect charges of war crimes. Distinguishing between "proper" and "improper" forms of peace initiatives, the American public was warned against Soviet "peace offensives", especially cautioning women not to be duped by the Soviets in their naïve desire for peace. Such history of disparaging women's work for peace as foolhardy goes back to the early days of the Cold War. Under these circumstances, the significance of the international women's commission and its report, despite its limited scope, is underscored by the fact that the newly created UN could not provide the forum in which to discuss possible war crimes precisely because it was itself accessory to the war. South Koreans and Americans fought under the banner of the UN, a joint command made up of sixteen member states led by the US. Countering the male-led UN coalition, not only did WIDF launch an all-female fact-finding



commission that specifically reached out to women affected by the war, but through its international network and member organizations, showed how the Korean War was another disastrous global conflict on the heels of World War II.

Studying the history of women crossing borders and situating our 2015 Peace Walk in this long history has been a humbling experience and I posed the following question both to myself and the group while in Beijing as we took turns introducing ourselves during our first physical meeting: what does it mean to be making history as a historian? The always charismatic and indefatigable Gloria Steinem quickly answered, "It's important, or perhaps even better, to make history." I couldn't agree more, and in another life before I became a historian, that would have been the end of that question. But as a historian, there is something to be said for situating events in historical context and to specifically historicize the kinds of challenges that arose during the walk, in order to build upon what has been achieved. That is to say, how do we make historically informed decisions so that history is made relevant in the making of history?

### Crossing the DMZ

The DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea--North Korea's official name) UN Mission in New York had shown interest in the initial proposal for the Peace Walk in 2014, but by February 2015, they were telling us that Pyongyang was no longer so favorably inclined, asking why it had to be a *women's* peace walk. At a meeting with the mission that month, history became relevant when I reminded them of the important role that international women peacemakers played during the Korean War. We agreed to submit a revised proposal in the lead up to March 8, International Women's Day, highlighting this history of women peacemakers in the Korean context. During a panel at the annual meeting of the UN

Commission on the Status of Women on March 13, I again reiterated this history as Cora Weiss, President of the Hague Appeal for Peace and among the civil society drafters of Resolution 1325, spoke about its significance in codifying the inclusion of women in all peace processes, and Christine Ahn shared her [dream](#) of the central role that women should play in ending the Korean War.<sup>29</sup> That same week, after the first press conference on our plans on March 11, we finally received word that the South Korean government was considering our request. We were hoping that both governments would be able to give us the green light on the same day in the spirit of bringing both sides together, but North Korea came back in the affirmative first on April 3 while South Korea continued to stall.

Just one month before departure, many of us had not yet booked flights because we simply did not know whether we would be given the necessary South Korean approval for the crossing. In the end, two additional days were added to the North Korean itinerary in order to make sure that we would have the time to return to Beijing for a separate flight to Seoul if we were not granted approval to cross. This was why we ended up staying in North Korea longer than the original itinerary that would have been on par with the itinerary in the South, focusing on holding parallel peace symposiums and peace walks on both sides of the DMZ. Uncertain what would happen, we boarded flights to Beijing en route to Pyongyang, which already began with some drama as airline officials at some US airports initially refused to let us board without a Chinese visa. We had to explain that we would be applying for transit visas upon our arrival in Beijing with the letter of invitation from the DPRK and flight itinerary to Pyongyang – a rare occurrence no doubt. Once in Beijing, transit visas were only valid for 72 hours, and we had much ground to cover in terms of orientation and introductions as this was the first time that the entire group of women would be meeting

and sharing the same physical space. This much-needed time was cut short by the need to hold yet another press conference to pressure the South Korean authorities and the UN Command to facilitate the crossing at Panmunjom. Panmunjom is the location of the "truce village" where the armistice was signed, an iconic vestige of division where the militaries of the two Koreas stand off and face each other every day. Just the day before departure, on May 15, the South Korean Ministry of Unification finally announced that "Seoul has decided to allow the foreign activists to cross the DMZ," but with the proviso that "the government plans to recommend them to use the Western corridor along the Gyeongui railway." Different from Panmunjom, the Western corridor is the transportation route used for the Kaesong Industrial Complex, a joint economic venture between the North and South located just ten kilometers (6 miles) north of the DMZ where immigration facilities are located.

Once in Pyongyang, our nightly meetings turned into heated debates about where to cross – between the Western corridor that was approved by the South and the UN Command, and Panmunjom – and how far to push on this specific point when the vast majority of the world did not even know the difference. These debates reflected the diversity of experiences in the group from those who had engaged in direct action and civil disobedience to those who were more cautious and measured in their approach.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, our North Korean hosts informed us that without the facilitation of the UN Command and approval from the South, it would be impossible to cross at Panmunjom as it is a military zone and the North Korean military would not allow the crossing without agreement from their counterparts lest there be an incident that could spiral out of control and they would be held responsible. Contrary to stereotypes about totalitarian governments functioning like one mass with all branches and bureaus following orders and marching in lock-

step with each other, what I observed was each unit acting on its own with separate lists of guests between the three host organizations (Korean Committee for Solidarity with World Peoples, the Korean Democratic Women's Union, and the Committee for Overseas Compatriots of Korea), and none of our hosts knowing how the military would respond should we insist on crossing at Panmunjom.<sup>31</sup> For three days and nights, the group discussed the best course of action, while receiving conflicting information about how South Korean women wanted us to proceed. There were unconfirmed reports that the South Korean Ministry of Unification had unofficially stated that if we crossed at Panmunjom, we would not be arrested for it, and that this was meant to be a tacit form of approval.

We had landed in Pyongyang with the understanding that we would be able to communicate with our South Korean organizers through international cell phone service purchased on site, but upon arrival, we learned that the service did not provide access for South Korean numbers. It was yet another reminder of the state of division, and it took two long days for us to finally touch base with the South through an internet-based phone service by using a VPN to reroute the call through a third country. In the end, we could not risk worsening relations between the North and South by failing to reach an agreement on where we would cross, and the final decision was made by group consensus on Thursday evening, May 21, when we were told that the two militaries of the North and South had finally communicated and reached an agreement that we would cross through the Western corridor. Since communication lines had been cut with the end of the Sunshine Policy in 2008, it seemed the North and South had finally reached an agreement and we felt obliged to respect that agreement.

Once the decision was made about *where* to cross, the next issue became *how* to cross. On

our way to Kaesong on May 23, our hosts told us that the two sides had agreed to let a South Korean bus enter the northern side of the DMZ to pick us up, but this seemed an acceptable compromise. We had agreed to go through the Western corridor with the understanding that this would provide us with full cooperation from the UN Command to walk across the DMZ. Now we were being told that we would be bused across. We strategized on our three-hour bus ride to Kaesong how best to put pressure on the UN Command to let us get off before the last check point on the southern side to walk across the DMZ to greet our southern peace walkers. Before reaching the Kaesong DPRK Immigration and Customs Office, our northern hosts agreed to let us off the bus just before the first checkpoint on the northern side of the DMZ to make a symbolic walk with our banners. With only our documentary crew and some news media there to witness, we walked to the first checkpoint on the northern side of the DMZ, singing of peace and reunification, before saying farewells to our northern hosts at the Immigration and Customs Office. Once we got through immigration and customs, we boarded the bus sent from South Korea and conveyed to the bus driver that we had been told that the UN Command would provide full support for our wish to cross the border on foot. At the next checkpoint, there was a group of officers from the UN Command in military uniform, and Christine Ahn, Gloria Steinem, and retired US Army Reserve Colonel and former US diplomat, Ann Wright got off the bus to negotiate on our behalf. The group came back satisfied that the UN Command had agreed to let us off at the last checkpoint to walk across, but before we knew it, the bus had already driven past the last checkpoint. It remains a mystery to us all what happened; whether the bus driver just didn't know where to stop, whether the UN Command had no intention of letting us off the bus in the first place, or whether it was mutual misunderstanding about exactly where the walk was supposed to take place. But the point is

that we tried to walk across the DMZ, and in large part succeeded in walking at various points from Pyongyang to Kaesong to Paju with a small symbolic walk to the DMZ on the northern side on the way to the South.



**Walking for peace toward the first check point on the northern side of the DMZ (May 24, 2015)**  
**Christine Ahn, Gloria Steinem, and Ann Wright negotiating with UN Command at one of the check points in the DMZ on the southern side (May 24, 2015)**

I need not reiterate the day-by-day schedule and site visits while in North Korea as these sites are toured quite frequently by visitors, and many of the delegation members have written and spoken about them eloquently.<sup>32</sup> I will just say that, as a historian, it makes a world of difference to visit North Korea on multiple occasions and see the changes across time. Many first time visitors commented on how empty the streets were, and how the



model textile factory we visited seemed devoid of workers. For me visiting Pyongyang for the third time, it was startling to see so many more people and cars on the streets, particularly during rush hour, and the lines of taxis waiting at the Pyongyang Station. I asked one of our guides why there were so many taxis waiting when most people seemed to use bicycles or buses and trams, and she replied that people take taxis when they are in a rush, perhaps one of the many signs of **economic changes** in North Korea.<sup>33</sup> Although I missed the visit to the factory to prepare a press conference on our first full day in Pyongyang, I remembered my visit there in 2013 and how empty it had seemed then, until I was fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of the precise moment when there was a shift change, and peeking out through the window, I saw an entire mass of workers coming and going. But just as soon as they appeared, they were already gone by the time I went outside, and I realized just how regimented the life of a factory worker was in North Korea, with detailed schedules that designated times for work, study, rest, meals, and sleep for the full 24 hours of the day for those residing at the factory dormitories. As Ewa Eriksson Fortier shared, based on her longtime experience of humanitarian work there, "the point of the visit to the factory I believe was to show the model living quarters of the female staff. Although sleeping 8-9 girls in one room, they have modern facilities compared to sweatshops in many developing countries. Moreover, it was rice planting season, so many workers were mobilized to the countryside to plant rice."



**Mangyongdae, the birthplace of North Korean founding leader, Kim Il Sung**  
North Korean school children in school uniform visiting Mangyongdae (May 20, 2015)

The other site that needs unpacking is Mangyongdae, the birthplace of the founding North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung, that became so controversial during our visit. Christine and I had put our heads together regarding the itinerary in the planning stage, and having been to North Korea, we both knew that at least one site dedicated to the leader would have to be included. But in retrospect, perhaps even this could have been negotiated. In lieu of visiting the statues of the two deceased leaders at Mansudae, however, Mangyongdae seemed a fitting site to visit to understand historically why North Koreans value their leader. As historian Dae-Sook Suh has demonstrated in his detailed biography of Kim Il Sung, he was

an anticolonial guerrilla fighter along the Sino-Korean border of Manchuria during the Japanese colonial period.<sup>34</sup> He was well-known among Koreans, especially in the northern areas of the peninsula where he operated, because his exploits were covered in the colonial era newspapers and he was among the most wanted by the Japanese colonial police. The birthplace itself has no towering statues of any of the leaders; indeed it is a relatively modest place that features the thatched-roof home (rather than the tiled-roof of the upper class) of Kim's grandparents, situated within an expansive green park. By the time of Korea's liberation from colonial rule after Japan's defeat in the Asia Pacific War, both of Kim's parents had died and he returned to a hero's welcome to his hometown in Pyongyang where his grandmother lived. This is the home that is displayed there, and by simply reiterating this historical fact when asked by North Korean media what she thought of the place, Christine's comments were distorted in the North Korean press as "praise for the leader" and subsequently vilified in the South Korean press.<sup>35</sup> In many ways, this particular episode pinpoints precisely one of the major fault lines of the Korean division that has become so vitriolic that it negates whatever came before: how to remember Kim Il Sung's anticolonial exploits while holding him responsible for the Korean War?

Ultimately, what drives the division within Korea is the civil war and international war that are remembered so differently by the two sides today and the many generations that have been educated from only one point of view.<sup>36</sup> At a gathering of my extended family in Seoul recently, a minor argument broke out as my uncle asked me about the Peace Walk and its goals. When I answered that it was to overcome division and achieve peaceful reunification by meeting with women of both sides, there was an immediate generational divide between two of my uncles: one who was born in 1946 and believed there was no way that North Korea

wanted peaceful reunification since it started the Korean War by invading the South, and the other who was born in 1956 and stated matter-of-factly that North Korea, at least publicly, has consistently advocated peaceful reunification. In short, one believed that peaceful reunification was possible and the other did not, and this division has everything to do with how the Korean War and its possible resolution are conceptualized. It is no coincidence in this regard that so many of the protesters against our Peace Walk played straight into this polarity, which is also why Korean reunification will have to be entirely different from the German model of peaceful reunification by absorption. At no point was communication between the two sides in Germany completely cut off, and at no point did they see each other with such animosity that emanated from the experience of a civil war.

And this is why we need to think about the impact of the unended and continuing war – psychologically, socially and politically – that creates stark binaries between good and evil, pitting one side against the other and leaving no room for compromise. It is this kind of Manichean logic that associates any attempt at peace with the "enemy" as evil, pitting peace with North Korea against human rights in North Korea as if they are mutually exclusive. But peace is not against human rights; it is part and parcel of it. The continued state of war affects the human rights of North Korean people today in at least **two ways**.<sup>37</sup> Domestically, the North Korean government prioritizes military defense and national security over human security and political freedoms; this is also true in the South albeit to different degrees. Internationally, the North Korean people suffer due to political isolation and economic sanctions.

Despite disagreements over the prudence of sanctions, various scholars have clearly illustrated its poor track record, especially of unilateral sanctions, to achieve concrete aims.

Out of a total of 116 cases since World War I, there was only a 2 percent success rate of achieving the purported aims for sanctions against authoritarian regimes.<sup>38</sup> During the Cold War, multilateral sanctions were rare due to Cold War vetoes, but the US still instigated two-thirds of all sanctions. With the end of the Cold War, the US imposed 61 sanctions against 35 countries in just four years between 1992 and 1996, affecting 42 percent of the world population. In other words, sanctions in the post-Cold War era are to a great extent a direct manifestation of unilateral American power, often implemented for domestic political reasons as a form of "theatrical display" of power.<sup>39</sup>

What is certain is that sanctions disproportionately impact the most vulnerable populations who do not have the resources to deal with rising prices and dwindling goods.<sup>40</sup> While meant to inflict damage across the board in the hopes that the pain inflicted on society will translate into resistance against the government, they usually provide more ways for the regime to control supply, allowing privileged elites to profit from black market activities. That is, sanctions promote evasion through illicit activities, such as trade in drugs, counterfeit currency, and weapons proliferation instead of encouraging marketization and more contacts with the outside world. One policy that proponents and detractors of engagement may agree on is the importance of access to information and communication networks. But, Orascom, the Egyptian telecommunications company operating the North Korean cellular service Koryolink, recently announced that "international, U.S. and European Union sanctions were having a small but notable impact on its business by restricting the important export of goods required to maintain and develop the Koryolink network."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the [UN Commission of Inquiry](#) (COI) report on North Korean human rights, that is so often misused by those who advocate for isolation and sanctions, also recommends "the

promotion of incremental change through more people-to-people contact and an inter-Korean agenda for reconciliation." It concludes that "states and civil society organizations should foster opportunities for people-to-people dialogue and contact in such areas as culture, science, sports, good governance and economic development that provide citizens of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with opportunities to exchange information and be exposed to experiences outside their home country." The COI further stated that it "does not support sanctions imposed by the Security Council or introduced bilaterally that are targeted against the population or the economy as a whole."<sup>42</sup> In the end, the most convincing case against sanctions on North Korea is the fact that they have only led to the expansion of its missiles and nuclear weapons program while impoverishing the people without weakening the grip of the state.

Whenever civilian engagement has been tried, whether it was the 2008 visit to Pyongyang of the New York Philharmonic or the 2012 opening of the Associated Press Bureau, detractors have charged that these initiatives have been useful for the North Korean government as if engagement is a zero sum game in which only one side wins or loses. Peace is not a zero sum game that is beneficial to just one side. The Peace Walk endeavored to support peace in Korea, to be the rare empathic witness to listen to women on both sides of the Korean divide, to show that the conflict has not been forgotten by the world, and ultimately that there is hope of reconciliation and peace in Korea that will benefit *all* sides. This includes engaging with government bureaucrats such as the North Korean women leaders we met, military officials from the UN Command with whom we tried to negotiate, local government branches like the Seoul Metropolitan Government that offered the venue for the Seoul Peace Symposium, non-governmental organizations and activists such as our South Korean



partners, as well as North Korean refugees in South Korea and elsewhere. Indeed, the international women's delegation included among its ranks those who had previously worked with North Korean refugees.

It is yet another imposition of division when North Korean people are categorized into those that are "normal" and "real" as opposed to "puppets" and "tools" of the government. Under an extreme authoritarian system in which the state pervades most aspects of life, it would be realistically impossible to be outside the system. One is educated in state schools, offered jobs through government oversight, and allocated housing, food, healthcare benefits, and other necessities all through the state. What does it mean under these circumstances to be an "ordinary" North Korean as opposed to a "mouthpiece" of the government? Does it simply come down to whether one endorses or opposes the government, so that one is authentically among the ordinary people *only if* one is a dissident or defector? Would it be impossible for a government bureaucrat or party member to have independent thoughts and individual experiences to share that could constitute genuine interaction as an example of people-to-people contact? And what about factory workers or doctors and nurses at the maternity hospital – all government employees under a state socialist system?

As political scientist [Emma Campbell](#) has written, she saw signs of non-conformity in everyday encounters during her visits to North Korea, where people were "enthusiastic to learn about 'the outside'" and she was able to meet and talk to a variety of people, who like people elsewhere "were particularly interested in the topics of social norms and daily life in other countries such as prices of goods and services, marriageable age and women's lives and responsibilities."<sup>43</sup> Campbell concludes that "even inside North Korea it is possible to engage at a personal level with ordinary North Koreans and the normal humanity, empathy

and mutual interest commonly visible in personal interactions elsewhere is equally common when visiting and meeting people in North Korea." To deny such possibility is to relegate North Koreans, including the two million privileged residents of Pyongyang, to a category of the inhuman and therefore worthy of extermination by forced regime collapse. It is the same Manichean logic by which human rights are denied to North Korean political prisoners, who are deemed less than full members of society by North Korean authorities.

But these points seemed lost as a result of the so-called South-South divide, as ideological divisions within South Korean society undercut the main message of the Peace Walk. While the protesters were few in number, the high profile of the international women's delegation prompted the South Korean government to enhance security measures by surrounding our hotel in Seoul with plainclothes police officers and our South Korean organizers ferried us around in unmarked cars through underground parking lots for fear that if we took public transportation we would come under physical attack. Ironically and paradoxically, the tense atmosphere of fear in the South was a stark contrast to the relatively relaxed mood in the North. On the other hand, there was a strange sense of similarity between the two sides. Landmines were not just in the DMZ; political landmines pervaded the entire Korean peninsula, and functioning within such spaces had accustomed everyone – North and South – to make sure to control every little detail from submitting advance copies of speeches (admittedly, this was a necessity for simultaneous translation and the publication of conference material), to seating arrangements with a formal head table, and a high level of orchestration and performativity throughout. In other words, the level of formality and procedure, as well as a deep sense of national pride in Korean culture, felt eerily similar between North and South. Both sides had

enormous pride, not willing to fully share the bad along with the good; both sides wanted to show their best with formal dinners that featured authentic Korean food and Korean culture; and both sides displayed allegiance to their respective states with the portraits of the leaders hanging above our heads in the peace symposium in Pyongyang while the peace symposium in Seoul began with a salute to the South Korean flag.

### Toward a Multiplicity of Crossings

Traversing the Korean divide as a member of the Korean diaspora, I felt like the progeny of divorced parents when asked by South Koreans what it was like in the North. There seemed to be no right answer to the question of what I thought of the other parent that required me to choose a side. The fact is that both sides are terribly suffocated by the very fact that they confront each other with such ferocity. Certainly, one side may have more money and the power that comes with that, while the other side is stern and stoic, offering fewer options that money can buy, but in the end, I wanted neither. For those of us Korean Americans who feel compelled to contribute in some way to overcoming the Korean division, it isn't about the puerile desire to reunite divorced parents or the responsibility we may have to address problems in US-Korea relations. It stems from our community history as a minority group, having faced racial and ethnic discrimination in the United States along with many other forms of discrimination that some have experienced as women, as lesbians, as transgendered, as queer, as multiracial, and so on.<sup>44</sup> And this is why the Korean diaspora should be an integral part of the peace and reunification movement in Korea. It is our marginalized position within our respective communities that has enabled us to see the importance of overcoming division by embracing difference rather than restoring an illusory homogeneous whole. That is to say, the long-held aspiration for national reunification (*minjok t'ongil*) should be replaced by a more

substantive and programmatic peaceful reunification (*p'yŏnghwa t'ongil*), in which peace and reunification are more than slogans. And for this, both Koreas have many borders to cross.

Korea continues to be trapped in a time warp of the unending Cold War, where each side looks upon the other with distrust. The North is painted as evil by South Korea and much of the world, not only due to its own poor record on human rights and nuclear brinkmanship, but as a result of the "triumph" of the West in the global Cold War. It is depicted as a land of empty streets filled with untrustworthy brainwashed automatons repeating state propaganda, without spontaneity or knowledge of the outside world, rife with conspiracies and harboring dark secrets in the recesses of their minds. Meanwhile, the North looks upon the South as if its entire people are wallowing under the yoke of American imperialism in need of salvation. In this pervasive mood of tight national security on both sides of the DMZ, women are portrayed as weak and naïve in need of protection and men feel justified in their paternalistic and patriarchal attitudes toward women. If I'm not ever allowed to forget my ethnic and racial identity while in the US, I am never allowed to forget my gender identity while in Korea. The gender disparity in Korea that many pundits ascribe to legacies of Confucianism (perhaps another form of orientalist discourse), I ascribe in part to the division of the peninsula. This is why it is imperative for women to lead the peace and reunification movement in Korea – to dismantle the division system that enforces binaries between good and evil, between North and South, and between women and men. This aspect of the gendered division system is apparent in the display of masculinities and femininities in both Koreas. It is to protect the (divided) sovereignty that all able-bodied males on both sides are beholden to mandatory military service (up to 3 years in the South and 10 years in the North), and women are

essentialized as mothers to reproduce the next generation of citizen-soldiers with the correct ideology.

The challenges of overcoming this division system became evident during the peace symposiums in both Pyongyang and Seoul. In Pyongyang, the day was divided into a morning session where North Korean women shared their experiences of the war and its aftermath, while the afternoon consisted of our panel of international women – Mairead Maguire (Northern Ireland), Leymah Gbowee (Liberia), Suzuyo Takazato (Okinawa), Patricia Guerrero (Colombia) and Medea Benjamin (United States) – sharing experiences of mobilizing against militarism in our respective communities. The afternoon panel was joined by Kim Ch'un-sil, a North Korean advocate on behalf of "comfort women" who were forced into sexual slavery to serve the Japanese Imperial Army during the Asia Pacific War. The morning began with eight speakers. The first four spoke about their experiences of the war, including a decorated female general with 65 years of military service, as well as a war casualty who had lost her arms in the war. The next two speakers dealt with American violations of the armistice agreement that maintains "neither war nor peace in Korea," as well as the effects of sanctions on everyday life that restrict the import of medical equipment (due to potential dual-use) and even cosmetics. The last two speakers spoke of state benefits for women despite the hardships of the unending war, including maternity benefits and healthcare. What came through repeatedly was the absence of closure in a war that was halted with a temporary ceasefire 62 years ago. Women with experience of the war spoke about it as if it had happened just yesterday, and demanded justice for what they had suffered, shedding bitter tears of "resentment" (*wŏnhan*).

The high point that broke through this tragic embittered atmosphere – if for just a moment – was the quilting ceremony that emerged rather

spontaneously at the end of the morning session. We had asked our North Korean hosts to prepare a *chogakpo* (traditional Korean-style cloth made up of smaller pieces) to be sewn together with two other pieces we would bring – one made in the South and a third made by international women. At the end of the morning session, a representative of the Korean Democratic Women's Union brought out the piece that they had prepared, and one by one, women began to stand up from their seats and the solemn space of the conference room turned into an impromptu place – unrehearsed, unplanned, and spur-of-the-moment, where women improvised to begin to stitch the North Korean cloth to the other pieces, symbolic of our commitment and responsibility to heal the wounds of war and reunite families. And despite our male host telling us that it wouldn't be appropriate to sing, all the women broke out in song, singing "Our Wish is Reunification" (Uri ŭi sowŏn ūn t'ongil), shedding tears this time of empathy rather than bitterness.



**Stitching ceremony that spontaneously emerged during the Pyongyang Peace Symposium (May 21, 2015)**

But such moments are brief, and the road to peace is long. Shortly after, one of the interpreters who sat next to me at lunch told me that as beautiful as the ceremony was, she



was upset by what she heard. After the symbolic stitching, one of our delegation members with South Korean nationality had brought out a separate much larger cloth from one of her performance artist friends to wrap everyone with in a symbolic gesture of healing. As she did so, she had called out that everyone, Americans and Koreans, can now all forgive each other and be friends. Perhaps swept up in the moment, she kept using the South Korean term for Korea, *Hanguk*, rather than the North Korean term, *Chosŏn*. The interpreter, a city planner who spoke perfect English, explained that she did not appreciate such blanket statements of forgiveness when American policy had such negative effects in Korea, proving that not all Americans are friends. It was a sobering reminder that a serious peace movement must go beyond symbolic gestures to address real social and political ramifications of the unended war.

The trauma of the continued division of the peninsula erupted once again on the other side of the DMZ, during the peace symposium in Seoul. The day was organized in like fashion with a similar mix of our speakers, joined by Kim Suk-ja, a South Korean organizer on US military camp town women's issues. But the morning session was punctuated by a North Korean woman defector, who desperately shared her story from the floor about her inability to send rice to her family back in North Korea. Some of the negative reaction against the Peace Walk came from defectors, who seemed fixated on polarizing the call for peace as the very antithesis of North Korean human rights. The intent of the Peace Walk, however, was to call attention to the need to dismantle precisely the division, represented by the DMZ, so that there may be freedom of movement between the North and South, and North Koreans do not have to trek across third countries in order to reach the South (or vice versa); so that North Korean women like her can send rice to their families back home; and ultimately so that millions of separated families

- both more recent ones and those since the war - may finally be reunited. To convey this hope, Leymah Gbowee came down from the podium and went over to the North Korean woman, to personally share her pain as she embraced her, but again, it was a momentary gesture that would need much more follow-up to build relationships across the Korean divide. The agonizing question remained: How can women effectively embrace across the South-South, North-South, and the US-North Korea divide while the war in its present form continues?



**Pyeongyang Peace Symposium afternoon session (May 21, 2015)**

**Seoul Peace Symposium during Patricia Guerrero's presentation, showing Colombians holding up a sign that reads "Colombian women walking to end the Korean War" (May 25, 2015)**

What the highpoints, as well as the low, of the Peace Walk have affirmed for me is the true significance of crossing borders. There are, of course, the territorial borders, such as the DMZ where lack of information was a major obstacle to our crossing. The ambiguities over who has jurisdiction over the DMZ and uncertainties about the various routes and checkpoints within the DMZ showed just how difficult border crossings can be, especially when those borders are not fully understood. Eye-opening for many of us was the precariousness of peace in Korea; the arbitrary line that has divided millions of families for over six decades; the challenges facing current North-South relations with nearly all communication lines cut; and the divisions within South Korean society itself, even within the peace and reunification movement which, for those of us on the outside, made the coordinating process so perilous to navigate.

Here then are the multiple ways in which we need to cross borders – gendered borders that maintain inequalities between women and men, ethnic borders that discriminate against racialized others, biological borders that cast out the transgendered, religious borders that condemn nonbelievers, and ideological borders that paint the other as evil. What does peace and reunification mean in concrete terms? In the same way that peace is not simply the cessation of hostilities, reunification cannot remain an abstract term that anyone can appropriate as politically expedient. It requires an active crossing of borders, the acceptance of difference rather than sameness, unity by embracing difference rather than homogeneity. Reunification should not be about the restoration of a prior whole, but about moving forward to be inclusive of difference, whether it is ideological, political, class, ethnic, national, racial, or sexual. By initiating such border crossings, the women of the Peace Walk were not "played" nor did we "fail".

According to [Netsai Mushonga](#), one of our

delegation members and a member of the Women Peacemakers Program that has been celebrating International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament on May 24 for more than twenty years, our Peace Walk was among the most powerful commemorations of May 24 in two decades. In order to coordinate our crossing, communication took place between North and South Korea after many years of impasse, and while we could not cross at Panmunjom, this effectively highlighted the current state of division and challenges that must be overcome. There was mobilization of thousands of women in both North and South Korea to walk for peace. We saw ordinary families cheering from balconies and apartment windows in Kaesong in the North, while numerous families came out in support of the walk in Paju in the South. High-profile women led by Gloria Steinem, Mairead Maguire (1976 Nobel Peace Laureate), and Leymah Gbowee (2011 Nobel Peace Laureate) drew international attention to the unended state of war in Korea, garnering wide international media coverage. There was unprecedented use of media and technology during the trip that included accompanying journalists from National Geographic ([David Guttenfelder](#)) and the Associated Press ([Eric Talmadge](#)), as well as [Coleen Baik](#), former designer with Twitter, who used [Periscope](#) to send out live feed directly from North Korea. We were hardly naïve or uninformed; in fact, without the kind of flexibility and savviness that women have come to learn from overcoming challenges elsewhere, we could not have pulled this off.



**North Korean women waiting to join the Peace Walk in Pyongyang (May 23, 2015)**  
**South Korean families joining the Peace Walk in Paju (May 24, 2015)**

There were conciliations and adaptations all along the way, even before we began our journey. In one of our earlier organizational meetings in October 2014, Gloria Steinem and Cora Weiss suggested that a peace "march" was too militaristic and proposed the softer language of a peace "walk". The North Koreans thought this language strange and kept their terminology to call it the "grand march" (*taehaengjin*), announcing the official title of the walk as the International Women's Grand March for Peace and Reunification of Korea, even as we continued to use our own language. *Chogakpo*, the term used in the South to refer to a patchwork cloth, was foreign to the North, so they opted to use, *saekdongch'ŏn*, or multicolored cloth. And most substantively, long before we began our trip, the international women along with the women of the North and

South managed to establish lines of communication to come up with the language for a peace declaration that included all the basic points, including affirmation of the importance of human rights, to begin the long walk for peace and reunification of Korea (see Appendix 1). All of these efforts that culminated in the Peace Walk were examples of civic participation in the peaceful reunification of Korea called for by South Korean scholar, **Paik Nak-chung**, who has consistently emphasized the need to look beyond the state and stressed the importance of civil society as a major partner in reunification efforts. Although his focus is on the role of South Korean citizens as the "seventh interested party" (an addition to the Six Party Talks), the Peace Walk was an effort by international women to effect "change through contact" in order to overcome the inertia of "peaceful coexistence" (or "strategic patience"), whereby the US and South Korea await regime collapse and North Korea hunkers down for regime survival.<sup>45</sup> Just as Paik stressed the need for South Korean civil society to break the impasse of state-to-state level negotiations, Women Cross DMZ sought to model international civic engagement and highlight the important role and responsibility of the international community to be a productive force for peace and reconciliation in Korea.<sup>46</sup>

Despite our tight schedule, we were able to meet with several other international representatives based in Pyongyang, some by mere serendipity. One such person was **Robert Grund**, who has been a resident in Pyongyang since 2013 as the Representative Officer of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD).<sup>47</sup> After learning that WFD had no information on the status of the deaf in North Korea, Grund decided he would find out for himself. It took three separate visits by the fourth-generation deaf German for his North Korean hosts to finally allow him to visit a small school for the deaf on the outskirts of the city. In the two years that he has made it his mission to



empower the deaf in North Korea, he has built schools for the deaf, helped document the North Korean sign language, and raised awareness about the deaf community in North Korea both within and outside the country. It was another example of what crossing borders and breaking down barriers through international civic engagement can achieve in concrete terms. When he learned of our delegation's stay at the Yanggakdo Hotel where he dined on occasion, he sought us out to share his experience and we discussed ways that we might engage with the deaf women of North Korea. We also had a chance to meet with the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Pyongyang, who stated unequivocally that sanctions caused major disruptions in the delivery of aid, if nothing else because of the difficulty in financial and banking transactions. The UNDP officials we met with in both Beijing and Pyongyang were fully supportive of our women's delegation, sharing our belief in the important role of the international community, and seemed somewhat awed that we managed to get as far as we did.

Speaking as a historian of social change and someone who has tried to make history relevant through socially engaged work, it is extraordinarily hard work to put your body where your mouth is, to be on the ground trying to change the status quo at risk to your own safety and wellbeing. All of the women – North, South, and international women – on this Peace Walk did so, taking an extended time away from their demanding schedules and their families, many of them paying their own way and contributing even more to help others join the walk. It could not have happened without each of their efforts, putting heart, soul, and body on the line, not knowing how it would all turn out in the end. The Peace Walk was the result of women crossing borders with eyes wide open (even while dreaming the improbable), committed for the long-haul to take concrete steps to bring peace and

reunification to Korea. By comparison, it is easy to watch from the sidelines and add glib commentary without adding much that might contribute to progress. It is much too easy to assume one knows all there is to know. What will it take to end this division and what are you willing to do about it? That is the question I leave with, one which we are in the process of answering in order to devise concrete steps to move forward. Already, on July 21, Women Cross DMZ held a congressional [briefing](#) in Washington DC to discuss the results of the Peace Walk, which prompted the three remaining Korean War veterans in the US Congress - Representatives Charles B. Rangel (D-NY), John Conyers, Jr. (D-MI), and Sam Johnson (R-TX) - to introduce a [bill](#) calling for the formal end to the Korean War.<sup>48</sup> The Peace Walk was just the first step in building such long-term partnerships with a variety of sectors of women and men of both Koreas and the international community to address issues of peacebuilding, humanitarian aid, human rights, and the eventual denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.<sup>49</sup> After seventy years of division it is long overdue to formally bring an end to the Korean War and help bring about the peaceful reunification of Korea within our lifetimes.

## Appendix 1: Peace Declaration

### *2015 International Women's Walk for Peace & Reunification of Korea*

Whereas the year 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Korea and also the 70th year since Korea was divided by outside forces;

Whereas the tragedy suffered by the Korean people, the only nation to remain divided as a result of the Cold War, can no longer be ignored by the global community;

Whereas the Demilitarized Zone is one of the most militarized and dangerous conflict areas in the world and the symbol of Korean division;

Whereas peace & stability is an important foundation for human rights;

Whereas the year 2015 also marks the fifteenth anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security which calls for the "full participation of women in the peace process," including in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and in peace-building;

Therefore, on this day, May 24, International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament, we women, from North and South Korea and around the world, are walking to invite all concerned to begin a new chapter in Korean history, one marked by dialogue, reconciliation, mutual understanding & respect, and peaceful co-prosperity, we are walking to:

- Call for the official end of the Korean War by replacing the 1953 Armistice Agreement with a peace treaty as stipulated in Article 4 Paragraph 60;
- Help reunite Korean families tragically separated by an artificial, unwanted division;
- Lessen military tensions on the Korean peninsula;
- Appeal to the international community to lift sanctions that harm innocent civilians;
- Decry wartime violence toward women and girls and bring justice for the "comfort women" who survived sexual slavery during WWII;
- Redirect funds devoted to arms race toward improving people's welfare and protecting the environment;
- Amplify women's leadership in the peacebuilding process in Korea and around the world in accordance with international law; and
- Challenge the world to support Korea's reconciliation and reunification as a cornerstone of building world peace.

We hereby declare our commitment to support the desires of the Korean people and all people of conscience around the world, to work towards the peaceful reconciliation and reunification of the Korean peninsula for a durable peace and security in Korea and the world. By working together with Korean women at all levels, particularly from the grassroots, the International Women's Walk for Peace and Reunification of Korea, mindful of Korean women's right to determine the future of a peaceful Korea, will continue its work until these aims are fully achieved.

Appendix 2: Final Closing Statement (June 3, 2015)

### **Women Crossing the Korean Divide: Reflections and Resolutions**

Thirty women peacemakers from 15 countries made a historic crossing of the two-mile wide

De-Militarized Zone (DMZ) from North to South Korea on May 24 International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament. We called global attention to the need for a peace treaty to finally end the Korean War; to reunite families long separated by Korea's division; and to assure women's participation in the peace process. Because most citizens of North and South Korea are not allowed to cross the DMZ, international women crossed the DMZ on their behalf in solidarity with Korean women's desires for peace and reunification of Korea.

The delegation included prominent women leaders, including two Nobel Peace Laureates, Mairead Maguire of Northern Ireland and Leymah Gbowee of Liberia, who led citizen movements of women to bring peace to their countries, feminist author activist Gloria Steinem, as well as seasoned peace activists, human rights defenders, spiritual leaders, and Korea experts.

During the four-day visit to North Korea ahead of the May 24 DMZ crossing, we connected

with North Korean women, learning about their experiences of war and division, and sharing how we mobilize women to end conflict in our communities. Parallel events were organized with women of both Koreas, culminating in peace symposiums, one in Pyongyang and one in Seoul, and peace walks in Pyongyang, Kaesong, and Paju – all with thousands of Korean women.

## Successes

The 2015 Women's Peace Walk succeeded in bringing global attention to the unended, "forgotten" Korean War. By physically crossing the DMZ-the militarized division that was created as a direct result of the 62 year-old ceasefire-the Peace Walk generated major global media attention and an outpouring of support from world leaders, including eight Nobel Peace Laureates, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, U.S. President Jimmy Carter, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, authors Alice Walker and Naomi Klein, actor Robert Redford, Arun Gandhi, Cardinal Andrew Yeom Soo Jung, physician Deepak Chopra, co-founder of Twitter Evan Williams, U.S. Governor Bill Richardson, and Jack Rendler of Amnesty International USA.

Leading women's rights organizations supported us, including Nobel Women's Initiative, Global Fund for Women, AWID, MADRE, Urgent Action Fund, and Women Peacemaker Program, which started International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament twenty years ago. Dozens of South Korean women Parliamentarians across political lines issued a public statement endorsing our walk. And hundreds of individuals provided financial support to make our historic journey possible. We are so incredibly grateful for this community's leadership and partnership.

Inspired by the long history of Korean women peacemakers, we helped revive Korea's peace and reunification movements, which have been

deflated since the souring of inter-Korean relations. Since 2007, their efforts to engage with North Koreans have been greatly hampered, and even criminalized. According to our South Korean partners, the solidarity of international women peacemakers helped renew debate and open political space in South Korea, including putting into public discourse the legal mandate of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which ensures the female half of the world be involved at all levels of every peace process.

The deadlocked situation on the Korean peninsula calls for game changer initiatives like Women

Cross DMZ that go beyond conventional paths. As a group of people generally outside structures of power, women peacemakers offer a critical perspective in the analysis of conflict, providing strategies toward peacebuilding that focus on creating ties across opposing sides. As Korean feminists have taught us, the militarization of Korea leads to greater masculinization of society, which increases violence against women and strips resources away from social welfare and human security.

In preparing for the Peace Walk, a diverse group of international women from a variety of backgrounds and political views came together, including artists, scholars, human rights defenders, and peace activists from the Asia Pacific, Africa, North America, Latin America, and Europe. We partnered with organizations in both North and South Korea. In North Korea, we established working relationships with the **Korean Committee for Solidarity with World**

**Peoples and the Democratic Women's Union of Korea.** In South Korea, we partnered with local women's groups such as **Gyeonggi Women's Network, Korea Women's Political Solidarity**, and **Iftopia**, as well as several leading national women's organizations, including **Women Making Peace, YWCA of**



**Korea, Korean Women's Association United, and Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan.** We are enormously grateful for their leadership and partnership, without which the Women's Peace Walk could not have happened.

Through a collaborative process with both North and South Korean women, we issued the **Declaration of the 2015 International Women's Walk for Peace & Reunification of Korea.** At the end of our symposium in Pyongyang, through laughter, tears and song, we also stitched together a *jogakbo*, a traditional Korean quilt, with parts made by North and South Korean, diaspora, and international women, signifying the role that each group must play to help reunify the Korean peninsula.

We believe that knowledge and connection lead to meaningful dialogue. To that end, we leveraged technology as a medium for empathy, exposure, and education by using a video streaming application called Periscope. We broadcast live footage via social media such as Twitter from both North and South Korea. This was the first time in history that moments both formal and casual were shared live with the world in such a manner from North Korea. By providing intimate glimpses from the inside, we transported the world into an otherwise inaccessible place and culture, helping to transform the unknown into the familiar.

Finally, our walk brought renewed attention to the importance of world solidarity in ending the

Korean conflict, particularly since the 1953 Armistice Agreement was signed by North Korea, China, and the United States on behalf of the UN Command that included sixteen countries. It helped highlight the responsibility of the international community-whose governments were complicit in the division of Korea seventy years ago- to support Korea's peaceful reconciliation and reunification.

## Challenges

The challenges of overcoming Korea's division became apparent in the complex negotiations over our DMZ crossing between North and South Korea, as well as with the UN Command, which has formal jurisdiction over the DMZ. Although we hoped to cross at Panmunjom, the "Truce Village" where the armistice was signed, we decided after South Korea and the UN Command denied our crossing there that we would take the route agreed by all parties in the spirit of compromise lest our actions further strain the already tense North-South relationship.

The challenges of overcoming division were further illuminated by the misrepresentation of our delegation's comments made in North Korea. We registered complaints to our hosts, insisting that our comments not be misrepresented and used out of context. Instead, these misquotes were further distorted by some South Korean and international news outlets. We did not meet with any heads of state or endorse any political or economic system, maintaining a neutral stance throughout, and yet, it was apparent that divisions within South Korea itself were manifested in the ideologically divided reception and reactions to the work of our group.

Our Women's Peace Walk has initiated discussion, at times heated, on the best policies and strategies for advancing peace and reconciliation in Korea. This is healthy and we are glad to generate and participate in such debate, but as we engage in respectful dialogue, we expect the same of those who oppose our position. Our efforts to end the Korean War and press for family reunification and the participation of women in peacemaking are a true expression of our fundamental human rights to peaceful assembly, to freedom of expression, and to defend the right to peace.

## Road Ahead

The Women's Peace Walk will be a "long" walk. The 2015 DMZ crossing is not the end, but the continuation of a long-term movement for peace and reconciliation of Korea. We bring an alternative civilian voice from an international feminist perspective to challenge over 60 years of military standoff. It is the first step in highlighting the significance and urgency of peace in Korea to strengthen our support of Korean women to help bridge the two sides. This is our first meeting with women of North and South Korea as an organized international body, and the beginning of relationships that we hope will foster deeper conversations about the impact of militarism on the North and South, including issues of human rights and nuclear disarmament.

Peace is a necessary condition for the full realization of human rights. States of hostility and international conflict are the basis on which states have long violated the rights of their citizens.

Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all have a right to an international order that permits the fulfillment of all rights enumerated in the Declaration. The continued state of war between the two Koreas is a major obstacle to such an order and a rationale for the violation of human rights. Human rights and peace are integral one to the other. Neither is more important than the other; they proceed together.

As we look around the world, including our own countries, we also see that the closer a country is to a war footing the less it respects human rights values. Our focus is to increase civilian exchanges and women's leadership, highlighting the obligation of all parties involved to decrease militarization and move towards a peace treaty. We therefore urge increased engagement at every level -- civilian, economic, cultural, academic, governmental. The alternative is heightened risk of full military conflict, which is not an option.

Twenty countries fought in the Korean War, and thus, in many ways, it was – and continues to be – a global conflict. The absence of a peace treaty and the ongoing militarization of North and

South Korea and other countries in northeast Asia are global threats. The international community and the UN which took part in the Korean War have a responsibility to close this tragic chapter in Cold War history. Thus, we will continue our efforts until a peace settlement is achieved in Korea for peace in northeast Asia and our world.

*Acknowledgements: My gratitude goes to Christine Ahn, Gwyn Kirk, Deann Borshay Liem, and Ewa Eriksson Fortier for their helpful feedback and to Peter Hayes, Nan Kim, and Mark Selden for their astute editorial comments and suggestions. This article was developed in combined consultation to be published jointly with the Asia-Pacific Journal and the Nautilus Peace and Security Network (NAPSNet). Photos are by Niana Liu, who accompanied the delegation as the official photographer, as well as by members of the delegation, used with their permission.*

**Suzy Kim** is Associate Professor in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at Rutgers University. She received her Ph.D. in modern Korean history from the University of Chicago, and is author of *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Cornell University Press, 2013), winner of the 2015 James Palais Book Prize.

Recommended citation: Suzy Kim, "Crossing Borders: a feminist history of Women Cross DMZ", *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13, Issue 32, No. 7, August 17, 2015.

## Related articles

- Christine Ahn, [Opening the Door to Peace on the Korean Peninsula: Women Cross DMZ](#)

- Peter Hayes, [Ending a Nuclear Threat via a Northwest Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone](#)
- Christine Hong, [Stranger than Fiction: The Interview and U.S. Regime-Change Policy Toward North Korea](#)
- Sahr Conway-Lanz, [The Ethics of Bombing Civilians After World War II: The Persistence of Norms Against Targeting Civilians in the Korean War](#)
- Mel Gurtov, [Time for the U.S. to Engage North Korea](#)
- Ruediger Frank, [Why now is a good time for economic engagement of North Korea](#)
- Morton H. Halperin, [A New Approach to Security in Northeast Asia: Breaking the Gridlock](#)
- Bruce Cumings, Selig Harrison, [North Korea, the US, and the Bottom Line in Negotiating the Future](#)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See the working definition of feminism offered by [a feminist discussion forum](#) (accessed July 27, 2015). I thank Nan Kim for this helpful reference.

<sup>2</sup> The Korean War is conventionally understood as a three-year war between 1950 and 1953 but as discussed below, its civil origins complicate the beginnings that take its roots back to the colonial and postcolonial period, and the consequences of its unending remain to this day. For a fuller discussion, see Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library Chronicles, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Shin Hyon-hee, ["80% of N.K. defectors are female: data,"](#) *The Korea Herald* (July 5, 2015) accessed July 27, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Jane Kim, ["Trafficked: Domestic Violence, Exploitation in Marriage, and the Foreign-Bride Industry,"](#) *Virginia Journal of International Law*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (December 16, 2010): 455 (accessed July 5, 2015). See also, Good Friends: Centre for Peace, Human Rights and Refugees, [Alternative NGO Report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, First Periodic Report of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea](#) (June 2005) (accessed July 5, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Using this logic, feminist philosopher Sara Ruddick has coined the term 'maternal thinking' to describe the kind of praxis that arises from caring labor, a human activity that transcends gender but has come to be associated with femininity and motherhood due to particular historical developments. See Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); and Sara Ruddick, 'The Rationality of Care', in Jean Bethke Elshtain and Sheila Tobias (eds), *Women, Militarism, and War: Essays in History, Politics, and Social Theory* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990), 229-254.

<sup>6</sup> Cynthia Cockburn, *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 208.

<sup>7</sup> Stephan Haggard, ["Women's Walk for Peace,"](#) *North Korea: Witness to Transformation Blog* (March 17, 2015) (accessed July 2, 2015)

<sup>8</sup> Rudiger Frank, "Political economy of sanctions against North Korea," *Asian Perspective* 30,



no. 3 (2006), 5-36.

<sup>9</sup> Stephan Haggard, ["Women Cross the DMZ," North Korea: Witness to Transformation Blog](#) (June 8, 2015) (accessed July 2, 2015)

<sup>10</sup> Tae Yang Kwak, ["The Failure of Women Cross DMZ," Korea Exposé](#) (May 27, 2015) (accessed July 2, 2015). As the unofficial resident historian for the delegation, I must point out that Kwak is incorrect that there were "only" one to two million deaths from the war. [Bruce Cumings](#), a leading historian of the Korean War, writes that death tolls could be even higher than 4 million with "upward of three million North Koreans...along with another one million South Koreans, and nearly a million Chinese." See Bruce Cumings, *North Korea: Another Country* (New York: New Press, 2004), chapter one. Moreover, while technically correct that Korea was divided by Allied powers, as those reassessing the history of the Cold War know well, the conventional understanding that the Cold War "started" with the Truman Doctrine in 1947 is simplistic. Some scholars take the origins of the Cold War back to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, but certainly it was no later than Roosevelt's death and the use of atomic weapons in 1945 – and with that the demise of the vision for a pluralist and internationalist world – that marked the onset of the Cold War. Korea's division in 1945 should be placed within that longer frame of the Cold War. Symptomatic of this perspective is the inauguration of the Korean Association for Cold War Studies just this year on the seventieth anniversary of the division of the peninsula. See Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2006* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006); David C. Engerman, "Ideology and the origins of the Cold War, 1917-1962," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds. *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Origins*, Volume 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Namkoong Young, "Similarities and dissimilarities: The inter-Korean summit and unification formulae," *East Asian Review*, 13, no. 3, (2001), 59-80. Agreements between the North and South which explicitly state that the two sides recognize and respect each other's system include the December 1991 Basic Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation, the February 1992 Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and the June 15, 2000 Joint Declaration.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 238. See also Bruce Cumings, *The Korean War: A History* (New York: Modern Library Chronicles, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> In calling for a formal end to the Korean War, statements issued by Women Cross DMZ have specifically referred to the need to replace the armistice with a peace treaty to underscore the importance of an official termination of the war. However, the peace settlement called for in the armistice can take many forms, and therefore I have used the terms peace treaty and peace settlement or agreement interchangeably throughout this essay. According to legal expert Patrick Norton, under international law "any [formal] agreement between states, however denominated, constitutes a 'treaty' in the sense of an agreement legally binding the parties to its terms." For Norton's incisive discussion of the legalities involved in replacing the armistice agreement, see Patrick M. Norton, ["Ending the Korean Armistice Agreement: The Legal Issues," Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network](#) (March 1997) (accessed July 28, 2015). For concrete suggestions for steps to formally end the Korean War, see Peter Hayes, ["Overcoming US-DPRK Hostility: The Missing Link between a Northeast Asian Comprehensive Security Settlement and Ending the Korean War," NAPSNet](#)

Special Report (December 21, 2014) (accessed August 4, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> For Jodie Evans' reflections on the trip, see Jodie Evans, "[Stitching Korea Back Together After 60 Years of Military Divide](#)," *AlterNet* (June 15, 2015) (accessed July 2, 2015)

<sup>15</sup> For the history of the women's union, see Suzy Kim, "Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Volume 52, No. 4 (October 2010), 742-67; Suzy Kim, *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), chapter four.

<sup>16</sup> Asan Report, "South Korean Attitudes toward North Korea and Reunification," Asan Institute for Policy Studies (February 2015), 29-30.

<sup>17</sup> Katharine Moon, "[Why did 'Women Cross DMZ' in Korea?](#)" *Up Front*, Brookings (June 3, 2015) (accessed July 2, 2015). For an earlier piece that also pointed out the sexist difference in receptions to Women Cross DMZ in comparison to Hyundai founder Chung Ju-Yung's 1998 DMZ crossing with 500 cattle, see John Feffer, "[Women's Delegation to Cross the DMZ](#)," *The World Post* (April 22, 2015) (accessed July 2, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Kozue Akibayashi, "[Women Cross Demilitarised Zone \(DMZ\) on Korean Peninsula for Peace](#)," (accessed July 5, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Christine Ahn, "[Continuing the Centennial Work of Women and Citizen Diplomacy in Korea](#)," Inter Press Service News Agency (April 28, 2015) (accessed July 5, 2015).

<sup>20</sup> Hô Chông-suk was an important feminist figure during the colonial period, but she is rarely acknowledged in South Korean historiography of feminism. Just one indication of this is the Sôdaemun Prison Museum in Seoul. As a prison that held many of the political prisoners during the colonial era and later anti-government democracy activists in the postliberation period, it has been renovated as a historical site and museum since its closing in 1987. There is a women's building within the prison that commemorates the female prisoners held there, especially highlighting Yu Kwan-sun (a Christian independence activist tortured to death in the prison), but there is no mention of Hô Chông-suk despite her prisoner identification card being displayed. She has been relegated to anonymity due to her high-level ascendancy in the North Korean government after division. For a biography, see Ruth Barraclough, "Red Love and Betrayal in the Making of North Korea: Comrade Hô Jông-suk," *History Workshop Journal* 77 (1) (Spring 2014), 86-102.

<sup>21</sup> As historian Francisca de Haan argues, the history and work of the WIDF have largely been overlooked as a direct result of the Cold War. Francisca de Haan, 'The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda, and Contributions, 1945-1991', in Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin (eds), *Women and Social Movements, International 1840 to Present* (Alexandria, VA : Alexander Street Press, October 2012) available at [http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/help/view/the\\_womens\\_international\\_democratic\\_federation\\_widf\\_history\\_main\\_agenda\\_and\\_contributions\\_19451991](http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu/help/view/the_womens_international_democratic_federation_widf_history_main_agenda_and_contributions_19451991) (accessed September 14, 2014). See also Francisca de Haan, 'Continuing Cold War Paradigms in the Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)', *Women's History Review* (Sept. 2010), 547-573.

<sup>22</sup> Committee on Un-American Activities, U.S. House of Representatives, *Report on the Congress of American Women* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1950, 23 October 1949) cited in de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation," endnote 4.

<sup>23</sup> Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney, "Fighting fascism and forging new political activism: The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in the Cold War," in *De-Centering Cold War History: Local and Global Change*, eds. Jadwiga E. Pieper Mooney and Fabio Lanza (New York: Routledge, 2013), 55-56 [52-72]. Mooney explains that some of the bias against WIDF was the result of confluences with the Soviet "peace offensive," a highly publicized worldwide campaign that contrasted US "warmongers" (for its use of nuclear weapons against Japan at the end of WWII) with "peace-loving" communists as part of Soviet policy. For the variety of women's organizations that took part in WIDF, see 60-61.

<sup>24</sup> Melanie Ilic, "Soviet women, cultural exchange and the Women's International Democratic Federation," in *Reassessing Cold War Europe*, eds. Sari Autio-Saraso and Katalin Miklóssy (New York: Routledge, 2010), 160.

<sup>25</sup> *We Accuse! Report of the Commission of the Women's International Democratic Federation in Korea, May 16 to 27, 1951* (Berlin: WIDF, 1951).

<sup>26</sup> *We Accuse*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> *We Accuse*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> *We Accuse*, 48.

<sup>29</sup> Christine Ahn, "[Why Women Must End the Korean War](#)," *Foreign Policy in Focus* (March 8, 2013) (accessed July 5, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Deann Borshay Liem and her film crew have documented the trip in detail to produce the documentary film, *Crossings*, which will likely include the details of this debate. A description of the film is [available here](#) (accessed July 28, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> For an analyst's assessment of similar kinds of institutional differences, see [Patrick McEachern](#), *Inside the Red Box: North Korea's Post-totalitarian Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Jodie Evans, "[Stitching Korea Back Together After 60 Years of Military Divide](#)," *AlterNet* (June 15, 2015) (accessed July 2, 2015); Gregory Elich Interviews Christine Ahn, "[Opening the Door to Peace on the Korean Peninsula: Women Cross DMZ](#)," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13, Issue 28, No. 3, July 13, 2015 (accessed July 27, 2015); Mairead Maguire, "[Opinion: Why Women Peacemakers Marched in Korea](#)," Inter Press Service News Agency (July 13, 2015) (accessed July 27, 2015); Ann Wright, "[Coming Under 'Fire' at Korea's DMZ](#)," Consortium News (July 15, 2015) (accessed July 27, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> "[N. Korean economic conditions appear to be improving: CRS report](#)," The Korea Herald (July 27, 2015) (accessed July 28, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> [Dae-Sook Suh](#), *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988)

<sup>35</sup> For details of what happened in Christine's own words, see Gregory Elich Interviews Christine Ahn, "[Opening the Door to Peace on the Korean Peninsula: Women Cross DMZ](#)," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 13, Issue 28, No. 3, July 13, 2015 (accessed July 27, 2015). Once we became aware of North Korean media distortions of our Mangyondae visit, we lodged sharply-worded criticisms with our North Korean hosts, and physically prevented the journalists from covering our visit to the International Friendship Exhibit in Myohyangsan, where gifts to the leaders are displayed.

<sup>36</sup> For a comparative analysis of the way the Korean War has been memorialized in the two Koreas, China, and the US, see the special journal issue "[\(De\)Memorializing the Korean War](#):"



[A Critical Intervention](#)," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* (March 2015) (accessed July 5, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Christine Ahn and Suzy Kim, ["Opinion: Improve North Korean Human Rights by Ending War,"](#) *Inter Press Service News Agency* (December 2, 2014) (accessed July 28, 2015)

<sup>38</sup> Gary Clyde Hufbauer, Jeffrey J. Schott, and Kimberly Ann Elliott, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered: History and Current Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 1990); Marc Bossuyt, *The Adverse Consequences of Economic Sanctions on the Enjoyment of Human Rights* (Geneva: United Nations Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> Rudiger Frank, "Political economy of sanctions against North Korea," *Asian Perspective* 30, no. 3 (2006), 8-9. Frank found that sanctions are only effective when they are quick and decisive with an average of three years duration imposed by friendly states before affected countries develop "sanctions immunity". Otherwise, sanctions often serve to rally support for the regime, confirming the government's rhetoric of foreign hostility (13-17).

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed look at the devastating effects of sanctions on the general population in Iraq, see Joy Gordon, *Invisible War: The United States and the Iraq Sanctions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> ["Koryolink faces big problems with cash, competition,"](#) *North Korea Tech* (June 25, 2015) (accessed July 13, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> UN General Assembly Human Rights Council 25th Session, ["Report of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,"](#) A/HRC/25/63 (February 7, 2014), 16, 19-20 (accessed August 4, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> Emma Campbell, ["'Fieldwork' North Korea: Observations of daily life on the ground inside the country,"](#) *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 12, Issue 40, No. 2 (October 6, 2014) (accessed August 4, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> I thank Steph Lee for our fruitful discussions on this in the summer of 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Paik Nak-chung, *Division System in Crisis: Essays on Contemporary Korea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 161-172. As he explains, Paik focuses on the role of South Korean civil society due to the lack of a civil society in North Korea or a supranational body like the European Union that can play a role in Korea.

<sup>46</sup> In this regard, Women Cross DMZ can be differentiated from other border crossings carried out by South Korean activists, like the one by Im Sukyŏng in 1989 as a representative of the South Korean student movement. Comparing our Peace Walk to footage of Im's reception in Pyongyang, there were many similarities from the rows of women dressed in traditional Korean dress, waving red flowers, to their slogans, which called for *chaju t'ongil* (autonomous reunification). Despite such overlapping aesthetics, the two crossings are situated in different affective spaces as Im's crossing performed "emotional citizenship" to challenge the state mandated citizenship that inscribed the division into its very formulation by designating the other side as illegitimate. Rather than relying on such ethno-nationalist appeal to the concept of *minjok*, Women Cross DMZ emphasized global citizen diplomacy led by women as key. For fuller discussion of emotional citizenship as related to Korean border crossings, see Suk-Young Kim, *DMZ Crossing: Performing Emotional Citizenship along the Korean Border* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

<sup>47</sup> Eric Talmadge, ["Small steps: Kindergarten plan symbolizes novel attempt to empower](#)

[North Korea's isolated deaf," \*Star Tribune\*](#) (July 8, 2015) (accessed July 28, 2015)

<sup>48</sup> Representative Charles Rangel's Office Press Release, "[Three Remaining Korean War Veterans In Congress Introduce Bill Calling for Formal End of Korean War](#)," (July 28, 2015) (accessed August 4, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> For some concrete suggestions toward denuclearization, see Peter Hayes, "[Ending Nuclear Threat via a Northeast Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone](#)," NAPSNet Special Reports (January 06, 2015) accessed August 4, 2015; Peter Hayes, "[Nuclear Threat and Korean Reunification](#)," NAPSNet Policy Forum (June 01, 2015) accessed August 4, 2015).