

An as-If Ritual and Its Discontents: Everyday Life of North Korean Migrant Women in South Korea

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Abstract : This paper explores how the Partition of Korea is absorbed into everyday life through North Korean migrant women's rituals for traditional holidays in Korea. In national holidays called myungjul, Koreans traditionally visit their paternal ancestor's hometowns to hold jesa, the rites for the ancestors, at the graves and home. Due to the physical gaps in the kinship networks, marked by the kin left behind in North Korea, North Korean migrants gather among themselves in the neighborhood in South Korea as if they make the myungjul ritual of the family gatherings. This impossibility of the proper practice of the rites insinuates the violence of the Partition refracted into the family relations between those in the South and those in the North. Yet, the myungjul gathering creates a kind of collective hometown, beside one's genealogical hometown, where they can express lamentation and guilt over not being able to visit their parents and ancestors in their hometowns, which they are traditionally required to do. In this as-if ritual, myungjul is re-created for and by the women and for others in the community. Yet, the texture of this ritual is marked by discontent and dissatisfaction. Attending to fostering discontents that seep into the collective events, this paper aims to seek ways to study the violence that permeated in everyday life in partitioned Korea.

Keywords : as-if ritual, everyday life, kinship, migration

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