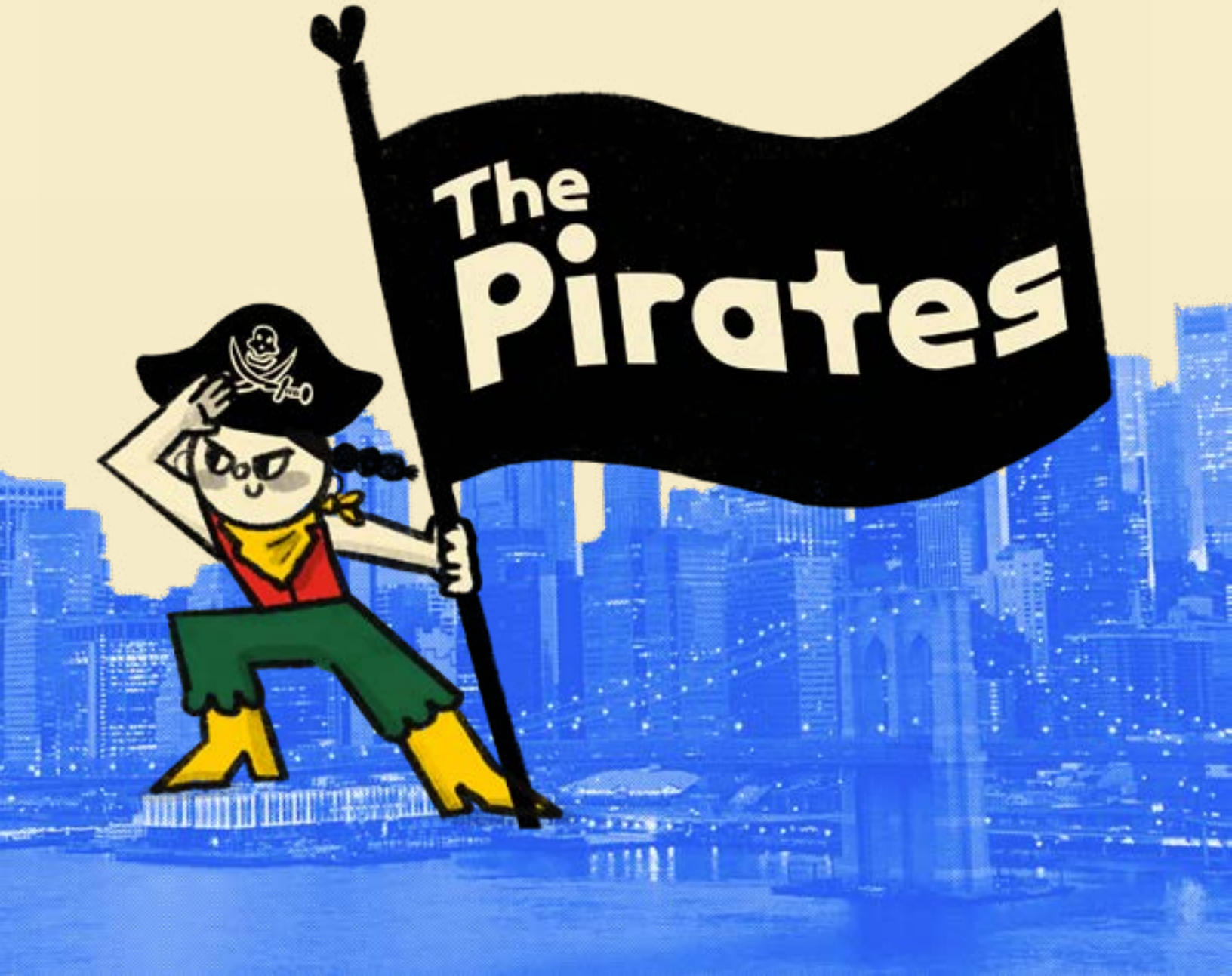
The Pirates

<The Pirates>
Thesis 2024
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In Partnership with
Cholong Lee
Mina Ha
and ten brave pirates in New York City

그녀는 방랑자, 부랑자, 망명자, 난민, 추방자, 떠돌이, 유랑객이다.
가끔은 정착하고 싶은 생각도 들지만, 호기심, 슬픔, 불만 때문에 그럴 수가 없다.
— 데버라 리비, 『지형을 삼키며』

She is the wanderer, bum, émigré, refugee, deportee, rambler, strolling player.
Sometimes she would like to be a settler, but curiosity, grief, and disaffection forbid it.
— Deborah Levy, *Swalloing Geography*

Table of Contents

This process paper serves as a documentation of unheard voices. The emergence of the “Tal-Joseon (Escape-Korea*)” discourse within the Korean youth demographic during the 2010s, particularly among young Korean women, is intricately tied to the “Feminism Reboot” catalyzed by the Seocho-dong public-toilet murder case in 2016. While empirical data quantifying the emigration patterns of women during this period is unavailable, the narratives presented herein, drawn from personal experiences of myself, my friends, and broader social circles, provide anecdotal evidence of this societal phenomenon.

My thesis project resonates as a plea for the recognition and validation of these narratives, highlighting the need for the community to accommodate and amplify the voices of first-generation Korean immigrant women. Substantial sections of this paper are dedicated to contextualizing prevailing sentiments. To fully grasp the depths of Korean women’s discontentment that surfaced during the “Feminism Reboot,” an exploration of the entrenched misogyny within Korean society becomes indispensable.

Looking back at the history of Korean immigration to the United States helps us understand why first-generation Korean immigrant women, whose main motivation for immigration was gender discrimination, are a newly emerging population following the “Feminism Reboot” period and cannot easily assimilate or feel a sense of belonging to the existing Korean immigrant community in the United States.

The “Tal-Joseon” discourse still reverberates amongst Korean women as of 2024. I hope that this process paper will serve as proof of this phenomenon, capturing the voices of first-generation Korean immigrant women who have never been heard before. It aspires to pay homage to the resilience and fortitude of these pioneering individuals who navigate the complexities of an unfamiliar terrain with unwavering determination and grace.

* The term “Korea” specifically denotes the Republic of Korea, commonly recognized as South Korea.

Context

Women Who Survived

“What is the meaning of being born and living in Korea? Don’t you sometimes feel like you are ditched in the desert?”
Lee Lang – *Playing God*

When I was young,
Photographed by
Sang Lin Shin, my dad

Lucky Enough to Be Born

I was born as the first daughter in 1992, in Seoul, South Korea. During the 1980s and 1990s, in an effort to curb population growth, the “Limiting Birth” policy was implemented in Korea, coinciding with the emergence of sex determination technology to ascertain the gender of fetuses. Consequently, the practice of aborting female children became prevalent, driven by a societal preference for sons, perpetuated by the deeply ingrained Confucian stereotype that only male offspring can perpetuate the family lineage. In Korea, where gender imbalances became increasingly pronounced since the 1980s, the sex ratio at birth surged to 115 (the number of boys per 100 girls) in 1990. Usually, the natural male-to-female ratio at birth is considered to be around 105:100.[1] However, during this period in Korea, a superstition prevailed that “Women born in the year of the Tiger, Dragon, Snake, or Horse are unlucky, have a difficult life, and cannot get married because they have a violent temper.” Remarkably, 1990 was the year of the white horse, perpetuating the belief that girls born in such years faced a bleak future due

1. Kwak, No-Pil. “4.7 million fetuses disappear... only because it is a female.” *Hankyoreh*, 10 Aug. 2021, www.hani.co.kr/arti/science/future/1007086.html.

to perceived traits of unluckiness and difficulty in finding a husband. Consequently, there were cases where female fetuses were not carried to term, influenced by the stigma attached to the prospects of unmarried life for strong-willed women, believed to lead to failure. In 1992, the sex ratio at birth stood at 113.6:100, indicating a significant skew towards male births.[2] There were individuals of my age who were never born simply because they were female. I count myself fortunate to have survived against such odds.

2. Statistics Korea. "Number of births, total fertility rate, natural increase." *Kosis.kr*, 19 March 2024, https://kosis.kr/statHtml/statHtml.do?orgId=101&tblId=INH_1B8000F_01&vw_cd=MT_ZTITLE&list_id=A21&seqNo=&lang_mode=ko&language=kor&obj_var_id=&itm_id=&conn_path=MT_ZTITLE.

Recognizing Discrimination

I attended girls' middle school and high school, where many of my teachers were graduates of women's colleges. Throughout my school years, they consistently instilled in me the belief that there were no limits to what I could achieve simply because I was a woman. However, my first stark encounter with gender discrimination in Korea came after I gained admission to college. It was then that I was introduced to my father's strict and conservative family, who adhered to traditional customs and attire, and regularly performed *Jesa* (제사), the ancestral rituals. Being the first in my entire family to secure a place at the nation's premier university, I anticipated pride and support. Yet, the first question posed to me at a family gathering was, "So when are you getting married?" This moment left me utterly bewildered. During *Jesa* held in the family home, I observed a striking gender disparity. While all the women diligently toiled in the kitchen, preparing food for their husbands' ancestors, only the men were permitted to bow. I had the feeling that something was very wrong. That feeling visited me often while I was in college.

A scene from our family's *Jesa*(the ancestral ritual), Photographed by Wha Yong Shin

I vividly recall moments when I witnessed male seniors in the club room exchanging lewd jokes and casting knowing glances, asserting confidently, "Women don't know this kind of thing." Similarly, I observed a male classmate creating a spectacle on my face without make up, questioning aloud what was wrong. It was during these instances that I felt a profound disconnect from my own body and identity. My appearance became a constant target for criticism, and as a woman, I internalized a multitude of societal expectations dictating what I should and should not do. Although feminist clubs had existed on campus since the 1990s, I initially dismissed them. I harbored reservations about aligning myself with feminism, fearing the stereotype of the "loud and angry woman" often associated with the movement. I was reluctant to embrace a label that might discomfort others or invite negative perceptions.

However, in 2015, a pivotal event occurred when a 17-year-old boy joined IS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant), and a prominent journalist to post a column in a women's magazine titled "Brainless feminism is more dangerous than IS." The piece sparked widespread controversy, raising questions about the portrayal of feminism in Korea. Subsequently, the #IAmAFeminist hashtag movement gained momentum on Korean Twitter[3], prompting me to confront my own internalized biases and criticisms surrounding feminism. Recognizing the importance of advocating for gender equality, I took a stand by posting a tweet with the hashtag. Since then, I have proudly identified myself as a feminist, determined to amplify the voices of marginalized groups and challenge entrenched gender norms in Korean society.

3. Lee, Hana. "Feminism is more dangerous than IS? Controversy over Kim Tae-hoon's column that exposed misogyny." *Women News*, 10 Feb. 2015, www.womennews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=80745.

Starting the Movement

As I delved deeper into feminist studies and engaged in student council initiatives, I naturally gravitated towards friends who shared a passion for social movements. During a casual discussion about the upcoming general election, we were dismayed to find that none of the major political parties had outlined specific policies addressing women's issues. Even within progressive parties, incidents of sexual violence perpetrated by party members persisted. In jest, we created a Facebook group called "Femidangdang (페미당당)," jokingly suggesting, "If we can't find anything for us, let's just create one." Surprisingly, over 100 people joined the group, and it quickly became a hub for lighthearted political commentary and meme-sharing. However, our tone shifted dramatically on May 17, 2016, when a horrific incident unfolded in a public restroom at a *Noraebang* (karaoke) building in Gangnam, a bustling district of Seoul. A 23-year-old woman was fatally stabbed by a stranger who harbored misogynistic sentiments, citing his anger at women ignoring him as his motive. Despite the clear misogynistic nature of the crime, authorities hesitated to classify it as such. The community's grief and outrage were palpable, evident in the multitude of Post-it notes covering the walls of Gangnam Station's subway exit, near the site of the tragedy.[4]

Amidst the collective anguish, a friend who co-founded Femidangdang with me reached out, declaring, "Hwayong, We need to take action." Mobilizing members from Femidangdang's Facebook group, we organized a vigil from the *Noraebang* building to Gangnam Station. This event marked the beginning of Femidangdang's ascent to national prominence as a leading force in the emergent feminist movement sparked by the 2016 2016 Seocho-dong public-toilet murder case. Since then, we protested against the unfair treatment of feminists, participated in Black Protests advocating for abortion rights, established "Feminist Zones" to counter misogyny, and safeguarded women from sexual harassment during protests calling for the impeachment of a female president.

However, our activism was met with hostility and intimidation. Our personal information and photos were maliciously circulated online, accompanied by threats and derogatory comments. We encountered confrontations with aggressive individuals, and several members of our collective fell ill from the stress. My own anxiety and agoraphobia worsened to the point where I made the difficult decision to leave Korea.

4. Kim, Bo-eun. "Random Murder Triggers Angry Response from Women." *Koreatimes*, 19 May 2016, https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/05/113_205091.html.

The 'Mirror Action' protest, organized by the Femidangdang, participants holding mirrors wrapped in condolence ribbons as they silently marched from the location of the Gangnam Station murder to Exit 11 of Gangnam Station, where a memorial space had been established by citizens.

Courtesy of the SisaIn

Finding Sanctuary

In March 2017, as I graduated, Femidangdang temporarily suspended its activities to safeguard its members. By June 2017, I had relocated to Berlin, Germany, seeking solace and distance from the tumultuous environment that had taken its toll on my well-being The struggles persisted even in Germany. I introduced myself as Hwayong, only to be met with responses like, "It's too difficult, so I'll just call you *Dong Xuan*[5]" or casual greetings like "*Ni Hao*[6]" or assumptions like "Are you Japanese?" Enduring such micro-aggressions became a daily occurrence. When my visa expired, I returned to Korea. With encouragement and support from my parents, I applied to the School of Visual Arts, MFA Design for Social Innovation (DSI), and was accepted. However,

5. Dong Xuan Center is the largest Asian supermarket in Berlin, Germany.

6. "Hello" in Chinese.

just as I awaited admission, the COVID-19 pandemic swept the world. As the pandemic unfolded, admission to the program was postponed for a year. During that year, I continued to hear stories about hate crimes against Asians around the world. With a mix of anxiety and excitement, I relocated to New York in 2021.

Lost in Between

While the arrival of COVID-19 vaccines signaled an end to lockdowns, New York, like many cities globally, grappled with the aftermath of the pandemic. Of all the challenges, the surge in racial animosity towards the Asian community struck me the hardest. On January 15, 2022, tragedy struck when 40-year-old Michelle Alyssa Go was pushed onto the subway tracks at the 42nd Street platform by an unknown assailant, resulting in her untimely death at the scene.[7] About a month later, on February 13, 2022, another tragedy struck when Christina Yuna Lee was brutally stabbed more than 40 times and murdered by an assailant who followed her from the subway to her apartment.[8] The fear and apprehension that gripped me in Korea resurfaced with renewed intensity. There were days when the mere thought of taking the subway or being in crowded places paralyzed me with fear.

Desperate for solace and understanding, I sought refuge in communal spaces where I could share my pain and seek comfort. Attending a vigil held at Washington Square Park for the victims of Asian-targeted hate crimes, including those from the 2021 Atlanta spa shooting, provided a semblance of solace. However, my emotions became even more conflicted when I encountered a *Jesa* set up at the vigil. The *Jesa*, a ritual deeply ingrained in Korean culture, symbolized for me the pervasive misogyny and oppression of women disguised as tradition. As the memorial event was hosted by the diaspora community, for whom Korea represented their ancestral roots, I grappled with feelings of estrangement. While Korea was their homecoming, for me, it was a place I felt compelled to flee.

To raise awareness about ongoing crimes targeting the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, New York City launched a public art campaign titled “I Still Believe in Our City,”

7. Tracey, Tully, and Ashley Southall. “Woman Pushed onto Subway Tracks “Never Saw” Her Attacker.” *The New York Times*, 17 Jan. 2022, www.nytimes.com/2022/01/16/nyregion/mi-chelle-go-man-pushes-woman-subway.html.

8. Southall, Ashley, et al. “Screams That “Went Quiet”: Prosecutors’ Account of Chinatown Killing.” *The New York Times*, 15 Feb. 2022, www.nytimes.com/2022/02/14/nyregion/suspect-christina-yu-na-lee-murder.html.

Poster from public art campaign
“I Still Believe in Our City”
by Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya

Courtesy of
Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya
https://www.istillbelieve.nyc/

adorned with phrases like “This is our home too,” “We belong here,” and “We too are America.” They only served as a partial consolation to me. Questions nagged at me: Is this truly my home? During the F1 visa interview, crucial for securing a student visa, I was required to specify my return date—an unsettling reminder of the transient nature of my residency. Should I dare to call this place home, knowing that authority could one day cast me out? Did I truly belong here? Did I aspire to become an American? Would there ever come a day when this foreign land, devoid of familial ties or childhood memories, would feel like home? I wanted to know how other Korean women in my age who chose to immigrate to New York were navigating this situation.

“No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.” – Warsan Shire

My narrative transcends the personal; it is emblematic of the pervasive discrimination faced by women in South Korea. Confronted with a climate marked by violence and systemic oppression targeting women and marginalized communities, I made the decision to immigrate. This choice reflects a broader trend: migration increasingly serves as a private recourse to address systemic societal challenges. Indeed, the global landscape of migration is characterized by a burgeoning exodus driven by factors such as economic disparity, social inequity, poverty, political suppression, persecution, conflict, and natural calamities in individuals’ countries of origin.[1]

According to the World Migration Report 2022, the global population of international migrants has exhibited sustained growth, surging from 272 million in 2019 to 281 million in 2020. This expansion is paralleled by a notable rise in the number of female immigrants and their consequential economic influence. In 2020, the cohort of international female migrants reached 135 million, constituting 3.5% of the world’s female populace—an increase from 130 million in the previous year.[2] Of significance is the trend wherein an increasing number of women migrate autonomously, driven by career aspirations rather than familial ties.

Korea’s immigration history to the United States commemorates its 120th anniversary in 2023. The narrative unfolds through distinct waves of immigration, each reflective of unique historical contexts and socio-political landscapes.

1. Maymon, Paulina Lucio. “The Feminization of Migration: Why Are Women Moving More?” *The Cornell Policy Review*, 5 May 2017.

2. International Organization for Migration. World Migration Report 2022. *Publications.iom.int*, International Organization for Migration, 21 May 2020, https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2022

The First Wave of Korean Immigrants*

In 1903, amidst burgeoning turmoil preceding Japan’s colonial rule (1910), a significant influx of Korean workers arrived in Hawaii seeking refuge from famine and political upheaval. By 1905, over 7,200 Koreans, including women and children, had settled in Hawaii. With the expiration of plantation labor contracts, approximately half of these immigrants migrated to the mainland, pioneering independent businesses such as laundry stores and nail salons. The period from 1905 to 1924 witnessed the emergence of “picture brides,” as around 2,000 Korean women immigrated to Hawaii and California to wed

* Chung, Soojin. “History of Korean Immigration to America, from 1903 to Present | Boston Korean Diaspora Project.” *Boston University School of Theology*, 2011, sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/issues/history-of-korean-immigration-to-america-from-1903-to-present/.

bachelor immigrants through arranged marriages facilitated by matchmakers. “Picture bride” is a name derived from the custom of Japanese and Korean immigrants to the United States where male workers used matchmakers in their home countries to select spouses just by looking at each other’s photos.[3] However, mass immigration was curtailed with the enactment of the Asian Immigration Prohibition Act in 1924.

The Second Wave of Korean Immigrants*

The aftermath of World War II saw Korea’s division and occupation by the United States and the Soviet Union, setting the stage for the Korean War (1950-1953). Against the backdrop of geopolitical tensions, approximately 15,000 Koreans immigrated to the United States during the conflict. The McCarran and Walter Act of 1952 marked a pivotal juncture, nullifying the Asian immigration ban and extending eligibility for citizenship to Asian immigrants. After the war, Korean women who married American soldiers—known as War brides—and war orphans, most of whom were mixed-race children born to American soldiers, as well as Korean women—referred to as GI Babies—immigrated to the United States through adoption. The War Bride Act of 1946 facilitated the immigration of Korean wives of American soldiers. The war brides, like the first wave of Korean immigrants, suffered from alienation and the cultural barrier. They were isolated from both Korean and American communities because most were required to stay on military bases or stigma against women who marry outside of race. Mixed-race GI babies also faced discrimination due to the stigma against mixed-race children and the fact that their mothers had children with Americans.

The Third Wave of Korean Immigrants*

The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 heralded a new era of Korean immigration, abolishing the national quota system and paving the way for a steady influx of immigrants. By 1976, annual Korean immigration had surpassed 30,000 individuals. Economic instability, political insecurity, and military dictatorship in Korea fueled this wave, which saw the emergence of a burgeoning Korean-American community comprising first-generation immigrants[4] and *Gyopo* (교포, second-generation Korean immigrants). Notably, third-wave immigrants, predominantly white-collar workers, contributed to the diversification and enrichment of the Korean-American demographic landscape.

Subtle Waves: Women and Tal-Joseon Discourse

The phenomenon of “Tal-Joseon(Escape-Korea),” emblematic of the desire to escape from the intense competition and societal pressures inherent in South Korea’s rapid economic growth, has garnered significant attention in recent years. Stemming from the socioeconomic complexities engendered by South Korea’s remarkable transformation from poverty to OECD membership, “Tal-Joseon” reflects a nuanced response to the entrenched inequalities and social conflicts exacerbated by prioritizing economic growth above all else.[5] A novel titled “*Because I Hate Korea*”[6], in which the character dreams of “Tal-Joseon” to Australia by receiving a working holiday visa, became a bestseller in 2015. The concept of “Tal-Joseon,” rooted in the desire to seek refuge from the competitive and hierarchal structures reminiscent of the feudal era, gained prominence in the wake of societal challenges and tragedies. It found resonance particularly among women, sparking what can be termed a “Feminism Reboot”[7] following incidents such as the Seocho-dong bathroom murder case in 2016.

Despite South Korea’s notable achievements in tertiary education rates for women, gender disparities persist, as evidenced by the country’s low rankings in global gender gap indices. In the World Economic Forum’s most recent report on the global gender gap, South Korea ranked 115th out of 149 countries[7], with significant disparities in terms of wage equality and earned income for women. Women’s representation in politics remains disproportionately low, and significant

3. George, Claire. “Korean Picture Brides of 20th Century.” *The Korea Herald*, 5 Apr. 2010, www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20070815000065.

* Chung, Soojin. “History of Korean Immigration to America, from 1903 to Present | Boston Korean Diaspora Project.” *Boston University School of Theology*, 2011, sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/issues/history-of-korean-immigration-to-america-from-1903-to-present/.

* Chung, Soojin. “History of Korean Immigration to America, from 1903 to Present | Boston Korean Diaspora Project.” *Boston University School of Theology*, 2011, sites.bu.edu/koreandiaspora/issues/history-of-korean-immigration-to-america-from-1903-to-present/.

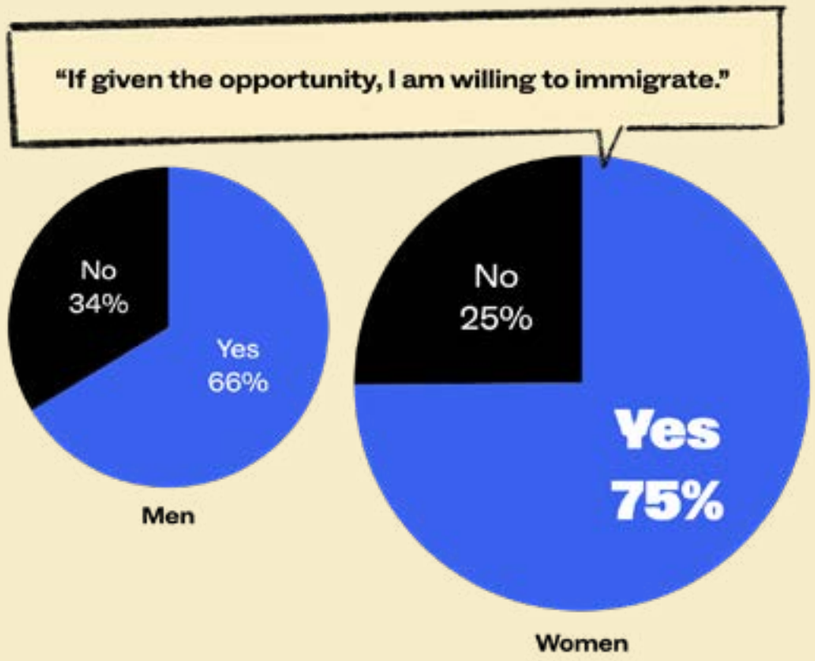
4. A person who is a first-generation immigrant is defined as one who is born outside of the United States. 1.5-generation immigrants are individuals who came to the United States as children. Second-generation immigrants are born in the United States but have parents who are born abroad, Academic Web. “First and Second Generation.” *Immigration Initiative at Harvard*, immigrationinitiative.harvard.edu/topic/first-and-second-generation/.

5. Ahn, Sangjoon. “Serious Side Effects of Rapid Growth in Korea.” *Medical Today*, 11 Jan. 2012, mdtoday.co.kr/news/view/179512208272817.

5. 장강명, ‘한국이 싫어서’

6. Heejung Son, a research professor at Kyung Hee University, first named the trend of popularizing feminism sparked in online spaces as ‘feminism reboot’ through ‘Culture/Science’ in 2015, Bae, Moon-kyu. “Five years after the ‘feminism reboot,’ we move beyond hatred to ‘expanding feminism.’” *Kyunghyang*, 23 Dec. 2020, www.khan.co.kr/culture/culture-general/article/202012231319001. Accessed 9 May 2024.

7. “Global Risks Report 2024.” *World Economic Forum*, 10 Jan. 2024, www.weforum.org/publications/#economy=KOR.



wage gaps persist, contributing to a pervasive sense of disenfranchisement among women. In 2018, the country ranked 30th out of 36 OECD nations for women's employment[8]. Politics, in particular, is marked by inequality, with women holding just 17% of seats in South Korea's parliament, according to the World Bank.[9]

Despite this reality, against the backdrop of backlash and stigma against the feminist movement, anti-feminists are gaining influence in the country. Job Korea, a Korean employment portal, announced that according to a survey of 4,802 adults, 70.8% responded, "I am willing to immigrate to a foreign country if given the opportunity." Women (74.9%) responded that they would immigrate more than men (66.3%), and by age group, those in their 20s (73.7%)[10] had the highest percentage of people dreaming of "Tal-Joseon."

8. OECD. "Employment Rate." *The OECD*, 2022, data.oecd.org/emp/employment-rate.htm.

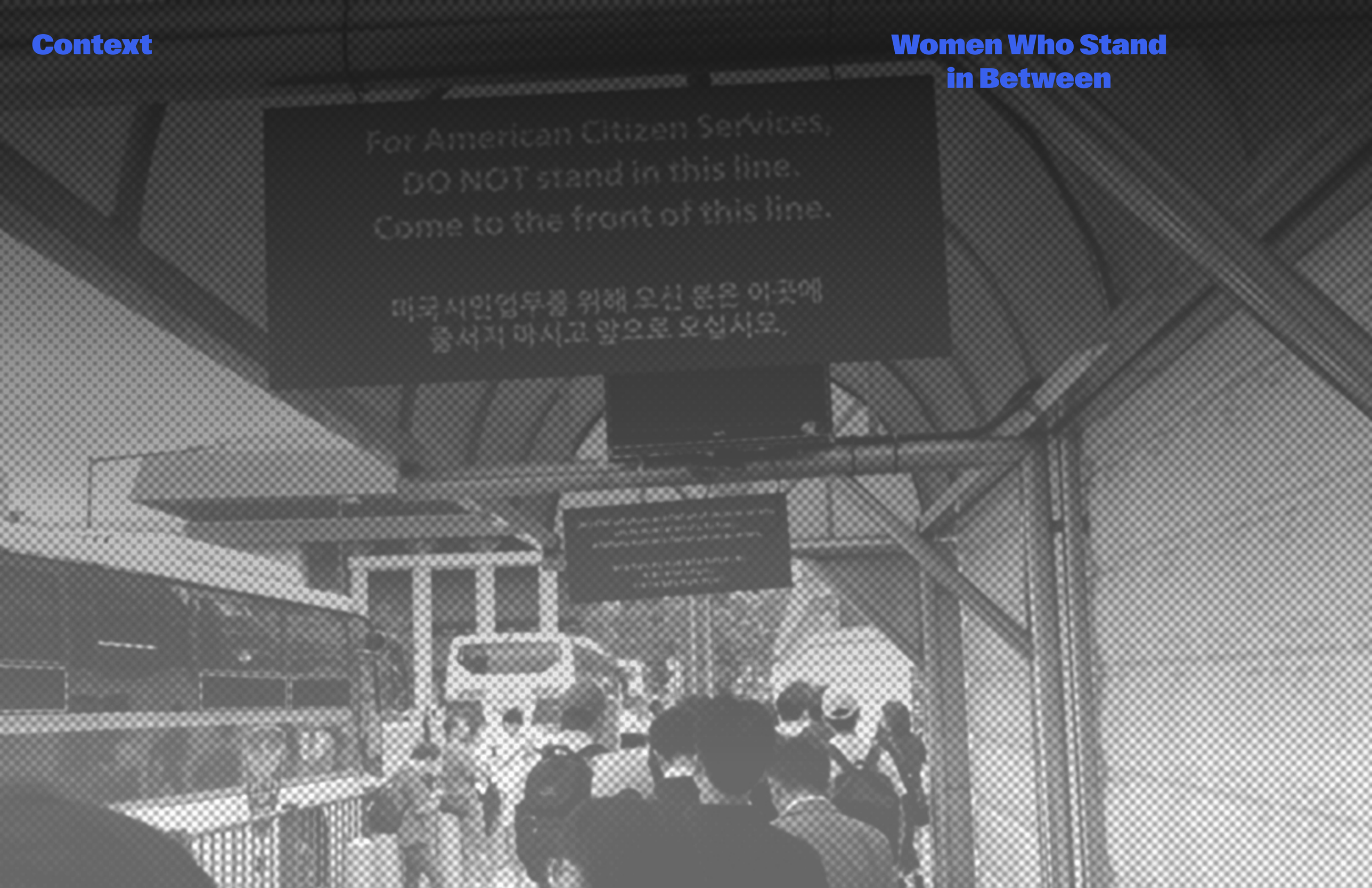
9. "Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliaments (%) - Korea, Rep." *The World Bank*, data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?locations=KR.

10. Kim, Bomi. "7 out of 10 adults dream of 'Tal-Joseon'... Which country would you most like to immigrate to?" *The Kyunghyang Shinmun*, 11 Jan. 2017, m.khan.co.kr/economy/economy-general/article/201701111004001#c2b.

However, the question arises: What becomes of those who choose to leave South Korea in pursuit of "Tal-Joseon?" How do they navigate the complexities of life in a foreign land, away from the societal pressures they sought to escape? Although it may not have gained significant momentum as a major movement, what kind of life does the demographic of this *subtle wave* lead after immigrating?

Context

Women Who Stand in Between



“I know.
I know the room you’ve been crying in is called America.”
Ocean Vuong – *Beautiful Short Loser*

Difficulties of First-generation Korean Immigrant Women

New immigrants encounter numerous challenges and undergo significant distress, including the loss of familiar environments and social networks,[1] the need to acquire new skills such as learning a different language, loss of employment status, wages, and social class,[2] “culture shock,”[3] family conflicts, social isolation, and loneliness.[4]

A 2011 study conducted in California, which assessed immigration stress among first-generation Korean women immigrants, categorized immigration stress into six main areas: language barriers, sense of loss, not feeling at home, perceived discrimination, novelty, and occupation. Among these, language barriers were found to account for the most significant variance, indicating that language posed the most subtle stress for first-generation Korean immigrants.[5]

This immigration stress profoundly affects the mental health of immigrant communities. A prior study from 2007 highlighted depression as a prevalent health issue among first-generation Korean immigrant groups. Depression has been extensively documented, particularly among first-generation Korean immigrant women.[6]

However, neither study examines the motivations for emigration. Another limitation is the difficulty in understanding the “Tal-Joseon” discourse in Korea during the 2010s and the impact of the immigrant community following the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, given that the data are from 13 and 17 years ago.

The COVID-19 pandemic and Its Aftermath

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the invisible racism against the Asian community that still exists in the United States. Donald Trump, who was president at the time, called the coronavirus the “China virus” and actively encouraged hatred toward China, the source of the virus. It helped to stoke the fires of anti-Asian violence against Asian communities. As the number of infections soared across the United States, hate crimes targeting the Asian community also surged. Anti-Asian hate crime in 16 of America’s largest cities increased 149%

1. Tartakovsky, Eugene. “A Longitudinal Study of Acculturative Stress and Homesickness: High-school Adolescents Immigrating from Russia and Ukraine to Israel without Parents.” *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, vol. 42, no. 6, 2007, pp. 485-494.

2. Dean, Jason A., and Kimberley Wilson. “Education? It is irrelevant to my job now. It makes me very depressed …”: Exploring the Health Impacts of Under/Unemployment among Highly Skilled Recent Immigrants in Canada.” *Ethnicity and Health*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2009, pp. 185-204.

3. Oberg, Kalervo. “Acculturative Stress: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments.” *Practical Anthropology*, vol. 7, 1960, pp. 177-182.

4. Hofstetter, C. R., et al. “Intergenerational Differences in Acculturation and Family Conflict Among Korean Immigrant Families.” Strengths and Challenges of New Immigrant Families: Implications for Research, Education, Policy, and Service, edited by R. L. Dalla et al., *Lexington Books*, 2008.

5. Ding, Ding, et al. “Measuring Immigration Stress of First-Generation Female Korean Immigrants in California: Psychometric Evaluation of Demand of Immigration Scale.” *Ethnicity & Health*, vol. 16, no. 1, 4 Jan. 2011, pp. 11–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2010.523107. Accessed 16 Sept. 2021.

6. Choi, JiWon., et al. “Acculturation and Depressive Symptoms in Korean Immigrant Women.” *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, vol. 11, no. 1, 9 Oct. 2007, pp. 13–19.

in 2020. This number is not that high, considering that racial slurs are not understood due to language barriers and crimes committed by minority groups are not reported due to distrust of law enforcement.[7] Stop AAPI Hate, a nonprofit organization that tracks anti-Asian attacks, set up a website to help track the cases, some of which were not reported to the police, found that there were more than 3,795 verbal and physical assaults between March 19, 2020, and Feb. 28. New York City saw a 223% increase in racially motivated attacks against Asian people in 2021, making the sharpest increase of anti-Asian hate crimes anywhere in the country.[8]

In March 2021, a 65-year-old woman was attacked, stomped several times on the way to church in Hells' Kitchen, and hospitalized with serious injuries. Police said he made anti-Asian statements: "You don't belong here"[9] In the same month, an Asian passenger brutally beaten unconscious in a Manhattan-bound J train at the Kosciuszko street station.[10] In April 2021, 61-year-old Yao Pan Ma was attacked, kicked in the head multiple times in East Harlem, and died from injuries 8 months later.[11] "It is an attack on something that is within the person's identity, something that's immutable about them and often something they can't even change. So that has a very deep psychological effect."[12] As one citizen said, the coronavirus pandemic has caused great harm to the AAPI community.

"We Too Are America." But Are We?

In response to the increasing number of Anti-Asian hate crimes in New York City, The NYC Commission on Human Rights, the Mayor's Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, the Mayor's Community Affairs Unit (CAU), and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs are coordinating closely to educate the public about their rights and protections in light of COVID-19-related stigma and hate crimes.[13] Among the campaigns carried out as part of this is "I Still Believe in Our City." It is a public awareness campaign by multidisciplinary artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya. One of the slogans on the poster was "We Too Are America." Advocate groups comprised of second and third-generation immigrants, including Stop AAPI Hate, also conducted

7. Kim, Deborah, et al. ""We're Being Scapegoated": Asians and Asian Americans Speak out against Spate of Violence." *ABC News*, 18 Feb. 2021, abcnews.go.com/US/scapegoated-asians-asian-americans-speak-spate-violence/story?id=75956385.

8. Levin, Brian . Report to the Nation: Anti-Asian Prejudice & Hate Crime. *Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism*, 2021.

9. "Asian Woman on Her Way to Church Brutally Attacked in Hell's Kitchen; Suspect Reportedly Told Her, 'You Don't Belong Here' - CBS New York." *CBS New York*, 30 Mar. 2021, www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/anti-asian-hate-crimes-task-force-woman-beaten-hells-kitchen/.

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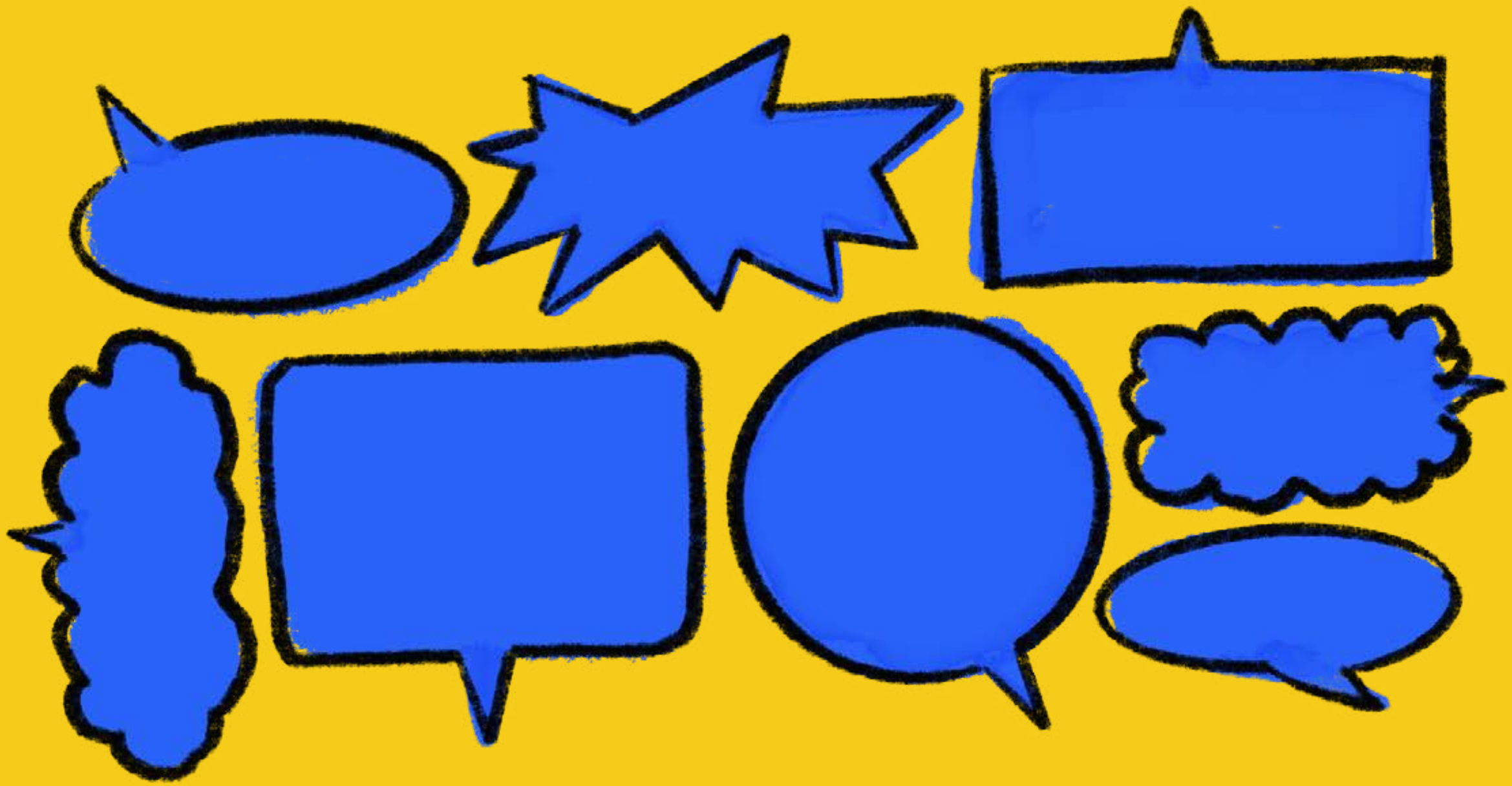
campaigns emphasizing American identity and belonging. This phrase seeks to empower the diaspora community who were born and raised in the United States and identify as Asian Americans.

Then, how do first-generation Korean immigrant women who immigrated due to the trauma they experienced in Korea, but do not define themselves by their American identity, navigate this period of hatred? I started collecting stories of women standing on the border between Korea and the United States. I felt the need to collect undocumented stories of current first-generation Korean immigrant women.

Process

Interviews



Purpose

A notable constraint encountered during secondary research was the absence of first-hand accounts and narratives from first-generation Korean immigrant women. This underscored the imperative to directly engage with this demographic and collect their unique experiences.

Apart from church communities, primary sources of information for Korean immigrants in the United States include online platforms such as Hey Korean and MissyUSA. Established in 1998 and 1999, respectively, these platforms predominantly cater to middle-aged and first-generation immigrant users. The “Feminism Reboot” in Korea witnessed a surge in web-based, anonymous activism. Social media platforms like Twitter emerged as crucial channels for disseminating information and promoting the endeavors of organizations like Gangnam Station Exit 10, Femidangdang, and Flame Feminist Action, which were pivotal during the “Feminism Reboot.” Twitter also facilitated the formation of online communities dedicated to discussions and information exchange surrounding women’s issues, particularly the “Tal-Joseon” discourse.

Participants for 1:1 interviews were recruited through Twitter and Instagram, focusing on first-generation Korean immigrant women in New York who migrated during or after the “Tal-Joseon” Movement and “Feminism Reboot” era, or those whose experiences of gender discrimination in Korea served as their primary motivation for immigration. Over the period from October 2023 to March 2024, in-person interviews were conducted with 12 first-generation Korean immigrant women in their 20s and 30s in New York. These interviews aimed to document each individual’s immigration journey, explore challenges encountered along the way, examine experiences of seeking or receiving community support, and assess personal achievements.

Through these interviews, the objective was to elucidate the specific needs of first-generation Korean immigrant women and gain deeper insights into their lived experiences as immigrant women in the U.S.

The interviews have been edited for conciseness and clarity. Additionally, efforts were made to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees. If a response is missing, it indicates that the question was not answered.

Motivation of Migration

1. “I grew up in a city that was very conservative and where you faced a lot of discrimination if you were just different from the norm. During my school days, when rumors spread that I was queer, my teacher warned me about it. Even when I went to college, I couldn’t find a queer community that I felt like I belonged to. But how can I hide my identity? My immigration journey has been a constant search for a place where I can truly be myself.”
2. “It was very difficult for me to live in Korea throughout my 20s. In particular, after graduating from college and entering the job market, I came to deeply experience gender discrimination in Korea. As I entered my late 20s, I also struggled with the social norm that continued to limit the possibilities of older women. The Sewol Ferry incident, which made people feel that the foundation and agreements of civil society had been destroyed, was also one of the reasons. At the time I dreamed of immigrating to the United States, Obama was president and same-sex marriage was legalized. It was a kind of American dream – a feeling that society would change in a good direction and that values that needed to be protected, would be protected.”
3. “I didn’t think about it, but I just vaguely thought that I should go to New York. I heard people say that if you succeed in New York, you can succeed anywhere, so I decided to go to New York.”
4. “I always wanted to go abroad. It was the period of feminist reboot that made me decide to leave Korea. I think I survived through that time because I had the mindset to leave here.”
5. “I think I always had a desire to go abroad. I always liked new things and loved traveling. I also wanted to become good at English.”
6. “I always lived a hectic life in Korea. So at first, I intended to go and rest for a while. After taking a break for 1-2 years, I thought that it would be difficult to get a job if I went back to Korea, where taking gap years is like a sin.”
7. “As I decided to go to graduate school, I thought that it would be better in the United States, where the power dynamics between professors is more equal. I visited the United States a few times before, and since I was allowed to receive support from my family, I decided to give it a go.”
8. “The field I want to work in is an exclusive environment where women are not given many opportunities in Korea. I wanted to find a better opportunity for myself.”
9. “I went to high school with a very competitive atmosphere. I didn’t want to compete in the College Scholastic Ability Test and I think I always dreamed about living abroad.”
10. “I came here as a child with my family. My parents returned to Korea, but I chose to stay. I feel more free in New York than in Korea. I don’t feel like I need to explain who I am in here.”
11. “I always had a lot of anger while living in Korea. I went to high school in a violent and oppressive atmosphere. I hated and was so sick of living in Korea. I decided to leave Korea ever since then”
12. “The stress and burden from the College Scholastic Ability Test was exceptionally huge. I didn’t want to go through that cutthroat competition.”

The Difficulties in Imigrated Country

1. “The closed and exclusive atmosphere of my Korean students in college was difficult. I even get out in the Korean students’ community. I went to a predominantly white school. Everyone in the college queer club was white and I felt left out. I had a longing for a community where there were people like me and I could feel a sense of belonging.”
2. “The most difficult thing was the status issues arising from the unfairness and uncertainty of Immigration and Nationality law”
3. “When something difficult happened at work, I couldn’t tell anyone but blamed myself that it happened because I am just a person who could always be replaced. Since visa support issues were involved, I couldn’t quit and had

no choice but to keep working. I felt like I couldn't get any sympathy even if I spoke. The Korean church I started to go around that time to find a sense of peace was homophobic and patriarchal."

4. "There was a time when I wanted to reject everything about Korea because it hurt me so much. So I think there were times when I couldn't be myself. In the beginning, I wanted to assimilate with the people here. But the most of me was formed in Korea. Now I know that I can't erase that and completely assimilate with the people who were born and raised here. I'm trying to find a way to belong while still being myself here."
5. "The closed and sexist atmosphere of the existing Korean community here (in New York) was difficult. If I talked about feminism or gay rights, I was treated like a rebel. ... I teach children, and it was really difficult when I heard racist comments from them."
6. "I once worked at a Korean company due to visa support issues. It was difficult to be in an atmosphere where everyone was being nosy about others' businesses. I had to worry about too many things besides work. In the beginning of life here, it was difficult to make friends. Many of my friends who were international students returned home after graduation. Also, I felt like I didn't fit in well with people who immigrated when they were young or grew up here."
7. "Visa status is the biggest difficulty. I have to constantly prove that I am needed by this country, while constantly being denied and doubted."
8. "Visa status is the biggest difficulty. Because you have to continually prove to the company and the immigration office that you are a person who will contribute gradually to the United States, it makes me prioritize not being kicked out, became reluctant to act like going to protests even when injustice happens. Due to the nature of the city of New York, there are so many goodbyes. so definitely there was loneliness."
9. "I started thinking about which country would be my home: Korea or the United States."

10. 'For a while, I was afraid of meeting Korean people in the U.S. because of the racism in the Korean community and the exclusiveness of the people within it. Because of the trauma I experienced in Korea, I was particularly avoiding meeting Korean men."
11. "The instability of visa status has always been the biggest stress. It is difficult to make long-term plans for the future. It is so unpredictable and uncertain. I can't even visit my family often because of that."

Community Experience

1. "When I was having a hard time with Asian hate crimes, the majority of the college clubs I belonged to were white. I got the feeling that there was no sympathy for the seriousness of this issue. To me, a community is a place that gives me a sense of collectiveness, a place where I can work together based on understanding and empathy for political issues."
2. "I found friends on Twitter and blogs. In early 2023, I was almost pushed onto the tracks by a stranger on a subway platform. When I posted this on social media, friends I met on Twitter sent messages and checked in on me, which was a great comfort. I felt that even if something was difficult like this if I had a community, it would give me the strength to endure."
3. "I felt empowered every time I saw how people like me lived their lives somehow somewhere. Even if we don't meet in real life, it's comforting to know that someone out there is thriving as well."
4. "I ended up leaving, but I think it was the first time I felt the power of community at church. Power of receiving and giving help. After learning about Twitter, I felt that people could come together and support each other with the commonality of being a woman and a queer immigrant, even without religion as the focal point."
5. "We all had a community that we could rely on, then it

disappeared when we immigrated. In the beginning, I tried to find it on Twitter. But you can't be completely honest there."

6. "I met regularly with people I met in the same training program. I also went to church."
7. "In the beginning, I wanted to meet friends, so I joined an online open chat room for Koreans living in New York. A very uncomfortable conversation took place. I'm using Twitter to listen to other immigrants' stories"
8. "My friends who moved abroad around the same time helped me a lot. Also, members of the diaspora community who understand what it means to live away from their home country, even if they are not Korean, were of great help."
9. "The immigrant friends around me are my community. We have become so close that we have now become like family."
10. "I was focused on meeting friends who were immigrants and shared my hobbies at the same time. After finding a group where I can comfortably exist as myself, New York now feels more like home than Korea."
11. "I have maintained close relationships with friends who share my hobbies for a long time."

Accomplishments and Pleasurable Moments

1. "As a queer person, I had a simple wish to live in a place where there were many people like me. So accomplishment for me is that I can exist as myself without hiding my identity."
2. "When I received my green card and when I achieved financial independence. I felt like it was recognized that I was a person needed in this society."
3. "My friends in Korea have a hard time with the stress of having to meet their parents' expectations and society's standards. Still, it's nice to be able to live somewhat freely here."
4. "I think I'm still in the process of finding it."
5. "After receiving therapy and reflecting on my past experiences and emotions and understanding what they

were, I experienced a shift within me. In Korea, I always thought I was a strange and problematic person because I always spoke out and expressed my emotions"

6. "As I became financially and career-wise more stable, I was able to trust myself more. I became more aware and clear of my family issue and the cause of it thanks to the distance between them."
7. "I didn't have any specific expectations, but I always feel like I can breathe here. I can experience a more diverse way of life than when I was in Korea."
8. "For me, happiness is the most important thing in my life. So, rather than a career or livelihood, I am passionate and satisfied with the things I like and do as hobbies. I also think that surviving as a minority is a great achievement in itself."
9. "I like living in New York City where various races and cultures come together and learn new things and broaden my perspective."
10. "The very fact that I have survived here as a woman immigrant itself."

Analysis

1. The primary motivations for immigration among participants included the gender discrimination prevalent in Korean society, encompassing stigmatization of aging women and limited opportunities available to them, discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals and marginalized groups, the perceived closed and exclusive nature of Korean culture, as well as the highly competitive educational and professional environments. Additionally, a desire for a different lifestyle abroad served as a significant factor. While only one participant cited the “Feminism Reboot” period as a direct motivation for immigration, several interviewees who migrated before this era acknowledged its influence on their decision to settle in the United States.
2. Many interviewees identified unstable visa status and challenges within the immigration system as major obstacles to immigrant life. Participants expressed the constant pressure of proving themselves to obtain and maintain visas, making it difficult to take personal breaks or address workplace injustices without risking their immigration status. Lengthy visa processing periods and restrictive stay conditions often prevented immigrants from visiting their families in their home countries for extended periods. Furthermore, a hierarchical structure based on visa status within the immigrant community, which perpetuated disparities between green card holders and non-holders and biases against marriage immigrants, discouraged making relationships among first-generation Korean immigrant women.
3. interviewees frequently recounted encountering resistance within the existing Korean community in the United States, with some experiencing a reiteration of the traumas they faced in Korea. Within church communities, individuals often felt compelled to leave due to internal cultures characterized by homophobia and patriarchy. Instances of discrimination, misogyny, and racism within the Korean immigrant community further alienated individuals and hindered their connections with fellow immigrants. Some interviewees intentionally avoided interactions with other Koreans due to these negative experiences. Additionally, first-generation Korean immigrant women often struggled to find a sense of belonging in diaspora communities dominated by second and third generations, grappling with language barriers and cultural disparities.
4. When discussing achievements or moments of joy in immigrant life, participants often hesitated or found it challenging to articulate immediate responses. Many cited never having contemplated such moments, while others highlighted the simple pleasure of being able to live authentically without conforming to Korea’s competitive societal norms. Achieving stability in visa status and persevering through adversity were also noted as significant accomplishments by some interviewees.

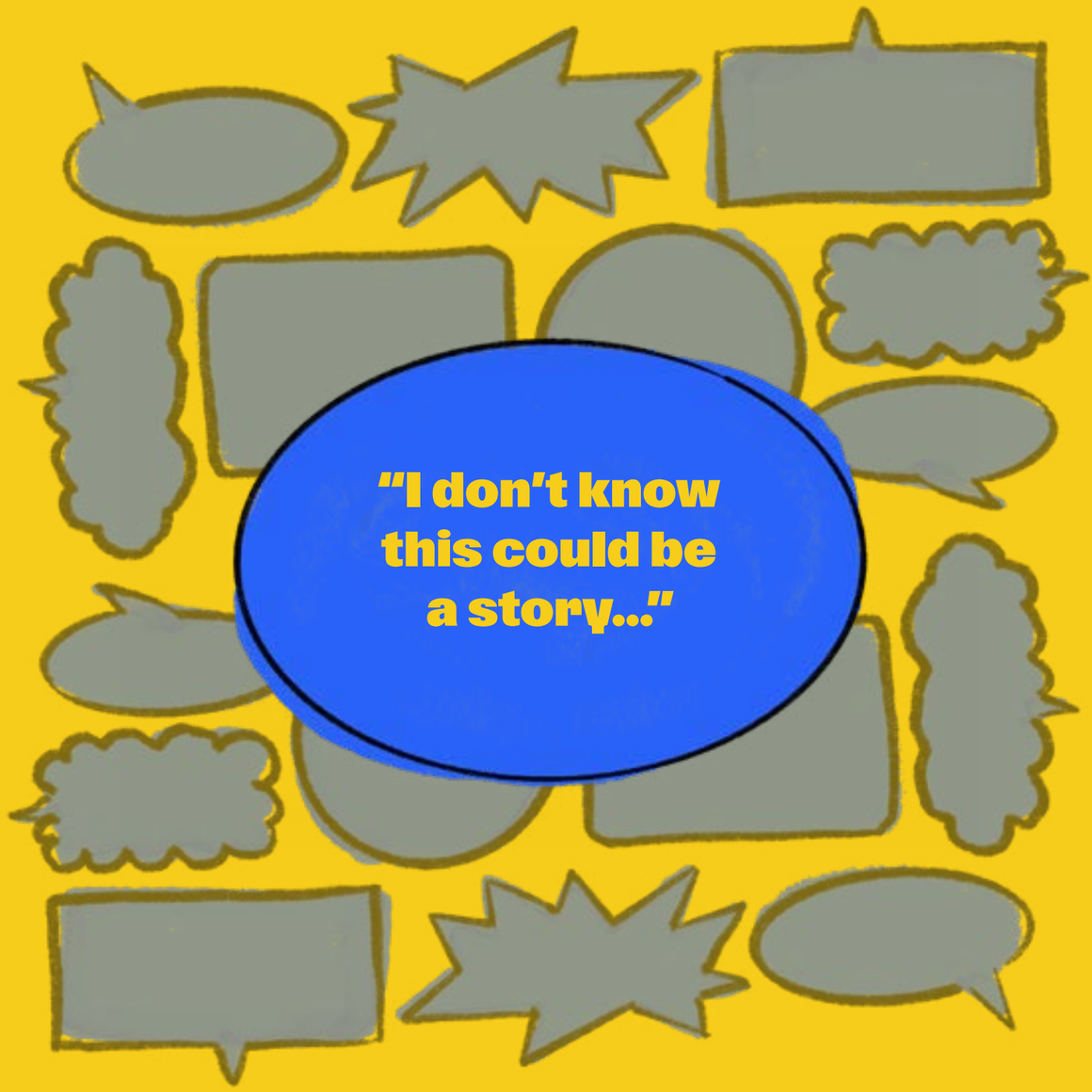
Insight

There were as many different stories as there were interviews. The interviews with first-generation Korean immigrant women revealed a plethora of diverse and captivating life stories, each unique in its trajectory and experiences. These narratives served as a source of inspiration for me personally, especially as I navigated my own decision to leave Korea and establish myself in the United States. The array of stories I collected showcased the various ways in which immigrant life can unfold, reminding me that there are endless possibilities and directions to explore.

Despite the richness and vibrancy of their stories, I observed a commonality among the interviewees: they all began the interview with a sense of apprehension and self-doubt, often apologizing or expressing uncertainty about the relevance of their experiences. This phenomenon, which I refer to as “Forced Humility,” stems from the constant pressure to prove oneself and the pervasive sense of uncertainty that characterizes immigrant life. Many of the women immigrants I spoke with tended to downplay their achievements, attributing them to luck rather than recognizing their own agency and resilience.

Furthermore, I noted that first-generation Korean immigrant women rarely afforded themselves the opportunity to pause and reflect on their journey or acknowledge their accomplishments. The interview process provided a rare moment for them to engage in introspection and release emotions that had long been suppressed or overlooked.

During the interviews, I found solace and solidarity in the shared experiences and struggles of the participants. Building a sense of camaraderie with these women, I felt empowered by the realization that I was not alone in my journey as a women immigrant navigating life in a foreign land.



Community Partner

New York Public Library

During the course of my interviews, I came across an intriguing initiative—an online Korean book club hosted by the New York Public Library's 53rd Street branch. This club convenes monthly, selecting a new book for discussion and gathering virtually on the last Wednesday of each month via Zoom. Led by Cholong Lee, a librarian at the 53rd Street branch and the club's founder, participants engage in lively conversations about the selected book.

Cholong Lee holds the distinction of being the first Korean librarian at the New York Public Library, bringing her own perspective as a first-generation Korean immigrant woman who arrived in the United States in her mid-20s. She conceived the idea for the book club in response to the pandemic-induced cancellation of many in-person library events, seeking a way to maintain community engagement. In its nascent stages, the club faced challenges, with some sessions attracting no participants. However, through Cholong's dedication and perseverance, the club gained momentum.

The 53rd Street Library now boasts a dedicated Korean language corner on its shelves, a testament to Cholong's efforts to cater to the needs and interests of the Korean-speaking community. Through positive word-of-mouth and recommendations from library patrons, the club's membership has swelled, currently boasting an impressive 215 participants in its chat room. While the club does not impose gender restrictions, it predominantly attracts women, reflecting the community's demographics.

Recognizing the potential for collaboration and shared objectives, I extended an invitation to Cholong Lee to serve as a community partner for my project. Given her experience in fostering community connections through storytelling, I believe she would be an invaluable ally in furthering the goals of my research.

Left
The 53rd Street branch of
The New York Public Library
Photographed by Wha Yong Shin

Top-right
Photograph of Cholong Lee
Courtesy of Cholong Lee

Process

Purpose

The purpose of this initiative is to observe and cultivate the relationships and bonds that emerge within a small gathering of first-generation Korean immigrant women. By creating a space for interaction, both I and the participants aim to collaboratively shape the type of community we aspire to build together.

Process

The gathering took place on Christmas Eve, a poignant occasion for first-generation immigrants who often find themselves separated from their families during the holiday season. I extended invitations to five individuals who had previously participated in interviews. Over shared food, the participants engaged in natural conversations about their respective immigration journeys and collectively envisioned the kind of community they hoped to foster.

Insight

The gathering provided a platform for participants to open up and engage in meaningful dialogue in an intimate setting devoid of the usual pressures associated with formal networking events. Free from constraints and expectations, individuals shared their stories and experiences with spontaneity and authenticity, fostering a sense of camaraderie and connection.

Small Gathering

Photographs from small gathering
Photographed by Wha Yong Shin

The Pirates

Background

The concept of being on the border symbolizes the freedom to choose one's path. For those who find no place that truly feels like home, it means the ability to dwell anywhere. During a challenging period while residing in Germany, I received a letter from a friend who was also part of Femidangdang. She shared her own journey of searching for a place to call home, only to realize that such a place may not exist. As she reflected on her identity as a feminist and a wanderer, she likened herself to a pirate—a figure who roams the world spreading love yet never settles in one place. This sentiment brought me solace and inspired me to name the community I envisioned as "The Pirates."

From grappling with the uncertainty of belonging to either the United States or Korea, to embracing the freedom to roam and anchor wherever I choose, The Pirates represents a space of empowerment and agency first-generation Korean immigrant women. It is a space where they can redefine themselves as courageous individuals who actively shape their destinies, rejecting the constraints imposed upon them and forging their own path forward. As pirates, we proudly raise our voices and share our untold stories, reclaiming our narratives and asserting our presence in lands where we may be marginalized or feared.

Thesis Statement

Throughout my thesis project, I aim to establish a safe and inclusive community for first-generation Korean immigrant women residing in New York City, fostering a sense of belonging and cultivating solidarity among its members. The goal of this community is to address the challenges of first-generation Korean immigrant women, document their immigration journey, and enabling individuals to embrace their immigrant identities with pride. Furthermore, this community endeavors to celebrate the accomplishments of its members, providing a platform for recognition and empowerment.

Description

The Pirates is a collaborative safe space for first-generation Korean immigrant women who relocated to New York City seeking sanctuary from the prevalent gender discrimination in South Korea. Women of the Pirates collectively recount migration experiences, commemorate achievements, affirm their identities, and document the contemporary narrative of Korean women's immigration history. The Pirates envisions a diverse community of *pirates* spanning generations and nationalities, navigating the seas of life with fearless determination, propagating love, and courage in our wake.

Why Writing?

"Your own language begins with clearly recognizing your existence in society. As you write about yourself, your own situation becomes clearer and you learn what the problem is and how to change it. Through the discrimination, alienation, and exclusion they experience in their lives, women perceive the unjust order of society, feel the gap from their dreamed ideal, and experience cognitive dissonance. Unable to endure this, they gain the right to drive social change and persuade themselves to move. Women's writing is like a ritual to welcome a new self and a new world."[1]

1. Lee, Go-Eun. Women's Writing. *Power of Thinking*, 25 Nov. 2019.

Writing serves as a powerful medium for first-generation Korean immigrant women to narrate their personal stories of immigration. Through the act of writing, individuals celebrate the small triumphs encountered along their immigration journey and embrace their identity as immigrants. The workshop endeavors to establish a collaborative and safe space where participants can forge connections by sharing their narratives and collectively build solidarity. Furthermore, the workshop aims to document the contemporary movement of women born in the Republic of Korea during the late 1980s and 1990s—a demographic not extensively studied before. These individuals choose to immigrate due to persistent gender discrimination in Korea, thus highlighting a new wave of immigration that demands documentation and recognition.

Progress

NY Sailing Log marks the first writing workshop organized by The Pirates. This workshop is a collaborative effort in partnership with Mina Ha, an author and former activist of Femidangdang, currently residing in Berlin, and the 53rd Street Library. Recruitment for the workshop was conducted through Instagram and Twitter, resulting in 30 applications, from which 10 participants were selected.

The workshop unfolded over two sessions, with a primary focus on nurturing a supportive environment conducive to creative expression. During the initial session, participants, meeting for the first time, introduced themselves and collectively explored the workshop's objectives and guidelines under the guidance of author Mina Ha. This was followed by a concise yet informative lecture on writing techniques, accompanied by a collaborative reading of sample writings from diaspora authors such as Theresa Hak Kyung Cha and Yoko Tawada. Subsequently, participants engaged in an individual writing exercise, reflecting on their unique immigration journeys.

The second session convened for the sharing and discussion of participants' written reflections, facilitating constructive feedback and further deepening connections among the group.

Photograph of Mina Ha
Courtesy of Mina Ha

Promotional Post

1. Cover page

1

2. Due to the inequality they experienced in their home country, Korean women immigrate to find greater possibilities and opportunities, and to find a place where they can live as themselves. Many Korean women in their 20s and 30s who experienced the “Tal-Joseon” discourse and the feminist reboot period in the 2010s wanted to leave Korea, decided to leave or already immigrated.

2

3. This writing workshop is for first-generation Korean immigrant women in their 20s and 30s (identified as women) who, like pirates sailing the seas without hesitation, are not afraid of challenges and are adventuring in an unfamiliar land called New York and creating a space they can call home.

3

4. The NY Sailing Log writing workshop have 2 sessions, each session is 2 hours long. It will held on Saturdays, March 9 and 23, from 3 to 5 p.m., at the New York Public Library on 53rd Street. In the first session, we will have a brief lecture then start writing individually and in the second session, we will have feedback session. This event is for those who can participate in both sessions.

4

5. The workshop can accommodate approximately 10 people, and applications will be accepted through Google Form until March 5th. Applications will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis, and confirmation information will be sent via text or email. This is a workshop using laptops on both days. You must bring your own laptop or tablet on the day of the workshop.

5

6. This writing workship is co-facilitated by an author Mina Ha based in Berlin and Seoul, and Hwayong who is a feminist activist and social designer living in New York.

6

Theory of Change

The Pirates will be a collaborative safe space for first-generation Korean immigrant women who relocated to New York City due to gender discrimination in South Korea to recount migration experiences, commemorate achievements, affirm their identities, and document the contemporary narrative of Korean women's immigration history.

So that first-generation Korean immigrant women in New York, who often struggle to find community due to language barriers, visa status, and traumas they experienced in both Korea and the United States, to co-create a safe space for themselves.

So that first-generation Korean immigrant women in New York can take a break from the busy immigrant life burdened by constant proof requirements. This respite will afford them the opportunity for reflection, documentation, and celebration of their immigrant journeys and accomplishments, as well as the chance to unpack and share the traumas they have experienced in both Korea and the U.S., initiating their healing journey.

So that first-generation Korean immigrant women will build solidarity by sharing their stories and experience a heightened sense of belonging, this will empower first-generation Korean immigrant women in New York City to construct a new frame and narrative to embrace their identity as immigrants.

So that more first-generation Korean immigrant women will be equipped to organize community events and create spaces, broadening the circle of solidarity to include more generations and backgrounds.

So that ultimately, this will foster global, international, and intergenerational solidarity among immigrant women across borders, sparking a dialogue about the need for political and social change for immigrant women and calling for women's solidarity to be a force in this discussion in an era of ongoing feminization of immigration.

First Session

On March 9, 2024, the first session took place at the 53rd Street Library with 10 participants, while author Mina Ha joined remotely from Berlin. The primary objective of this initial session was to introduce the purpose of the workshop and establish feedback principles, creating a safe and non-judgmental environment for the forthcoming writing workshop. Mina delivered a lecture on writing, drawing insights from examples of works by diaspora women writers. Following the lecture and self-introductions, participants engaged in a discussion based on prompt questions facilitated by Mina through an anonymous chat room. These prompt questions encompassed topics such as the motivation for leaving Korea, the availability of support networks for sharing personal stories, hesitations in connecting with other first-generation Korean immigrant women, feelings about relocating to a new environment, as well as identifying essential needs and challenges in life. Participants freely responded to the prompt questions and engaged in open conversations.

Photographs from the first session of New York Sailing Log Workshop
Photographed by Samantha Rori Blumenfeld

Photographs from the second session of New York Sailing Log Workshop
Photographed by Wha Yong Shin

Second Session

The second session took place on March 23, 2024. Following the first session, participants were tasked with writing their “My New York Sailing Log” which were shared on Google Drive on the 21st, two days prior to the second session. This allowed participants to read each other’s writing beforehand and prepare feedback. During the second session, participants spent 10 minutes each getting feedback from their peers. Rather than emphasizing the completeness or format of the writing, the feedback focused on identifying strengths in the writing, highlighting aspects that resonated with the reader, expressing interest in hearing more about certain stories, and demonstrating empathy for the content of the writing.

The participants’ writing exhibited a diverse range of formats, lengths, and styles. Many participants, while explaining their reasons for immigrating, naturally transitioned into writing about their lives in Korea prior to coming to New York. During the feedback sessions in the second session, some participants expressed the experience of reliving, confronting, and processing traumatic events and emotions for the first time through their writing. Some participants left their writing incomplete as they realized they had not yet fully processed their experiences. Witnessing others willingly share their experiences through writing prompted, some participants to contemplate redefining their own writing styles.

Despite the formal conclusion of the two scheduled workshop sessions, we collectively decided to extend the workshop until all writing projects were completed. The deadline for the final completion of the article documenting these journeys has been set for May 20th.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The questionnaire for monitoring and evaluation after the workshop is as follows. The survey was conducted anonymously. This evaluation paper assesses the effectiveness of the writing workshop in providing a safe space for all participants and fostering a sense of belonging. The aim is to determine whether the projects initiated by The Pirates will undergo further development and expansion, addressing any identified shortcomings based on the responses gathered from these questionnaires.

1. Did you feel that the writing workshop was a safe space? (Scan scale from 1-5)
2. If you felt it was a safe space, why?
3. If you felt it was not a safe space, why? What needs to be improved to create safer spaces?
4. Did you feel a sense of belonging in the writing workshop?
5. If you felt a sense of belonging, why?
6. If you did not feel a sense of belonging, what was the reason?
7. New York Sailing Log aims to allow immigrants to take time out of their busy daily lives to look back on their immigration journey so far, and to become more positive about their lives as immigrants in the process of documenting and rediscovering achievements and happy moments. What emotions came to you in the process of writing and sharing your immigration journey with others? How was the experience of recalling many memories, processing your emotions, and writing them down?
8. Please tell me what you liked about the <New York Sailing Log> writing workshop.
9. Please tell me what you regretted about the <New York Voyage Log> writing workshop.
10. If you have anything to say to the host, please share it freely.

Based on the findings of an anonymous survey administered following the workshop, participants generally agreed that the writing workshop provided a safe space. However, suggestions were made regarding the need for clearer guidance and instructions when sharing writing, particularly to enhance the sense of safety. Dissatisfaction was expressed regarding the constraints of the short duration, consisting of two sessions lasting two hours each. Participants suggested that a longer-term project with a defined positive purpose could foster deeper connections and empathy among participants. Additionally, requests were made for more detailed guidance, recognizing the varying boundaries and pacing of relationship establishment among participants. Suggestions for incorporating language justice and consideration for embracing diverse identities, including women, non-binary, and queer individuals, were also voiced.

Regarding the sense of belonging, participants noted limitations due to the brief timeframe and proposed the implementation of longer-term projects. Some participants appreciated the freedom to participate at their own discretion, even if they did not experience a strong sense of belonging. Many participants reported positive experiences during the writing process, finding comfort and validation in sharing their stories.

Participants also expressed disappointment with the use of an anonymous chat room for communication during in-person sessions, suggesting the need for clearer agreements and direct dialogue to address issues. Technical difficulties in communicating with Mina were highlighted, impacting the workshop experience for some participants. Concerns were raised about the abstract nature of the takeaway points and the need for a clear direction for the workshop outcomes. Additionally, during feedback sessions, the importance of ensuring equal speaking rights for all participants was emphasized. Some participants expressed regret over the lack of clarity regarding the role and ownership of the facilitator.

Future Plan

The Pirates is an ever-evolving and ongoing project. Scan the QR code to stay updated. Following the success of the New York Sailing Log workshop, I am planning to develop a location-based story archiving web platform. Additionally, I envision hosting further writing workshops, zine workshops, public performances, and more. My goal is to inspire and empower more individuals to join us as pirates, fostering communities not only in New York but also in cities worldwide.

Reflection

Coincidentally, New York experienced heavy rainfall, prompting flood warnings on both days of the workshop. Despite subway delays and congested traffic, all participants showed up on time for both sessions. In the anonymous chat room utilized on the first day, participants were asked about their most essential needs when living in a new place, to which many responded with a resounding call for community. They expressed a longing for a supportive network—a community to rely on, stand in solidarity with, and find comfort in amidst the challenges of navigating life in a foreign country. These sentiments underscored the participants' fervent desire to connect with like-minded individuals, as one attendee remarked, "We all gathered at the library despite the rain in search of a community..." These words vividly capture the passion and dedication of the participants toward fostering meaningful connections.

Throughout the workshop, I observed firsthand the diverse array of stories shared by the participants, each narrative serving as a testament to the rich tapestry of experiences within the first-generation Korean immigrant women's community. Witnessing their willingness to open up and share intimate personal histories filled me with profound gratitude. These stories, unquantifiable by mere data, embody the lived experiences of countless Korean women—a reminder of the importance of amplifying their voices.

Reflecting on the tears shed during one-on-one interviews and workshop discussions, I was reminded of the inherent significance of these narratives. It reaffirmed my belief in the necessity of social projects aimed at supporting first-generation Korean immigrant women who have immigrated due to gender discrimination. Embarking on this thesis project was, in essence, a declaration of the validity and existence of these experiences—a proclamation echoed through the stories we collected and shared.

At the New York Sailing Log, participants curious about my untold story prompted a request to share my writing in our next gathering. This process paper also serves as my immigration journey. I hope this could be offering solace, affirmation, and compassion to all who encounter it.

Gratitude

First and foremost, I express my deepest gratitude to the first-generation Korean immigrant women who trusted me and shared their stories. It is out of a profound sense of responsibility for these beautiful narratives that I completed this project. To each of you, I extend my infinite respect and love.

To 미섭 Miseup, credit of design and framework for The Pirates is wholly attributed to you. Your support has been unwavering, not only for this project but for countless moments in my life. Wherever you may be, I hope you find solace in a glass of rum.

To 민아 Mina, without your invaluable contribution, this project would not have come to fruition. It is a privilege to call you a friend, someone who continuously expands my world, making it more beautiful with each passing day.

To 초롱 Chorong. Thank you for being my willing community partner. Getting to know you was also a great benefit of this project. I will always support you.

To Mari, I am profoundly grateful for your mentorship throughout graduate school. Your understanding and patience have propelled me to this point, and I will forever cherish the moments spent together. Many of the tears shed in our sessions were born from the relief of feeling understood beyond language barrier. Thank you for your unwavering trust and support.

To Sahar, Kara, and Lona, your wisdom and encouragement have been a beacon of light during the project's most challenging moments. I appreciate your guidance.

To Miya, your unwavering support has been a constant source of strength, especially during the tumultuous times of three cohorts. Your nurturing presence has contributed immensely to my growth and maturity.

To my colleagues, this past year has been an enriching journey, filled with shared talents and invaluable friendships. I am grateful for the opportunity to study alongside all of you. Your passion, sincerity, courage, kindness, and humor have left an indelible mark on me.

To Jhonn and Melissa, thank you for accompanying us on the journey to the Thesis show. Though brief, the experience will be etched in my memory forever.

To 아인 Ain, 상호 Sang-ho, and 지윤 Jiyoun, 문 Moon, 수진 Sujin, the camaraderie we share as fellow border-crossers is immeasurable. 아인, particularly, your support has been indispensable during my time in New York.

To 지원 Jiwon and 마리 Maria, your unwavering support has been a lifeline during my time in New York. Your love and kindness have carried me through the most challenging times.

To 소냐 Sonia, thank you for your patience and understanding, even in moments of frustration and anger. Your unwavering support has helped me better understand myself and navigate life's challenges with grace and resilience.

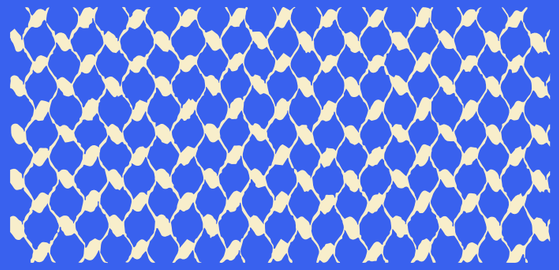
Damar, having you as a companion who understands and endures even my lowest moments has been one of life's greatest blessings. I am deeply grateful for your presence, and completing graduate school would have been impossible without you. I look forward to repaying your love with even greater affection.

그리고 이 모든 여정을 가능하게 해준 나의 부모님께, 늘 고맙고 사랑합니다.

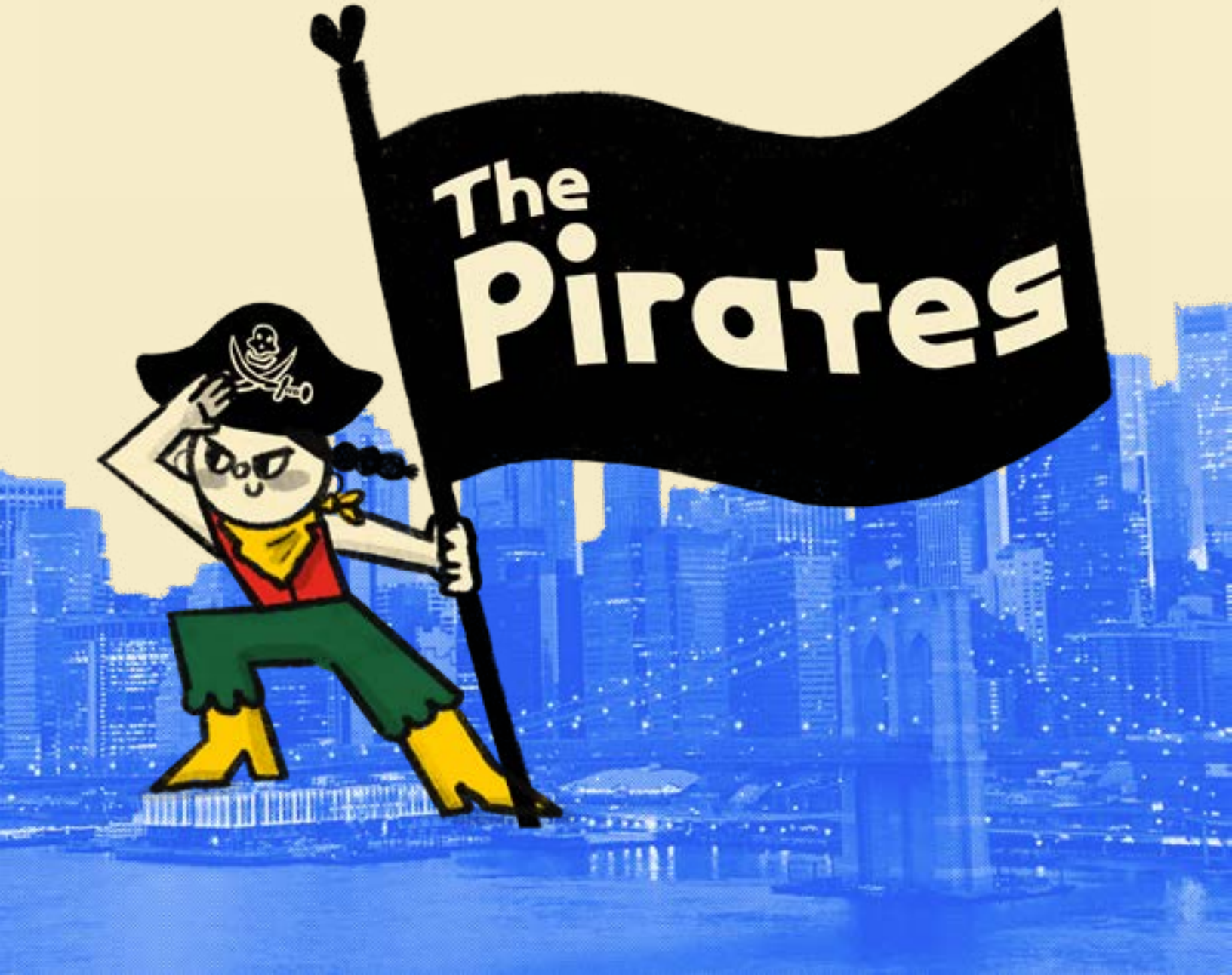
won't you celebrate with me by Lucille Clifton

won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

The Pirates stands as a testament to the courage and resilience of women who dared to traverse borders, each embodying a narrative worthy of preservation and celebration. With profound respect and admiration, I honor the resilience of the Palestinian people amidst the ongoing genocide and displacement in the lands of Palestine. I pledge to never stop resisting injustice and honoring the story of the resilience of the Palestinian people, until the day the Palestinian people are liberated from the river to the seas.



Bottom-right
Fishnet pattern from keffiyeh
Illustration by Hey Porter!
www.heyporterposter.com


The
Pirates