

The Departments of Sociology & Anthropology and History present

Intimacy of a Divided Nation

Inter-Korean Reconciliation, Traumatic Memory, and the Scene of Public Emotion

A Book Talk by

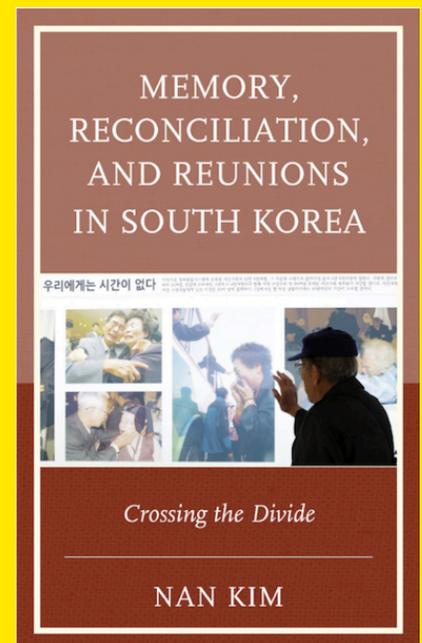
Professor Nan Kim, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Thursday, January 31st | 3:30-5:00 PM

Johnson Center, 3rd floor, Room D

Following a year of remarkable change in the relationship between the two Koreas, this talk revisits another pivotal period following the *first* Inter-Korean Summit, which took place during the early summer of 2000. Two months after that first-ever meeting between two Korean heads of state, a series of emotionally charged events would emerge at the center of reconciliatory developments on the Korean Peninsula. In August of that year, hundreds of elderly war survivors traveled across the 38th parallel to meet with family members in dramatic “reunions” after having lost all contact for more than half a century since the 1950-1953 Korean War.

While those events involved civilian crossings of the inter-Korean divide in the then-largest numbers to date, the reunions also signified figurative crossings from death to life. The family members who returned from the other side during the reunions had gone missing during the war and had long been assumed to have perished in the war’s destruction. As their once-impossible reappearances occurred at the cusp of the millennium amid unprecedented breakthroughs in the Korean peace process, these meetings would suddenly bring public attention to how countless war deaths could never be properly mourned due to the tremendous scale of wartime devastation and the entrenchment of national division. This talk engages with questions about suppressed war memory and the representation of collective trauma, particularly the generation of intense public affect in contexts ethically complex and politically fraught. How did the resurfacing of those who had long been mourned as war dead open a space for reckoning more broadly with the Korean War’s abiding impact on the lives of ordinary people?



Nan Kim is Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, where she directs the graduate program in Public History. She serves on the editorial board of Critical Asian Studies and on the steering committee of the international peace organization Women Cross DMZ.