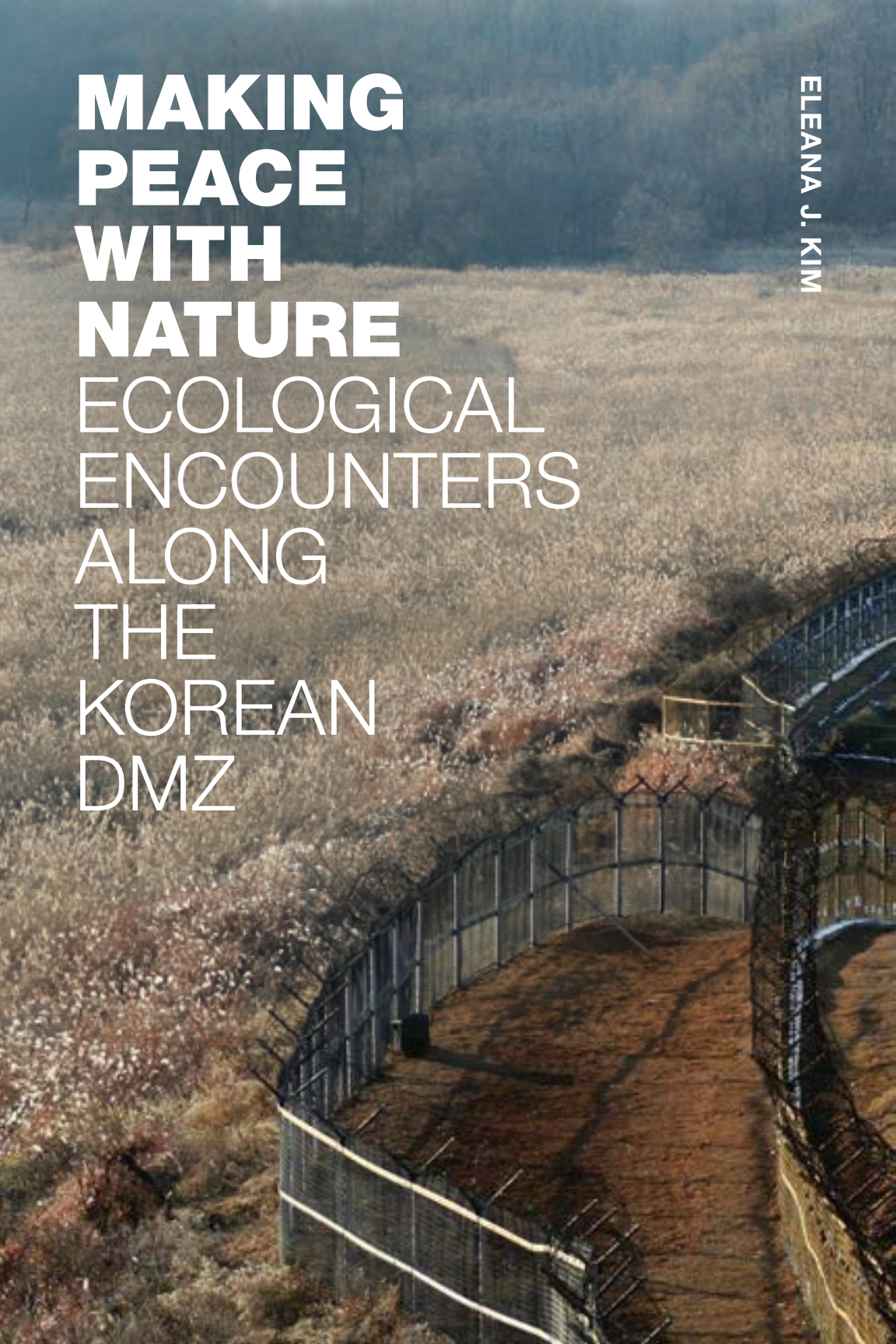


MAKING PEACE WITH NATURE

ECOLOGICAL
ENCOUNTERS
ALONG
THE
KOREAN
DMZ

ELEANA J. KIM



MAKING PEACE WITH NATURE

BUY

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ELEANA J. KIM

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To my kin, familiar and strange

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1

2

3

4

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Contents

List of Abbreviations ix
The South Korean DMZ Region xi
A Note about Romanization and Translation xii
Acknowledgments xiii

Introduction 1

IN THE MEANTIME OF DIVISION 30

PONDS 62

BIRDS 87

LANDMINES 119

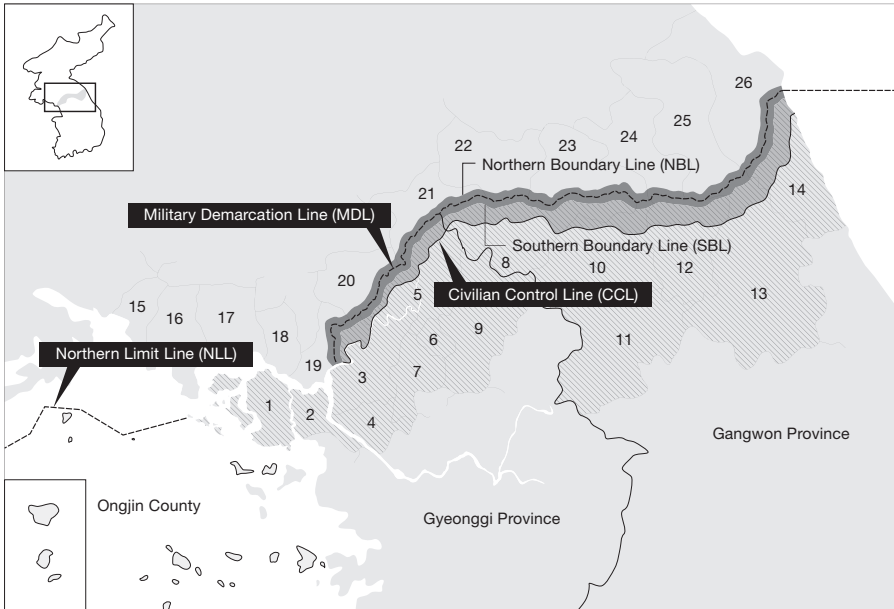
Epilogue De/militarized Ecologies 152

Notes 159
References 177
Index 191



List of Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| BFS | black-faced spoonbill |
| CCL | Civilian Control Line |
| CCZ | Civilian Control Zone |
| DERI | DMZ Ecology Research Institute |
| DMZ | Demilitarized Zone |
| DPRK | Democratic People's Republic of Korea |
| GPS | Global Positioning System |
| HLZ | Handicapped Life Zone |
| IUCN | International Union for the Conservation of Nature |
| KATUSA | Korean Augmentation to the United States Army |
| KCCNNR | Korean Commission for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources |
| MAB | UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme |
| MAPS | Migratory Animals Pathological Survey |
| MDL | Military Demarcation Line |
| MIPD | Military Installations Protection District |
| NBL | Northern Boundary Line |
| NLL | Northern Limit Line |
| NSL | National Security Law |
| PLV | Peace and Life Valley |
| PLZ | Peace and Life Zone |
| POBS | Pacific Ocean Biological Survey |
| RCC | red-crowned crane |
| ROK | Republic of Korea |
| SBL | Southern Boundary Line |
| UNCMAC | United Nations Command Military Armistice Commission |



- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| DMZ | 1 Gangwha County | 10 Hwacheon County | 19 P'anmun County |
| CCZ | 2 Gimpo City | 11 Yanggu County | 20 Changp'ung County |
| Border | 3 Paju City | 12 Chuncheon City | 21 Chŏlwŏn County |
| Area | 4 Goyang City | 13 Inje County | 22 P'yŏnggang County |
| | 5 Yeoncheon County | 14 Goseong County | 23 Kimhwa County |
| | 6 Dongducheon City | 15 Ch'angdan County | 24 Ch'angdo County |
| | 7 Yangju City | 16 Yŏnan County | 25 Kŭmgang County |
| | 8 Cheorwon County | 17 Paekch'ŏn County | 26 Kosŏng County |
| | 9 Pocheon City | 18 Kaep'ung County | |

Map FM.1

Map of the Korean DMZ region. Adapted from E.-J. Park (2013c) and Son (2011).

The South Korean DMZ Region

The South Korean DMZ region includes the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), the Civilian Control Zone (CCZ), and the Border Area. The Military Demarcation Line (MDL), which is the actual Korean War ceasefire line, is represented by the dotted line. By order of the 1953 Armistice Agreement, the DMZ extends two kilometers on either side of the MDL and is bordered by the Northern Boundary Line (NBL) and the Southern Boundary Line (SBL). The Civilian Control Line (CCL) marks the southern border of the CCZ, and prior clearance is required to pass through checkpoints into the CCZ, which is guarded by South Korean soldiers. The CCL has been adjusted northward four times since 1983 and has shrunk by 75 percent since the 1950s. In 2008, it was legally redefined as the area within five to ten kilometers from the SBL. The Border Area, which incorporates but extends beyond the CCZ, is an administratively defined region that has been targeted for economic development since the 2000s.

The DMZ is a terrestrial border only, which ends at the mouth of the Han River estuary. The estuary, which is defined by the Armistice Agreement as neutral waters, may be used by both North and South Korean civilian vessels. Despite this fact, as of this writing, neither country has used the waters of the estuary. The Northern Limit Line (NLL) off the western coast has been highly contested since the signing of the Armistice Agreement. Several islands in the Yellow Sea belong to South Korea and are part of Ongjin County, five of which are north of the thirty-eighth parallel.

There are eight counties in the border area: Ongjin, Ganghwa, and Yeoncheon in Gyeonggi Province; and Cheorwon, Hwacheon, Yanggu, Inje, and Goseong in Gangwon Province. There are also seven cities: Gimpo, Paju, Goyang, Yangju, Dongducheon, Pocheon, and Chuncheon. Both Goseong and Cheorwon counties, like Gangwon Province, are divided, existing on both sides of the DMZ.

A Note about Romanization and Translation

I use the McCune–Reischauer romanization system to transliterate Korean words into Latin script, except for instances in which a common transliteration is in wide usage, such as Seoul instead of Sŏul. Personal names in Korean follow the cultural convention of family name followed by given name, except for individuals who publish under or who prefer Western conventions. Place names in South Korea follow the South Korean revised romanization system, which was adopted by the South Korean government in 2000. I forgo transliteration in favor of Korean script (*hangŭl*) throughout the text when the meaning might be enhanced for readers familiar with the Korean language. I also forgo romanization for Korean-language bibliographic sources but include the English-language translation. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Korean are my own.

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Acknowledgments

Because the Korean DMZ is often described as a no-man's land, I sometimes joked that I was writing an ethnography of a place without people. Of course, this was far from the truth, and no ethnography could be written without dozens of interlocutors, colleagues, and friends—human and other-than-human—some of whom appear in the following pages, and others who were crucial in aiding me behind the scenes. Moreover, writing these words of appreciation after more than a year of isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I am acutely aware of the deep sociality and feelingful co-presences that brought this project into being. Countless conversations with generous collaborators, stimulating colleagues, and dear friends suffuse every word. Yet, I alone am responsible for any omissions or inaccuracies.

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The seeds of this project were first planted when I attended a presentation by then president of the DMZ Forum, Hall Healy, in New York City.

I soon met the founders, Dr. Ke Chung (K. C.) Kim and Seung-ho Lee, who invited me to join the board a few years later. I thank Hall, K. C., and Seung-ho, as well as other members of the board for teaching me about their ongoing efforts to ensure the DMZ's future as a protected area. K. C.'s pivotal role in the history of the DMZ's ecologies and the history of biodiversity conservation is hinted at in the pages of this book, but it deserves much more focused in-depth treatment. Conversations with George Archibald of the International Crane Foundation also helped to situate the work of crane conservation into a longer history of postwar South Korea.

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xviii

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Introduction

It was the advent of the first rice harvest and just before the initial weeks of the migratory bird season. Ubiquitous reeds on the borders of the mature rice paddies created a feathery landscape of light brown and yellowish green that emanated a gold hue against the open blue skies of early autumn. I witnessed grasshoppers mating on the rice stalks, exchanged silent stares with soldiers passing by in military convoys, and relished the textures and fragrance of the overgrown vegetation alongside the borders of small ponds hidden amid the flourishing fields (figure I.1).

I had just stepped out of Dr. Rhee's Jeep to join the others in identifying wildflowers on the side of the road. There was a group of several high school students on this trip who were being taught by the citizen-ecologists to use the field guide and to pay close attention to the specific characteristics of various plants. Dr. Rhee, more anthropological than botanical in his interests, wanted to introduce me to the paradoxes of the area known as the Civilian Control Zone (CCZ; 민간인출입통제구역), the heavily militarized area immediately south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) proper. The CCZ is where the majority of species that constitute the DMZ's famed biodiversity have been identified and studied. Rhee pointed past the barbed wire along the side of the road, directing my gaze beyond a low cement barrier and down a corridor of trees, and said, "That used to be a road connecting to the North!" Jokes ensued about how easy it would be for us to run across the border and who would go first. Another member of our group, an avid nature photographer, made a mock gesture of stepping over the barbed wire and, in the process, snagged the edge of his trousers, which added a dose of reality and physical humor to the moment.

Dr. Rhee was a wiry and wry ethnolinguist in his sixties who had a bad leg from a congenital disability and had written about the DMZ as the Handicapped Life Zone (HLZ), to critique the state-branded Peace and Life Zone (PLZ; 평화·생명지대; Rhee 2010). He was intrigued by my earlier



Figure I.1

A combine threshing rice for the first harvest, CCZ north of Paju City, South Korea. October 2011. Photograph by the author.

research on transnational adoption from South Korea and considered the abandonment of Korean children by the state to be akin to the state's lack of "ecological welfare" (생태 복지) for nonhuman life in the DMZ area (see E. J. Kim 2010). His poetic and analytic mind was continually seeking out connections and conceptual

rhymes, such as his beloved vehicle (non-military Jeeps were at the time unusual to see in South Korea), itself a civilian-military hybrid, which was perfectly suited for forays into the CCZ. For him, the "paradox" (역설) of the DMZ was of endless fascination, one that similarly drew me to this research project. Just an hour before, he had articulated strongly worded critiques of US hegemony, but also expressed humility at the tremendous benefits South Korea had received from its Cold War benefactor. Like his biopolitical critique of the state's lack of welfare for both the nation's children and its nonhuman creatures, his views were informed by both cultural nationalism and an anti-state perspective that existed in ambivalent relation to US empire.

Back in Dr. Rhee's Jeep, I was sitting in the backseat with artist Heo Young (Dr. Rhee's spouse) as he drove us south through the checkpoint, along Freedom Road, toward Seoul's expanding satellite cities of Ilisan and

Paju. We passed billboards advertising English-language immersion academies, Peace and Life K-pop concerts, and the most bizarre one of a chubby baby's face sticking out of a hooded Astroturf onesie, promoting the greening of Paju City. There were also mammoth cement tank blockades along the highway, designed to stop North Korean tanks in a future land war, and engine-powered replicas of ancient sailboats that used to ferry people from Seoul to towns along the Imjin River basin.

Several kilometers past the checkpoint, Heo Young pointed out the window past me, toward the mountains, across the expanse of the Han River estuary. "That's North Korea. You can tell because the mountains don't have a single tree left on them." I adjusted my gaze to look beyond the highway guardrails, the barbed wired fences, the guard posts, and the wetlands toward the mountains, which were the color of bark or, more likely, dirt. I knew that fuel shortages in North Korea had led to massive deforestation, with additional ecological and social consequences, including mudslides, soil erosion, and ecosystem vulnerability. Having been asked to view those dark shapes as bare, I took them as visual evidence of the poverty and desperation of the people on the other side. When she asked me moments later what my impressions were, I was caught off guard. Instinctively, I said that the sight made me sad, but it was a pat and generic response to the national division and ongoing war, one that felt acutely inadequate to encompass the affective and sensory excess from my first foray into the ecology of the CCZ, which was still vibrating around and through me with immediacy and novelty.

That first visit introduced me to the CCZ as a heterotopic space of multiple temporalities, ambiguities, and affective possibilities—of premodern and (post-)Cold War histories, future visions of and nostalgic desires for a reconnected if not unified peninsula, as well as ecological timescapes of seasons, annual migrations, and cyclical changes of various nonhuman creatures in the context of climate change. These temporal readjustments, epistemological associations, ontological states, and multiscalar relations soon exceeded the paradoxical framing that had first intrigued me. The disorientation I felt after that first visit was influenced by the peculiar insecurity of knowing that one is in a space of heightened military security. But more importantly, it was also related to my bodily attunement to multispecies landscapes that denaturalized the dominant timescapes of contemporary South Korea—the hyperactive rhythms of capitalist growth, the past-oriented traumas of national division, and future-oriented teleologies of Korean unification.

The proposition that the Korean DMZ, one of the most heavily fortified and militarized spaces in the world, has become a site of rare biodiversity seems, on the face of it, paradoxical. This notion—that war and nature or militarization and preservation, when juxtaposed, coexist in ironic tension—has informed assertions that the DMZ, once representing national division, war, and death, now represents communication, peace, and life. These binaries were difficult to escape during my fieldwork in South Korea, emanating from local and regional governments, tourism ventures, government ministries, environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the media.

These discourses and framings are premised on scientific findings that South Korea's DMZ region—including both the southern half of the DMZ and the CCZ and which constitutes just 1,557 square kilometers, or 1.6 percent of the total South Korean territory—is home to 6,168 identified species. According to a 2019 report by the Ministry of Environment, 102 of these species are categorized as endangered, and they constitute 38.2 percent of all such species in South Korea. Based on similar data, the National Institute of Ecology in 2018 asserted that “the DMZ has become an important habitat for endangered species.”¹ Scholars, bureaucrats, journalists, artists, and tourists draw on this fact to posit the DMZ's nature as a redemptive force for healing the “scars of war,” invariably finding aesthetic appeal in the “paradoxical coexistence of manmade conflict *and* an environment of natural wildlife that is completely indifferent to the surrounding human world of absurdity and violence” (S.-Y. Kim 2011: 397; emphasis in original).²

Yet, however alluring it may be, the framework of paradox is conceptually limited, for its rhetorical force depends on an ahistorical logic that holds two ostensible, yet incommensurable, truths in tension: ecology and war or, put another way, nature and culture. Rather than merely dwell in the space of paradox, I became intrigued by what one of my main interlocutors, Kim Seung Ho, calls “biological peace.” Biological peace became a key to understanding the life forms of the DMZ, which exist not in spite of the division, as the paradoxical narratives would attest, but alongside and in relation to it. This book examines some of these life forms and relations “in the meantime of division,” the peacelessness of almost seventy years of unending war. I analyze ponds, birds, and landmines in the CCZ/DMZ region as networked assemblages to show how each disrupts the temporalities common to South Korean discourses of division and unification and offers other less anthropocentric approaches to “making peace with nature.”

The Double Bind of the DMZ's Nature

If paradox is one common cultural trope that frames the DMZ's nature, another could be described as that of the double bind. The double bind characterizes the discourses and concerns of policy makers and environmentalists who debate how to guard these precious landscapes within the purview of international environmental governance and the nation-state system. It originates from a concern that inter-Korean peace and exchange will lead to the destruction of the DMZ as a *de facto* protected area, and that preparations must be made to ensure against this possibility. The unprecedented *détente* of the late-1990s Sunshine Policy era (1998–2008) in particular enlivened discussions among conservationists and UN-level organizations, which called for the designation of the zone as a peace park or World Heritage Site. Since the mid-1990s, for instance, the DMZ Forum, a US-based not-for-profit, has sought to raise awareness and rally support for these efforts, which would use existing modes of international governance to recognize the DMZ as a site of global significance and protect it from any future development. As a member of the Forum's board, I participated in conversations centered on these goals, but because the North would not entertain the idea of a peace park in the absence of a peace treaty, we invariably came up against a fundamental impasse. On the one hand, members believed that the DMZ's nature could serve as the vehicle for building peace on the peninsula, but on the other hand, no meaningful progress could be made without North Korean agreement.

South Korean leaders—who, following the language of Article 12, Chapter 2, of the 1992 Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression and Exchanges and Cooperation between South and North, have proposed to “peacefully utilize” (평화적 이용) the DMZ's nature—have been consistently rejected by the North on the grounds that the DMZ does not represent peace and also that, in the absence of a peace treaty, it cannot be transformed into a peace park or nature reserve.³ Moreover, a unilateral attempt in 2011 by South Korea to register the DMZ as a UNESCO biosphere reserve was fiercely opposed by the North Korean representative to the governing committee as a violation of the Armistice Agreement.

The double bind thus entails two distinct yet interconnected impossibilities: (1) the DMZ's rare ecologies cannot be adequately protected from future development without having achieved peace, and (2) if peace is achieved, its precious nature will be sacrificed in the name of economic development. In other words, nature preservation depends on peace, but

Table I.1
 South Korean Presidential Plans for the DMZ (1988–2020)

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Roh Tae-woo (1988–93) | International Peace City (1988) Peace Zone (1989) |
| Kim Young-sam (1993–98) | DMZ Nature Park (1994) |
| Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) | DMZ Peace Park (2001) |
| Roh Moo-hyun (2003–8) | Peace and Life Zone (2006) |
| Lee Myung-bak (2008–13) | UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (2011) |
| Park Geun-hye (2013–16) | International Peace Park (2013) |
| Moon Jae-in (2016–21) | International Peace Zone (2019) |

peace, which is more than ever defined as economic cooperation, would destroy its nature. The values of a state-centric, capital-driven peace and a less anthropocentric, more-than-human peace seem to be in an impossible contradiction.

The future of the DMZ is tied to complex and knotty geopolitical negotiations involving multiple state parties, making the probability of any solution to the double bind uncertain at best. The impossibility of this double bind has not, however, prevented multiple South Korean administrations from attempting to leverage the DMZ as the site of future inter-Korean cooperation and peace. In fact, the policies of recent conservative administrations suggest that the more unpromising the prospects of inter-Korean dialogue are, the more the state invests in the DMZ’s nature as a symbol of (future) peace, under the guise of preparing for unification, but more likely to shore up its own political agendas (see Table I.1).⁴

Of course, the double bind has led to certain practical measures to be sought by state and nonstate actors. For instance, under Article 2 of the Natural Environment Conservation Act (Act No. 13885), once the DMZ is under the jurisdiction of the Republic of Korea (ROK), it would be designated a “natural reservation area” (자연유보지역) for two years.⁵ Bureaucrats in South Korea’s Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries, as well as government researchers in both Gyeonggi and Gangwon Provinces, have spent at least a decade preparing plans for a post-unification DMZ, which include conservation of the DMZ’s biodiversity.⁶

During the period of my fieldwork (2011–16), many observers I met were not optimistic that commitments to nature conservation would be able to

temper the drive for economic development, and the changes taking place in the CCZ only reinforced their pessimistic views. People such as Dr. Rhee, for instance, abhorred the government slogan “peace and life” (hereafter without quotes) because they viewed it as a thinly disguised project for economic development. The slogan was also problematic in that it ignored the existence of the double bind by wedding two universal categories into a pacified harmony, idealizing life in the DMZ as if it symbolically represents unification itself, while ignoring the actual life forms that have been documented. I conducted this fieldwork during the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations (2008–16) when inter-Korean hostility was peaking and, at the same time, the sacrifice of nonhuman nature to the dictates of economic development was intensifying. In this context, the optimistic tone presupposed by the slogan of peace and life rang especially hollow. The dynamic of the double bind is one in which, according to Gregory Bateson, the person who is caught within it cannot overcome the situation—it’s a no-win situation (2000 [1972]). It was particularly ironic, then, that the PLZ and its related tourism ventures were frequently being framed by its proponents as a win-win situation—not for North and South Korea, but for conservation and development interests.

If Dr. Rhee viewed the discourses of peace and life to be a form of greenwashing, his HLZ refuses to ignore the ravages of history and ongoing violence. Rhee succinctly captures the environmental failures of both communism and capitalism, writing that the DMZ’s disability is due to “the dual agonies of poverty *and* development” (2010: 80; emphasis added). The DMZ, as he asserts, is a space not of spontaneous nature but of dependent nature, having evolved in relation to the agricultural activities in the CCZ (see chapter 2). In this way, the DMZ’s nature defamiliarizes the present: “From the space of division between North and South, sensing simultaneously the cruel bare mountains to the north and the ostentatious buildings in the south, [the DMZ’s biodiversity] restlessly observes, from between the barbed wire fences, the face of humanity” (2010: 80). In Rhee’s framing of the HLZ, South Korea’s widely celebrated economic miracle is to blame for creating the conditions that necessitate “ecological welfare.” Instead of welfare, however, the state offers what disability studies scholar Eunjung Kim might call the “curative violence” of peace and life.⁷ Moreover, although the ecology of the DMZ can appear to be refreshingly beyond the reach of state power and global capital, Rhee’s HLZ emphasizes that it is not just paradoxically protected by the militarization of the zone; rather, it is threatened by both militarization and neoliberal capital as

climate change and development continue to affect multiple lifeways and prospects of survival.

Thinking alongside Dr. Rhee's HLZ, I depart from policy approaches that seek to solve the double bind—that is, by determining whether a peace treaty or a peace park agreement comes first. These approaches are too often tied to conservation imaginaries that scholars have critiqued because they depend on a liberal internationalist worldview that ultimately privileges market-based solutions (Büscher, Dressler, and Fletcher 2014). Instead, I show how the double bind, however intractable it may seem to be, has nonetheless been generative of unexpected and novel possibilities.⁸ I return to these possibilities by connecting them to Kim Seung Ho's notion of biological peace after first discussing the DMZ's history and its associations with peace.

Situating the DMZ

Ever since the fateful line was drawn by US Army colonels Charles Bonesteel and Dean Rusk, dividing the newly liberated Korea at the thirty-eighth parallel on August 15, 1945, the Korean peninsula has served as a buffer or bulwark within a Cold War and post-Cold War global order. As artist and theorist Kyong Park writes, the “Korean peninsula was turned into a collaboratively designed buffer zone that predestined and defined the Cold War” (K. Park 2020: n.p.). Policy analysts and political scientists credit the DMZ with “maintaining the peace,” even as it is the emblematic site of the unresolved Korean War (1950–53), which was suspended but not ended nearly seventy years ago with the signing of the Armistice Agreement.

The Armistice Agreement set the boundaries of the buffer zone at two kilometers north and two kilometers south of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL), which is the actual ceasefire line. The DMZ runs across the entire 250-kilometer-long width of the peninsula and separates the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea) and the ROK (South Korea; see map FM.1). No heavy artillery is permitted between the Northern Boundary Line (NBL) and Southern Boundary Line (SBL), and this fact is what defines the DMZ as demilitarized, even though there are one million troops north of the NBL and more than 600,000 south of the SBL, along with an estimated one million landmines within the DMZ, and more than one million landmines in the southern half alone.⁹

The 1953 Armistice Agreement was signed by the UN forces, the North Korean People's Army, and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army (repre-

sented by the North Korean People's Army), with President Syngman Rhee of South Korea unwilling to sign anything that would fall short of the reunification of the nation. The signatories agreed to the terms under the assumption that a solution to the division would be decided within the year. The 1954 Geneva Conference, which was intended to bring about a peaceful resolution to the war, ultimately served to reinscribe the Cold War biopolarity, allowing the United States to set the terms of discussion while satisfying the desires of Britain and the Soviet Union for the "relaxation of world tensions" (Ra 1999: 403). Haruka Matsuda argues that the conference on Korea, coinciding with the conference on Indochina (which established the division of another country, Vietnam), "was the decisive opportunity for the US to act as a 'new empire' in all of East Asia" (Matsuda 2007: 208), while the influence of the old imperial powers, Britain and France, receded. The DMZ, an uneasy outcome of the armistice, thereby represented the inauguration of a new world order, a provisional solution to the international war, and the radically indecisive suspension of the civil war.

At the DMZ, this indecisive condition has led to the continuous and iterative drawing of lines and assertion of positions in a "zone of undecidability" or space of exception (Agamben 2005: 2). Politically, it is an exceptional, extraterritorial space governed in the south by the UN Command Military Armistice Commission (UNCMAC), directed by the US Army, and in the north by the DPRK Army. For both the ROK and DPRK, however, the division is considered to be unconstitutional, and each state is illegitimate in the eyes of the other. Both agree that the DMZ is rightfully part of Korean territory, but each asserts singular sovereignty over that same territory. Yet South Korean sovereignty ends at the SBL.¹⁰ To comply with the Armistice Agreement, any activities within the southern half of the DMZ require UNCMAC approval, making many South Koreans resentful that their own land is controlled by the United States.

The division and ongoing war justify not only the militarization at the border, but also the militarization of everyday life and the normalization of militarized violence in both societies. It also reproduces and underwrites the expansion of US imperial power in the region. With few exceptions, all South Korean men are subject to mandatory two-year military service, and US armed forces have been a continuous presence since the Korean War. The UNCMAC is supported by roughly twenty-nine thousand Eighth US Army forces as well as members of the Korean Augmentation to the United States Army (KATUSA), English-proficient South Korean soldiers who are granted relatively privileged status as part of the Eighth US Army.¹¹ It was

only in 1994 that peacetime command of the ROK army was returned to South Korea, and despite frequent plans to shift wartime command of South Korean defense forces to ROK leadership, these changes in command have been deferred by every administration, most recently by Moon Jae-in, to 2022. Thus, the DMZ area is caught up not only in inter-Korean contests over political legitimacy, but also post-Cold War tensions over military and territorial sovereignty that now characterize the once unshakeable alliance between the ROK and the United States.

The geographic, political, and economic shifts on the South Korean side of the DMZ take place both despite and in relation to the DMZ's status as a militarized and contested space. Indeed, much of the development feeds off the DMZ's allure as an international tourist attraction. In the global imaginary, the DMZ continues to be seen by many, to quote US president Bill Clinton's memorable assessment, as "the scariest place on Earth." It invites other superlative descriptions: the most heavily fortified border, a symbol of the longest running war, and the last Cold War division. These superlatives highlight the ways in which the two Koreas exist at the margins of what is considered to be normative in the global order of things, calling out the assumptions of a progressive model of history in which we are now in a post-Cold War era, or one in which wars end and postcolonial states are expected to transition into liberal democratic governments, lest they be labeled "failed" or "rogue."

In South Korea, the DMZ's associations have shifted over time, from the dark semiotics of the Cold War era to the progressive peace politics of the post-Cold War period (see chapter 1). It is referred to as DMZ, DM-Zed, or *pimujangjidae* (비무장지대), a literal translation of "demilitarized zone," and in place of the MDL (군사분계선; *kunsa pun'gyesŏn*), Koreans refer to the dividing line as the thirty-eighth parallel (삼팔선; *samp'alŏn*) or the Armistice Line (휴전선; *hyujŏnsŏn*). The word "border" is rarely referred to as such. Even the "Border Area," an administrative designation, is a rough translation of *chŏpkyŏng chiyŏk* (접경지역), which would be more accurately referred to as "frontier area." The Korean word *chŏpkyŏng* emphasizes contiguity over boundary making. In other words, the Border Area is that which is abutting the CCZ, and does not refer to the border with the North. All of these lines and areas have shifted over time. The environmental organization, Green Korea United, through field studies and satellite image analysis, determined that the four-kilometer width of the DMZ had shrunk by 43 percent in the sixty years between 1953 and 2013, with both ROK and DPRK soldiers moving the barbed wire fencing in toward the MDL (Green Korea United 2013b).

Areas of the northern CCZ are thus actually part of the former DMZ, while the CCL has moved northward, making formerly militarily restricted zones part of the civilian Border Area. As I discuss in chapter 2, the zone is therefore far from being merely the location of an immobile standoff. As more areas are freed from the restriction of the CCZ, the area has witnessed increasing numbers of economic development projects. Valérie Gelézeau's assertion that "the persistence, growth and continued emergence of enclaves around the inter-Korean border suggest that the border is anything but static" (2013: 31) continues to ring true.

For decades, the conventional wisdom of political scientists, military experts, and policy makers was that the Korean DMZ was a success story in that it managed to keep the peace for nearly seventy years. For more critical analysts, however, rather than representing peace, the armistice and the MDL are framed as the grounds on which inter-Korean tensions and the threat of war have been continuously reproduced. Historian Steven Lee writes, "Despite the consistent refrain heard over the decades after 1953 that the Armistice had maintained the peace on the Korean peninsula, in many ways the reverse was true—the Armistice had preserved the state of war, and the constant violations of the agreement on both sides had only accelerated the arms buildup on the peninsula" (2013: 206). This unstable relationship with the North has furthermore served as the basis for the asymmetrical, neocolonial relationship between the United States and South Korea, and the justification for state violence and political repression on the part of both South Korean and North Korean regimes. The absence of war, or what peace scholars refer to as "negative peace," is merely a form of peace premised on militarized and imperial logics and does not address the lack of "positive peace," an open-ended concept encompassing "all other good things in the world community, particularly cooperation and integration between human groups" (Galtung 1967: 12).

Progressive scholars and activists in South Korea and the diaspora believe that the resolution of the civil war and reconciliation based on positive peace can only be achieved with the complete withdrawal of US troops and the cessation of political interference (see Baik and Kaisen 2018). More hawkish perspectives are skeptical of this approach because it aligns with the DPRK's demands, which have been consistent in calling for the "obsolete and outdated" Armistice Agreement to be replaced with a peace treaty, as the first step toward lasting peace on the peninsula.¹² In fact, after more than six decades and after multiple violations of the armistice on both sides, not to mention North Korean withdrawals from the agreement, the

question of which parties would actually sign any future peace treaty remains unanswered.

Given this history, it could be argued that, the most paradoxical aspect of the DMZ is not that pristine nature coexists with manmade violence, but rather that the thanatopolitical logics of modern military power were for so long unproblematically equated with peace. This dominant view of the DMZ normalizes a militarized and US-centric world order that indiscriminately produces politically and socially exceptional spaces, which are then further normalized when the ecologies they contain are celebrated as accidental by-products of (post)war. Equating those ecologies with peace is another step in a discursive logic that naturalizes the foundational status of war and empire, and “obfuscate[s] an alternative genealogy of arrested decolonization and demilitarization” (Shigematsu and Camacho 2010: xxxii). Given these imperial periodizations and Cold War epistemologies (J. Kim 2010) that dare to represent the most militarized and war-enmeshed spaces as “peaceful,” how can we think of the DMZ’s ecology as related to peace? What peace, and whose peace?

Fuzzy Peace

When the story of the DMZ is told as “a diplomatic failure turned into an environmental success,” to paraphrase historian Lisa Brady (2008), it can serve as a satisfying allegory for our planetary moment, highlighting nature’s resilience over the vagaries of human politics. This is what I refer to as the DMZ’s “ecological exceptionalism,” and that it is depicted as an ironic outcome of war and indecisive peace makes it an even better tale. This narrative not only satisfies the desire of audiences in the United States and other parts of the Global North, who seek optimistic examples to buttress hopes for the future, it also captures the imagination of people in South Korea, for whom the future has always been entangled with collective dreams of and doubts over peace.

In South Korea, peace invariably is defined as “overcoming division,” meaning the division between the two Koreas. As I discuss chapter 1, many discourses of peace in the post-Cold War era extended peace to include the transcendence of all forms of difference, scaling up from peace on the peninsula to cosmopolitan peace among all nations and peoples. This operation transforms Korea’s tragic and dark associations with the Cold War into a modern and future-oriented symbol that rescues (South) Korea from the margins of world history and places it at the center. Nature and

biodiversity have played a key part in South Korean resignifications of the DMZ, producing a hybrid figure that at once naturalizes peace as universal and also pacifies nature as a symbol of an organic moral order.¹³

When I looked to the anthropological literature for guidance on how to approach peace analytically, I found it to be curiously attenuated. Liisa Malkki, in her ethnography of everyday forms of humanitarianism among Finnish aid workers, writes, “peace...is conspicuously not an anthropological category” (2015: 92). In contrast, peace and conflict studies is a wide and diverse field, but, like anthropology, it has tended to focus on the conflict/post-conflict binary more than it has centered on peace *per se*. Erica Weiss, in her ethnographic research on Israeli conscientious objectors, notes that “militarism has been far more theorized than pacifism” (2012: 86). Both Weiss and Malkki are ambivalent about whether peace deserves to be theorized, suggesting that this absence of theorization is perhaps “legitimate” (Weiss 2012: 86) and “perhaps for good reasons” (Malkki 2015: 92), but both also insist that peace requires greater ethnographic attention—for Weiss, to ask how it challenges the state’s monopoly over legitimate violence, and for Malkki, to understand the cultural specificities of peace and its tendency to be “readily infantilized and thus depoliticized” (104).

I share the ambivalence that both Malkki and Weiss express in their approaches to peace because of its “fuzzy and sentimental” associations (Malkki 2015: 104), which are part of the aesthetics of peace in South Korea, and also because of a well-honed anthropological skepticism to anything purporting to be universal—in the sense of ubiquitous or timeless. Yet, as Anna Tsing (2005) usefully suggests, the ethnographic analysis of “actually existing universalisms” requires grappling with the social significance of universals in the everyday lives of anthropologists’ interlocutors as well as in our own knowledge production. As she writes, slyly invoking a universal register, “the universal offers us the chance to participate in the global stream of humanity. We can’t turn it down” (1).

The simultaneous universality of peace as a concept and its nonexistence as an anthropological category may be explained by the fact that it has always been hiding in plain sight. War (and peace) has been a feature in the history of modern anthropology since its origins in early twentieth-century Europe, and the disciplinary focus on social organization and kinship in small-scale societies was conditioned in part by the crisis of modernity brought on by the conflict and violence of World War I. Marcel Mauss, who lost many of his friends and colleagues in the war, famously concluded his treatise on the gift with an allegory of King Arthur’s Round

Table, and a reflection on the relationship between exchange and peace: “Societies have progressed in so far as they themselves, their subgroups, and lastly, the individuals in them, have succeeded in stabilizing relationships, giving, receiving, and finally, giving in return. To trade, the first condition was to be able to lay aside the spear” (Mauss 1990 [1924]: 105).

Thus, peace may not be an anthropological category like exchange, kinship, or religion, but it exists as part of the implicit comparative epistemologies of anthropology (beyond sociobiological categories of “peaceful” and “warlike” societies). Like conflict and power, moreover, peace is inseparable from colonial and postcolonial histories and the material and epistemological violence anthropologists have abetted and resisted. Peace also partakes of “the universal,” that which we “cannot not want, even as it so often excludes us” (Tsing 2005: 1; citing Gayatri Spivak). And in that way, like justice, it informs many of the questions we ask about the relevance of our work to political futures and underlies the progressivist impulse in much of contemporary anthropology and cultural studies.

“Peace” appears most explicitly in the work of Bruno Latour in his rejection of the “perpetual peace” of Kantian cosmopolitanism. Building on the concept of cosmopolitics coined by Isabelle Stengers, he offers a new kind of peace but, unlike Malkki and Weiss, expresses no reservations about peace’s legitimacy, sentimentality, or fuzziness. Instead, he posits what he calls a “true peace”—as opposed to the “fake peace” of the liberal, Eurocentric world order—which will be the outcome of what he calls the “war of the worlds” (2002), in which plural sciences (as opposed to singular Science) will overcome the Enlightenment reduction of the pluriverse to a universal logic based on a singular Nature. In a less agonistic vein, Arturo Escobar’s offers “peace-with-justice,” a central part of his theory of the “ecology of difference,” which refers to “a set of economic, cultural, and ecological processes that bring about a measure of justice and balance to the natural and social orders” (2008: 17).

How is it that peace can foreclose theorizing, on the one hand, and also become an object of it, on the other? One answer may be that the peace of humanitarianism and pacifism cannot escape its own impossibility because of the overwhelming evidence in our contemporary world that state violence and human warfare cannot be overcome. It is for this reason, as Malkki observes, that peace can be accused of evacuating history and also can be “readily infantilized” (2015: 104). But the peace of Latour and Escobar returns a hopeful orientation to anthropology through what Ghasan Hage calls “alter-politics,” a mode of critical anthropology that centers

radical alterity. This is an optimistic view of how the study of difference can lead to new conceptual, political, and ethical possibilities—“we can be other than we are” (2012: 300; see Miyazaki 2006 on hope in social theory).

The peace imaginaries and processes that appear in this book hinge between pessimism and optimism—constituting what might be called a “fuzzy peace.” Fuzzy here is not of the cute and fuzzy variety (though it can be that), but fuzzy in the sense of incipient, residual, and emergent formations, affects, and structures of feeling (Williams 1976). It emerges out of a space of (im)possibility—between the impossibility of cosmopolitan peace in the liberal internationalist, militaristic order of things and the possibilities opened by a cosmopolitical peace in the more-than-human modes of relating that I experienced with my interlocutors. Fuzzy peace is, in this way—like ethnography and our (im)possible relationship to our own universalisms—a practice of sensing the outlines of emergent worlds and pulling them momentarily into focus.

In contemporary South Korea, the unstable distinctions between war/peace and conflict/post-conflict are already blurry, and the DMZ region is now a site where military/civilian spaces are hybridizing and physical borders are shifting dramatically. In this context, peace is a ubiquitous yet ambiguous and inherently multiple concept. This is the condition of unending war, in a gray zone of “peacelessness” (N. Kim 2017: 220), what I frame in the following pages as peace under erasure.

Peace

Despite the persistence of hardline anti-Communist sentiments among some South Koreans, after more than seventy-five years of division, many express an openness to alternative ways of thinking about war, peace, division, and unification, and these visions have embraced a hopeful, speculative, and non-prescriptive logic. Samuel Collins cogently identifies this cultural mood of hope as “simultaneously future-oriented and retrograde.” This hope, in his assessment, points to “the achievement of a unified Korea that is at the same time a return to the unified past. But, importantly, this is not recourse to an impotent nostalgia or a refusal to change with changing times” (2013: 140). This shift in the politics of unification marks a turn away from the desire for the restitution of an organic ethnic nation (Grinker 1998) to a more prospective, post-ideological, and potentially generative futurity.

The DMZ is a screen on which these multiple and heterotopic visions and desires have been projected. Whereas in Western representations of

the DMZ a simplistic juxtaposition of war and nature frames it as ironic, in many South Korean narratives, there is an added pathos for those who cannot help but value the hopeful vitality that has emerged out of the tragedy and traumas of war and national division. “The DMZ Lives!” (DMZ는 살아있다) is the telling title of a 2013 MBC television documentary series on the topic. This is the sentimental core of cultural representations of the DMZ in South Korea, where peace has been, for more than half a century, *sous rature*, or under erasure. Following Jacques Derrida’s Heideggerian formulation, to consider peace under erasure is to deconstruct its metaphysical presence while also acknowledging its indispensability and inadequacy as a signifier (Derrida 1976). It is an aspiration and an idea that lacks a clear referent or telos.

While there is widespread desire, especially among progressive activists, for positive peace and the values of justice and freedom it represents, within both the pragmatic politics of engagement and the utopian politics of ethnonationalist recovery, it has always existed in dialectical relationship to unending war and capitalist hegemony.¹⁴ In fact, the transformation of the DMZ region into the touristic PLZ in 2007 is part of a wider politics of memory in South Korea. Sheila Miyoshi Jager and Jiyul Kim argue that “South Korea’s post–Cold War and post–Korean War consciousness [shifted] from a ‘war’ narrative to a ‘peace’ narrative...[which] also brought a fundamental reevaluation of US–South Korea relations” (2007: 264). They link a “peace politics” ushered in by the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003–8) to a pan-Korean nationalism that reframed the Cold War mutual defense posture of the United States–ROK alliance against the common enemy of North Korea into a pre–Korean War spirit of national defense that allies all Koreans, North and South, against foreign aggressors, including Japanese and US empires. This shift also entailed a change in the commemoration of war—instead of the national remembrance of June 25 (the day that North Korean forces attacked the South), July 27, Armistice Day, has gained in increasing symbolic relevance as an opportunity to foreground a “progressive peace system between the two Koreas” (Cho Hui-yŏn, cited in Jager and Kim 2007: 258).

As “peace” became a keyword in South Korean state discourses and resignifications of post–Cold War nationalism, however, it also became commodified and simplified. Seunghei Clara Hong (2015), in her analysis of the war memorial at No-Gun-Ri, rightly asks, “What peace, whose peace?” observing that peace is presented as “an empty, abstract concept, devoid of any political or ideological value” (196). The detached concept of peace

seemed to take on more concrete directions with the unprecedented dialogue and engagement between President Moon Jae-in of South Korea and Kim Jong Un of North Korea, starting with the Panmunjom Declaration of April 2018. That mood of euphoria was short-lived, however, and for peace activists in Korea and elsewhere who advance a notion of peace beyond that of the liberal internationalist order, it remains the case that whatever form peace takes for the two Koreas, it will likely exceed that of a state-centric peace treaty and fall short of any idealized vision of national unification.

The political logics of peace and unification have multiplied over the course of the past seven decades of the division, along a wide spectrum of positions, from left-wing to right-wing, from the prewar generation to cosmopolitan millennials. Whether peace precedes or follows unification and whether peace without unification is an acceptable goal are topics of endless debate, even as, for many South Koreans, the status of the division and the threat of North Korea typically exist far from their everyday concerns. Sociologist Hyun Ok Park, however, argues that a capital-driven “transnational form of Korean unification” (2015: 7) has already been achieved, during the Sunshine Policy era. She critiques this form of unification (through neoliberal capital) and trenchantly captures the contemporary moment in which “the appeal for Korean unification has been reconfigured into a transnational form by the new global system of neoliberal capitalism and its utopian politics” (288). For Park, the “national utopia” of mass liberation that characterized the reunification imaginaries for the leftist democratization movement of the 1970s and 1980s (민중운동; *minjung undong*) has entirely given way to the “market utopia” of the 1990s, particularly in light of the Asian financial crisis and the embrace of free trade as the solution for both economic crises: South Korea’s crisis capitalism, and North Korea’s crisis of economic isolation in the post-socialist world.¹⁵ During the Sunshine Policy decade, the DMZ was the literal site of engagement, where the peace of ethnonational restitution was actively transformed into the peace of unification through capital (H. O. Park 2015: 195).

In fact, one reason that progressive administrations have not been a boon for the DMZ’s conservation is because, in the scenario of inter-Korean cooperation, the DMZ’s nature could be seen as an impediment to economically driven unification. It is no surprise, then, that during the hawkish administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye, when the enmity between the two Koreas was at an all-time high, plans to turn the DMZ into a peace park or biosphere reserve were seen as worthy and exciting. Those administrations were also periods in which DMZ ecotourism was

actively promoted and pursued at all levels of government, from national to regional levels. As soon as Moon Jae-in's engagement policy gained a foothold, however, the significance of the DMZ as an ecological asset radically diminished. A sense of foreboding among those who value protection of the DMZ's ecology was made apparent to me at a forum on the topic, held at the National Assembly building in July 2018. There, Choe Jae Chun (Ch'oe Jae Ch'ŏn), professor of ecology at Ewha Womans University and the former head of the National Institute of Ecology, described his discordant reaction to the April 2018 inter-Korean summit and the possibility of peace on the peninsula: "In this mood of interKorean 'thawing,' many people are feeling their hearts beating with anticipation (가슴이 벌렁벌렁). Instead, mine was beating with dread (가슴이 철렁철렁). There are twenty roads and rail lines that have been severed by the DMZ—it's a very thin and vulnerable space."

Making Peace with Nature

In the shadow of these global geopolitical dramas and domestic policies, numerous scholars, bureaucrats, environmentalists, and journalists in South Korea and transnationally debate the future of the DMZ and its sustainable development—particularly regarding how to include local residents in the process while creating as small a human footprint as possible. In contrast, I sought to understand how knowledge of the DMZ's nature and the biodiversity that it hosts was being produced, valued, and leveraged.

In chapter 1, I unpack the ubiquity and polysemy of discourses of peace in relation to the DMZ's nature and examine how its ecological exceptionalism opened new conceptual and material possibilities for South Koreans. In these new peace imaginaries, "nature" (자연; *chayŏn*) and "life" (생명; *saengmyŏng*; "life" or "living beings") served to defamiliarize politics as usual and reoriented the scale of perception from the national division to the global or cosmopolitan, and this reorientation was experienced and framed as both progressive and hopeful. Yet, in these discourses, life or nature served a symbolic function that could be instrumentalized for human political preoccupations, particularly through the state's promotion of the PLZ. This market-driven logic simplified and singularized "nature" as a commodity and attached it to an abstract and ahistorical notion of peace.

In contrast to the dehistoricizing simplification and the utopian teleology of the PLZ, the ecologists I worked with were highly attuned to the multiple timescapes and material changes taking place in the CCZ,

where the majority of scientific research takes place. When I first met Kim Seung Ho, founder and director of the small NGO, DMZ Ecology Research Institute (DERI), in October 2011, I asked about the relationship between the DMZ's nature and peace, at a moment of heightened tensions between the two Koreas. Kim's answer revealed that peace needn't be only human oriented. According to him, peace had "nothing to do with North or South, leftwing or rightwing." He asserted that those parties interested in the DMZ's ecology were oriented toward political interests that could only understand the DMZ's ecological life as a means, not an end. He went on to say, "Regarding the concept of peace—well, ultimately, if you're talking about science—science is about making things concrete (구체화), so if ideology (이데올로기; i.e., Cold War politics) tries to include science, peace is exceedingly difficult. Therefore, when referring to the DMZ's peace, [politicians] are only talking about political peace. For me, what seems more important is biological peace (생물학적 평화)."

Kim's notion of biological peace offers a key analytic for this book. He highlighted the fact that "peace" is not only a human construct, but also one that privileges human protagonists. My gloss of "biological" is a rough translation of what Kim more literally referred to as "life-sciences peace." In other words, peace as understood through scientific knowledge of biological life forms. Biological peace therefore differs from other peace and life discourses in South Korea, but it also contributes to the heterogeneity of ideas that come together under that banner. These include state-centric discourses that instrumentalize nature for peaceful engagement, environmentalist projects that defend the DMZ's rare nature in the name of a progressive vision of peace and life against the forces of neoliberal development, and the notion of biological peace, which displaces South Korean politics of the national division and reformulates peace by centering nonhuman nature.

In my rendering, biological peace is related to a biocentric vision embodied in Aldo Leopold's "land ethic" (1989 [1949]) and draws on South Korean discourses and practices of life philosophy (생명사상; *saengmyŏng sa-sang*). It also resonates with the peace of cosmopolitics, as mentioned earlier. Cosmopolitics is oriented around a rejection of Kantian metaphysics and his vision of cosmopolitanism, framed as a perpetual peace grounded in Enlightenment reason and universal science. According to Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers, John Law, and others, this "one-world" vision of universal peace has been imposed coercively on the non-West. In contrast, a cosmopolitical response (Stengers 2005) submits a non-ethnocentric,

non-Eurocentric, and non-anthropocentric vision of peace that promotes a pluriverse of relations, irreducible to a single cosmos or world. From one world to many, from worlds to worldings, from a singular Nature to multi-naturalism, both the ontological turn and multispecies ethnography have found inspiration in emergent entanglements of humans and nonhumans, which include animate and inanimate forces.

Kim's statement draws a distinction between the peace of politicians and the peace of nature, associating the former with ideology and the latter with science. This statement might suggest that he is invested in the Enlightenment logics of objective science that Latour and his colleagues have strenuously critiqued. As I discuss in more ethnographic detail in the chapters that follow, however, for Kim, science's concreteness is not necessarily derived from an underlying universal truth. Rather, it is the concreteness itself that grounds peace in practices of scientific observation and data gathering in ways that recall Lévi-Strauss's famous discussion of the "science of the concrete" from *The Savage Mind* (1966).

A former member of the DERI complained to me on more than one occasion that the problem with the group was its research was purely descriptive and wasn't guided by any theory. In contrast to his privileging of a certain kind of epistemological value, I found fertile connections between the quotidian practices of my interlocutors in their entanglements with nonhuman others and the contributions of feminist science and technology studies scholars such as Karen Barad, Vinciane Despret, and Donna Haraway, whose notions of "relational ontology" (Barad 2007), ethical "enacting" (Despret 2013), and "becoming with" (Haraway 2008) foreground the intra-active agencies of humans and nonhumans. In her research with natural scientists, feminist philosopher Despret refers to ethical forms of knowledge production as "enacting," and I found that South Korean ecologists engage in practices that could be described in similar terms. Enacting, she writes, "blurs the clear cut divide between knowing subject and known object: Scientists and animals are fleshly creatures which are enacted and enacting through their embodied choreography. This is not only an epistemological issue it is a political one and an ontological one" (2013: 69). A focus on my interlocutors' practices of data gathering, observation, and their quotidian encounters with the nonhumans they study reveals biological peace to be a process that often entails the decentering of human exceptionalism.¹⁶

The Infrastructure of Division

It is telling that Choe Jae Chun framed his concern for the DMZ's ecological protection around infrastructural links between the two Koreas. When people think about development of the DMZ or in the DMZ region, it invariably has to do with transportation infrastructures that will provide the material basis for human connection. The discourses of peace (평화; *p'yŏnghwa*), mutual understanding (소통), and exchange and cooperation (교류와 협조) all depend on these links, particularly roads and rail lines.¹⁷ But this infrastructure is not just about inter-Korean connections—it has also shaped the debate around the CCZ and Border Area when it comes to DMZ-related tourism and economic development.

Although both Gangwon and Gyeonggi Provinces are actively planning for their central roles and locations in a unified peninsula, until that time, their more immediate goals are focused on enhancing economic development through tourism. To draw more visitors to the Border Area, the central government's 2011 Comprehensive Plan for Border Development (2011–30) has entailed the expansion of roads and rebuilding of defunct rail links as well as a DMZ-wide trail, called the Pyeonghwa Nuri Trail (평화누리길; Peace World Trail) that has been expanded since the 2018 Panmunjom Summit to include Peace Trails inside the actual DMZ.¹⁸

Early in my fieldwork, I came across the word *inp'ŭra* (인프라) frequently, and it took me a moment to realize that it was a transliterated abbreviation for “infrastructure.” *Inp'ŭra* was what the “local people” (지역주민) wanted and what had been denied them during the many decades that they lived under the tightest of militarized restrictions due to national security concerns. *Inp'ŭra* referred primarily to transportation infrastructure—roads, bridges, rail lines, and bike paths that would connect their villages to their regional capitals, but most importantly to the flows of capital emanating from the Seoul metropolitan area.

Undeniably, for local residents, the lack of infrastructure development has been central to their feelings of abandonment and isolation, particularly for those in the remote villages and mountainous areas of Gangwon Province. In Gyeonggi Province, which has benefited from its proximity to Seoul, infrastructure, particularly trains and railroads, has been a frequently deployed symbol used by local and central governments to represent future unification. But it also reflects the urgency local residents feel about their cultural and social distance from the nation. In the post-Cold War DMZ era, therefore, military infrastructures and civilian infrastructures exist

side by side, and they are materially potent symbols deployed by the state in ways that spatially and culturally define the twenty-first century South Korean borderlands.

What I refer to as the “infrastructure of division” was installed during the 1960s and became increasingly fortified during that decade. In coordination with the state’s anti-Communist juridical and political projects, it was designed to prevent and disrupt flows—of people, products, media, and ideologies. The physical elements of this peacekeeping spatial order include barbed wire, landmines, guard posts, tank barriers, trenches, surveillance cameras, bases and military installments, firing ranges, training grounds, ammunitions storage facilities, and the like. It has been remarkably successful, but its near impermeability has led to the evolution of other circuits—as North Koreans seek escape via northern routes into China, for instance, or the citizens of Pyongyang rig their television sets to pick up South Korean soap operas (see S.-Y. Kim 2011).

The brutal aesthetics of the division infrastructure, which are easily commodified by dark tourism into romanticized images—such as camouflage paint peeling off the facades of concrete barriers, shallow trenches lined with army-green sandbags, or the ubiquitous barbed wire and landmine warning signs—underscore the past temporality of the DMZ as a Cold War holdover, violently and irrationally impeding co-ethnic amity and neoliberal capitalism’s triumphant, borderless world.¹⁹ For the South Korean state, this territorial problem is also an economic problem—infrastructural connections linking South Korea to North Korea would open up more efficient land routes to Eurasia for South Korean products, as well as gas pipelines from Russia into the fossil fuel-starved peninsula. At the regional level, the Military Installations Protection Districts (MIPD; 군사시설보호구역) are defined by their distance from the MDL. The area, which constitutes 5 percent of South Korea’s territory, encompasses more than 90 percent of Paju City, Yeoncheon County, and Cheorwon County, which all exist within fifty kilometers of the MDL (Gelézeau 2013: 17). The injunction against infrastructure development is one of the primary restrictions on economic growth in the border areas and produces an outsized sense of distance from the metropolitan center: Paju City Hall, for instance, is just thirty-one miles from Seoul City Hall, and Cheorwon County Hall is just fifty-eight miles.

South Korean president Moon Jae-in’s peace economy and inter-Korean engagement policy took on material substance through infrastructure. Removing landmines and the spectacular implosion of a guard post in 2018 were both examples of the South Korean state transitioning from the militarized

infrastructure of contested sovereignty, containment, and division to the capitalist infrastructure of transnational flows, or inter-Korean exchange and cooperation. But Moon's highly symbolic moves to demilitarize the DMZ were not a far departure from nearly every previous president since Roh Tae-woo's *Nordpolitik* engagement policy in 1989. As Valérie Gelézeau notes, the "growth of the South Korean Capital Region is now being driven towards the north" (2013: 32), and the infrastructure of division no longer privileges stasis and blockage, but rather promotes the possibilities of connection, like the road connecting the Kaeseong Industrial Complex to the southern side of the DMZ, and the Dongui and Gyeongui rail lines, however restricted or unutilized they may be.

In fact, the lines separating the various military and civilian areas in the DMZ have shifted continually over the years, liberating formerly military restricted areas. Even the barbed wire marking the southern and northern limit lines has been moved by soldiers on either side of the border, narrowing the DMZ itself. Thus, as the South Korean Border Area liberalizes, two overlapping regimes of power and spatial control—sovereign exception and biopolitical discipline (Foucault 2009)—are being materialized through infrastructures of bordering and circulation, of militarization and capitalism. These infrastructures reflect what Wendy Brown identifies as a "series of paradoxes" in a "post-Westphalian order" (2010: 21). Central to these paradoxes are the contradictory values of closure and openness. Despite the globalization of capital, and in light of proliferating transnational flows, states are erecting militarized barriers or installing, in the case of the United States–Mexico border, a "tactical infrastructure" (Jusionyte 2018) to counteract perceived threats from non-state actors.

These tactical infrastructures may be less monolithic than the infrastructure of division at the DMZ, but they make the DMZ seem less anachronistic than it may have in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Indeed, US president Donald Trump's June 2019 invocation of the Korean DMZ as a "real border" and an implicit model for his United States–Mexico border wall suggests how these seeming anachronisms may become reconciled and normalized should protectionist ideologies and xenophobic nationalisms continue to gain political legitimacy.²⁰ If other states are fortifying their borders against refugees and illicit commodities to make them more akin to the DMZ, the DMZ, over the decades, has become spatially, politically, and symbolically a hybrid military-capitalist zone, with tactical openings to allow for limited exchanges between the two Korean states, especially during periods of diplomatic warming.

Fieldwork in “Naturalcultural Borderlands”

My research for this book was limited to areas accessible to me as an ethnic Korean woman with a US passport. Although tours to North Korea have grown in number over the past decade, most of them are explicit in prohibiting participants from writing about their experiences in scholarly publications. Given my commitment to fine-grained, long-term ethnography, researching the DMZ from the North Korean side could only offer data of a fly-by-night nature. This book therefore focuses on the South Korean side of the DMZ and, more specifically, on what might be called the South Korean “naturalcultural borderlands” (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010: 548), the areas immediately abutting the southern side of the DMZ.

The data that inform my analyses were gathered between 2011 and 2016, primarily in the CCZ, the area immediately south of the DMZ proper. These limitations of access are also ones that constrain South Korean ecological researchers, only one of whom has explicit permission from the UN Command to conduct intermittent ecological surveys inside the DMZ (K.-g. Kim 2010). It was not until 2014 that annual surveys of the DMZ were conducted by the National Institute of Ecology. Despite this fact, the DMZ brand had been building into a powerful one that dozens of DMZ-related organizations, NGOs, and projects were capitalizing on for several years, referring to their work on the DMZ, even as their actual purview was restricted to the CCZ. This slippage is reinforced in recent policy discourses that include the CCZ in what is designated as the “DMZ region,” which encompasses the CCZ and the Border Area (접경지역).

The entire region is directly affected by the national division, militarism, and the shifting political economy related to the DMZ as it has been defined over the past six decades—as both the military forward areas (전방지역) and as a neoliberal economic frontier, generating increasingly hybrid spaces of division and connection, of militarized security and capital flows. This invention of the DMZ region in South Korea has very little to do with North Korea and everything to do with particular economic, political, and social conjunctures on the southern side of the border, in the contexts of national and transnational environmental movements and economic neoliberalization.

Considering the large expanse of the DMZ region, I had to make choices about what I would do and where I would spend my time. It would be impossible to achieve a holistic survey of the DMZ. There are eight extant villages in the CCZ and two inside the DMZ proper—one South Korean,

the other North Korean. Regular access to any one of those villages would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to secure. I therefore sought to align my fieldwork with that of ecological researchers conducting regular fieldwork in the DMZ region. The DMZ Ecology Research Institute was the only NGO that regularly monitored the ecology in the CCZ, with a focus on the western coast, north of Paju, where the organization's office is located. I participated in nearly all of their weekly research and educational activities between October 2011 and June 2012, as well as during shorter visits between 2013 and 2015. I draw on this research in chapter 2, where I discuss the small irrigation ponds that they analyzed in the spring and summer months.

I also spent time in Cheorwon, a county in Gangwon Province, which, due to its position in the center of the peninsula and its history as a rice-growing region, was a political and economic nexus in the premodern and colonial eras. Because of its proximity to the border and former inclusion in the militarily restricted CCZ, Cheorwon, along with other northern counties in Gangwon Province, has been viewed as culturally inferior and economically stagnant. High-speed transportation infrastructure has recently made Cheorwon a convenient day trip from Seoul and a destination for domestic tourists from the capital. It offers a rich and multilayered history as the ancient capital of Taebong, a state ruled by King Gung Ye during the later Three Kingdoms period (892–936), a central transportation hub during the Japanese colonial period (1910–45), a highly contested battleground during the Korean War, and, today, a primary wintering site for endangered birds.

Multiple stays in Cheorwon between 2012 and 2015 permitted me to witness rapid changes to infrastructure as well as to learn of how the lives and lifeways of residents were being caught up in state and regional projects related to the PLZ. Plans for ecotourism and conservation have been heavily promoted as promissory notes for the economically depressed areas in Gangwon Province, where the category of “local people” has become a key term in policy and tourism discourses. Whereas ecologists focused on nonhuman biota in the DMZ region, I learned from residents about the contested meanings of “environment,” which is more closely associated with military waste and landmine pollution than with the pristine picture of the PLZ (chapter 4). In addition, because of Cheorwon's significance as a winter habitat for endangered birds, I came to know Dr. Lee Kisup, an ornithologist and expert on cranes and waterbirds. I participated in his Waterbird Network Korea and Korea Crane Network, overlapping groups

of South Korean bird lovers that promote research on the birds and public awareness about their highly endangered status.

The period in which much of this research took place was marked by heightened tensions between the two Koreas. A conservative turn in South Korean politics in 2008 had effectively dismantled the previous decade's Sunshine Policy. The reversal—from engagement to sanctions and from rapprochement to rebuke—also witnessed the inflation of the stature and value of the DMZ's nature in South Korea, as the hawkish and neoliberal government actively leveraged the zone's symbolics of peace for both political and economic ends. During this dark period of political stalemate, if not crisis, centrists and progressives alike continued using the phrase “peaceful utilization of the DMZ” to advance unification efforts. At the same moment, an ecological turn in South Korean environmental movements, as well as the “green agenda” of then president Lee Myung-bak (2008–13), created new funding opportunities for studies of the DMZ, especially in 2011, when he pushed for the southern half of the DMZ to be designated a UNESCO biosphere reserve. That effort was ultimately stymied by North Korea, but Lee's successor, Park Geun-hye, continued to pursue the possibilities of peaceful utilization when she announced her plans to turn the DMZ into an international peace park in 2013.

In contrast to policy makers and bureaucrats who sought to “make peace with nature” by instrumentalizing the DMZ's ecologies in the name of fundamentally nationalist or statist projects, others who engaged directly with the ecologies of the DMZ were “making peace with nature” through other means—by elevating the significance of nonhuman life and foregrounding reconciliation, not between North Koreans and South Koreans but between humans and their environments. In these diverse ways, the existence of the DMZ's rare biodiversity provided the material and symbolic basis for a heterogeneous and collective peace imaginary that ultimately defied tidy binaries of anthropocentric and biocentric, anthropomorphic and multispecies, nationalist and cosmopolitical. In fact, part of the persistent allure of the DMZ's nature is that it is inseparable from the national division and the geopolitics of the (post-)Cold War, yet the biodiversity that lives there can never be fully captured by human knowledge practices and ideologies.

Eventually, my ethnographic gaze homed in on three assemblages: ponds, avian flyways, and landmines. I frame these assemblages as alternative infrastructures in that they are human–nonhuman–technical networks that exist in relation to the infrastructure of division, while generating other

flows, circulations, and temporalities. These flows, circulations, and temporalities, in turn, often exceed the material and imaginative bounds of capitalist logics, sovereign power, ethnonationalist teleologies, and anthropocentric metaphysics. These alternative infrastructures reveal the DMZ's nature to be impure and endangered but also cosmopolitical. In contrast to prevalent discourses of ecological exceptionalism in South Korea and internationally, which frame the DMZ's nature as pure, timeless, and symbolically representative of a future Korea, ponds, avian flyways, and landmines offer modes of imagining peace beyond the human.

The Chapters

Chapter 1, "In the Meantime of Division," analyzes how the DMZ's nature came to be recognized as valuable for a diverse range of social actors, particularly in the early 2000s. If discourses of ecological exceptionalism abstracted the DMZ's nature as a symbol of peace, what I call the "the meantime of division" designates a specific spatiotemporality in the late-Cold War era. South Korean desires for peace and the impossibility of imagining geopolitical amity outside of capitalist relations created the conditions in which the DMZ and its rare nature took on significant symbolic and material value. With the waxing and waning of inter-Korean détente and cooperation, the actually existing biodiversity of the DMZ drew ecologists and others to the border areas, precisely because of its "substantiality" (구체성). The CCZ in particular became a site of encounter, with metropolitan environmentalists, state bureaucrats, local people, tourists, and others meeting each other in the borderlands and, in effect, discursively and performatively producing the DMZ's nature. These performances take place in a meantime that is not static but oscillating—between aspirations and hopes for forward movement out of the present impasse and a resigned acceptance of the continuous deferral of peace. Chapter 1 frames the chronopolitics of actually existing biodiversity in the DMZ in a present and near future (Guyer 2007) that stands in contrast to revanchist Cold War ideological binaries that continue to influence division politics and dispensationalist imaginaries focused on a utopian future to come.

Chapter 2, "Ponds," introduces the Paju DMZ area, where agricultural fields dominate the landscape but where security restrictions require farmers to rely on premodern irrigation technologies in the form of *dumbeong* (돔뽕; small rainwater-fed irrigation ponds). These ponds are highly biodiverse, but the landscapes of the Paju DMZ area are also shifting, under

economic pressures to open the CCZ area to further inter-Korean cooperation and tourism and to exploit the land for more highly profitable crops. I frame *dumbeong* as negative infrastructure, in that they, and the knowledge produced about them, would not exist were it not for the infrastructure of division.

If these ponds help us to understand the DMZ's value as more than the site of inevitable inter-Korean economic cooperation and development, then chapter 3, "Birds," takes the avian flyways of black-faced spoonbills as a particular human–nonhuman–technical infrastructure that intervenes into the timeless ethnonationalist myths of primordial Korea. Like the ponds, the habitats of birds are protected by the division, but it does not mean that the birds transcend human politics through their eternal migratory journeys. Against unification imaginaries that frame the Korean nation as a family divided, I show how the division opens up spaces for "strange kinship" (Merleau-Ponty 2003: 214) between humans and avian creatures. This is accomplished through arduous conservation efforts of ornithological researchers and bird lovers who use visual technologies to understand and protect endangered birds who suffer from the effects of development, land reclamation, and climate change, even as they find temporary refuge in the militarized spaces of the DMZ area.

Lastly, chapter 4, "Landmines," shifts attention to a different kind of nonhuman assemblage through the framework of rogue infrastructures—these are constituted by the widespread problem of landmines in the CCZ area—where dozens of minefields exist and where the longevity of landmines terrorizes local residents. The long life spans of landmines introduce another chronopolitics of the meantime, against post-war narratives that frame mines as a problem of the past, or else as being safely contained within the DMZ. As peace and life discourses circulate through state policy and tourism ventures, the existence and persistence of landmines reveal how US policies that maintain the "Korea exception" to keep mines on the Korean peninsula in the name of military security attempt to resignify landmines as humanitarian "peacekeepers," even as they extend the effects of the war into the present. Mines have widespread consequences for local people, killing and maiming residents, destroying families and livelihoods, restricting land use, and generating fear. At the same time, I suggest that a framing of mine victims as only abject subjects of the state's thanatopolitics misses the more complex ways that people exist within landmine-contaminated landscapes. The mines "protect" nature from human development, but they also have multiple and heterogeneous effects.

The Epilogue reflects on the DMZ's ecologies as an occasion to consider how to conceptualize peace as more-than-human. Viewed from a certain distance, de/militarized ecologies have become more normative than exceptional in the context of post-World War II military and capital expansion at a planetary scale. With this in mind, I suggest that biological peace is a necessary framework for appreciating the impure, polluted, and endangered life that exists. It is from this situated location that we can begin to reconfigure our relationships to nonhuman others and the Earth and begin to imagine peace beyond merely human politics.

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Notes

Introduction

- 1 “5,929 Species, 101 Endangered, Inhabit the DMZ,” press release, National Institute of Ecology, June 14, 2018, <http://www.me.go.kr/home/web/board/read.do?boardMasterId=1&boardId=874030&menuId=286>; accessed July 9, 2019.
- 2 Suk-Young Kim frames the DMZ as paradoxical because it is both a site of “man-made conflict and an environment of natural wildlife” (S.-Y. Kim 2011: 397), and historian Lisa Brady (2008) characterizes as ironic the fact that the Korean War and the national division have created the possibility for the flourishing of nonhuman biodiversity.
- 3 For the full text of the agreement, see Conference on Disarmament, “Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression and Exchanges and Cooperation between North and South,” March 25, 1992, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/KR%20KP_911213_Agreement%20on%20reconciliation%20non%20aggression%20and%20exchangespdf.pdf; accessed October 11, 2021.
- 4 President Roh Tae-woo (1987–93) was the first of several South Korean presidents with bold plans for the DMZ. He followed up his 1988 plan for an International Peace City in the DMZ with a detailed plan for a peace zone in 1989. His successor, Kim Young-sam (1993–98), proposed a DMZ nature park in 1994, followed by Kim Dae-jung’s (1998–2003) consideration of a DMZ peace park in 2001, Roh Moo-hyun’s (2003–8) designation of the Border Area as the PLZ in 2006 and proposal for a marine peace park in the Yellow Sea in 2007, Lee Myung-bak’s (2008–13) 2011 proposal for a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and Park Geun-hye’s (2013–16) plans for an international peace park in 2013. The recycling of the idea over the past thirty years has been remarkably consistent, so much so that it is both ironic and unsurprising that the international peace zone presented by President Moon Jae-in (2016–21) in his September 2019 speech to the UN General Assembly was notably similar to Roh Tae-woo’s 1989 peace zone.
- 5 See the South Korean Natural Environment Conservation Act of January 2016, Act No. 13885.
- 6 In 2019, important steps toward this goal were achieved, with the entry of the Gangwon Eco-Peace Biosphere Reserve and the Yeoncheon Imjin River Biosphere Reserve into the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB).

Although the designations do not guarantee successful implementation of conservation and sustainable development objectives, they provide significant international recognition of the biodiversity of the CCZ region. Whether and how the DMZ proper will be protected, however, remains an open question. At least for the near future, it seems certain that the economies of the border areas will be increasingly tied to the expansion of tourism, much of it linked directly to the DMZ's rare ecologies.

- 7 Eunjeong Kim (2017), in the context of disability rights in South Korea, critiques what she calls "curative violence," which imposes a normative form to the cured body. She interrogates the violence that "cure" imposes through the erasure of difference and the imposition of a teleological and eugenic temporality.
- 8 On double binds and creativity, see Cattellino (2010: 253).
- 9 According to a July 25, 2018, report by the South Korean news station JTBC, in spring 2019, there were sixty guard posts on the southern side, with thirty soldiers manning each one, for a minimum total of 1,800 troops. On the northern side, there are 160 guard posts with around ten thousand soldiers stationed. In addition, both North and South are armed with machine guns and rocket launchers and other heavy artillery (http://news.jtbc.joins.com/article/article.aspx?news_id=NB11670803; accessed August 20, 2018).
- 10 Jang-Hie Lee writes, "The DMZ is not an international public domain, but an area where imperium resides in the UNCMAC and dominium resides in both South and North Korea" (2001: 143).
- 11 For a critical historical and contemporary analysis of the KATUSA system, see Seungsook Moon (2010), who describes conscripted KATUSAs as a "cheap and reliable human resource that has stood in the place of American GIs, who are expensive in both the economic and political sense" (237). Moon also describes the shifting class and educational status of KATUSA soldiers, especially with the implementation by the South Korean military of a competitive test in 1982 (246) and how any privileges the KATUSA soldiers receive from serving in the US Army are offset by the entrenched racism and institutionalized inequities to which they are subject.
- 12 See D. Shin (2017) on the DPRK's consistent call for a peace treaty to replace what the DPRK characterizes as the "outdated and obsolete" Armistice Agreement.
- 13 Other globally circulating discourses connect nature and peace through bodies such as the UN Environment Programme, which promotes environmental peacebuilding. These projects tend to be inherently statist and internationalist, with the goals of peacebuilding defined within conventional political terms.
- 14 On peace as a process, see Arturo Escobar's *Territories of Difference* (2008). He theorizes "peace-as-justice," which, he writes, "should be seen as always in process, something that can be approached only asymptotically but can never really be reached" (17).
- 15 Park's critique of the post-Cold War is worth citing: "If the Cold War is to be understood not just as a military rivalry between superpowers but also as an

American project of establishing a capitalist hegemony, then the post-Cold War does not negate the Cold War order but reconfigures a global capitalist order marked by porous borders and neoliberal democracy” (6).

- 16 The terminology used by scholars to refer to nonhuman creatures has proliferated in multispecies ethnography and environmental humanities. In many instances, the terms “nonhuman,” “more-than-human,” “other-than-human,” and “multispecies” appear interchangeably. Although some writers eschew the term “nonhuman” because it implicitly reproduces human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism (see Pugliese 2020: 3–4 for a recent discussion), I am less inclined to do this because my ethnographic analysis centers the knowledge practices of my human interlocutors. I use “more-than-human” and “other-than-human” to characterize different worldings and performative relations, which emerge out of the ethical enactments that I analyze as key to understanding the lifeways and forms of nonhuman others. I reserve “multispecies” for describing relations that operate at the level of species (such as flyways) or when citing other scholars who use the term in ways that I find useful. But I am generally wary of the taxonomic assumptions embedded in species thinking.
- 17 As Suk-Young Kim notes in her analysis of Imjingak Peace Park near the western CCZ, trains are curiously ubiquitous “icons of mobility and stagnation” (2014: 148) in South Korean division politics and tourism. Train car relics and reconnected rail lines have become emblematic of the division and complex desires for unification, which now include both histories of trauma and playfully nostalgic kitsch (148 ff.).
- 18 Kang Chin-kyu (강진규) reported in *NK Kyōngje* on February 7, 2019, that 2.8 billion Korean won (US \$2.4 million) had been invested between 2011 and 2018. A revised budget of 1.3 billion won, covering 225 projects, was passed in 2019. Of those, 108 projects (totaling three trillion won) were earmarked for ecological and peace tourism, and twenty-one projects (totaling 512 trillion won) were targeted for enhancing and building transportation networks around the DMZ area (<https://www.nkeconomy.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=1028>; accessed February 10, 2019).
- 19 On “dark tourism,” see Lennon and Foley (2000) and Schwenkel (2006).
- 20 Margaret Talev reported on June 28, 2019, for *Bloomberg News* that “Donald Trump spoke admiringly of the Korean Peninsula’s demilitarized zone...making an implicit comparison with his own struggles to meet his top campaign promise and construct a wall on the US southern border.... ‘We may go to the DMZ, or the border, as they call it,’ he told reporters at the Group of 20 summit in Osaka, Japan. ‘That, by the way—when you talk about a wall, when you talk about a border, that’s what you call a border. Nobody goes through that border. Just about nobody. That’s called a real border’” (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-06-29/trump-calls-korean-dmz-a-real-border-compared-with-his-wall>; accessed September 22, 2019).