

Interview at the end of Tanzrecherche #17 Bonn

Sung-Im Her

1. Sung-Im, you have now spend 7 weeks in Bonn for your research entitled YOU ARE OKAY! What does the title mean?
I have been in lots of different counties last 10 years to perform and to travel. Specially, I have traveled often to UK where my partner is working. And whenever I pass border control I have very uneasy and unfriendly feelings from douana. Their main concern is why am I there and when will I be out of their country. It is very uncomfortable feeling to be judged by your own passport and this little booklet will show who is okay to be in and who isn't in other country.
2. Since the 1960s more than 20.000 nurses and miners came to NRW as immigrant workers. What do you know about the political circumstances?
Just after North-South Korea war, 1960s South Korea was considered as a poor country. People were starved and had no chance to study.
When Germany needed to have young workers who can work as mine workers and nurses, it was a big chance for Korean people. With the money they earned they could support their own family and their own country to be developed. What these workers have earned 10% of total South Korea's income and it made possible to make country to develop.
3. How did you prepare your residency? Tell me how you got in touch with these peoples. How did you find them? And how did you prepare the interviews? What did you search for?
I wanted to find an answer of "What's Home?", "Where do they feel Home or Can you make it?" which is the answer what I am searching for last ten years. I was curious if they feel Home in Germany or in Korea or don't feel Home nowhere.
I have contacted dispatched workers association, which located in Essen. They helped me to find nurses and mine workers who came to Germany half century ago and still based in NRW area.
4. Why did these Koreans come to Germany and what was their plan?
Most of them came to Germany to support their family in South Korea. With the money they sent, their family in Korea could eat properly and could continue study. All of them had 3 years of contract and after 3 years most of them decided to stay.
5. Do they feel they integrated in the German society?
People who I have interviewed felt very well integrated in German society.
They have received well and felt welcome in German society.
Most of them have lived 20 years in Korea and 50 years in Germany but still they feel having strong connection with Korean root.
Lots of their family has passed away and that gives less reason to go back to Korea. Korea is fast growing and changing country, when they go back lots of things have changed and they don't understand and don't recognize things anymore. Therefore they feel not belonging anywhere and being in betweeners.
6. What surprised you in the stories?
I found there were lots of family struggle in their stories . One partner wants to go back to Korea while the other doesn't want to, Family in Korea doesn't accept international marriage and refuse to meet them, different generational conflict which creates tension and distance between their relationship.

7. What is home for these immigrants?

Most of them who I interviewed was saying that they don't feel home anywhere. South Korea has been changed so much and they has been changed as well, they don't understand Korean way of living and thinking any more. It seems like they are living with the fact they are living in between the lands.

8. Do you see some parallels to your own story?

I wanted to find an answer from feeling no Home in anywhere. By looking close into their life story, I wanted to find the answer to my question "Where is Home?"

But people who I interviewed have except to being in betweeners and that became who they are. They are not Korean neither German.

7. What did you find out about your identity and your "home"

Korea is my root so I will be always Korean but I know that I don't belonging there anymore. As my country has been changed, I also have been changed. Being in betweeners became my identity. Sometimes it makes me confuse and uneasy.

Now I became Home of my child. I was 8 months pregnant when I was researching this project in Bonn and now my child is 3 months old. I realized that I am Home to my child. I am where he can crawl back when he feels uncomfortable, hungry, where he can find his comfort.

8. Today we grow up as a kind of "global citizen". What does this mean for our identity and felling of "home"?

Live in a city where you grew up is not common thing anymore.

People are constantly moving and meeting new people and finding their nest in different places. We are living in multinational, multicultural life. That gives much more complication in life but also could enrich our life.

9. For you as a performer, what is interesting about these questions?

I wanted to record interviewers voice and what is this abstract voice could bring to audience, how is this nonsense emotional voice could or could not effect German audience. But in fact, interviewers were not wiling to record their voice so I wrote down their story and made my own story line.

10. Your presentation was divided in 4 sections. How came this idea?

Before I make one complete piece, I like to make omnibus series of what was interesting and what I want to put in the piece.

13. Can you introduce Somang Lee? How was the collaboration? She was particularly important as collaborator to make all this visible in an abstract and non-narrative way on stage.

I met Somang in London. Her mother came to Germany as a nurse in 70th and somang was born in Germany. I could see oriental calligraphy drawing on her illustration, she developed simple method but powerful drawing which could embody my shadow. I was fascinated by how simple method could bring such a powerful image. I also interviewed her mother who is still a nurse in Stuttgart. For Somang, it was a chance to see how her mother's life through history and her history.

14. How did you deal with sound and music? (talk about how the idea came and who was the sound technician and what did you ask him to do?)

I asked what they were doing when they miss Korea. They were only 20 years old and they liked to hear most popular song by then. I found the most popular song in 60th and mix with mine machinery sounds. And also used "Pan sori" music which represent Korean vocal musical and which is also a solo music drama accompanied by a drummer.

It originated in 17th century, had been influenced by shamanistic songs and public entertainment.

Pansori has it's unique form and vocal method. It is a powerful and yet has a simple form.

Among Pan sori, I choose Gu-eum, which has no lyric but only thunder like voice.

15. About the content of the 4 sections. How did you start to transform all these stories into movement and action on stage? The first section was longing.

Through interview, I could sense lots of emotional feeling when they talk about their stories. I could imagine how hard it was to contact their family, friends and how they were missing them. Therefore I started with Longing. Longing starts with pure body and somang's simple illustration drawing which stays like tattoo on my body and wipes with water. For me it links with our past, memory path.

16. The second was stuttering.

Not able to understand and not able to say what they think would have been one of the most difficult thing for them. Stutter is speech disorder, repeating certain syllables, words or phrases. I found this is interesting state that mentally, physically so unsure, it come out stuttering and repeating same words again and again.

17. The third was stories.

Each interviewers story was very rich and intense. It was their history. I wanted to make a parallel line where their stories can meet mine. I had to create a story, which is dense and yet able to embrace the truth.

18. And finally home.

In the end of research, I was desperate to find the answer of what is Home. Dose it really exist? Maybe it was there long time ago and doesn't exist anymore?

I was working with So-Mang's illustration, and I found it very interesting.

The fact is, my shadow could merge into the illustration but not my actual body. As if my past is in the part of drawing and my actual body could just looking at it and can't get closer. As if my ideal Home was there but does not exist anymore.

19. What do you take with you after this research in Bonn? How do you want to develop this material? Are there any ideas for a concrete production?

I had such a freedom to create whatever came out after 7 weeks of research without any pressure. In the end Somang and I decided to have little showing so we invited Korean dispatched workers and German audience to open a common field to discuss.

I was 8 months pregnant when I started my first research in Bonn, It was challenging and also interesting moment for me to find what is physically possible. Now I would like to continue to research on relationship with my body and show and calligraphy drawing, body and language. I have 3 weeks residence in Seoul Dance Center this summer for my further research and also we are going to be a part of Danse elargie (Theatre de la Ville/ LG Art Center) this year.