Desiring America:
Ironic American Dream in Nora Okja Keller's Fox Girl

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1. Introduction

In The Mobility of Labor and Capital, Saskia Sassen provides a valuable examination of the global trend of massive migration and “proletarization” of women. Turning our attention toward root causes of ever increasing migration of women and away from popular American discourses that emphasize social problems caused by these migrants, Sassen examines the active role of First World countries in uprooting local women of the Third World. According to Sassen, it is the “linkage” between investing and industrializing countries that “facilitates the emergence of emigration as an option,” and the popularity of the US as a destination point for these migrating women is only natural, considering the profound amount of foreign investment of the US. (117-118). Extending Sassen’s analysis, Grace Chang also emphasizes the fact that “First World imperialism and development policy in the Third World have resulted in resource depletion, debt,
and poverty for many people in these nations” (3). Chang argues that “[t]he extraction of resources by the United States and other First world nations forces many people in the Third World to migrate to follow their countries’ wealth” (3).

In a way, both Sassen and Chang’s arguments suggest a new interpretation to the definition of American dream in the age of global migration. In 1931, James Truslow Adams, who first coined the term, American dream, defined American dream as following:

> dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. . . . It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (404)

Applied to Sassen and Chang’s theorization of root causes of US migration trend, Adams’s ideal of American dream raises two interesting questions. One is how the dream of ideal American land is extended to the Third World countries because of US intervention and investment in those countries. Second is how American dream, which promotes an equal social order for its members, turns into a powerful myth and fantasy to the potential migrants living in the Third World countries.

In search for partial answers to the above raised questions, I attempt a close reading of Nora Okja Keller’s Fox Girl. Keller depicts reciprocal yet unequal traffics of resources between America and South Korea through the portrayal of female protagonists’ migration story which reveals complicated causes that trigger the heroines’ aspiration for the movement toward America. Keller represents how the linkage between the US and South Korea is established through military intervention and military prostitution system, proving that the very establishment of US military bases “brings not only goods and information about life in the United