

North Koreans and the Rules of Art in South Korea

Outsiders, Identity and the Media

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Abstract

This thesis examines North Korean migrants' agency over the objective constraints caused by their categorization as 'defectors'. By analyzing the direct accounts of three North Korean artists residing in South Korea, this thesis explores the mechanisms they employ to develop their artistic career in a context where their identity is labelled. Current literature on North Korean migrants' social adaptation finds that their difficulties stem from various changes in migration policy. Yet, very few studies consider the individual steps that they might take during their adaptation process. Relying on Bourdieu's theory of practice, the idea of social identity and the concept of the 'outsider' in art, this study finds that North Korean migrants are exposed to diverse settings that can both prevent from and enable them to expand their agency. The thesis attempts to offer a more nuanced explanation of social adaptation by looking at the specific contexts in which individuals are collectively categorized whilst striving for their own individuality.

Keywords: North Korean migrants, categorization, 'defectors', artists, labelling, social identity, 'outsider', adaptation

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1 Introduction

1.1 Context of the Study

In January 2015 *The Guardian* published an article under the title “Artists low income and status are international issues” which featured reports of different artists associations in wealthy countries, such as Canada, Sweden and South Korea revealing how artists struggled financially. The myth of ‘the starving artist’ lies in the fact that the artistic profession is associated with precarious economy and unpaid labour. Moreover, art education tends to be discredited over science which is considered more ‘useful’ when it comes to find a well paid job. Yet, the emphasis that is put to achieve certain academic competencies or educational background varies across countries and cultures.

South Korea’s educational fever is a well known phenomenon and Korean parents consider education a tool for upward social mobility (Koo, 2016). However, in such a competitive society the best education does not guarantee the most sought white-collar job. Despite having one of the largest shares of people with tertiary education among OECD countries, youth unemployment is one of the major concerns of South Korean government (Choi, 2017).

Looking closely at the structure of the South Korean society, representing 0,06% of the total population are North Korean migrants (Ministry of Reunification [MOU], 2016). North Koreans’ unemployment rate is almost double that of south koreans with 5,1%. Furthermore, those who have a job earn less than two thirds of the average South Korean (MOU, 2016).

Academic research on the social adaptation of North Korean migrants emphasizes how they form an ‘outsider’ group in the South Korean society as they are seen as “not quite adjustable to the conditions of South Korean society and thus a social and budgetary burden” (Lankov, 2006: 105).

Considering how challenging their conditions seem and the economic instability of the artistic profession globally, North Korean migrants who are artists in South Korea make a very peculiar case that is worth of study. Moreover, the elitist and hermetic structure of the art field in South Korea makes artists alone a particular instance through which analyze and juxtapose power systems and individual agency.

North Korean artists face two main difficulties, first they have to deal with a stigmatized social identity and secondly they are completely new to the political, economic and social systems. Paradoxically, the condition of ‘outsider’ can also be their biggest advantage for their artistic career as the ‘defector’ identity can be commodified and reproduced in the context of a global art market. The struggles of the social adaptation of North Koreans migrants have been widely examined in academic studies. The larger amount of research tends to be focused on the objective causes for their integration problems into the South Korean society. Few studies include migrants’ subjective stories which take into account their agency over their life conditions (Kim, 2016). This thesis aims to explore the subjective perspectives to understand how North Korean migrants develop an artistic career, despite their apparent circumstantial constraints.

1.2 Study aim and Research Questions

The point of departure of this study is to examine the relationships between North Korean ‘defector’ artists and the art scene in South Korea where their identity is stigmatized. In order to understand how North Korean artists act on the South Korean art field this thesis asks: *How does the ‘defector’ identity operate for an artist’s career?* The verb ‘operate’ has been deliberately chosen, instead of ‘affect’, since it denotes a rather active and conscious process on behalf of the artists. This is significant to set the outlook for this thesis as it attempts to look beyond the determinism of the ‘defector’ identity and instead offer a dynamic and fluid understanding of identity categories. Two sub-questions are included to frame the analysis more specifically. These sub-questions consider the specific circumstances of North Korean migrants and the configuration of the artistic field in South Korea: What factors influence and determine their career choice? Which set of ideas does the ‘defector’ identity convey? The sub-questions serve as a basis for the literature review and help to establish, whether and how these subjects are featured in current debates. Consequently, these questions are also examined in the data collection process and analysis, to investigate how the artists have approached each of them and with what repercussions.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Understanding how North Korean migrants make decisions about how they use creatively their ‘defector’ status and the mechanisms available to them to attain their chosen career path

could contribute to several fields of study as migration, identity and art studies. Focusing on the artists' narratives this research seeks to explore both the limitations and the advantages of their causal factors and add to the literature on North Korean migrants' social adaptation.

1.4 Disposition

The main focus of this research are three North Korean 'defector' artists whose direct verbal and written accounts present the main body of data to be analyzed. The study introduces a qualitative study with data collected from semi-structured interviews and several casual meetings with three North Korean artists who currently live and work in Seoul. The interviews are examined thematically and according to the factors raised by the sub-questions. The available data is framed and juxtaposed within the context of the academic literature reviewed.

The first chapter of this thesis serves to introduce the research problem, the aim of the study and research questions. The second chapter reviews the available academic literature on North Korean migrants social adaptation, South Korean art scene, North Korean art and Nationalistic discourses on art which assist in setting the foundations of this study. It is followed by a theoretical discussion on social identity, Bourdieu's theory of practice and 'the outsider' as a concept in the art field. Chapter four provides a context of the art field in South Korea and maps its structure according to the Bourdieusian framework. Chapter five presents the study design, research methods, the interview process and ethical considerations. The findings are analyzed in chapter six and concluded in chapter seven which suggests several indications for further research.

2 Literature Review

2.1 North Korean Migrants

North Korean migrants social adaptation has been studied as part of research on national identity, migration policies, Korean unification, and in the light of socio-economic and cultural barriers (see Choi, 2005; Lankov, 2006; Jonsson, 2006; Kim and Jang, 2007; Chung, 2008; Seol and Seo, 2014; Han, 2016; Kim, 2016; Son, 2016; Suh, 2017). The main body of literature on North Korean migrants used for this thesis is within the disciplines of international relations and sociology as it discusses how South Korean government migration

policies have shaped public opinion and discourse on North Koreans migrants who have “faced different legal statuses and varied degrees of social acceptance” (Seon and Seo, 2014:19).

Academic research on the experiences of North Korean migrants’ adaptation into South Korea suggests that these are rather negative as their vulnerable circumstances put them at the centre of discriminatory social practices (see Bidet, 2013; Choi, 2005; Ko, Chung, and Oh; 2004, Lankov, 2006). Scholars emphasize unemployment and poor economic circumstances as the main reasons “for defectors’ psychological tensions which even made some people long after more secure life they had enjoyed in the North” (Jonsson, 2006: 172). Since some of the difficulties migrants experience when adapting to life in South Korea are, according to Jonsson, “reinforced by South Koreans’ prejudices towards North Korean defectors” (ibid: 173).

Article 3 of the South Korean constitution defines the whole Korean peninsula and its contiguous islands as a territory of the Republic of Korea. Therefore, ‘defectors’ should be “treated as repatriated nationals and this means that they are, not in theory, ‘immigrants,’ but citizens of South Korea” (Choi, 2005:3). Despite belonging to the same ethnic group, sharing a common history and possessing legal citizenship, North Koreans are situated as an ‘out-group’ within South Korean society having direct consequences for their social integration. Gil-Soo Han argues that South Korean discrimination against North Koreans “is the epitome of nouveau-riche nationalism” (2016: 134) which he identifies within the socio-economic aspect embedded in the discourse of Korean homogeneity and pure blood nationalism. Following the same line of argument Sara Ah Son frames the structural discrimination that leads to the social exclusion of North Koreans within “the construction of social reality through discourse” (2016: 173). According to Son, this is reflected in the continuous shifts of South Korean government’s settlement policies towards North Korean migrants (ibid:174). These changes in policy have resulted into multiple identity narratives present in South Korean institutions, the media and ultimately the society.

In this sense, the focus is placed on their social identity as ‘defectors’ which has varied across time. Byung-Ho Chung (2008) provides a historical account of the different social definitions that have been assigned to North Korean migrants and have affected their identity and adaptation strategies since the Korean war (1950-53), the early stages of the North Korean regime and the Cold War period (1962-1993). During the Cold War, their

political value was seen as a scarce commodity and they were perceived as heroes, administered by the Minister of Defence North Koreans were placed “under the Special Relief Act for Patriots and Heroes Who Returned to the State (kukka yugongja wöllnam kwisunja)”(Chung: 7). The overall number of North Korean migrants during this period was quite small, usually ten per year and they were part of the North Korean elite, diplomats or high ranking officials who had useful information and valuable skills in South Korea (Lankov 2006:108). However, since the mid 1990s due to the big famine and harsh conditions in the North, the number of North Koreans migrants increased dramatically. They came from poorer backgrounds and regions, “rather farmers, workers, and minor clerks from the borderland areas of North Korea” (Lankov:110). The rapid growth of North Korean migrants and their decreasing political value resulted in drastic cuts in the budget allocated for their resettlement and “the lowered support from the government, combined with the poverty and low social status, caused them to self-identify as second-class citizens or strangers”(Chung:9). Moreover, it was during this time that the media “began speaking of the migrants as “Escapees from the North” (t’albukja), a term that, until recently, was the most common way of referring to the North Korean migrants” (ibid).

The precariousness of the ‘defector’ identity is central to understand North Koreans unstable situation in South Korea as this is bound to the socio-historical context and the changes within South Korean legislation towards their reception. The newest term to refer to North Korean migrants is *saetonim* which translates as ‘new resident’ and was introduced in January 2005 as the South Korean government “tried to move away from politically charged Cold War terminology like “Defectors” or “Escapees” characteristics of these people” (Chung, 2008: 12). Yet, the term *talbukja* ‘escapee’ which was enforced since 1997 when “the South Korean legislature passed the Act on the Protection and Resettlement Support for the Residents Who Escaped from North Korea” (Chung: 10) which denotes their escapee and poverty conditions is still widely used. Despite being *saetonim* ‘new resident’ a more politically correct term, Han argues that some North Koreans “prefer to be called *talbukja* which better acknowledges their unhappiness with the North Korean regime and that they chose to come to South Korea as political refugees”(Han, 2016: 132).

Yi analyzes how the socio-lexical labelling of defectors has generated several narratives ranging from human rights, minorities, international conflict and media representations that contribute to “the fluctuating boundary of what it means to be a Korean” which “causes paradoxical ways of labeling defectors” (2017:8) as these create a complex and

ambiguous set of identities that affect their living experiences. Similarly Kim and Jang after conducting empirical research argue that “policies regarding *saeteomin*, which focus on the economic side, do not address the goal of assimilating them into South Korean society to become responsible citizens” (2007:21). To emphasize the particular conditions of North Korean migrants in South Korea the ‘defector’ identity must be understood as a relational concept to the shifting political context and the official definitions provided by the South Korean government. These definitions ultimately affect the attitudes of South Koreans towards North Korean migrants which consequently influence their life experiences. While there have been studies on North Korean migrants’ social adaptation (Chung, 2008; Kim and Yeol, 2014; Kim, 2016), none closely examines the particular case of artists.

Media Representation

When discussing the usage and the diverse array of terms to define North Koreans migrants some scholars mention the role of the South Korean media in constructing a negative image. Lankov observes that “some articles and interviews of defectors are so critical that they are reprinted in North Korea for use as propaganda material” (2006:123). Son discusses how in the early 2000s the South Korean press reported that North Korean spying activities presented a threat to national security (2016: 177). These episodes “were a blow for defectors struggling to achieve acceptance, as the official and media responses to the events highlighted the systemic failings in terms of monitoring defectors, who were thus by default constructed in threatening terms”(ibid). North Korean migrants regarded these media reports as an “‘attempt to paint defectors as spies’ and the ‘beginning of a witch hunt.’the atmosphere was more conducive to discursive treatment of North Koreans in South Korea as presenting a real security threat” (ibid:178). Furthermore, Yi’s examination of the representations of North Korean migrants in the South Korean media through a corpus based analysis resolves that there is a political emphasis on migrants’ narratives. According to Yi, these “describe defectors as topics of political and diplomatic challenges, potential secret agents, and consequently those who must be trained and adapted” (2015:43). Looking at the media representation of North Korean migrants is especially relevant in the case of artists since this can impact on how their work is framed or received by a wider audience.

2.2 Studies on South Korean Art

The South Korean art scene, as any art scene is difficult to grasp and define as it is constantly evolving influenced by political, social movements and trends. After all, a scene is a setting that acquires a determined meaning according to the particular events (art production and consumption) performed by the agents involved (artists, cultural, academic and private institutions and their agents). Although there is limited academic work in English devoted to the study of Korean art scene and its artists, most scholars situate the development of Korean art scene after the process of democratisation in the late 1980s (see Lee and Kyander, 2005; Amirsadeghi, 2013; Chung; 2015).

The literature suggests that what characterises Korean contemporary art, is its marked Western influence after the country became politically more open as Korean artists started to travel and reach international audiences. Other academics situate the Korean art scene as part of the broader context of contemporary Asian art (see Chiu and Genocchio, 2010) which is seen as an “emerging scholarly field” (Chiu and Genocchio:8) as it is the emergence of “global contemporary art” (Amirsadeghi:23). Thus, in an increasingly globalized world it is difficult to study the Korean art scene in isolation as in doing so, we are opening a matryoshka doll where we first encounter the asian and international art scenes. However, mapping out the structure of the South Korean art field is relevant to understand artists’ specific context and what professional opportunities or strategies are available to them.

Chung Young-mok establishes the start of Korean contemporary art scene in the 1970s with monochrome painting known as the *dansaekhwak* movement which is considered to be influenced by traditional ink paintings and Eastern philosophical traditions such as Taoism that invites to meditation and abstraction (2015:17-22). Yet, Hyungsook Kim argues that monochrome painting developed during Park Chung Hee’s regime (1963-79), since it conveyed the sense of Koreanness embedded in the “Yushin regime’s policy of national renaissance” (2015:122). Kim emphasizes that monochrome painters were defined in relation to the spiritual paradigm of East Asian philosophy as this “was an effective tool for convincing people that Korean art had an identity that differentiated itself from Western art” (ibid)

In the 1980s Minjung art, which translates as ‘the people’ or ‘the masses’, sought to confront the state repression having a social approach that represented the images of common

Korean people. Although, still marked by a nationalistic character the “Minjung artists’ plan was to develop national culture based on masse’s interest” by “opposing capitalism, bourgeois culture art galleries and museums as these were perceived as symbols of elitist selected few” (Joo, 2016: 362). Oppositional opinions on the function and interests of art resulted into the organization of the art sector into different artists’ associations such as Yechong and Minyechong which are marked by conservative or progressive ideological affiliations. Since the cultural sector is considerably dependent on state funding these associations have been highly susceptible to governmental change (Lee, 2014). Moreover, Lee argues that the arts sector’s sensitivity to political control “stems from the country’s political circumstance of ‘divided Korea’ and military dictatorship” since to justify the superiority of “the anti-communist South Korea as the true bearer of Korean culture and national identity, the government foisted on society the pressing need for political and ideological consensus” (Lee, 2012:327). Thus, the persistent division within the arts sector is considered one of the legacies of “the strong presence of politics in state’s arts policy” (ibid) during Park Chun-Hee’s dictatorship and the Cold War period. According to Lee “the crucial issue here is that the politicization of arts policy deters the sector from developing a sense of common interests and a shared understanding of the arts-government relationship” (2014: 136)

During the 1990s the Korean art scene manifests the effects of a developed and global economy as video and installations seem to become a cultural channel of communication and expression as “the artworks were not constrained to their existing format, “isms” or ideology” (Chung 2015:133). Art and technology merge in *Mediacity Seoul* (2000) an art festival dedicated to media art which Chiu and Genocchio see as a characteristic of contemporary Asian artists who develop their identity in highly modernized urban settings (2010:10). Jiyeon Lee and Pontus Kyander find that a particular characteristic to the current Korean art scene is its corporatism which has “also brought an abundance of company owned museums and art spaces” (2005:23) such as the Samsung Museum of art Leeum or the Doosan group gallery in Seoul.

Although the centre of Korean art scene is placed in Seoul, the Gwangju (1995) and Busan (1998) biennales have been key in the internationalisation of Korean art and its participation as both recipient and contributor to the global art scene. Yet, critical voices suggest that “preconceived notions or mythological views of East Asian cultures”(Moon, 2008: 225) prevail when it comes to Korean art exhibitions with a more international scope as

these are mostly curated for foreign audiences and tend to be organized around the “restrictive nature of a nation-state” (Moon *ibid*: 226). Therefore, one of the questions that is debated among scholars and curators is what are the needs and the politics of nation-based exhibitions these days as for instance in the case of Korean art this is frequently included in the broader context of Asian art. To other scholars, this process denotes an “identity crisis” within Korean art as it “is moving from regional particularity closely to a general globality” (Kyander, *ibid*: 215) which can overlook specific perspectives and conceptual diversity as well as formal approaches.

2.3 Studies on North Korean Art

North Korean art has mostly been analysed in light of Western approach to North Korea as an alien socio-political and economic entity. However, the study of its arts and culture is nowadays a flourishing scholarly field. One of the most comprehensive studies to date on North Korean Art in English is Jane Portal’s *Art Under Control In North Korea* (2005) in which she provides an overview of the country’s historical background, *Juche* ideology and the consequent cult to the Kim dynasty by exploring the role of art in North Korean society. David-West emphasizes that the majority of these studies come from a variety of disciplines in which none of the authors are art specialists, yet acknowledges that an attempt is being made to engage with North Korean visual culture (2014: 106). These, including Jane Portal’s work, are compiled in *Exploring North Korean Arts* (2011) the outcome of an international symposium jointly held with an exhibition of North Korean art at the MAK in Vienna in 2010.

This exhibition was titled ‘Flowers for Kim Il Sung—Art and Architecture from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea’ and was “the largest show abroad of works from the Korean Art Gallery in Pyongyang” (Noever, 2011: 7). Certainly, the show was a sensation and as these studies mainly discuss, it generated a debate on whether socialist realist art from North Korea should be considered genuine art or mere propaganda (Rudiger et al 2011). However, David Shim argues that despite the new intriguing questions on North Korea that the symposium stimulated, there are political and ethical implications when exhibiting art from the DPRK since these are inevitably linked to questions of international politics (2011: 87). Therefore, depending on how these images are curated these “can become integral parts of political dynamics themselves” (*ibid*:89).

Similarly, Yoon argues about the necessity of looking at the historical self-representations of North Korea through art to see how politics combine with culture from an inside out perspective (2014:8-9). B.G. Muhn is another scholar who has been dedicated to the study of *Chosunhwa* paintings, a form of traditional of ink and brush painting on rice paper. Muhn is another scholar who urges for an academic study of North Korean art which considers its unique aesthetics qualities. Some of the paintings that Muhn has studied will be displayed at the Gwangju Biennale (2018) under the theme “Imagined Borders” which questions how globalization is restructuring national and geopolitical borders.

The work of one of the interviewed artists in this thesis, is briefly mentioned in *Exploring North Korean Arts* as a form of satirical art on North Korea concluding that “making art of North Korea serves to de-familiarize the DPRK’s self-idealization on loosen its sentimental grip” (Foster-Carter and Hext, 45:2011). While there have been media reports on these North Korean migrants artists which have emphasized the subversive nature of some of these artists’ works, there are no academic works devoted to analyze closely these artists experiences in South Korea that are considered with the ‘defector’ identity and its possible biases.

2.4 On the politics of Nation-Based Exhibitions

Using a national framework to organize an art exhibition, particularly when it comes to display artworks from Asian artists is currently debated among professionals and art academics. Having a national frame can serve to contextualize local settings but it can also be perceived as a reductive way to identify and commodify the ‘other’ in the global art market. The necessity to establish fixed identity categories is seen as a result of globalization and neoliberal multiculturalism which brings societies and individuals culturally closer yet when it comes to art is still divided between center and periphery (Chiu and Genocchio: 2011).

Clark asserts that when it comes to define and represent art from Asia, EuroAmerican interpretative discourses and codes prevail (1993:41). This exhibits a political dimension in which values of judgements to evaluate art are often tied to orientalist perspectives. Moon claims that “the most common criterion for organizing exhibitions of art from other cultures in Euro-America remains the nation-state” (1993: 226). Although this might allow the audience to interpret an artist’s work through a specific context this exhibitions “often assume an official political function” (ibid:227) and disregard the individual character of the artist.

Poshyananda argues that art exhibitions under a national framework offer a form of ‘packaged nationalism’ to satisfy “the nostalgic yearning for exotic culture and the desire to rescue ‘authenticity’”(1993: 121) particularly found in exhibitions of contemporary art from Asia in the West. He emphasizes that “exhibitions of “serious art” by marginal, nonwhite groups tend to carry more impact when they are treated as “Third World” artists within the “First World”” (ibid: 124). Similarly, Weisenfield observes that there is a “lucrative-commodification of difference in a neo-auto-Orientalization mode” (2007:372) tied to concepts of ‘tradition’ which “continue to be compelling rhetorical devices in contemporary art because they are immediate markers of identity” as these “can offer a fabric form which to weave a genealogy of cultural continuity” (ibid: 388).

Kiliç and Petzen find that in a context of neoliberal multiculturalism “the marketing of art relies on the commodification and circulation of racial categories, which are reproduced and distributed as globalized racial knowledge” (2013:49). Thus, migrant artists “are ascribed a “magic of personality,” an authenticity which sticks to the body of the Other, who is expected to provide an authentic cultural product, whose commodification value lies in its proximity to the exotic” (ibid:51).

One of the main criticisms around nation-based exhibitions, particularly those displaying artworks from Asian artists is that these rather offer manufactured exotica based on orientalist notions of authenticity and tradition. This is significant to analyze how the work of North Korean artists is displayed and framed in South Korea and abroad, particularly in group shows under the themes of social and political identity. Furthermore, this raises questions on how North Koreans might be ‘othered’ or ‘exoticized’ in South Korea.

3 Theoretical Framework and Concepts

3.1 Social Identity and Categorization

To explain how the ‘defector’ label functions for the three artists of this study, we need to first understand it as part of their social identity. By looking at the different meanings and features of the identity categories ascribed to North Koreans we can study if these could have a function at an individual level and as part of adaptation processes. Social identity, at its most basic definition refers to the relationship between the individual and the group (Tajfel 1982; Turner 1979; Capozza and Brown 2000). As argued by Jenkins, social identity should

be understood in connection with group identification and categorization processes. According to Jenkins social identity is also related to how people “collectively identify themselves and others, and they conduct their everyday lives in terms of those identities, which therefore have practical consequences” (2008:111). Whilst *groups* “are defined by and meaningful to, their members”; *categories* “are externally defined without any necessary recognition by their members” (2008:112). Yet, social identity is never unilateral since actors are subjected to both internal group identification and external social categorization (Jenkins, 2000:9). Thus, looking at the internal-external dialectic is central to understand identification processes (ibid) and reveals how social identity is used both internally and externally.

The categorization of North Korean migrants is evident through the unilateral and power-centered discourse that surrounds them which “deprives them from their own agency” and “takes away defectors’ individuality, especially regarding their unique life experiences” (Yi, 2015:17). Moreover, the ideological divide between South and North Korea traditionally produced a set of ascribed identities that functioned as potential criteria of regulatory membership. Hence, each new term to define North Korean migrants has had practical consequences for their bearers as it “carried a subtle political connotation, rising into and falling out of usage based on the shifting political context”(ibid:12).

The fluctuating definitions and representations of North Korean migrants are, therefore, the outcome of South Korean government policies (Choi, 2005; Chung, 2009; Lankov, 2006; Son 2016; Kim, 2016) to host a group in a country where national identity can be defined by “the absence of internal ethnic others and the denial of internal social others as a collectivity” (Seol and So 2014:13). This implies a disruption with a certain construction of normality and requires of a new explanation or *category*. According to Hacking, particularly in periods of change, new systems of conceptualization appear to account for social phenomena which eventually become a certainty of human reality. Hacking argues that “many of the facts presented by the bureaucracies did not even exist ahead of time. Categories had to be invented into which people could conveniently fall in order to be counted” (1990:3).

In this sense, we can see South Korean government’s categorization of North Korean migrants as part of organizational processes of identification. In turn, these categories produce stereotypical identifications of North Korean migrants which ultimately serve to “inform policy and administrative allocation” (Jenkins 2008:193). Administrative allocation is a type of collective categorization. As described by Jenkins, it is “a process of labelling, imbued

with organisational and administrative authority, in which positive and negative stereotypes of particular categories are applied to individuals, systematically influencing the distribution to them of resources and penalties”(2008:192).

Studies on North Korean migrants social adaptation have pointed out the relationship between South Koreans’ negative perceptions of North Korean migrants with the reduction in the aid packages that the South Korean government allocates for them, emphasizing their economic dependency (Choi, 2005; Lankov, 2006; Yoon and Lim 2007; Kim, 2016; Son 2016). Thus, the ways the South Korean government labels North Korean migrants through their policy of dealing with the refugees translate into the amount of opportunities North Koreans get in their host country.

However, establishing that North Koreans’ struggle in South Korea is the outcome of the various shifts in the migration policy is not sufficient to fully assess and understand their adaptation process. As Kim argues, these studies often present North Koreans “as research objects to be observed for purposes of identifying adaptive problems rather than as subjective agents who are able to create independent lives through their own actions” and “ironically, this objectification contributes to the bias or stereotype of North Korean settlers in South Korea and presents an obstacle to their adaptation” (2015: 1019). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the individual steps that North Koreans might take when they arrive to South Korea whilst dealing with stereotypical notions.

Social identity is a crucial concept in order to understand the relationship between an individual and the social system as to explain the behaviour of those who are labelled. Classifications usually work top-down as those who label are those in power, and accordingly “can change our evaluations of our personal worth, of the moral kind of person that we are. Sometimes this means that people passively accept what experts say about them, and see themselves in that light” (Hacking, 1990: 131). According to Jenkins “problematizing the group-category distinction, put crudely self-determination versus domination emphasizes the centrality of power to processes of identification”(2000:10).

In the analysis of this paper the concept of social identity is used to examine the power structures within which the interviewees are categorized as ‘defectors’, yet once aware, this questions how the label it is or not adopted by them. The fact that they are artists and therefore exposed to an audience which might be attracted by the ‘defector’ label differences them from the rest of North Korean migrants. In this case, the artists have the possibility to

internally identify with an externally imposed identity to advance professionally and perhaps progress personally as they do not need to hide the ‘defector’ identity.

3.2 Bourdieu: Habitus, Field and Capital

To overcome the dualities between structuralism and voluntarism, or in other words, to locate individual agency in a determined social structure, Pierre Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice (1972) remains an efficient approach. The interplay of its three main elements: *habitus*, *capital* and *field*, leads to a *strategy of practice* which Bourdieu expresses with the following equation: [(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice (1984:101). The formula serves to explain how individuals guide their social practice by reconciling objectivist and subjectivist views on social life. These theoretical elements provide a framework to assess the interviewees’ approaches in achieving their professional interests without neglecting the influence of the deterministic definitions of their social identity. Furthermore, as practice is located in space and time (Jenkins 1992:69) shows how my interviewees respond or have responded when confronted with new contexts that challenge their preconceived notions of socialization. They have to adapt their own habitus or develop one that allows them to interact in a social structure different from the North Korean. Hence, Bourdieu’s conceptual toolkit allows us to look at a process of adaptation and argue that “life and subsequent experience is then a process of adjustment between subjectivity (habitus) and objective reality” (Jenkins, 1992: 80).

Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* challenges the freedom/constraint dichotomy on agency as it proposes that individuals’ actions match their interests and purposes, yet these are neither reflexive or conscious (Crossley 2005:110). Nevertheless, Bourdieu argues that *habitus* is besides the outcome of collective history “the heritage accumulated by the collective work presents itself to each agent as a space of possibles, that is, as an ensemble of probable *constraints* which are the condition and the counterpart of a set of possible uses” (1996: 265). Thus, “any habitus as a system of dispositions, is only effectively realized in relation to a determined structure of socially marked positions” (ibid:235). *Habitus* is a relational concept, it cannot be seen in isolation from the various contexts or fields in which it operates, it is both objective as a “collective homogenous phenomenon” and subjective as it is “embodied in individuals” (Jenkins 1992: 79).

The *field* is a sector or structured system such as the educational, the media, the political field and so on, in which agents are positioned as a result of the power relations within that field. Consequently, “what they do and say assumes its significance as a *consequence* of the structure of the field” (Crossley *ibid*: 81). The economic, social and cultural *capital* refers to the quantity of resources agents have and allow an individual to enter and move through diverse social *fields* which are in turn negotiated by their own *habitus*.

Human activity is, therefore, best explained through the metaphor of the ‘game’ which Bourdieu refers to the *habitus* as ‘a feel for the game’. This reveals the competitive and arbitrary nature of the fields as “it is less about ‘following a rule’, as about acting strategically” (Grenfell and Hardy 2007: 59). Thus, the question is how can we apply Bourdieu’s theory of practice to consider how the artist’s *habitus* is related to the field of art and in this case the South Korean art world? Grenfell and Hardy (*ibid*: 60) propose a three steps approach to see the different layers of interaction between *habitus* and *field* and the role of *capital*:

1. Analyse the position of the field vis-à-vis the field of power.
2. Map out the objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by agents who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which the field is a site;
3. Analyze the *habitus* of agents; the systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalizing a deterministic type of social and economic conditions.

On a first level, these layers allow us to see the field of art in relation to the other fields, particularly the field of power. At the second level we can examine the structural characteristics of the art field and all those who have a position within it. These positions are expressed through the different amounts of various forms of capital which can ‘buy’ the entrance to the field. At the third level we can study the individual’s background, trajectory and positioning within the field (2007:61).

Then, we can establish a comparison between artists, groups and the way the different structures interact and organize the course of action of the art field with other fields (*ibid*). These analytical elements, although not systematically applied, are used in relation to the social identity of ‘defector’ and integrated through the different questions posed during the interviews. The aim is to provide ‘insider accounts’ on how they perceive the sociocultural structures and their position taking within the field of art. Levels 1 and 2 are applied when looking at the context of the South Korean art field.

3.3 The Outsider

Finally, we look at the concept of ‘outsider’ in the art field as a fetish post-modern construction. In the 1940s, French artist Jean Dubuffet coined the term ‘Art Brut’ as part of an anticultural manifesto in which he presented a collection of artworks from patients in psychiatric institutions and other creators who were “unscathed” (Dubuffet, 1993:3) from social norms and artistic conventions. Later in 1972, Roger Cardinal wrote a book about Art Brut in which he called it ‘Outsider Art’ in an attempt to broaden the spectrum to identify artists whose work was considered to be outside of mainstream art circles. Since then, series of definitions of what constitutes ‘outside art’ and not, have followed (Beveridge, 2001; Prinzhorn, 2011; Hollander, 2014).

This reveals how arbitrary art categories can be, as Grenfell and Hardy argue in Bourdieusian terms. Such categories of thinking and “the words used to talk about art are therefore bound to a particular socio-historical context, and marked by the ‘social positions of the users who exercise the constitutive dispositions of their habitus in the aesthetic choices these categories make possible” (2007: 50-51). Consequently, these definitions “can become for those who use them veritable weapons and stakes in the battle of power over defining the terms of the discourse on art” (ibid). Moreover, by creating an art-historical context these artists have to work under the conventions of ‘Outsider art’ and owe their market reception to the establishment of a tradition.

As David Maclagan suggests, when it comes to ‘Outsider art’ “we need some evidence that its creator really was insulated in one way or another from the culture they were born into, and their story, even if it consists only of a few bare facts” (2009:10) since “we are fascinated by how someone could manage to survive, let alone be creative, in conditions of near total isolation” (ibid:18).

Certainly, North Korean migrants fulfill the ‘outsider’ expectations on both the social and, in some cases, artistic level. Furthermore, one of the reasons I decided to include this concept is because it emerged on several occasions when discussing the position of the artists within the South Korean art field with individuals from the art, political and humanitarian fields. One of the implications is that the artist and his works are viewed with a sense of exoticism or fetish, and unfortunately, it becomes less about the individuality of the creator and more about their ‘defector’ identity. Moreover, this can tell us about the power relations

that mediate the production of art and how is this framed (Kiliç and Pretzen 2013:61). This idea is integrated in some of the questions that I posed during the interviews such as how the media or cultural institutions approach their work knowing that they are ‘defectors’ or what kind of reception has their work had.

4 Context

4.1 The Field of Art in South Korea

The artistic field deserves separate mentioning, in the context of this thesis and as part of the theory that looks into Bourdieu’s theory of practice. In *The Rules of Art* (1992) and *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) Bourdieu examines the process of autonomization of the art-world outside the field of power (Fowler:104) and attempts to define a method that can be applied to analyze both artistic consumption and production. Bourdieu seeks to identify the ‘independent intellectual’ (Jenkins 1992:135) within the historical development in the field of art as a consequence of the secularization of society, the disappearance of nobility and the appearance of the bourgeoisie which liberated art from fulfilling a specific function. Therefore, the birth of ‘art-for-art’s sake’ “was a shift from the domination of the field by a small number of very powerful legitimising forces or agents, to a market situation” (ibid). Yet, the field of art is “categorically dependent on an audience or, more particularly, a market and it is in this sense that artists are structurally located ‘in between’, as the ‘dominated members of the dominant class” (Fowler: 53).

To understand the specific context that North Korean artists encounter, we need to look at the art field in the South Korean case, which diverges considerably from the French or Western model that Bourdieu analyzed. Fundamentally, we depart from a post-colonial and post-war context where power structures have been redefined. Yet, the structural changes that led to the so-called modernity in the Western world, identified with industrialism and “the sweeping social, economic and cultural changes associated with it” (Hall et al.1992: 2) in Korea were ‘compressed’. This means that those changes that took roughly 100 years in the West happened in a condensed manner in both space and time (Calhoun, 2010; Han & Shim, 2010) leading to “the dynamic coexistence of mutually disparate historical and social elements” (Chang, 2010:446).

In the first phase of social, economic and cultural reconstruction, we have an economic model known as the developmental state in which the state makes use of the market for developmental purposes (Leftwich, 1994). The developmental model consequently affected the institutional and commercial division within the art field. Unlike in many democratic countries, the cultural sector in South Korea cannot be considered as relatively autonomous from the field of power, since it is still mainly funded by the state and big corporations. As argued by Lee, this is due to a “shortage of social legitimation and deeply institutionalized division within the sector makes the arts community turn to the state for legitimacy, power and resource” (2014: 88). Hence, the division takes place internally and politically which further ties the arts to the field of power. Just last year South Korean ministry of culture had to issue a formal apology for writing up a blacklist of cultural figures to be excluded from government support and subsidies for being critical of the former president Park Geun-hye (Park, 2017).

This situation suggests that the arts and cultural policies are “vulnerable to party politics and political pressure” (Lee: 87). Although Korea often borrows cultural policy discourses from the West “their actual uses and consequences are not predictable as they are contested and negotiated within the country’s historical, political and socio-economic conditions” (Lee, 2012:323). These conditions are marked by a high division within the field, which is indeed illustrated by the organization of the cultural sector in different artists associations such as Yechong (The Federation of Arts and Cultural Organizations in Korea) with approximately 1,300,000 members and Minyechong 100,000 (Korean People’s Artist Federation) (Lee, 2014).

Traditionally, Yechong is considered conservative and Minyechong liberal. Both federations participate actively in the politics of formulating art policy and the government considers them to be representative of the country’s art community. Yet ‘culture wars’ are common between these two groups due to ideological differences rooted in the country’s political history. The arts sector in South Korea is, thus, characterized by internal division, heavy dependency and close relationship with the government, corporatism, lack of social legitimacy and support (Lee, 2014).

4.2 The Structure of the Art Field

As argued by Bourdieu (1993) artistic production should be understood in regard to its sociocultural circumstances of production. *Figure 4.2* shows the way in which the field of contemporary art in South Korea is structured and connects to other fields and, ultimately, the field of politics. The ‘developmental nature’ of the Korean state is also evident in the ‘dominated’ position of the art field within the fields of power and commerce. Despite deregulation, decentralisation, and cultural industries’ development since political democratisation in the 1990s the lack of social legitimacy and internal consensus within the sector make it heavily dependent on the state for power and resources (Lee, 2012). However, this fragmentation allowed corporations “to pursue win-win strategies in relation to financial support for the arts” (Kim 2013: 209). In this case, the dynamic interactions between the art and commerce fields can be used by the latter “to support a prestigious corporate image and to position the company strategically within the more general field of power”(Grenfell and Hardy 2007:111). The lack of middle-class cultural patronage is another effect of compressed modernity which ties the arts with politics and commerce. The acquisition of cultural capital was not necessary for the formation of a middle-class in contemporary Korea as this was “deprived of the cultural legacies of the old literati classes that were disrupted and disappeared”(Lee, 2014:94). The middle-class is rather a socioeconomic concept “a product of condensed economic growth since the 1960s, flexible social mobility, and meritocratic education” (ibid). As argued by Lee, for the Korean upper and middle classes funding the arts “or securing their autonomy from politics and the market has seldom been an issue that matters to their class or status of consciousness”(ibid:95).

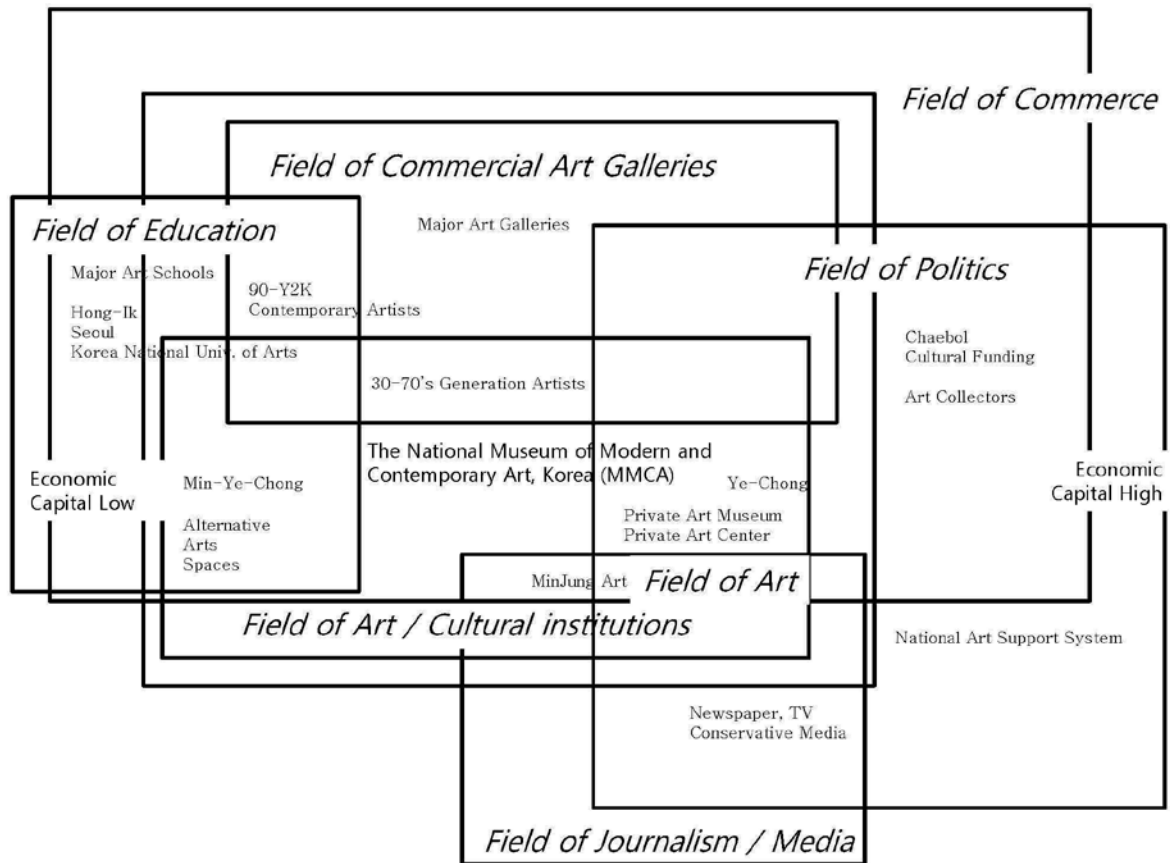


Figure 4.2 Level 1 analysis: fields in relation to the field of power.

4.3 Networks in the Art Field

Figure 4.3 maps the “objective structure of relations between the positions occupied by agents who compete for the legitimate forms of specific authority of which the field is a site”(Grenfell and Hardy 2007: 60). A salient aspect which tends to be overlooked is that the art field in South Korea is mostly ruled by kinship relations. Thus, it is evident that some of the most influential agents are directly related to the powerful *chaebols* business groups, politics or media groups. Lee Kun-Hee chairman of the Samsung group is married to Hong Ra-Hee, one of the Hong sisters the daughters of Hong Jin-Ki the former chairman of JoongAng Ilbo, one of the three major newspapers in Korea. Ra-Hee is the president of the Leeum Samsung Museum of Art and her sister Hong Ra-Young is the vice-president and is married to Rho Chul-Soo CEO of Amicus media group. Kim Sun Jung, the daughter of Kim Woo-Jung former chairman of the Daewoo group, is another powerful agent in the art field. She is the director of Art Sonje Center, has been the director of the Gwangju Biennale, commissioner of Venice Biennale for the Korean pavilion and she is also a professor at the

National University of Arts. Yun Dong Koo, the son of Yun Bo Seon the first president of Republic of Korea after the Korean war, is an artist and professor at this same institution. Roh Soh Yeon the director of Nabi Art Center, located at the headquarters of SK, is the daughter of Rho Tae-Woo, the 13th President of Korea and Choi Tae Won the former president of SK, one of the biggest telecommunications companies in Korea.

These close connections within the field of art and power provide an important context for this thesis in that it suggests what it takes to be 'in' the field. The figures illustrate how difficult it is for any outsider, especially North Koreans, to fit 'in' the art field without determined connections. Looking at the objective structures is essential to understand how the artists conduct themselves and deal with the 'defector' label and develop their profession.

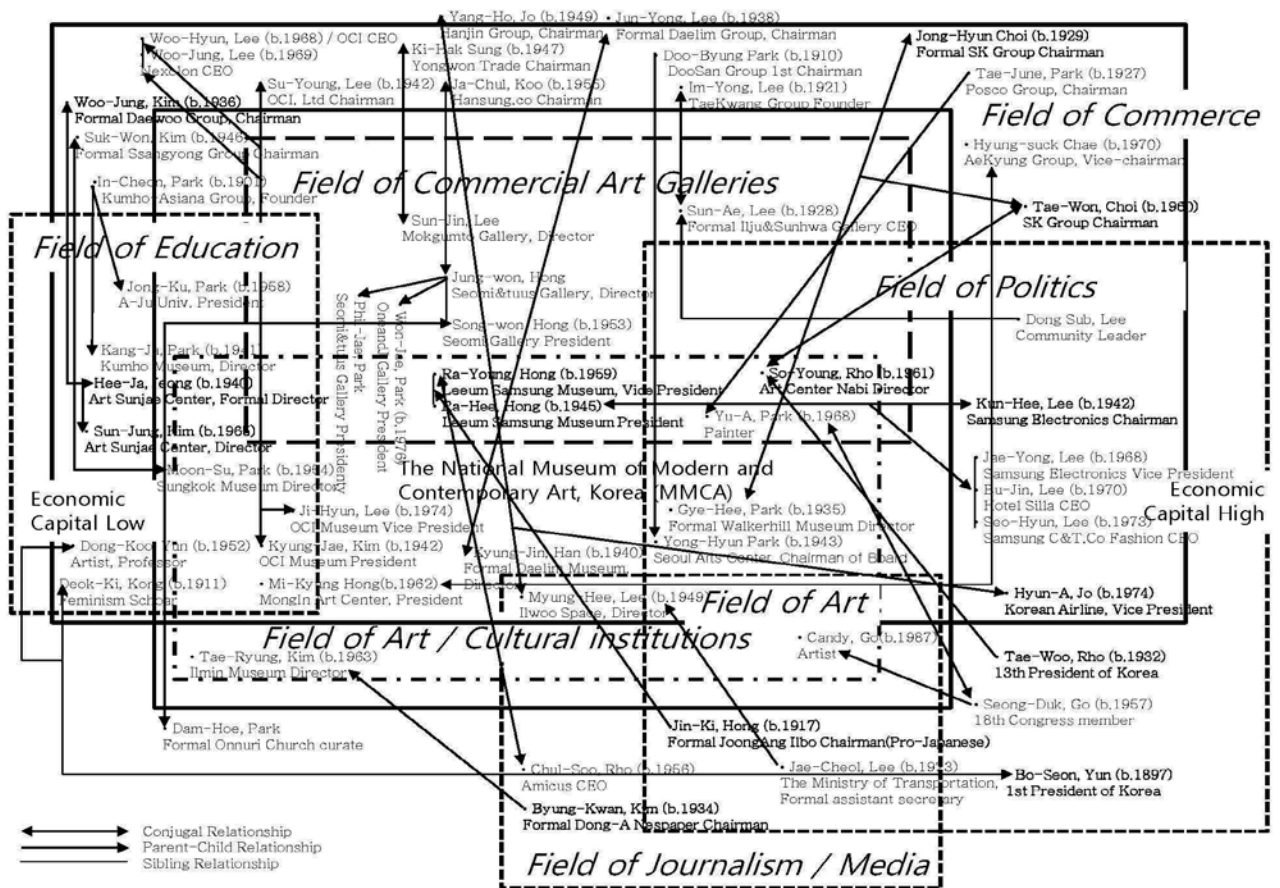


Figure 4.3 Level 2 analysis: key agents and some relationships to other institutions.

5 Methodology

5.1 Study design

This research project consists of a case study that looks into the development of the artistic career of three North Koreans migrants. Although much of the information in this study is qualitative, in the sense that it is based on in-depth interviews, it can be said that it rather makes use of a combination of *extensive* and *intensive* methods:

in intensive research the primary questions concern how some causal process works out in a particular case or limited number of cases. Extensive research, which is more common, is concerned with discovering some of the common properties and general patterns of a population as a whole (Sayer, 1992: 242)

This results in a study that “accepts given taxonomic categories, looks for regularities, patterns and similarities” (Easton, 2010:123). Therefore it is concerned in both mapping the abstract structures that shape the social reality of actors whilst considering that “structures are constituted by internal relations which must be understood qualitatively” (Sayer, *ibid*: 99). In other words, “we need to know not only what the main strategies were of actors, but what it was about the context which enabled them to be successful or otherwise” (*ibid*). This is done by first considering the context for North Korean migrants on a general level, such as different bureaucratic practices by which they are labelled in the South Korean society. Secondly by examining the specific context where they develop their artistic profession.

The primary data has been collected through face to face interviews and casual meetings with the artists. As this research aims to understand how the label ‘defector’ operates in their professional lives through the own understanding of the interviewees, semi-structured interviews with open and closed-ended questions are the most suited method of data collecting. A semi-structured questioning offers flexibility and a guideline “indicating that there is concern about completing an agenda” (Stake, 1995: 65). The secondary data that informs part of this research comes from mass-media outputs as film, art reviews, previous interviews of the artists, surveys on North Koreans migrants in South Korea and interviews and meetings with third parties from the humanitarian, artistic and political field. These materials have been chosen in accordance with the parameters set by the research questions in order to deepen the context and background of the answers I got from the artists.

5.2 The Case Study

This research sheds light onto the case of three North Korean artists and their integration into South Korean society through their occupation as artists and their ‘defector’ identity. Although, the case study tends to be overlooked in the social sciences for its lack of generalization, a case study research is about particularization, it looks for the singular and the extraordinary. As argued by Stake within a case study, “we look for the detail of interaction with its contexts” (1995:1). Therefore, the selection of interviewees is limited as case study research is not sampling research (ibid: 4) “what distinguishes a case study is that the researcher is usually concerned to elucidate the unique features of the case” (Bryman 2012: 69). Moreover, this case study falls into the atypical/extreme category, as defined by Flyvbjerg it is carried out “to obtain information on unusual cases”(2006: 34).

The main focus is the interviewees’ profession, whose work and personality has been referred to or presented in the context of ‘North Korean defector art/artist’ paying attention to the ‘defector’ label. One of the artists was a serendipitous discovery, being a close friend of one of the participants. Serendipity “can either refer to finding something of value while searching for something else or to finding something sought after in an unexpected place or manner” (Given 2008:2).

Data from multiple sources has been collected (articles from web magazines, published documents, academic literature, government reports and surveys on North Koreans). This constitutes a form of triangulation which “entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena” (Bryman, 2012: 392). Triangulation is used in this research to map the different set of perspectives presented in this study and strengthen the reliability of the data.

5.3 Data Collection

Process

The data collection process started in the summer of 2017 over a period of two months in Seoul. During my stay, I attended several events about North Korea and North Koreans which served as a previous step to inform my study. One of these occasions was a talk by a North Korean ‘elite defector’ organized by an NGO that offers support and assistance to North

Korean migrants. A couple of days later, I attended a lecture on North Korean Art and *Chosunhwa* by professor BG Muhn which gave me an overview of the ongoing discussion about the exhibition and appreciation of this type of artwork outside North Korea. Whilst doing a language course at Korea University, I went to a lecture on the ‘North Korean crisis’ by professor Andrei Lankov during which I could ask him about his thoughts on the situation of North Korean migrants in South Korea. Additionally, I talked to both, an expert on North Korean politics and an expert on North Korean artistic performance with whom I could discuss about my interest in these artists and the particularities of their status as well as the artistic practices of North Korea.

Moreover, I used this time to get acquainted with the South Korean art scene by visiting as many art galleries and museums as possible while looking for the exhibition spaces where some of these North Korean artists had showed their work. These situations and meetings provided me with an invaluable insight into the ‘area’ that I was about to venture and resulted into a number of different perspectives from the humanitarian, artistic, political and academic fields intertwined in this research. It was during this first trip, when I had my first meeting and interview with Lee, one of the artists and I was able to establish a contact for a second meeting and for an in-depth interview in December.

During my second visit to Seoul in December 2017, I carried out three in depth interviews with two artists and I met a third one on several occasions. Over this period, I also met with people from the education field, an art professor and the art field a curator who are active members in the South Korean art scene. Finally, I had a meeting with an NGO worker who assists and supports North Korean migrants and is familiar with the work of one of the artists. This continuous moving back and forth whilst travelling through the city of Seoul to meet different kinds of people allowed me to explore different spaces and situations which added depth and scope to my research.

The artists and the spaces

The three artists came to South Korea in the early 2000s for a variety of reasons, Lee and Kim came escaping hunger, Choo came to pursue an artistic career free from censorship. They are from different social backgrounds, Choo being more privileged comes from Pyongyang province whilst Lee and Kim come from small provinces. Both Lee and Choo have served in

the North Korean army painting propaganda posters. Kim arrived to South Korea with his family when he still was a teenager. The three artists have studied fine art at South Korean universities after they arrived. Kim is also pursuing a career in the music industry as a rapper.

When I first met Lee in summer at his studio in Seoul, we had lunch at the restaurant downstairs with his manager and few American journalists who had just interviewed him. In Seoul, I saw Lee's work at SeMa (Seoul Museum of Art) and at one major art gallery in Hyoja dong district. The two times I met Lee was always at his studio and we communicated by email.

I met Choo at Jongno area where showed me the space for his next exhibition, a small gallery in one of the backstreets. Shortly after, we met with Kim for dinner and they invited me to join their Christmas gathering in the gallery where they were preparing their next show. The gallery was located at the outskirts of Seoul at the basement of a bar. I had dinner at the gallery with them and another artist, the owner of the bar and the gallery, a couple that identified as the curators and other friends that were invited. When I met with Choo and Kim was always at spaces open to the public as none of them have a studio and they work from home. After a first meeting with Choo and Kim we communicated through social media or phone calls.

To observe the exhibition spaces where the artists' work was shown and the places where I met with the artists as the people who accompanied them, was a valuable experience to evaluate their positions within the art field. To visit different spaces and meet other people also allowed me to ask questions about their connections to each other which added a wider outlook to the interviews.

Semi-Structured Interviews

My Korean language skills are too limited to carry out an in-depth interview, for this reason I relied on the assistance of an interpreter, an artist himself, who is a very close acquaintance and is familiar with my research topic. Although this could affect the reliability of the research, this dynamic proved to have a main advantage. The time-delay that occurred during the translation gave the interviewees time to reflect and add remarks to their own comments which resulted in richer data. Furthermore, after a first informal meeting with one of the artists, I encouraged my interpreter to be spontaneous and add questions or remarks related to

my own questions. This added fluidity and depth to the conversation and resulted in longer interviews.

5.4 Reflexivity

According to Farhana “being reflexive is important in situating the research and knowledge production so that ethical commitments can be maintained” (2007: 376). Introducing myself to the artists not just as a student of Asian studies, but as a foreigner married to a Korean artist who lives abroad has had a positive effect when establishing a first contact with the participants. They seemed to feel more inclined to meet as I showed more interest in their profession than at their ‘defector’ identity when I contacted them. Having said this, their positive response and readiness to schedule a meeting could be due to just the fact that I am a foreigner and consequently placed in “an irreconcilable position of difference” (ibid:378) which in this case was positively regarded.

In the art world a solid network of contacts is essential (Bourdieu, 1996) despite their willingness to be interviewed there might be some interest on their side to meet people who they might perceive to have connections in the European art scene or simply have another opportunity to show their work. These are aspects that I considered prior to meeting them but that suppose an advantage for the research and for the participants as well as I was willing to establish personal connections with them, which certainly affect my position as a researcher.

Yet, as a foreigner who is familiar with the cultural differences between Korean and Spanish, I am aware that I was allowed to break certain barriers when communicating with them. I tended to use a more informal and familiar address that, in this case, was helpful in producing a friendly and comfortable atmosphere and in some cases resulted in them inviting us to join their social gatherings.

5.5 Validity and Reliability

A common misconception regarding case study research is that the knowledge produced from case studies cannot be generalized. Yet, Flyvbjerg argues that the advantage of the case study is “that it can ‘close in’ on real- life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice”(2006:19). Flyvbjerg explains that cases serve to clarify

and analyze the particular causes of a given problem which “random samples emphasizing representativeness will seldom be able to produce this kind of insight; it is more appropriate to select some few cases chosen for their validity” (ibid:13). Yet, he further discusses that choosing cases strategically such an extreme case can increase generalizability since these “cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied” (ibid: 14).

When seeking for either expected or unanticipated patterns to account for the internal validity in a case study, Stakes explains that “the dependent variables are experientially rather than operationally defined” and “even the independent variables are expected to develop in unexpected ways” (1995:41). The specificity of the context allows to develop a deep understanding of a determined situation and produce findings that are relevant. In this case, external validity is not central as the representativeness of research subjects “with which the issue is concerned has a more obvious application to the realm of quantitative research, with its preoccupation with sampling procedures that maximize the opportunity for generating a representative sample” (Bryman, 2012: 48).

Reliability in research entails trustworthiness of the data or asks whether the results produced from the research can be repeated (Bryman, ibid:46) something that rarely occurs in case studies. However, Yin suggests that this can be done by documenting the process and by keeping the data produced during the fieldwork as accessible and explicit as possible (2018:46). In this study this is achieved by recording the interviews and writing summaries right after the meetings with the artists.

5.6 Limitation and Demarcation

Only men were interviewed for this study, two of the artists are in their forties and one in his twenties and arrived in Seoul at a younger age than the others. This can be a limitation for the research as including female or younger perspectives would offer a much more representative case of North Korean artists in South Korea. However, when looking for media articles on North Korean ‘defector’ artists living in South Korea I only found seven artists, and one of them passed away in 2010, all of them male and aged between 40 to 50 (see Jung, 2014; Kim, 2016; Kim, 2017). The selected cases emphasize that this research is an extreme case study “based on the idea of trying to find paradigmatic cases” (Mills et al, 2010: 19)

With the exception of two interviews among a total of five were not recorded. In one case, this was due to the impossibility to schedule a meeting for the interview prior to my departure so I had to send the questions by email. Having said this, I had met this artist twice on informal occasions during which valuable information relevant to the research was also exchanged. In another case, recording was not possible due to technical problems, however since I brought my interview guide and a notebook I could write the interviewee's answers during this meeting. After transcribing the interviews, collecting the written answers and my summaries of the different meetings the data has been categorized by themes and patterns. The thematic analysis is juxtaposed to the academic literature and theoretical concepts discussed in the previous chapters.

5.7 Ethical considerations

On a general political level, the interviewees personal experiences as migrants are sensitive, therefore previous knowledge about the interviewees and their country's political situation and the relationship with South Korea is required to produce an informed and unbiased study.

This research might be sensitive in the sense that it may appear critical of how North Koreans are treated in South Korean. What is partly questioned during the interviews is the use of the artists' 'defector' identity by third parties; the media, cultural and political institutions to either make profits or generate expectation.

To preserve their privacy the identity of the three artists remains anonymous and I changed their names. However, some of the participants asked me about the purpose of their anonymity, because as artists they generally prefer their authorship to be acknowledged. Furthermore, on an individual and personal level, the fact that reports, articles and even a film have been produced referring to some of them have made them public figures and although they might be more recognized outside of Korea certain precautions need to be taken.

Certainly, there are some security concerns regarding revealing their identity. Although their profession does not entail any risks in South Korea, there might be some danger involving the families of the interviewees in North Korea. Therefore taking pictures showing their faces or indicating their specific location can be a risk for some of them. Despite this was one of my major concerns when doing fieldwork, one of them proposed to take a picture together and uploaded it on social media immediately, which proved that

carefulness is discretionary. Consent for recording the interviews was asked by email prior the meetings and was reminded verbally at the time of the meeting.

In South Korea social meetings can take place during meals over which alcohol is involved. Although the plan was to meet with artists at their studios some suggested to meet for lunch or dinner. As Loubere (2014) discusses accessibility to the field is often determined by the “researcher’s ability to ‘play the game’, say/do the right things, and ultimately make a good impression on potential gatekeepers during these meals is often directly related to that researcher’s ability to gain prolonged and meaningful access to fieldwork sites” (1). Even though these situations can be helpful to generate a more intimate atmosphere and trust with the participants, these can also infringe upon the ability of the researcher to maintain the focus on the research subject. Nevertheless, valuable information for the research is shared during these informal meetings and one has the chance to witness directly in a real-life situation many of the views that shape the study. To ensure ethical consistency during these rather festive gatherings I kept a moderate alcohol consumption.

6. Findings and Analysis

This chapter presents the data collected during the interviews and meetings with the artists and analyzes how artists use the ‘defector’ label as their identity and in which ways does the ‘defector’ label interfere within the scope of their artist’s career. The analysis first examines in what ways the interviewees make use of or cope with their social identity as ‘defector’ on a general level. The discussion proceeds to explore which sets of ideas the ‘defector’ identity conveys to the artists and their views about the role of the media in reproducing certain stereotypes on North Korean migrants. Following this subject, the analysis considers the artists’ motivations and the factors influencing their career choice within the art field. In order to find their place in the art field, the analysis examines whether the structure of the art field or their social identity places them as ‘outsiders’ within the artistic profession. The data analysis further seeks to identify examples of North Korean migrants’ agency by engaging with the current academic literature on North Korean migrants social adaptation and Bourdieu’s theoretical framework.

6.1 Living with the ‘defector’ label

As demonstrated in the literature review, (Chung ,2009; Lankov, 2006; Kim, 2017; Yi, 2015; Son; 2016) the terms to define North Korean migrants have changed over different (socio)-historical periods and have been subjected to particular political discourses and interests. The findings show that stereotypes attached to the North Korean identity affect their social adaptation to various degrees. Yet, artists are a very special group within the ‘defector’ category as a wide social network is necessary to enter the art field. In that sense they deal with the ‘defector’ label differently than other migrants as none of them hides their identity. Only one artist explicitly stated that he is bothered by the label and that this affects him both personally and professionally. More so than labelling, distrust for others is the aspect which affects artists more negatively and which they associate with political division and Korea’s social homogeneity.

When asked if they refer to themselves by the terms *talbukja* or *saetonim* their responses varied. Kim, said that unless he is asked about his hometown he does not say that he is a migrant “I just say that I am from North Korea without using any of those terms”. Lee answers “Yes, I am a *talbukja* but I don’t care how people call me because it is always changing”. Contrarily, Choo dislikes the term, yet he does not hide his identity “No, I don’t care about it because is not relate it to art, but I don’t deny I’m from North Korea”. He finds that political and social organizations in South Korean are responsible for North Koreans unfair treatment and low social status. Choo was particularly vocal about North Koreans vulnerability when it comes to find support and building a social network in South Korea. He thinks that many North Koreans join political and religious associations or NGOs with the hope of establishing connections but eventually become exploited as propaganda instruments for these:

“There are many political groups here and they use what they want as they want and there are about 30,000 defectors and 124 different defector groups and all of them are supported by the conservative party and they are easily used by them. For instance, they were participating in protests for the previous president Park Geun Hye who was accused for corruption, but they’ve joined the conservative side which was against the impeachment. So I try to stay away from this.”

Research on North Korean migrants emphasizes that a large number of them join Christian groups and NGOs when they arrive to South Korea to be part of different communities and networks (Chung, 2009; Lankov, 2006). Following Bourdieu's strategy of practice we could see this as way for North Korean migrants to gain some type of social capital which might consequently affect the way they conduct themselves or their *habitus* and ultimately place some constraints when developing their own individual agency. Furthermore, as argued by Chung, these accounts reveal "how entering into a new society creates a crisis of social status. One has little control over how his or her background, skills, abilities, and social and cultural capital will translate into his or her identity in the new so- ciety" (2009:15). In the case of the artists, they need to evaluate how their artistic abilities can be transformed into a professional activity in South Korea. Thus, artists not only need to be aware of the means that lead to a career in art in a new society, they also need to know with which portion of that society they can establish a pertinent social network for developing their profession.

Social adjustment and Distrust

The three artists agreed in their responses to the idea that there is a label attached to the North Korean identity which is often negative, since a different sociocultural identity and a poor economic background are the main defining features. Although none of the interviewees has to hide his identity, they are well aware of the discrimination towards North Korean migrants and that the 'defector' identity somehow sets them apart from the rest of the population. This is in line with the argument that social adjustment is one of the main problems that North Korean migrants face once in South Korea (Bidet, 2009; Chung, 2007; Lankov, 2006; Seol and Seo, 2014). Thus, it is their social identity (Jenkins, 2008) as 'defectors' that puts them at a difference casting them as 'outsiders'. Seol and Seo claim that North Korean migrants "quickly became one of the strangest 'others' within South Korean society due to their distinguishable accent, behavioral patterns, and inability to adapt smoothly to the South Korean capitalist economy" (2014:15). Artists being the strangest group among North Korean migrants can easily be 'othered' through their profession in which, paradoxically, their 'outsider' condition can have a certain value and therefore become a form of inclusion into the art field.

However, Lee mentioned that being 'labelled' does not affect him negatively in his profession as much as in trusting other people. Distrust for others is an element that emerged

in all the interviews. In their interpersonal relationships the artists tend to be cautious of people's reaction when they mention where they come from. Kim noted that "mostly when I say that I came from North Korea, people seem to feel sorry for me and sad. It may vary from person to person though". Similarly, Choo declared that "people might take advantage of my situation or judge me because they think I don't have money". These explanations suggest that the 'defector' label results in social prejudices which in turn might affect migrants' trust for others. This is consistent with findings by Bidet (2009) on North Koreans migrants' social adaptation which indicate that their lack of social capital causes distrust, loneliness and isolation among migrants (169) and conversely prevents them to gain social connections. In the case of the artists this can be detrimental for their profession which needs of an audience and a network that brings visibility to their work. However, this can also become an advantage as they might become more selective with the people they associate.

Different Perceptions

All three artists have had exhibitions abroad and these experiences have had a profound impact on their view of South Korean society. Lee mentioned that when he visited New York he was fascinated by the social diversity "everyone is mixed, people are from different places and nobody cares". Thus, the 'othering' they experience in South Korean society from a stereotyped identity for Lee is also due to the lack of diversity and political ideology "this is a country occupied by ideology just like North Korea, it is really hard to find diversity here, Korean national identity is characterized by this homogeneity and group mentality". Similarly, Choo expressed that both discrimination and mistrust towards others are grounded on political ideology in a country still divided by the politics of the Cold War:

We have been separated because of political ideology so we are used to make separations between each other so even in daily life we don't accept differences or different values. In Korea (both North and South) we were trained that someone who has a different ideology is your enemy so even in an everyday situation people who think differently will be assumed as kind of enemy and in the end we cannot mingle with them. I don't care about ideology but people here always assume I have certain ideas because I'm from North".

Choo, particularly, expressed his wish of moving and working abroad where he thinks he could have better professional opportunities and social status. The three artists see

globalization and democracy as positive aspects for their profession as they can express themselves freely and have international projection. Perhaps the fact that they are more known outside Korea shows how deeply rooted the politics of division still are. This was a recurrent subject when I posed questions on identity such as which ideas does the ‘defector’ identity or being North Korean convey on a general level. As argued by Chung (2008) the political dimension seems to play a decisive role in the meaning ascribed to migrants’ ‘defector’ identity, this consequently affects their level of social adaptation and their position in the artistic field. Lee experienced difficulties with South Korean authorities during Lee Myung-bak’s presidency (2008-2013) whose aggressive policy towards North Korea “eroded many achievements of the decade-long Sunshine Policy”(Khamidov 2008:23).

“When Lee was president there were two reports about me on the NIS saying that I am making propaganda for North Korea because they manipulated the words from my work to use it to report me as someone biased or supportive of North Korea. I first thought that South Korea was a better society but they also have an ideology and political parties and NGOs try to influence”.

It is worth mentioning that another notorious aspect of the Lee Myung Back’s government (2008-2013) was his quasi autocratic approach to culture exerting “overt political pressure on the arts world and attempting to mobilize artists for party political purposes” (Lee, 2014:95).

The interviewees’ accounts suggest that the labelling experience is manifold and that it is mostly shaped by politics. The terms *talbukja* or *saetonim* are generally avoided by the artists, except for one of them, as these may cause prejudices against them. Their distrust of others has a profound influence on how they interact with South Korean society and this conversely might inhibit their possibilities of acquiring a wider social capital. The artists also associate the prejudices against migrants to Korea’s lack of diversity and see more advantages abroad for their profession and status.

6.2 Media labelling

This section deals with the artists’ interaction with the media for professional purposes. Although the experiences vary from artist to artist, the findings show that the artists consider the media responsible for the perpetuation or creation of stereotypes concerning North Korea and migrants. Two interviewees find that the news content is manipulated according to

politically biased opinions or to fit the purposes of the publicated issue. Only one of them answered that the media approaches his work and story adequately.

According to Lee, it is a matter of time that definitions and ideas about North Korean migrants will change again, he finds that it is principally the media more than politics that shapes people's opinion. When asked about how the media approaches their work and what kind information is the press most interested in, Choo bluntly declares that: "Is never about my work, they want to find some negative stories or drama narrative about my past. I've never been happier in South Korea, I was better economically and had better social status in North Korea, I came here to paint freely". The artist explained that these encounters with the press made him realize how to come to terms with the 'defector' label as "South Korean society has also their own ideology and here everything is according to money seems they just want to hear how bad my situation is". Choo particularly expressed his distrust of Korean media. The data is consistent with Son's findings on the strong power imbalance that is reflected in the defector narratives reported by the media (2015).

Yet, Kim and Lee recall a much more positive experience. They usually are asked about their work and how they arrived to South Korea, although Lee mentions that he is aware that the media has their own agenda. However, he decides to turn the tables to both his advantage and amusement:

"They usually ask about my job and political opinions like what do I think about the situation with North Korea and personal matters about my past or ask me about my age but I don't really open to that. They make interviews and edit the video later so in the end things get manipulated. This situation produces different images about me that I actually enjoy because it's interesting to see. Even this is better for me because the North Korean government must observe me so this will confuse them to specify who is the real Lee as a person"

The question of the stereotype reappeared again in this section, when I asked how the foreign media frames their work knowing that they are from North Korea. Lee explained that often the media interview him with certain ideas in mind for their specific issue:

"The foreign media has also a certain stereotype about North Korea and there are stories that they want to listen. Last year, I had an interview with *The Guardian* they interviewed several North Korean artist as I know. I think that their purpose was to

categorize them as one group of defector artists in South Korea and create a story of us together. But my answers were too different from others and they couldn't expect it. For instance, they asked if I like NK they might expected me to answer no but I answered yes. So the questions that followed were why do you like NK so in this way more conversation was developed from the answers I gave them so in the end what I answered was very different from others so they decided to not include others in the interview and feature a special issue about me. I didn't know that this North Korean artists were interviewed before me. I got to know after the article was published”.

Applying a Bourdieusian framework, Lee's responses indicate that he is somehow aware of the internal structure of the media field and knows how to use his cultural and symbolic capital in this case to shift from object to subject. Moreover, he makes use of his North Korean *habitus* to make a transition from a rather subordinate position to a position of power. Thus, for Lee when interacting with the media the 'defector' label becomes a tool that he can also use to advance positions in the art field as having an article published in *The Guardian* specifically about him gives him international projection both personally and professionally.

Labelling of the artwork

The three artists expressed their dislike for having their work grouped with the work of other 'North Korean defector artists' or as part of group exhibitions on North Korea. They feel that there is a discourse created by cultural and political institutions which ultimately becomes another way to 'label' them or produce stereotyped representations by only taking their North Korean identity and displacing the artist. The commodification of identity is however a common practice in the international art market “whose appetite for art from the Other defines the production of “Western art” and culture” (Kiliç and Petzen 2013: 51). Choo claimed that being categorized as a 'North Korean defector artist' in his case does not tell anything about his work in particular which is about human nature and empathy. Although occasionally he might make reference to North Korea in his work: “I don't want to exhibit with just North Korean artists or South Korean either or have an exhibition curated by a theme or a theory because I think if it happens at the same space, I don't feel it is necessary to dictate a specific subject or create a group”.

When discussing how their work is presented in the media, I inquired if this might be because it is regarded as a product of the sociohistorical context and the politics of division to which they make constant reference. Lee argues that it is too soon to talk about ‘North Korean defector art’: “It is too early to define North Korean defector art as a category because there are few people just doing this and if you want to say ‘category’ maybe you can find certain style in North Korea which already existed I am just using this style for my work”. Despite the tendency of the media and institutions to contextualize or label their work under the ‘North Korean defector art’ category they find that it is personal and tells their own story as individuals.

Lee, who is the youngest and practically grew up in Seoul, is the only one who seems to think that his work might have a role in discussing the migrant experience or giving voice to other North Koreans, that unlike him, cannot express themselves through art:

“I think my story is not only my story but also the story of all defectors. If possible, I would describe my role that I am a spokesman of other all defector who are reluctant to speak out through my artistic profession in music and art. And I spread it out in the society and the world”.

6.3 The Art Field

As argued previously, the arts sector in Korea is mainly supported by state funding and corporations which have a close relationship with the state. Therefore, it is not surprising that many of the ‘key players’ are from wealthy backgrounds. This section investigates the interviewees’ motivations to pursue a career in the art field and their awareness of the ties and networks that determine its structure.

Education and Social Networking

The three interviewees find that being an artist in South Korea might be perceived as an elitist profession when associated with a determined institution or background. Traditionally, artists are among the lowest classes (Lee, 2014) and in such a competitive society there is further stigmatization of being unemployed. Choo had a variety of multiple jobs at a time just to be able to survive. Similarly, Kim has had part time jobs although now he is focused on his artistic and musical careers. Only Lee has been able to earn a living just through art.

Their motivations to pursue an artistic career vary. Lee mentioned that being an artist for him was a natural thing since that is what he did when he was in North Korea painting propaganda posters for the army. In Bourdieusian terms we can say that being a painter in Lee's case, was part of his *habitus*. He is satisfied with his life in South Korea since he can express himself freely through painting, yet he tells me that he knows that he has been very lucky. However, when Lee started painting in South Korea he was told that without any connections it was really hard to make a living as an artist. He then enrolled at one of the best art schools in the country determined to find his way in the art world and establishing a network. The South Korean government has a special admission system for North Koreans with high school diplomas and "provides full tuition for those enrolled in institutions of higher education until age thirty-five, provided they maintain a C average or above"(Chung, 2008:21). Thus, by enrolling at a prestigious university more than cultural or symbolic capital Lee's was seeking social capital which he considered to have more value for his career. This is consistent with Chung study on North Korean migrants that indicates that "education is one of the few ways for the newcomers to gain access to the middle-class status and networks in South Korea"(2008: 20). However, Lee explained that despite establishing connections he never thought about the art industry or following any mainstream trend:

"After I got into university to study art and started to paint I got advice from teachers and I realized I had a story to tell so I just focused on my work. If I had the opportunity I would make a show. Usually working in alternative spaces, and later some museums contacted me naturally, I was lucky. I have never tried to follow anything, change my work or identity".

Unlike the others, Kim mentioned that before studying fine arts at university in Seoul he lacked any kind of formal training or experience in the arts and was completely self taught. After graduation, he has not pursued much of a commercial art career and shows his work at alternative spaces. Choo, who also painted posters in the army, is going to study a master's degree in fine arts at the university Lee and Kim attended. He feels that having a degree from a prestigious institution specialized in the arts is essential to work as an artist in South Korea. This is in line with previous research on the South Korean art field which claims that "being associated with higher education institutions is almost the only way to secure social respect and a stable income" (Lee: 93). They all mentioned how challenging it is to make a living as an artist and how having connections is crucial. For Lee having friends who are curators or

other art professionals who he has met through various projects and his former school has certainly helped him to establish his career.

When asked if they felt part of the South Korean art scene Choo criticized the lack of support for artists. He felt easily outed by a system he perceives is monopolized by a few:

“The art market is totally manipulated by some people with authority. For instance the galleries abuse artist because they ask for money like an artist fee to make a show, most of the artists come from a certain background and usually these artists are going to be professors generating the same type of artists. So in the end they make some kind of cartel between institutions, academics and galleries so the rest of the artists are struggling or are abused by them”.

Choo’s comments corroborate Bidet’s findings on North Korean migrants who “cannot enter the numerous and powerful South Korean social networks based upon university and high school background (alumni connections), regional origin, and family ties that automatically regard them as outsiders” (2009:168). These accounts indicate that the social networks in the South Korean art field is extremely closed. Furthermore, following Bourdieusian thinking, the interviewees engage in the artistic practice in South Korea by first entering the ‘right’ educational institutions. Rather than cultural capital these institutions provide them with social capital which is what they need to be ‘in’ the field. This is evident in both Lee and Choo’s comments who remark that to advance in the art field is not subjected to ‘following a trend’ or even starting one, as it is to whom you are connected in the field. As argued by Grenfell and Hardy (2007) referring to Bourdieu and the competition in the fields “it is less about ‘following a rule’, as about acting strategically”(59). Moreover, only Choo, who has not yet attended the university where Kim and Lee graduated, claimed that he did not feel part of the art scene.

Labelling in the Art Field

Discussing membership in the South Korea art field started a conversation on how politics could affect the content of exhibitions. Lee declared his aversion for group shows that have North Korea as a main theme as these can be easily exploited for political interests:

“Even exhibitions are manipulated by political matter so I try not to be involved in these type of exhibitions, for instance sometimes I am invited to a show with the

name 'One Country' or 'One Nation' as a concept when I check the names of the artists list it was all the North Korean defector artists so I thought this is nothing about one country is just about North Korea so I rejected to participated so then I was replaced by another defector artist”.

As argued by Moon, nation-based exhibitions can often “assume an official political function” (2008: 227) and displace the artist’s work which becomes an ingredient rather than a central aspect of the exhibition.

The artists find that it is much easier to have a show abroad than in Korea, one main reason for them is the politics of division in Korea which still influence people’s opinion. When asked about people’s reactions to his work Lee answered that “foreigners have a different attitude to my work. They think it is interesting or funny but Koreans react more negatively”. Yet, he admitted that there is a generational gap and the negative reactions come mainly from the elderly:

“I had once a show in a gallery here and from the street people could see my paintings and reported the police because they saw Kim Jong Il and thought that something was wrong in there, this experience affected me a lot in the sense that I saw that there is still a big gap at understanding difference”

The findings of this section reveal that the artists are aware that politics and kinship networks are greatly present in the South Korean art field. This former point is particularly relevant in the case of Lee, who had several encounters with the authorities as the ‘propaganda’ style of some of his paintings is still considered controversial. These findings are also consistent with research on South Korean art policy by Lee (2014) who explains that “Korean society has not yet overcome the ‘red complex’ and many Koreans - particularly those on the conservative spectrum and the elderly- are susceptible to the dichotomist view that frames political opinions and activities challenging the conservative regime as ‘leftist’ and even ‘pro-North Korea’” (90). The developmental nature of the art field in South Korea engages with the next section which analyzes how the artists cope with the ‘defector’ label in the case of being outside of the art field and how the interviewees perceive the country’s ideological divide.

6.4 Outside of the Field and Dealing with Ideological Labelling

A recurring element in all the interviews was ideology, the artists repeated several times how in South Korea everything is decided by the politics of capitalism. It is important to note, that the South Korean context of capitalism is the developmental state which is characterized by a state-led economic development (Leftwich, 1995). The artists find that this has shaped people's mentality when associating someone's socioeconomic background with politics. In their case this is directly implied in the 'defector' label. Moreover, the artists argue that this is manifested in South Koreans' indifference towards North Korea and the social division caused by politics. The interviewees perceive South Korean society as more individualistic and more preoccupied with accumulating economic capital rather than helping North Koreans. This is in line with Lankov's argument that "South Koreans do not want to sacrifice their hard-won prosperity for the sake of people who, whatever the Republic of Korea (ROK) constitution says, clearly belong to another and rather hostile state" (2006: 114).

Choo is the most affected by political ideology and what he finds is the biggest obstacle in establishing his artistic career. During the interviews with Choo words like 'capitalism' and 'politics' were repeated several times and he thinks that "all the system is based on money, the legal and social services here are based on capitalism so in the end it is nothing about caring about the human being" according to him: "artists should be neutral regarding politics, but here artists are standing with politics either conservative or liberal". Democracy and capitalism, he argues, might have improved the country's economy but people's mentality still corresponds to feudal times, as division is present through different social classes and generations. He believes that young generations are too concerned with accumulating material possessions and getting distracted as *chaebols* continue being the owners of the economy which he finds influences all aspects of life, especially art. Choo prefers not to reference North Korea in his work directly since it might become object of political criticism. The art field and the political field are rarely indivisible in South Korea where he feels artists must abide to party politics to be successful. Choo finds that he is struggling to establish a career because he attempts to make "humanistic and pure art" devoid of political content.

Conversely, for Kim working with the North Korean subject in his work stemmed from South Koreans indifference towards it:

“Koreans, specially young generation, are only busy with daily life so they are indifferent and it seems that they are not aware of how serious the conflict between the two Koreas is. This lack of interest stimulated me to do some work about it. I started with the viewpoint that we are only divided into two but there are not different people. It is such a shame, it seems that the other countries in the world are more aware of the seriousness of North Korea than South Korea”.

Kim expressed his wish to raise awareness about the importance of the conflict through his work and how North Koreans need help from South Korea. In his case, the political content of his work and the interpretation or the labelling of it as such was not considered an obstacle to establish an artistic career.

Despite North Korea being the main subject of his work, Lee expressed a more detached attitude when explaining the influence of politics on pursuing an artistic profession. He explained that at the beginning of being in South Korea the lack of interest on North Korea bothered him and he tried to be more active raising awareness about North Korea through different NGOs. However, he soon realized that it was useless as both “political parties and NGOs try to influence” and decided to only focus on his work as this is what enabled him to establish his career. He emphasized his determination to ‘make it’ as an artist, and not politics, as the most decisive factor to advance in the art field.

Views on Unification and Future Projects

The discussion on art and politics started a conversation on the possibility of unification, a situation that they all seem to consider. Regarding the situation of North Korean migrants in South Korea I asked if they think North Koreans will be at risk of becoming second-class citizens in a unified Korea. Choo and Kim conveyed that this would certainly be the case. Yet, they think that their experience as migrants living in South Korea could benefit other North Koreans as “there is no one in South Korea that can understand North Koreans’ mentality or systems like us and they also will resist about this capitalist system so in that case when they resist we are the ones who can introduce this new system”. This is in line with Lankov’s conclusions, who argues that “North Korean defectors could become important “interpreters” of and “guides” to the outside world, and would likely be more acceptable to the Northerners than the complete outsiders from the South” (Lankov, 2006:130).

Contrarily, Lee explained that this opinion is only valid when one assumes that unification would happen under the American government. Although he finds that the opposite situation is unlikely, he explains that North Koreans will not easily accept the South Korean system. However, they all seem to have projects and ideas in case of re-unification, for instance, Kim mentioned that he would like to open an art school in his province:

“After re-unification, I would like to establish a comprehensive arts university in my hometown, not in Pyongyang that only shows the superficial appearance of socialism. I would like to establish a school for those who are really talented but didn’t have the opportunity”.

7. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated how artists can make use or cope with identity categories attached to the ‘defector’ label within their profession. The aim with this thesis was to provide an account that considers North Korean migrants as active agents rather than passive objects of their circumstances. Thus, the scope of this project is multifaceted as it explores migrants adaptive processes through the different areas of identity, politics, the media and the art field.

The data analysis showed that the artists use the ‘defector’ label creatively and strategically when dealing with the media as suffer from it as they encounter social prejudices. Distrust is one of the main barriers when interacting with others resulting from the stigma attached to the ‘defector’ label. Paradoxically, it is implied in the interviewees’ accounts that social capital is one of the major strategies to ensure their participation in the art field. Their career choices were motivated by their practical skills and their own preferences along with a will for freedom of speech and expression. However, lack of social diversity, the influence of politics and the restrictive nature of the art field seem to be the most detrimental factors for their career in South Korea. For this reason, the international art scene is regarded much more positively. The South Korean media is regarded negatively by the artists who consider it responsible for the perpetuation of stereotypes on North Korea and North Korean migrants. The artists consider that establishing social networks through education is essential to enter the art field. Yet, they find that nation based or ‘defector art’ exhibitions result reductive and disadvantageous for their career. For one of the artists in particular, political division and ideological differences have emerged as an obstacle to establish an artistic career.

Following Bourdieu's strategy of practice, I discuss that they can position themselves in the art field as they engage in the adaptive process rather than focusing on the adaptation measures intended to solve their obstacles. By working with Bourdieu's tools relationally, we can see how the individual *habitus* responds in harmony or discord with the art field and other related areas as the media or the political fields. A Bourdieusian framework provides a multifaceted and fluid sense of identities and allows to look into the objective structures and subjective perspectives that shape individual agency.

This research is a case study of three North Korean migrants artists and their particular experiences as an example of individual agency which adds to studies of North Korean migrants social adaptation. This study has emphasized the artists' views on the 'defector' label and how they use or relate to it, as this can create the false belief of commonality where there is indeed great variety. Their stories offer further lines of enquiry on the agency of both artists and migrants in South Korea. Studies could be conducted to assess the challenges that North Korean migrants face in pursuing their career and how they overcome them, providing a greater insight on the interaction of the social, political and cultural dynamics.

APPENDIX

Interview Questions Guidelines

1. Do you refer to yourself as *talbukja* (defector) or *saetonim* (new resident)?
2. Do you think there is a North Korean (defector/new resident) stereotype?
3. What topics are South Korean and foreign media most interested in, when they interview you? Are there any stereotypes or images of North Korea(ns) when they ask you certain questions?
4. What about galleries or museums how do they approach you and your work?
5. What motivates you to work as an artist?
6. Do you think your artwork belongs to a determined category or that it will become a category?

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