

Earning Refuge

A Case Study on the Afghan Special Contributors in the Republic of Korea

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze how Afghan evacuees have been constructed as belonging in Korea and what impacts might their status as ‘special contributors’ have for the future resettlement and integration of refugees. ‘Special contributor’ is a term used for the Afghan personnel and their families that worked with Korean governmental agencies in Afghanistan, and were evacuated upon the Taliban takeover of Kabul in 2021. Although a Refugee Act was already in place, the Afghans entered Korea not as refugees, but as *special contributors*. The study was carried out as a case study, where material was collected primarily from news articles directed at an English-speaking audience, and the data analyzed using the framework on ‘belonging’ by Yuval-Davis (2006). The results showed inter alia that the new framework ‘special contributors’ may lead to a situation where future refugees may have to justify their belonging based on their contribution to Korea, aside from their fear of persecution.

Keywords: Refugees; Belonging; Multiculturalism; Identity

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Contents

Introduction	5
Literature Review	7
Introduction	7
Korean Identity	7
Multiculturalism in Korea.....	9
Anti-multiculturalism	12
Integration	13
Belonging	14
Identifying gaps.....	15
Theoretical framework	15
Belonging	16
Social locations.....	17
Identifications and emotional attachments.....	17
Ethical and political values.....	18
The politics of belonging.....	19
Citizenship and the politics of belonging	20
Status, entitlement and the politics of belonging.....	20
Methodology.....	21
Aim and objective	21
Justification of Case study and Background.....	21
Methodology and method	22
Challenges, Risks and Limitations	23
Ethical Considerations.....	23
Case study – data and analysis	23
Introduction	24
North Korean defectors	24
Background on Immigration in Korea	24
Background – The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and Afghan refugees in Korea	26
Discussion.....	36
Conclusion.....	39
References	41

Introduction

Myths have commonly been used in order to foster ideas of commonality between groups and people (Cawley, 2016). South Korea (hereafter Korea) has come to be known as an ethnically homogenous and racially pure country (Lim, 2020; Kim, 2020), where there is a myth of Koreans' common ancestry, said to derive from *Tan'gun*, half god, half human (Cawley, 2016). After the Japanese colonization of Korea, the pure blood theory (sunsuhyeltongui, 순수혈통의) also became an important part of Korean identity as a way to rebuild the nation and create a sense of unity between Koreans (Kim, 2020).

In the early 1990's the term 'multiculturalism', or in Korean *damunhwa* (다문화), first started showing up in Korean newspapers, but it was only used when reporting on foreign cases (Ahn, 2012). However, in the years 2004 and 2005 there was a sudden sharp increase of journal articles discussing multiculturalism, where it had become a subject not only referred to as 'in the West' but adopted as Korea's own, highlighting that Korea was now becoming an increasingly more multi-racial country (Ahn, 2012). One could consider the following year of 2006 as the year that Korea took an official approach to multiculturalism. Although policies had been implemented before in order to facilitate immigrants, the announcement of the 'Plan for Promoting the Social Integration of Migrant Women, Biracial people, and Immigrants' in 2006 was "the first integrated governmental plan for multicultural society" (Ahn, 2012, pp. 100). Additionally, two pieces of legislation regarding multiculturalism were passed – the Act on Social Integration of Mixed-Race Koreans and Immigrants and the Act on Marriage Migrant Integration (Kim, Ming, Zhen, 2020). The following year, multiculturalism was added to the elementary and middle school curriculum, followed by the Support for Multicultural Families Act (Kim, Ming, Zhen, 2020, pp. 602). Indeed, the focus of multiculturalism in Korea has primarily been on marriage immigrants and multicultural families. However, Korea has in recent years started to see an increase of refugees¹ and asylum seekers² as well (Yoon, Fisshea & Suk, 2020; Yoon, et al., 2020).

¹ Refugees are legally recognized under the 1951 Refugee Convention as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 2022).

² Asylum seekers, similar to refugees have left their country due to a fear of persecution, and/or human rights violations, and seek asylum in another country, however they have not been legally recognized as a refugee (Amnesty International, 2022).

In the year 2018, there were 9'942 refugee applications (Nancen, 2021). Followingly in 2019 there were 16'173 applications, and in 2020 6'684 people applied for refugee status (Nancen, 2021). Despite the increasing applications, the refugee recognition rate in Korea remains low. The refugee recognition rate for the last year available (2020) is 0,4 per cent (Nancen, 2021). Comparably, the most recent data from the EU+ showed a recognition rate of 32 per cent (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2021).

The latest wave of refugees to Korea followed the Taliban takeover of Kabul in Afghanistan 2021. Afghans who had cooperated with different governments and embassies, such as the United States, Germany, Australia and Korea, faced possible retaliation (Song, 2021). These countries quickly implemented policies in order to accept Afghan collaborators as refugees (Song, 2021). In Korea there were divided opinions in both the public and political sphere in regards to accepting the Afghans as refugees (Jung, 2021). However, *Operation Miracle* was soon executed, where 391 Afghans were flown into Korea (Lee & Slavney, 2021), not as refugees, but through a new framework, or project of politics of belonging; 'special contributors.' The reason behind 'special contributors' can be understood as to deter possible discrimination against the Afghans in a country where there is a general negative attitude toward refugees (Larsen, 2021). However, it is worth questioning what such a framework may mean for future refugees in Korea. Will fleeing your home country due to the fear of being persecuted no longer cut it? The aim of this thesis is therefore to answer the question of *how have Afghan evacuees been constructed as belonging in Korea and what impacts might their status as 'special contributors' have for the future resettlement and integration of refugees?* This will be done through a case study on the Afghan special contributors in Korea, by applying the framework of 'belonging' by Yuval-Davis (2006).

Literature Review

Introduction

The literature review covers the topics relevant to this thesis: Korean identity, multiculturalism in Korea, anti-multiculturalism, integration and belonging. This literature allows for an understanding of the Korean society and thought, and how Afghan special contributors may belong accordingly.

Korean Identity

The Korean identity and culture can be found to be consistent with ethnic nationalist sentiments, and includes primarily three elements, “having Korean blood, knowing and using the Korean language, and understanding Korean culture and customs” (Kim, 2020, pp. 77). The right of blood (*jus sanguinis*) has been a central part of Korean citizenship. More recently however, this has taken a shift toward multiculturalism and citizenship based on residence (*jus domicile*) (Kim, 2020). Despite of this shift, there is a common cultural understanding that one’s blood is the determinant of being Korean (Kim, 2020). The importance of blood can be found to trace back to the ‘pure blood theory’ (*sunsuhyeoltongjui*) (Kim, 2020). The pure blood theory was implemented by the state following the Japanese colonial period, when they were looking to unify the people through a common national identity (Kim, 2020).

The Korean language is also an important element of Korean identity and can be considered to be the “embodiment of the Korean identity” (Simpsons, 2007, pp. 233) (in Kim, 2020, pp. 77). Finally, the knowledge of the Korean culture is included in the Korean identity (Kim, 2020). It is important to note that, not only does one have to know Korean culture, but one needs to personally endorse it and agree with the majority of the cultural values and beliefs (Kim, 2020). In addition to the three elements of Korean blood, language and culture, there is another element that plays a part in what it means to be Korean, and that is what Kim (2020) terms as ‘Korean-ness’, a skin privilege expressed through *Korean* skin color. This term also includes the “identities, beliefs, values, and ideologies behind the concept” (Kim, 2020, pp. 80).

Kim (2020) means that Korean-ness can be identified as the cause behind racism and colorism in Korea. The preference for a lighter skin color is related to social class, and goes back historically to the time when aristocrats and educators stayed at home studying and reading, resulting in having a lighter skin tone (Kim, 2020). On the other hand, commoners and servants who were less educated and worked outside with physical labor and in the sun, consequently had a darker skin tone (Kim, 2020). This hierarchal racial system based on skin color can be divided into three categories (Kim, 2020). The first, and preferential category is “Koreans”, followed by “Honorary Koreans” such as East Asian immigrants and light-skinned non-Koreans (Kim, 2020). The final third category, and least desirable would be “Collective Dark”, including among others Southeast Asian immigrants, and Middle Eastern (Kim, 2020).

Lee (2017) similarly finds that Korean identity is affected by skin color, according to a 'color-coding hierarchy' (Lee, 2017, pp. 533), where the color of skin and physical appearance of a person of mixed ethnicity is considered. Lee (2017) found that the 'one drop rule' is applied in Korean society. The American hypodescent or 'one drop rule' delegates mixed race children to the racial group of the parent with lower social status. This was typically used in the USA to refer to children of mixed heritage of one Black and one Caucasian parent (Lee, 2017). Similarly in Korea, the one-drop rule applies to any mix of Korean and other nationality. Should an individual have heritage from another nationality, other than Korean, then one cannot be counted as fully Korean (Lee, 2017). This can also be seen expressed in the term mixed-blood (*honhyeol*), which refers to a mix of race (Lee, 2017). It "implies hybridity, dirtiness, disorder, abnormality, disability, and contamination, is the opposite of 'pure blood'" (Lee, 2017, pp.535).

However, Korean identity is not only affected by ethnicity - the deciding factor is being born within the borders of Korea (Lee, 2017). Although the parents may be ethnically Korean, have they been born or raised abroad, they would not be considered fully Korean (Lee, 2017). Therefore, the 'origin-coding hierarchy' (Lee, 2017, pp. 531) can additionally express the Korean identity. The origin-coding hierarchy refers to how the country of origin of immigrant parents may influence their mixed-child's identity and racial categorization (Lee, 2017).

Multiculturalism in Korea

The formation of the Republic of Korea as we know today, had and has a large number of foreigners present, namely US soldiers (Lim, 2020) and since the late 19th century a Chinese migrant population as well (Kang, 2020). The US soldiers were however never included in the immigration statistics, but the Korean society was naturally influenced by a daily interaction (Lim, 2020). By the end of the Korean war in 1953 there were a total of 225,590 US soldiers stationed in Korea, and during the span of 30 years (1956-1985) there has been an annual average of 49,100 US soldiers stationed (Lim, 2020). Over this period of time, more than 40,000 multiracial children were born, and the number later reached 60,000 - possibly more considering not all births were registered (Lim, 2020). Following the Japanese colonization and the Korean war (1950-1953), the government looked to unify the Korean people by the implementation of the idea of Korea as a homogenous nation (Kang, 2020). Therefore, internationals, such as people of mixed heritage, or refugees, may be considered a threat to the Korean culture and identity (Lim, 2020). With this in mind, the government responded to the number multiracial children at the time by arranging adoptions abroad - although most of the children ended up remaining in Korea (Lim, 2020).

Aside from US soldiers and multiracial children, an increase of marriage migrants, North Korean defectors and migrant workers have increasingly diversified Korea's society in terms of both culture and race (Ahn, 2012). In the Korean context, multi-culturalism is found to take on three distinct types of meanings, (1) 'multiculture' which also has the meaning of 'multi-race', (2) 'minority culture', and (3) 'diverse' (Ahn, 2012). Multiculturalism is also related to the minority discourse in terms of rights and citizenship, as it is a "political matter how to endow public rights to a minority culture" (Ahn, 2012, p. 105).

The interchangeable use of race and multi-culture, means that multiculturalism may work on the premise of race (Ahn, 2012). The increase of immigrants has led to racial issues being raised, which Ahn (2012) means may be an indication of a collective worry of the fate of the mono-ethnic Korean national identity. In other words, immigrants may be perceived as a threat to the narrated mono-Korean identity.

This attitude to multiculturalism can be seen taking a more positive turn when Hines Ward Jr., half Korean, half African-American, caught the winning touchdown of the 2005 Superbowl (Lim, 2020). Upon his visit in Korea, he was warmly embraced and was given much media attention.

His visit was considered to have had an especially important impact on the social discourse in Korea by highlighting Korea's racial issues (Lim, 2020).

Multicultural societies are often referred to as melting-pots as well as salad bowls (Shen, 2017). The melting-pot has represented assimilation where the immigrant would 'become' and 'adapt' to the host society's culture and values whilst putting aside their own (Shen, 2017). The salad bowl on the other hand depicts a society where one can make out different cultures and people (Shen, 2017), one can taste the feta cheese as well as the dressing, the flavors and people complementing and harmoniously working together. However, Shen (2017) means that neither of these two metaphors work well within the context of the Korean society.

As an alternative, Shen (2017) presents the *Bibimbap metaphor*, which can be found in between the melting pot and salad bowl. Bibimbap is a traditional Korean dish made up of a bowl of rice with vegetables, chili pepper-paste and a fried egg. The rice, being the majority and base of the dish represents Koreans, the vegetables represent migrants, and finally the chili pepper paste and the egg represent the government's multicultural policies (Shen, 2017). When mixing these ingredients together, no matter how much you mix, the ingredients will not blend, yet will still be together (Shen, 2017). Shen (2017) means that the current multicultural policies are not implemented in a way that allows for integration and understanding between local Koreans and internationals. Rather, the integration procedure reproduces a society rooted in Korean culture, without taking into account, or adapting the cultures of internationals alike - as seen with the multicultural support centers focused on internationals alone instead of an exchange between the two (Shen, 2017). Furthermore, the definition of a multicultural family according to Korean law is a family made up of a Korean part and an international part (Shen, 2017). Therefore, any family without a Korean national part will not be covered under the *Support for Multicultural Families Act (2010)* (Shen, 2017). Shen (2017) means that multiculturalism has a purpose to "strengthen intercultural understanding" (p. 778). Ahn adds to this as "how to deal the matters of identity, difference, and recognition along with political rights and political subjectivity" (Ahn, 2012, pp. 98). Yet, the current situation reflects a one-way process. This in turn leaves to question whether or not the Korean multicultural policy truly can be called multicultural (Shen, 2017).

Lim (2020) means that Korean multiculturalism perhaps can be likened to that of the economic goals of a developmental state. In developmental states, they do not only place a focus on, but

prioritize “economic growth and productivity over redistributive policies and equality” (Lim, 2020, pp. 353). Immigration policy as such can also be regarded as an “instrument to pursue state interests” (Lim, 2020, pp. 353). Indeed, rights and privileges for immigrants in Korea are primarily reserved for an exclusive group of immigrants with the ability to contribute to the specific goals of the government, such as people in the highly skilled sector, and marriage migrants (Lim, 2020). Marriage migrants have been used by the Korean state since the 1990’s in order to counteract the declining birthrate and aging population (Lim, 2020). Gabriel Hunt (2020) similarly identifies migrant workers and marriage migrants as tools of the state, a temporary source of labor to easily dispose of once they have played their part.

Walton (2020), like Lim (2020) calls attention to the possibility of cultural diversity being regarded by the government as a threat to the unity of the Korean ‘one-ness.’ In 2012, an implemented policy focused on the multicultural education in Korea read “does not seek to understand students’ diversity or to change the privilege and power of the dominant culture” (Grant and Ham, 2013) (in Walton, 2020, pp. 841). Therefore, Walton (2020) means that the multiculturalism policy is taking on a top-down approach as well as one where multi-ethnic children are asked to assimilate to the structures of being Korean, “without challenging an imagined Korean ethno-racial homogeneity” (Walton, 2020, pp. 841).

Lee (2021) similar to Kim (2020) found that there is a need for endorsement of Korean cultural values and beliefs in order to be considered Korean. In the TV-program *Mom's Touch*, one person named Sumi teaches Korean cooking to three chefs and occasional guests (Lee, 2021).

Eric Nam, a Korean-American singer who was born and raised in the US was once featured on the show (Lee, 2021). Eric explained during the program that he mostly cooks Western dishes as opposed to Korean dishes, and that he also has a difficult time telling the flavor of a popular Korean side dish, acorn pudding (Lee, 2021). Upon hearing this he is called out for not being Korean enough and still ‘too foreign’ (Lee, 2021). On the other hand, Ashminov, a Bulgarian chef often featured on this show, has lived in Korea since more than 20 years is both fluent in Korean and expresses his love for Korean Food (Lee, 2021). Ashminov has therefore been named "Foreigner Korean" (*daehan waegogin*), a sort of ‘honorary Korean’, although this title does not recognize him as Korean, he is included in the scope of Korean-ness, and can assist in the promotion of Brand Korea (Lee, 2021).

As part of the government's branding policy of Korea included "'treating foreigners and multicultural families better" and "increasing external aid"' (Lee, 2021, pp. 56). However, Lee (2021) argues that these initiatives may have been implemented only in order to *appear* cosmopolitan. In line with this, through international events, internationals are seen enjoying and complimenting Korean food – showcasing an international acceptance (Lee, 2021). However, in the quest of showcasing internationals' acceptance, there is also a scrutiny of who is and who is not Korean takes place, such as seen in the case of Eric Nam and Ashminov (Lee, 2021).

The benefits to Brand Korea that the cosmopolitan 'Foreigner Koreans' give is "their dual positionality: they have the elite cultural and economic status that makes them cosmopolitan, yet they chose to affiliate with Korean-ness" (Lee, 2021, p. 68). However, in order to be embraced as Foreign Korean and an asset to Brand Korea, Lee (2021) finds that there comes a pressure of having to become over-expressive in regards to Korean culture. Lee (2021) poses a question in regards to this, which I find very important; "If the place of migrants within South Korean society and the recognition of their Korean-ness is premised on their worth to Brand Korea, should they then be treated like defective products and deported back to their countries of origin if they fail to contribute adequately" (Lee, 2021, p. 72). This, will surely pose a problem for migrants who do not comply with the image of being cosmopolitan, such as refugees (Lee, 2021). In terms of cooking being passed down in the family, Korean-ness can consequently be considered passed on in the family – leading to a scrutiny of marriage migrants of whether they are competent to raise the future generations of Koreans (Lee, 2021). This shows how marriage migrant women can therefore be seen to be expected to assimilate by *becoming* Korean wives (Lee, 2021).

Anti-multiculturalism

As a reaction to the growth of multiculturalism in Korea, an anti-immigration movement has been growing, also known as anti-multiculturalism (*ban damunhwa*). By analyzing two online discussion forums on politics and culture, Kang (2020) found three main subjects being discussed. These included; "that multicultural families would lead to the demise of South Korea, foreign workers take jobs from South Koreans, and female marriage migrants deceive their Korean husbands" (Kang, 2020, pp. 94). Some discussions meant that the government was instead of facing Korea's contemporary problems, such as youth unemployment and a declining birthrate,

were taking a short-term solution by importing cheap labor (Kang, 2020). Carrying such arguments, netizens could be seen justifying xenophobia and blaming migrants and governmental policies for Korea's social issues (Kang, 2020). Kang (2020) meant that there has been a preference shaped in terms of skin color, where "whiteness" is preferred over "blackness". These sentiments are partly a result of both "Euro-American and Japanese imperialist hierarchies" (Kang, 2020, p. 92). Kang (2020) means that this preference is still alive today, which can be seen in White-Korean biracial children, whom are seen as representatives of a global Korea, whilst non-white biracial Korean children of Southeast Asian and African descent are considered comparably inferior (Kang, 2020).

Koo (2018) argues that Islamophobia has also become a part of the anti-multicultural discourse by being framed by the media "as a conflict between "good and evil"" (Koo, 2018, pp. 171). The image of Islam and Muslims is mostly constructed by the media, both in the West and Korea. Although there is a greater presence of a Muslim population in Europe and the US, and in turn greater interaction between the different groups, hate speech can increasingly be found on online platforms.

Integration

'Integration' is an ambiguous term considering its' many different meanings, often including both socio-economic incorporation and socio-cultural adaptation (Saharso, 2019). Shaw and Wachter (2022) identifies integration as an acculturation strategy where a person is able to maintain "their original culture and identity while also interacting socially with other communities and adopting basic values of the majority society" (Shaw and Wachter, 2022, p. 2). However, in order for this to be able to take place, two conditions are to be met; (1) the minority group needs to be able to choose how to acculturate, and (2) the society need to be open to diversity. "Therefore, in environments with low tolerance for cultural diversity, high levels of prejudice, and negative attitudes toward cultural groups, integration cannot be achieved" (Berry, 1997) (in Shaw and Wachter, 2022, pp. 2). This in turn shows that integration is an interactive process between the society and the individuals (Shaw and Wachter, 2022). Borrowing the words of Favell (2019) (in Easton-Calabria and Wood, 2021) "Whether you call it "assimilation" or "integration", the fundamental question- integration of whom into what? -is not resolved" (Easton-Calabria and Wood, 2021, p. 4309).

‘Successful integration’ has often been based on the norms and values of the host society, and the immigrant's ability to adapt to them (Saharso, 2019). Integration has therefore received critique for being normative rather than descriptive (Saharso, 2019). The problem that Saharso (2019) finds with this is that the host society would be a homogenous population that the immigrants would integrate into, which then puts the responsibility of integration on the immigrants, when in reality the problem is "racist structures of power and inequality in society" (Saharso, 2019, pp. 1). Viewing this from a transnational perspective, expecting immigrants to assimilate to one nation state's social life and culture, especially when considering their possible relation to other nations, is questionable (Saharso, 2019).

Belonging

Høyen (2021) discusses social exclusion in Denmark, by looking at a couple of biographical accounts. The first account is from Jerichow's *Brobyggerne*, where a scholar Melchior and an activist Cekik, discusses the themes of among others; what it means to be Danish, and what it is like to be a minority. Denmark has since long experienced migration, especially post WWII (Høyen, 2021). In the mid-1950's, Denmark experienced refugees from Spain, and in the 1970's from among others Portugal and Greece. With a 14 per cent migrant population, Høyen (2021) contends Denmark as a primarily homogenous society.

Melchior and Cekik suggests that to be Danish, or the essence of "Danishness" comes down to three main traits; “the language, a way of dealing with the world, and the fear of the unknown” (Høyen, 2021, p. 46). However, Melchior and Cekik concluded that the language was by far the most important aspect (Høyen, 2021, p. 46). "The language is also an opening to the culture... language shows who belongs" (Høyen, 2021, p. 47).

Lambert et al. (2013) highlights that earlier research on social relationships have shown to be an essential part in finding meaningfulness in life. In regards to this, Lambert et al. (2013) wanted to see to what extent belonging contributed to this. In their study, belonging is defined as "fitting in with others" (Lambert et al., 2013, p. 1425). However, this is not only referring to social relationships, but it is referred to as "a secure feeling of fitting in" (Lambert et al., 2013, p. 1425).

Lambert (2013) points out that social relationships are a natural part of human's needs. Earlier research has shown that social rejection has led to "cognitive destruction, marked by a decrease in meaningful thought" (Lambert, 2013, p. 1419). In terms of belonging to a group, there are scholars that argue that group membership provides a sense of stability and sense making (Lambert, 2013). By conducting four studies with different methodologies in order to test the hypothesis, Lambert et al. (2013) found that belonging, with the meaning of securely fitting in, was not only related to meaningfulness in life - the results showed that meaningfulness was more positively affected by belonging, than by social support and value (Lambert, 2013).

Sonn et al. (2017) looks at South African immigrants from different racialized groups in Australia, and how belonging is affected by their identity negotiation. Sonn et al (2017) seems to imply that Australia, being a "settler-colonial society" (p. 41) with an indigenous population, as well as a history of migration policies that have favored people of white descent, are still struggling today in terms of different races. Although Australia is known as a multicultural society, there are scholars that mean that Australia sees itself as a "White nation" (Sonn et al., 2017, p. 42).

Identifying gaps

Earlier research on immigration in Korea has mainly maintained a focus on North Korean defectors (see e.g. Rich et al. 2021; Kim and Hocking, 2018; Park and Ok, 2017), marriage migrants (see e.g. Thin, 2013; Yi, 2021; Shin, 2020; Lee-An 2020) as well as multicultural children (see e.g. Lee, 2021; Lim, 2020). In regards to multiculturalism, the studies have focused on multi-ethnic children (Walton, 2020; Kang, 2020). Studies on refugees in Korea are comparatively limited. Yoon et al. (2020) looked at the mental health of recognized refugees and asylum applicants, and Nho et al. (2018) at the difficulties of refugee children post-migration. There have also been a few studies on the Yemeni refugees (see e.g., Akhmedov et al. 2020), and some others written in Korean. Yet, there have not been many studies on refugees in Korea, especially in regards to non-Korean refugees. This paper aims to fill this gap through a case study on the 'Afghan special contributors' in Korea.

Theoretical framework

The choice of theoretical framework on belonging by Yuval-Davis (2006) is based on the understanding of Korea as a developing multicultural society, but with rigid requirements for

belonging rooted in Korean blood ancestry, Korean language and Korean culture and customs (Kim, 2020). Yuval-Davis (2006) accounts for the complexity and dynamics of belonging and politics of belonging, and how boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are drawn to separate ‘us’ and ‘them’. Yuval-Davis (2006) will be able to highlight and assist in answering the focus of this thesis, namely the potential effects on future refugees in Korea as a result of the new framework of special contributors.

Belonging

Yuval-Davis describes belonging as the feeling of being 'at home' (2006, p. 197), but belonging is a feeling that is normalized, and thus only highlighted or articulated when threatened (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The politics of belonging on the other hand refers to, as the name implies, the ways belonging is constructed through political motives (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

In Yuval-Davis’ framework, belonging is accounted for on three different levels: (1) social locations, (2) identifications and emotional attachments; and (3) ethical and political values (Yuval-Davis, 2006, pp. 199).

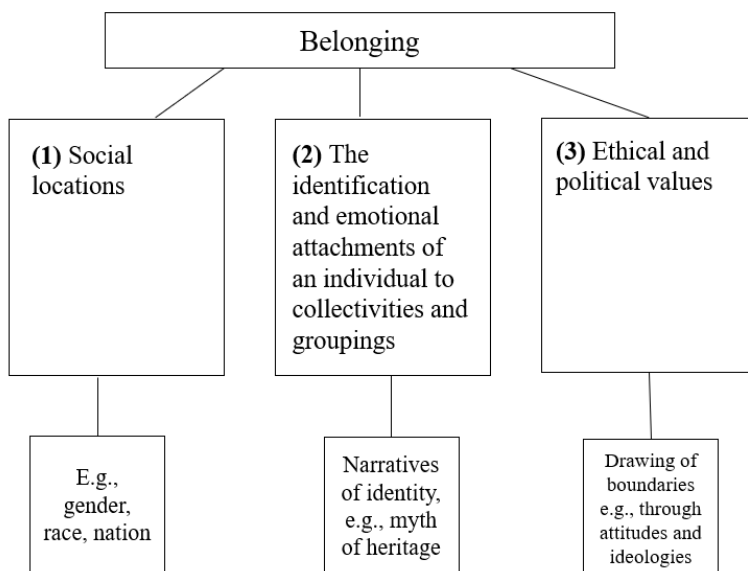


Figure 1: Figure on belonging made from the framework by Yuval-Davis (2006).

Social locations

Social locations refer to the belonging of people to "a particular gender, or race, or class or nation, (...) or a certain profession" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, pp. 199). However, although an individual can identify with one of these categories, their social location is actually a combination of several. Furthermore, these social divisions have divisions in themselves, where e.g., in relation to gender, being a woman is different depending on e.g., where you live, as well as your age (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Identifications and emotional attachments

Identities refer to the narratives told by people to explain who they are, and can be either individual or collective (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Such narratives can refer both to belonging to a particular group, as well as individual traits, such as body image or vocational aspirations (Yuval-Davis, 2006). With such narratives, not only is one's identity formed by the image one has of oneself, but is also influenced by the perceptions of others on what it means to belong to a specific group (Yuval-Davis, 2006). One such thing could be a myth of origin. Yuval-Davis (2006, p. 202) points out that these constructions of belonging are made from an individual's or groups longing to belong. Identity can be seen as a "process of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 202).

This sort of emotional attachment and identification to a particular community, and how others draw boundaries based on their judgment upon it, can be seen reflected in the 1990's England 'cricket test' (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 212). This test came into existence after a British politician by the name of Norman Tebbit, argued that if a person watched a cricket match between Britain and the country of their descent – depending on which country that person would cheer on, it would establish whether or not they belonged to the British collectivity (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Therefore, in this research, belonging will be referred to as a dynamic process inclined to change through the actions of individuals, resulting from a longing to belong, which in turn construct and reproduce identity narratives and attachments (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Ethical and political values

Belonging can thus far be understood as social locations and individual and collective identities. However, these are in turn constructed by the interaction of people, judging, evaluating and drawing boundaries based on them (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yuval-Davis (2006) points out that related to this are attitudes and ideologies, that contest where boundaries, in exclusionary ways, should be drawn in order to belong (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

The drawing of these boundaries in relation to attitudes and ideologies can be viewed historically in different extremes (Yuval-Davis, 2006). I believe one extreme case can be seen in a man by the name of Enoch Powell, who was a conservative political figure in the British post-imperial era (Yuval-Davis, 2006). He meant that one's descent would define whether or not one was English. At this time there were still people brought from the Caribbean to England for work, and Powell argued that if they were to have children, these children would not automatically be English simply because of them being born on British soil (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Powell even went so far as to argue that in order for England to have an integrated society, the people that had been brought to England, had to return to their home countries, otherwise England would end up in chaos with people fighting (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Some readers of this thesis may be happy to know that Powell was eventually expelled from the party (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Through the case of Powell, we can see how a contestation of English belonging and the drawing of boundaries takes place. According to the judgment and attitude of Powell, being English is derived from one's descent. I believe it can be assumed that for Powell, English descent also meant race, and cultural and political identification (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Even though a person was born and raised in England, and identified as English, according to the judgment of Powell, it would still not make that person English as her or his descent differed (Yuval-Davis, 2006) from what I would assume to be the homogenous majority of 'us' English men and women.

In terms of ethical and political values, we can see how after the 2001 riots in England, England went from a focus on multiculturalism to a social and community integration (Yuval-Davis, 2006). David Blunkett who was a politician in the liberal party at this time highlighted that this did not mean a focus on common descent or culture, but rather on solidarity and loyalty to the British state and society. Blunkett even meant that marriage between British and South Asian communities would ease a 'cultural and social cohesion' (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 211)

According to Yuval-Davis, “It is in the arena of the contestations around these ethical and ideological issues and the ways they utilize social locations and narratives of identities that we move from the realm of belonging into that of the politics of belonging” (2006, pp. 203-204).

The politics of belonging

The politics of belonging can be understood as boundary maintenance, where there is a separation of the population into ‘us’ and ‘them’ by the political community (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Such boundaries of separation, of inclusion and exclusion are related to the nation being divided into ‘imagined communities’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 204), resulting from ‘imagined borders’ of ‘belonging’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yuval-Davis (2006) highlights an example by Benedict Anderson (p. 204) where he says that the population of a nation cannot possibly meet each other, yet there is an imagined communion. These imagined communities and division of ‘us’ and ‘them’ thus become a construction of each individual’s own social location, experiences, identity narratives and values (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Chin (2019) described it as “the everyday practice of asserting and reacting to belonging-claims” (p. 725) where people decide whether or not they fit in the ‘us’ or ‘them’.

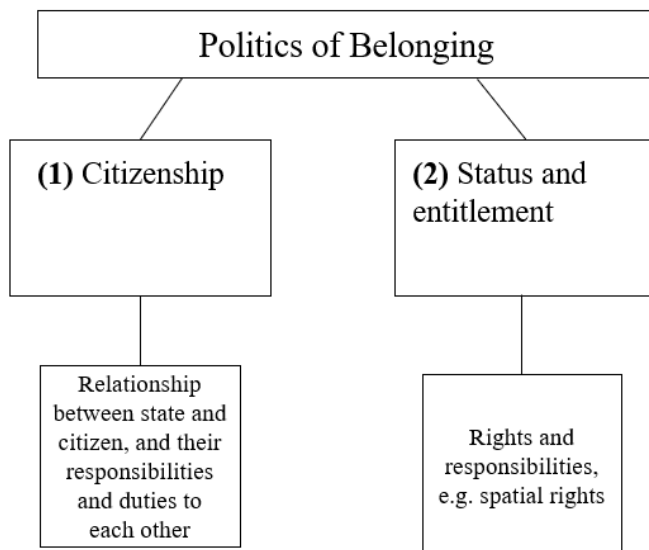


Figure 2: Figure on politics of belonging made from the framework by Yuval-Davis (2006).

Citizenship and the politics of belonging

Yuval-Davis (2006) describes citizenship in relation to liberal theory and republican theory. The liberal theory accounts for citizenship as a relationship where both the individual and the state has a "reciprocal relationship of rights and responsibilities" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 205). The republican theory differs from the liberal theory in the way that the relationship is no longer reciprocal between the citizen and the state. Rather, the political community acts as a mediator between the two, and the citizen's "loyalty to that political community, the nation, and its preservation and promotion are the primary duties of the citizen" (p. 206), in some cases to the point of sacrificing their life. Communitarian theories of citizenship takes an even stronger focus than the republican theory on the duty of the citizen to the political community.

Yuval-Davis (2006) points out that the commonality between citizenship in the framework of different theories is that they all tackle the question of how to deal with differences. This begs the question of how these differences should affect who 'deserves' support from the state, and political communities, such as the European Union, United Nations, or a religious community.

Status, entitlement and the politics of belonging

Citizenship means that one is not just a member of the political community, but with the membership comes also rights and responsibilities (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In terms of rights, it could be spatial rights, and the right to work. For responsibilities, it could be to pay tax and obey the law (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The duties related to a member's rights and responsibilities has in time become requirements. Exactly what an individual needs to do of what and how much in order to 'belong' differs (Yuval-Davis, 2006) and likely changes with time and place.

Common descent, culture, religion and language are some examples of what could be demanded (Yuval-Davis, 2006). In pluralist societies, it is more common to see "Loyalty and solidarity, based on common values" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 209), whilst in racialized societies, one would find the strictest boundaries in the social locations of origin and race. "Language, culture and sometimes religion are more open to voluntary, often assimilatory, identification with particular collectivities"

(Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 209). In the more open requirements for belonging, there are common values, such as democracy or human rights (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Upon the decision of evacuating the Afghans who had worked with the Korean government to Korea, a new political project of belonging was formed and implemented, namely 'special contributors.' The application of the framework on belonging by Yuval-Davis (2006) on this case I believe will be able to highlight how the status of 'special contributors' may affect future refugees in Korea, where politics of belonging has long been based on the myth of common descent (Cawley, 2016), and Korean blood, Korean language, and culture (Kim, 2020), but is now taking a multicultural turn.

Methodology

Aim and objective

At the time of the withdrawal of Korean troops from Afghanistan and the evacuation of the Afghan special contributors took place due to the Taliban takeover, I was studying and living in Korea. Similarly, in 2018 when the Yemeni refugees arrived in Korea, I was also studying and living in Korea. During both periods, I followed the media coverage on the arrivals of what can be considered considerably large numbers of refugees in the case of Korea. However, at the time of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the government created a new framework for Afghan evacuees to enter Korea, rather than utilizing the Refugee Act that was already in place. From this, I wished to learn why this decision to name the Afghan evacuees as 'special contributors' was taken, how it may affect the Afghan special contributors in Korea, as well as future refugees in Korea.

Justification of Case study and Background

This is the first time, as far as the knowledge of the author, that the Korean government has created a new framework to enter Korea, when they have been eligible to enter as refugees. How this new situation will develop and is developing within the complexity of multiculturalism in Korea makes this an interesting case for a case study. Case studies have historically developed within a variety

of disciplines, such as political science and psychology (Tight, 2017). Tight (2017) highlights a few different definitions of case study research by different authors *inter alia* Merriam (1998) and Foreman (1948). I find the following quote and definition of a case-study by Thomas (2011a) to be the most relevant and defining for this research.

“Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions or other systems which are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame – an object – within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates.” (Thomas 2011a, p. 23, cited in Tight, 2017).

Methodology and method

To answer my research question, I manually collected 24 newspaper articles in English about the Afghan special contributors using a search engine. Please see Table 1 below for the phrases or words used. The news articles were collected from 18 newspapers aimed at an English-speaking audience in and outside of Korea, *inter alia* The Korea Herald, Yonhap News Agency and The Guardian. Additionally, governmental news outlets from MOFA and information from NGO’s were included in the data collection. It should be noted, due to the nature of a mixed deductive and inductive approach (Bryman, 2016, pp. 21-23) the research started with a theory based on the prior knowledge and experience of the author as well as the literature review, which led to a research question. This research question was then altered upon the collection of data and the inductive process.

Search Phrases
Afghan refugees Korea /Afghan refugees in Korea
Refugees in Korea / Refugees Korea
Afghanistan Korea

Special Contributors Korea
People of Special Merit Afghanistan Korea

Table 1: Search phrases

The articles were first coded manually in an Excel-document into a total of 12 different sub-themes. The sub-themes were chosen according to the expectations of the author, but were altered, as the data was collected, thus coding was both inductive and deductive. Followingly, the data was sorted according to the time of their publication and by type of coverage, whether the article referred in broad terms to *governmental statements*, *informational media coverage*, *Korean opinion*, or *Afghan special contributor statements*. The data was then analyzed according to the theoretical framework on belonging by Yuval-Davis (2006).

Challenges, Risks and Limitations

Considering that this is an ongoing case, there was a limited amount of information to access in English. Data coding and analysis may be affected by the author's personal frames of reference, thus leading to skewed data and biases. Other challenges included availability on information related to refugees in Korea, such as the allocation of subsidies. There is a possibility that there is more information on this in Korean, but this was unavailable to the author due to language barriers.

Ethical Considerations

The case of special contributors is ongoing and rapidly changing. Bryman (2016) strongly points out that any research where participants may be caused harm of any sort, such as physical harm or harm in the form of stress is considered unacceptable. Therefore, I did not find it appropriate at this time to conduct interviews. Nonetheless, weighing in on a case that is ongoing, and which may be considered controversial, may have impacts that are outside the control of the author.

Case study – data and analysis

Introduction

In the case study, I approach the treatment of Afghan special contributors through an understanding of how refugees have been conceptualized and treated historically. Although not officially included in the refugee statistics, the majority of refugees in Korea are North Korean (Rich et al., 2021). As such, this has a very different relationship to questions of refugee belonging. Korea has only recently begun to deal with refugees of other nationalities, the numbers of which still remain small (Nancen, 2021).

North Korean defectors

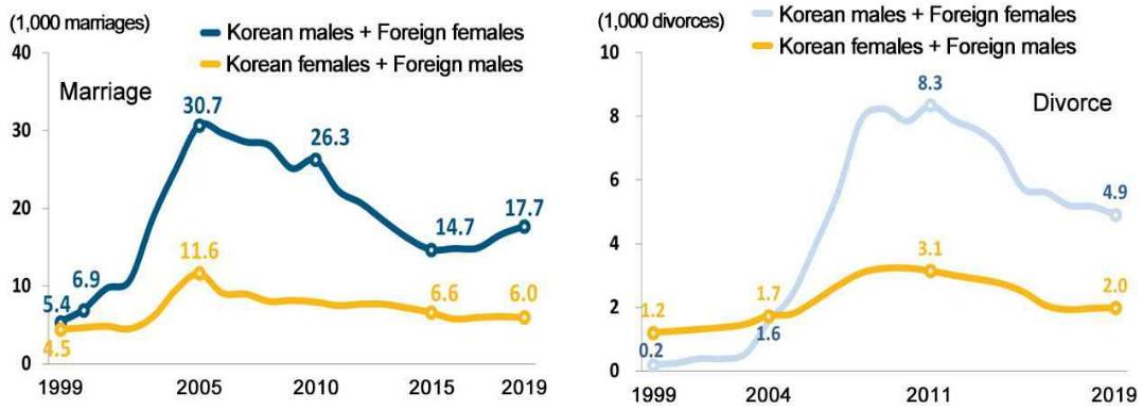
In 1997, the Protection and Settlement Support of Residents Escaping from North Korea Act was implemented with the purpose of North Korean defectors to settle in South Korea (Kim & Hocking, 2018). Once North Korean refugees arrive in South Korea, they first undergo an investigation in order to make sure that they truly are North Korean, and not a security threat (Sung & Go, 2014). Once they have gone through this process, they are taken to Hanawon, a government facility run by the Ministry of Unification, for the period of 12 weeks (Sung & Go, 2014; Kim & Hocking, 2018). During their stay at Hanawon, they learn about Korean history and democracy as well as economy (Sung & Go, 2014), and the basics of everyday life in Korea (Kim and Hocking, 2018). The North Korean defectors are then provided with assistance from the government after having spent three months at the Hanawon. This assistance includes among others “a one-time resettlement payment and housing assistance” (Sung & Go, 2014, pp.2). During the following two years, they are also provided with assistance from a person (Sung & Go, 2014) to help them adapt to the Korean society.

Background on Immigration in Korea

In the late 1980's and early 1990's Korea experienced a labor shortage in the 3D-jobs (dirty, dangerous, difficult), which led to the Korean government to implement the Employment Permit System (EPS) (Gabriel Hunt, 2020). The EPS allowed for workers to work in the country up to 3 years, upon which they had to return to their countries of origin (Gabriel Hunt, 2020). Similarly, with the purpose of alleviating the gender imbalance and shortage of marriageable women, especially in the countryside, the government facilitated policies for marriage migration. At the very beginning of the marriage migration, prior to 1996, the marriage migrants were predominantly joseonjok (조선족) women, namely women of Korean ethnicity who had migrated to China post

the Korean war. Later, marriage migrants derived from countries such as Mongolia, Russia, Vietnam and Philippines (Gabriel Hunt, 2020).

Found in the marriage and divorce statistics there has been a relatively steady increase of marriages with a foreign spouse (Statistics Korea, 2020). From year 2018 these marriages increased with 4.2% (Statistics Korea, 2020), with a dip of 35.1% from 2019 (Statistics Korea, 2021), which I believe may be an effect of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Graph 1: Marriage statistics on marriage between internationals and Korean nationals 2019.
Source: Statistics Korea (2020)

Naturally, marriage migrants have led to the birth of multi-ethnic children as well. Aside from immigration in the form of marriage migrants and migrant workers, Korea has typically not received many refugee claimants, with the exception of North Korean refugees, also known as North Korean defectors. North Korean defectors are at the time of writing the biggest group of ‘refugees’ in South Korea (Rich et al., 2021) with a number of a little over 33’000 staying in Korea (Ministry of Unification, 2021). It should be noted that North Korean nationals are automatically given (South) Korean citizenship, as they are considered Korean under the Korean constitution, and are thus not counted in the refugee statistics (Rich et al., 2021). However, Korea is now seeing an increasing trend of refugees, where in 2018 there were approximately 500 refugees from Yemen that claimed refugee status on the southern island Jeju Island (IOM, 2020). Followingly in 2021, Korea received approximately 400 Afghan evacuees as ‘special contributors’ due to the Taliban takeover the same year (Lee & Slavney, 2021).

Background – The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and Afghan refugees in Korea

US Occupation of Afghanistan

After the attack on the US twin towers on 9/11, 2001, President Bush declared war on terrorism. This led to the US occupation of Afghanistan that has lasted close to 20 years (Zucchini, 2021). The Taliban were governing most of Afghanistan and refusing to hand over the leader Osama bin Laden of the terrorist group Al Qaeda, which led to a conflict (Zucchini, 2021). However, in mid-April of 2021, President Biden declared an end to the occupation, and for US military troops to leave the country by August 31st of 2021 (Zucchini, 2021). Although they had initially planned to leave 650 troops behind in order to secure the embassy, a sudden Taliban victory led to a full-on withdrawal from the capital city Kabul, and a Taliban takeover (Zucchini, 2021).

Effects on Korea

Due to the strong political and military ties between the US and Korea following the Korean war, Korea assisted in the conflict in Afghanistan (Hemmings, 2012). Korea's involvement in Afghanistan began already in 2001 when President Kim Dae-Jung (1998-2003) sent 60 medics to the country who then established a field hospital. This was followed by 150 engineers who were sent to expand the base facilities (Hemmings, 2012). Around 500 troops have also since 2010 been present in Afghanistan, in order to assist in peacekeeping and reconstruction (Yeo, 2021). Aside from assisting in the Afghan conflict, Korea has also assisted abroad in UN-led peacekeeping operations, such as in Somalia in 1990 (Hemmings, 2012), and sent troops to Iraq 2004-2008 (Yeo, 2021). Hemmings (2012) means that Korea's assistance in the Afghan conflict can perhaps be efforts to be recognized as a 'global player'.

Once the US troops pulled out of Kabul, the Korean government was faced with the question of whether or not to pull out the Afghan employees from Afghanistan who were in danger of the Taliban due to having assisted the different Korean government organizations, e.g., the embassy and hospitals (Jung, 2021). Although there was a division in opinions on both a governmental as well as a civil level, 'Operation Miracle' was finally initiated by the Ministry of Defense, where approximately 391 Afghans were flown out of Kabul (Kim, 2021). By the end of 2021, the total number of Afghan special contributors in Korea were 389 after a few births, and also resettlements

to the USA (Chung, 2022). In a press release, Korea also pledged to donate 32 million US dollars to humanitarian assistance, with the goal of assisting Afghans affected by the war (MOFA, 2021). Part of this aid is planned to be allocated to Afghan refugees in Iran and Pakistan as well (MOFA, 2021).

The Resettlement Program

Upon their arrival to Korea, the Afghans were escorted to Jincheon facility, a National Human Resources Development Institute in North Chunchong Province (Lee, 2021). The Jungcheon facility followingly became the home of the Afghans for the following six to eight weeks, where they were to attend various programs including Korean language in order to settle in Korea (Yonhap News Agency, 2021). They were then moved to a different facility called Yeosu facility for another four months, where they continued the resettlement program (Chang, 2021).

The state is setting the boundaries by laying out what the Afghan special contributors need to do in order to integrate into the Korean society and what it means to be a part of Korea's (imagined) society. This included a 6-month educational program in Korean language, culture and everyday chores, which in itself preludes the understanding of 'us' Koreans, and 'them' Afghans. As earlier mentioned, the Korean identity can roughly be summarized to Korean blood, language and understanding of Korean culture and customs (Kim, 2020). Similarly, we can see this in the resettlement program for North Korean defectors as well. Once North Korean defectors arrive in South Korea, they first undergo an investigation, firstly in order to make sure that they are truly North Korean, and secondly to make sure they are not a security threat (Sung & Go, 2014). Once they have gone through this process, they are taken to Hanawon, a government facility run by the Ministry of Unification, where they stay for a period of 12 weeks (Sung & Go, 2014; Kim & Hocking, 2018). This time they spend learning about Korean history, democracy, economy (Sung & Go, 2014), and the basics of everyday life in Korea (Kim and Hocking, 2018). Once the three months have passed and they leave Hanawon, the North Korean defectors are provided by the state "a one-time resettlement payment and housing assistance" (Sung & Go, 2014, pp. 2), and a person who is available to assist them for a period of two years. Additionally, these assistance programs have been made available for a period of five years, as it is considered that by then they should have adapted to the Korean society (Sung & Go, 2014).

The Controversy of Special Contributors

The Afghan refugees were first designated as “persons of special merit” by the Korean government. However, as it was soon highlighted in Western media that there had only been nine people that had been termed this since 1948, they were quickly referred to as “special contributors” (Lee & Slavney, 2021). Choi Jongmoon, Second Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs said in a press conference that helping the Afghans was the “moral responsibility” of Korea (Choi & Chang, 2021). Furthermore, Choi highlighted that considering their contribution to Korea, they are not coming to Korea as refugees, but as “people who have done distinguished service to South Korea” (Choi & Chang, 2021). Thus, they are also receiving different (and better) treatment than other refugees, *inter alia* “in terms of education, stipends, and support” (Lee & Slavney, 2021). The Afghans were brought to Korea by military transportation. Therefore, the Justice Minister Park Beom-kye meant similar to the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, that the Afghans should be “distinguished” from other refugees (Yonhap News Agency, 2021).

According to the Blue House official, National Security Office Director Suh Hoon, despite the possibility for the Afghan evacuees to apply for refugee status according to the Refugee Act, the reason why the Afghan evacuees were given the title of ‘special contributors’ was in order to take ‘preemptive protective measures’ due to the lack of time (Kim, 2021).

Second Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Choi Jongmoon had said in a press conference on the Afghans that “the country’s “moral responsibility” to house the Afghans given the “serious situations” many of them are under. He added that the evacuees will be entering the country not as refugees, “but people who have done distinguished service to South Korea.”” (Choi & Chang, 2021).

A government official is thus making an official statement that the Afghans are entering Korea as “people who have done distinguished service” (Choi & Chang, 2021) to the country (unlike refugees). When stating that the Afghans are not to enter Korea as ‘refugees’ but because they have done a ‘distinguished service’, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Choi seems to be implying that they should be treated better than refugees (who have not done so), and thus there should be a difference in how they are treated. In fact, another statement by the government emphasized this aspect of better treatment.

“The government also emphasized that these Afghans are not refugees but are instead people who contributed to the national interests of South Korea. As a result, they will receive better care than refugees in terms of education, stipends, and support” (Lee & Slavney, 2021).

In terms of citizenship rights of who deserves to receive help from the state or other communities, the Korean state could be considered taking a liberal theory approach, where there is a reciprocal relationship between the state and the ‘citizen’, but in this case, Afghan special contributors. The ‘citizen’ had in this case helped the Korean state, which had put them in danger. Upon this, the Korean state was now obliged to help them, resulting in a “reciprocal relationship of rights and responsibilities” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, pp. 205). In this aspect, one could thus say that the Afghan special contributors ‘belong’.

One of the Afghan special contributors who arrived in Korea expressed his delight and pride in being called *special contributor* as opposed to being called a ‘refugee’ (Yi, 2021). This could be interpreted as showing that he himself has identified refugees as ‘them’ and as ‘not belonging’ in Korea and valued the title ‘refugee’ as *less* than ‘special contributor’. Yuval-Davis (2006) highlights how belonging often only becomes articulated once it is under threat. For the Afghan special contributor to come as a special contributor to Korea, the feeling of ‘being at home’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006) may have come under threat due to the social locations taking on new meanings due to a different judgment and value of others. Additionally, due to the at least partly loss of old emotional attachments and identifications, and a new identity narrative in the form of ‘special contributor’. For local Koreans, the inflow of Afghan special contributors may have threatened the mono-ethnic nationality and their emotional attachment to this identity, resulting in highlighting ‘belonging’ and ‘us’ and ‘them’.

The title of *special contributors* has been criticized for being a way of curbing negative backlash from the public (Kim, 2021).

"It is against the humanitarian value of the Refugee Convention to select 'special contributors,'" Advocates for Public Interest Law, or APIL, a non-profit organization working for asylum seekers in the country, said in a statement. "South Korea has benefited from economic gains by joining advanced countries, but has been free riding by avoiding its roles as part of the international community" (Kim, 2021).

Additionally, Lee Il, lawyer at Advocates for Public Interest Law and member of the Korea Refugee Rights Network civil group, commented on the term of ‘special contributors as ““It reduces refugee status, which should be granted according to South Korea’s obligations under international human rights law, to a medal awarded to those who have done well for the government rather than being granted to those who are clearly at risk of persecution.”” (Rashid, 2021).

Lee (2021) highlights the cooking show *Mom’s Touch* where a cosmopolitan Korea is being promoted by international guests. These international guests are perceived as having both *actively chosen* to stay in Korea, and to have a high cultural background and a high economic status (Lee, 2021). These credentials are in turn viewed as useful in the promotion Brand Korea, unlike refugees who have not actively chosen to come to the country because *they want to*, but for the fear of persecution in their home country, or immigrants for economic reasons. However, as pointed out by Lee (2021), "If the place of migrants within South Korean society and the recognition of their Korean-ness is premised on their worth to Brand Korea, should they then be treated like defective products and deported back to their countries of origin if they fail to contribute adequately"? (Lee, 2021, p. 72). This has serious implications for future refugees (Lee, 2021).

Visa, citizenship and working rights

The Afghan special contributors were first granted a short-term C-3 visa upon entering Korea, which was then turned to an F-1 visa, which later turned to F-2 visas (Kim, 2021). F-2 visas are the same visas given to refugees, through which they will be permitted to live and work for a period of five years, and then be able to renew their visa. In time, they should also be able to apply for F-5 residence visas (Kim, 2021). In order for the Afghan special contributors to be granted an F-2 visa, the Immigration Control Act was in need of alteration (Kim, 2021). However, before the Afghan special contributors came into question, the Ministry of Justice claimed that there had already been a proposal made to alter the Immigration Control Act, in order to grant F-2 visas to people who had provided special service for the interests of Korea (Kim, 2021). With the new situation of Afghan special contributors, this was moved up sooner (Kim, 2021).

Resettlement and Work Opportunities

Once Afghan special contributors had finished the governmental educational programs in early January of 2022, seven Afghan families, a total of 20 people moved to live in Incheon, 157 resettled somewhere else (Chung, 2022). This was followed by another 172 Afghan special contributors moving to Incheon, Ulsan and Gimpo (Chung, 2022). For the first year of the stay of the Afghan special contributors, the government had stated that there are plans to provide them with housing costs and resettlement aid (Yoon, 2022). I believe their continued move could be the result of this aid, but there were no articles that the author could find to confirm this.

In Ulsan, a subcontractor of the Hyundai Heavy Industries decided to employ 157 of the Afghan special contributors (Choi, 2022). The Ministry of Justice saw it as a mutually good opportunity for the Afghan evacuees to find work, and for the shipbuilding industry to find workers (Choi, 2022). In conjunction with the move to Ulsan, the children of the Afghan families per Korean regulations where the school allotment is related to the home address of the children, enrolled in the school of the district (Choi, 2022). For the Seoboo Elementary school in Ulsan it meant the enrollment of 25 primary school-age Afghan evacuees, which was the largest enrollment of Afghan evacuees among all institutions (Choi, 2022).

The situation of Afghan special contributors contrasts with recognized refugees, for whom finding employment has been found to be difficult, as their credentials have often not suited the Korean market (Schattle & McCann, 2014). Instead, a few have found employment through introductions, favors or even through media coverage (Schattle & McCann, 2014).

Attitudes toward 'Afghan Special Contributors'

The enrollment of the Afghan evacuee students in the Seoboo elementary school was however met with negative attitudes related to both Islamophobia, and in regards to the extent of knowledge of Korean culture and language (Choi, 2022). Choi (2022) highlights one mother of a (Korean) student from the school expressing her worries in regards to the potential dangers to her child due to Muslim families (the Afghan evacuees) living close by the school. Additionally, the learning environment was pointed out as being at risk of being disturbed by the Afghan evacuees due to their lack of Korean language and cultural knowledge (Choi, 2022). The mother meant that it is

necessary for them therefore to spend more time at academic institutions before starting school together with Korean students (Choi, 2022).

“They need to spend some time at academic institutions for non-Koreans to get used to the Korean language and culture.” (Choi, 2022).

The wish to have the Afghan students first at a separate school for a longer period in order for them to adapt to the Korean culture and language, shows how the boundaries are being drawn by the evaluation and judgment by the parents of how the Afghan children are not *Korean enough*. Therefore, in order for them to be so, they should receive additional education in Korean language and culture. Additionally, social locations are utilized by identifying Islam as unsafe and different from what being Korean is.

This worry was by many, as a group of parents from Seoboo elementary school on February 18th 2022 demonstrated on the school’s campus grounds against the enrollment of the Afghan students (Choi, 2022). Additionally, the worry of the resettlement of the Afghan refugees in Ulsan went as far as to the presidential office through an online petition system by the name of Cheong Wa Dae with the purpose of halting the group homes system for the Afghan special contributors (Choi, 2022). The online petition reached a number exceeding 15,180 signatures as of February 2022 (Choi, 2022).

““Without listening to voices of Korean nationals who pay taxes, the city has pushed ahead with assigning the Muslim evacuees to areas next to the school zone. I hope the city officials guarantee the security and safety of local residents first, before tending to the refugees,” the petition reads.” (Choi, 2022).

The statement of the petition highlights the people’s perceived rights as citizens of Korea, who do their duties of paying tax, which asserts for their belonging and citizenship. From this scenario, one can understand that the signers of the petition mean they have upheld their end of their duties, but that the government is not being responsible on their end of the ‘reciprocal relationship’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006) by placing the Afghan evacuees close to a school.

It can be understood that being a Muslim does not ‘belong’ in the commonly imagined community of Korea. Rather, it seems that it is judged as an identity where the person in question may act dangerously.

However, these negative attitudes toward the Afghan refugees seem to reflect a smaller part of the population. According to a Realmeter poll done on 500 respondents, close to 70% of these “approve of the plan to issue long-term visas to the Afghan evacuees.” (Choon, 2021). Furthermore, 70% were in favor of the Afghan special status (Yi, 2021).

The civil society additionally expressed a welcoming attitude among others through a church group who held a sign saying “We love all of you” outside the National Human Resources Development Institute, where the Afghan special contributors were said to be held at the start of their stay in Jincheon (Hassan, 2021). Additionally, “A cosmetics firm reportedly donated 1.5 million won (\$1,700) worth of products, while a farming association sent 30 boxes of halal-certified pears worth 1.8 million won. Two churches also donated 3 million won each.” (Choon, 2021)

These positive attitudes may be a product of the government’s efforts expressing Afghans’ belonging in Korea as *special contributors*. However, this begs the question of whether there would be similarly positive attitudes if there were to be a higher intake of refugees, or refugees who may not have made any ‘special contributions.’

The attitude toward North Korean defectors is on the other hand showing a negative turn (Sung & Go, 2014). A poll survey done by the East Asia Institute (EAI) showed that the degree of closeness felt toward North Korean defectors had dropped from 75% in 2005, to 55.2% in 2010. South Koreans in their 20s was the group with the most negative attitudes toward North Korean refugees, something which could be explained by the time period since the divide between the North and South, where many now regard them as two separate countries (Sung & Go, 2014). North Korean defectors often feel alienated and have a difficult time getting along with local South Koreans, due to a strong prejudice and stereotyping of North Korea and North Koreans (Sung & Go, 2014).

The prejudice and stereotyping, which North Korean defectors face shows the strict boundaries of belonging in Korea. Although North and South Koreans share a common heritage, the boundaries of belonging take expression.

Korea as a Middle-power

It was speculated that the reason behind Korea's acceptance of the Afghan special contributors was not only Korea stepping up to its responsibilities as a country of middle-power status, but perhaps done with a goal of gaining favor with the US in a race with China where both Korea and Japan are considered key geopolitical allies (Salmon, 2021).

“Choi Young-sam, spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, said in a briefing on Thursday that “South Korea is fulfilling its moral obligation as a responsible nation that doesn't forget its friends and turn away from the difficulties of the neighbor”” (Kim, 2021).

Similarly, “As President Moon Jae-in put it, it was "only natural for us to fulfil our moral responsibility by helping the Afghans who helped our operations”” (Choon, 2021).

“President Moon Jae-in said this week that his country has a "moral responsibility" to the Afghans, and Park mentioned how countries including the U.K., the U.S. and Germany had arranged flights to evacuate Afghans, and alluded to South Korea's history of having received assistance from abroad during and after the 1950-53 Korean War” (Borowiec, 2021).

The moral responsibility to Afghanistan was pointed out by among others President Moon Jae-in (Choon, 2021), as well as Choi Young-sam, spokesman for the Foreign Ministry (Kim, 2021). When speaking on moral responsibility, Korea's history was referred to, when in the 1950's Korean War, an estimated 91'000 Koreans were rescued by boat by the US Navy from the port of North Korea's city Hungnam (Choe, 2021). Thus, implying that Korea should help, as it once was helped before.

“South Korea stepping up to support evacuees from Afghanistan isn't just about a middle-power country carrying its weight as a good global citizen,” Leif Eric-Eastley, an international relations professor at Seoul's Ewha Womans' University wrote in an email to foreign reporters. “It's also a test of how the Washington-Seoul alliance extends beyond the Korean Peninsula” (Salmon, 2021).

“Among the chattering class, it is manifested in worried discussions about who Washington favors more: South Korea or national archrival and bete noire Japan. By agreeing to take in Afghan refugees at a moment of US weakness, Seoul could be well-placed to steal a march in that contest” (Salmon, 2021).

Attitudes toward refugees

The majority of Korean nationals have a negative attitude to accepting refugees, according to a report done in December 2020 by the UN refugee agency (Larsen, 2021). However, since the arrival of the Yemeni refugees in 2018, there has been a slight change in opinion, where more are positive to the acceptance of refugees, according to a UNHCR survey (Larsen, 2021).

“In 2018, only 24 per cent of Koreans were in favour of accepting refugees. But that figure rose to 33 per cent in 2020” (Larsen, 2021).

The root cause of the overall negative attitudes toward refugees have been explained by among others the competitive job market, affordable housing and a culture of competition (Borowiec, 2021). Other explanations relate to “the fear of people from different backgrounds” (Rashid, 2021).

The governmental position on accepting refugees also seems to take a negative position. In an interview with newspaper The Korea Herald before the Afghan special contributors were evacuated to Korea, Lee Jun-seok, the main opposition of the People Power Party (conservative) talked about among others refugees and immigrants (Shin, 2021). Lee meant that in an appropriate manner, Korea should let people who are working in the highly skilled sector, to be able to immigrate to Korea - such as in the field of technology and investments (Shin, 2021). He points out that this kind of immigration is what has been the driving sector behind the US development (Shin, 2021).

However, Lee meant that the case differs when it comes to refugees (Shin, 2021). “But, refugee issues are different,” Lee said. “For instance, when refugees from African countries, whose lifestyle, religion and culture are different than ours, come to Korea, what is their purpose?”

From Lee’s statement, we can see boundaries of belonging being drawn separating ‘us’ Koreans, and ‘them’ refugees through “lifestyle, religion and culture” (Shin, 2021). Yuval-Davis (2006) states that, among others, language and culture are open to voluntary identification. However, in the case of Korea, it seems to be demanded in order to belong.

In line with Lee’s stance on refugees, other than the Afghans who had worked together with the Korean government, there was no plan to accept other refugees (Rashid, 2021). According to

Moon's top security adviser Suh Hoon, accepting other refugees than the Afghan special contributors, was a complicated issue that would need to take into consideration 'the people's acceptance' (Rashid, 2021) of refugees, as well as other issues (Rashid, 2021). Perhaps this stance that the government is holding toward refugees can be considered a result of the (hypothetical) goal of becoming the US's key ally (Salmon, 2021).

Security adviser Hoon can be understood here in relation to politics of belonging, to be maintaining and reproducing the boundaries of community belonging. In relation to his statement that accepting Afghans other than the special contributors is something that requires 'people's acceptance' (Rashid, 2021), he assigns refugees as 'foreign' and unwanted by 'us' Koreans. Considering that the boundaries of community can be reproduced (Yuval-Davis, 2006), a different statement with a more positive attitude toward refugees could likely be reproduced as well, should they choose to do so. I think it should be questioned why this new framework of special contributors was implemented when there already was the Refugee Act in place that would allow them to enter Korea, and have the same rights as Korean citizens.

For the Afghan special contributors there is only one level that I believe this framework works to their disadvantage if compared to a recognized refugee. I believe the term 'special contributor' puts them in a situation of additional 'othering' and a position where they should be grateful for the help they receive, rather than a position recognized as people exposed to danger and presenting the state with a legal obligation to assist them.

Discussion

As earlier mentioned, Korea can be viewed as a racialized society with strict boundaries of belonging found in Korean culture, language and blood (Kim, 2020). Additionally, Lee (2017, p. 531) highlights the deciding factor of being Korean is being born within the borders of Korea. However, with the new project of politics of belonging in the form of 'special contributors', it seems that Korea is expanding the terms of 'belonging', at least to a certain extent.

This can be seen both in the 'reciprocal relationship' (Yuval-Davis, 2006) between the state and the citizen, where President Moon Jae-in expressed that Korea is carrying out their moral responsibility (Choon, 2021; Borowiec, 2021). It can also be seen in the entitlements that the

Afghan special contributors received in the form of stipends and support. It can even be seen in the process of receiving an F-2 visa, to which the current recognized refugee acceptance rate is 0,4 per cent.

Yuval-Davis (2006) explained in terms of citizenship, what a person needs *to do*, and in what amount, in order to belong differs, likely in terms of place and time. In the case of Korea, we can see in the statement of Lee from the Power People's Party; that he believes that the borders to Korea should be open to people working in the highly skilled sector, but not in the same manner to refugees (Shin, 2021). Similarly, the government supports marriage migrants with different policies such as the Multicultural Families Act (Shen, 2017). North Korean defectors are considered citizens under the Korean legislation and provided with support upon their arrival in Korea. What all of these cases can be seen to have in common is that they all in some way serve a purpose with their contribution to the Korean state – through imagined and social ties of blood, family, or service. Therefore, I believe the special contributor's framework can be considered to have become an additional form of 'belonging'.

Lim (2020) explained that the Korean multicultural approach perhaps could be viewed as taking the form of a developmental state's economic goals, where "economic growth and productivity [are prioritized] over redistributive policies and equality" (Lim, 2020, pp. 353). It thus seems that 'special contributors' has become a new tool in line with this approach of economic growth and productivity. Therefore, I believe belonging for special contributors only extends so far as to residing in the country, and to entitlements such as stipends and support, and not to the Korean identity narrative rooted in blood, culture and language (Kim, 2020).

What I find interesting with the Korean identity narrative (Kim, 2020) is that also North Korean defectors, who share a common heritage, language and culture with (South) Koreans, experience discrimination, such as in the form of prejudice, stereotypes and a form of othering (Kim and Hocking, 2018). North Korean defectors therefore try to hide their North Korean cosmetic traits, such as their accents that may give them away (Rich et al., 2021). This in turn I think shows a drawing of boundaries of exclusion, and the extent of the perception of the Korean identity narrative, and in turn Korea's rigid boundaries. In terms of attitudes to North Korean defectors, they were considered in the earlier years after the Cold War to be useful (Rich et al., 2021). But

more recently due to their increased migration, have started to be viewed by the general public as a burden to the economy (Rich et al., 2021). According to the definition of the Korean identity narrative (Kim, 2020), North Koreans should be considered to 'belong'. However, being a defector from North Korea, which I believe positions them symbolically as "refugee", they may be perceived as a 'burden'. Additionally, North Korean defectors face difficulties integrating in the Korean society. This together may put them in a position of not belonging, although they are Korean.

What currently differs from other non-Korean refugees and special contributors is that the public has positive perceptions of the Afghan special contributors, likely due to the governmental lead on the case. The government officially stated that accepting any other refugees than the special contributors was a 'complicated issue' which also needed to consider the opinions of the Korean population. Yuval-Davis (2006) argues that boundaries of community can be reproduced. I interpret this as if the government was to lead with a positive attitude toward all refugees or immigrants alike, the general public opinion who is at this time negative, would likely follow. Additionally, Yuval-Davis (2006) contests how attitudes and ideologies may contribute to the drawing of boundaries of belonging. In relation to this, we can see how the status 'special contributor' was constructed within these frames of negative attitudes and connotations to refugees. Thus, as a 'special contributor' the Afghans have a place of belonging. However, the Afghan contributors would likely qualify legally as a refugee, but would then obtain a status that is not considered to belong in the Korean society. However, being defectors from North Korea, which I believe positions them symbolically as "refugee", they may be perceived as a 'burden'. Additionally, North Korean defectors face difficulties integrating in the Korean society. This together may put them in a position of not belonging, although they are Korean.

Entering Korea as a 'special contributor' does however all in all seem to be in favor of the Afghan evacuees (and any future special contributor) both on a legal level as well as a public one. A majority of the public has shown an outpour of good will in the form of among others Hyundai Heavy Industries' subcontractor, employing close to half of the Afghan special contributors (Choi, 2022), companies that have provided them with cosmetics, and a welcoming of them at the airport (Choon, 2021). This may however be a result of the Korean government having led the opinion as to why they should be differentiated from other refugees and therefore accepted by Korea. One

such difference may be that they receive a particular social location in Korea, due to their assistance through their profession during Korea's involvement in Afghanistan. Legally, they have been provided with the same rights as recognized refugees to obtain, which they have not had to go through the refugee screening, been provided with visas without any waiting time, including working visas. They have additionally received better treatment in the form of stipends and support compared to recognized refugees (Lee & Slavney, 2021). Exactly to what extent is unclear.

Finally, I fear this approach of belonging through contribution for anyone with a different descent other than Korean, may put future refugees in a situation where they have to justify their belonging (other than their fear of persecution) in relation to their contribution.

Conclusion

The ways we can see Afghan special contributors to belong in Korea is through citizenship rights. This can be seen in the "reciprocal relationship of rights and responsibilities" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, pp. 205) where the Afghan special contributors had carried out their responsibilities, which put them in danger upon the Taliban takeover, which then made the Korean state obliged to help.

Additionally, in terms of Korean identity, the Afghan special contributors are learning Korean language and culture, which adds to their belonging. Kim (2020) described the Korean identity to boil down to mainly three things, Korean blood, language and culture and customs. Adding to this, Lee (2017) argues that the deciding factor of the Korean identity narrative is being born within Korean borders. However, neither the Afghan special contributors nor future refugees will be able to change their skin, or place of birth. Should this narrative continue, it would mean that anyone without Korean blood and birth within Korea's borders, will only be able to 'belong' in Korea to a certain extent – which again shows Korea as a racialized society with strict boundaries (Yuval-Davis, 2006). However, even in the case of North Korean defectors, who share a common heritage, culture and language with South Koreans, are also faced with a need to contribute in order to 'belong'.

In terms of the Korean government's current multicultural approach, it seems to be guided similar to those of a developmental state's economic goals. This can be seen in the multicultural policies taking a focus on marriage migrants. In regards to this, one can see additional boundaries of belonging being drawn where the legal definition of a multicultural family is that of one Korean

part, and one international part. Furthermore, in the political sphere, Lee from the Power People's Party believed the borders should be more open for people in the highly skilled sector, as opposed to for refugees. North Korean defectors also receive support once they arrive to Korea. Finally, the Afghan special contributors had different Korean government organizations in Afghanistan. As mentioned in the discussion part, the commonality between these cases (marriage migrants, highly skilled immigrants, defectors, and special contributors) is that they all serve a purpose to the Korean state, which in turn justifies their belonging in Korea.

If one was to put it into the perspective of Yuval-Davis' (2006) framework on 'belonging', it would be in regards to the relationship between the state and the citizen. In the case of the Afghan contributors, although the government may have taken a liberal approach when conducting 'Operation Miracle', the state seems to take an overall republican approach where there is a stronger focus on the citizens' loyalty to the nation and its promotion. This can be seen in the above-mentioned cases, expressed in the people fulfilling a purpose to the state.

Conclusively, the main idea of belonging in Korea has been in terms of Korea as a homogenous state, as seen in Korean culture, language, and blood (Kim, 2020). Korea can thus be seen having the strictest boundaries of belonging as a racialized society (Yuval-Davis, 2006). However, with this new framework of special contributor, what is being stated is that people who in some distinguished way contribute to Korea, will be given special entitlements and 'belong'. Rather than accepting 'any' refugee, it seems the state prefers to pick-and-choose who may enter the borders of Korea based on their contributions, such as someone in the higher skilled sector, which would leave refugees who are truly in need of assistance to themselves. This could in turn result in a new hierarchy and discrimination, not only between refugees and locals, but among immigrants alike. However, the definition of a 'refugee' by the UNHCR, as earlier mentioned is "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion (UNHCR, 2022)". This definition also coincides with the situation that the Afghans were, and are currently facing.

Finally, considering that this is a new and ongoing case, there is still much to learn about the future effects of 'special contributors'. Future research could therefore take a focus on this subject, through interviews, of both local Koreans, the Afghan special contributors themselves, and

refugees in order to get a holistic understanding of the impact of the framework. There will likely be a continuous increase of refugees due to the unstable world we live in, which makes it more important to follow up on this case for the future of refugees.

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