

North Korean Refugees, People from the Most Isolated Country

How to support them to break the isolation cycle

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Action Research

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1. Introduction

This paper is written as part of Action Research project that is designed to investigate the North Korean refugee's resettlement in Germany. For the last three months, we have researched the actual conditions of the North Korean refugees living in Germany. Through this research, we aimed to identify the problems that they were coping with and find out the solutions. It was never effortless for us to get access to them and put the pieces of puzzle together. Nevertheless, we were able to derive meaningful findings from what we have acted upon. Also, we managed to make plans for further steps, such as convening a public conference and cultural exchange event by cooperating with the NGOs.

The report will present our motivation, methodological approach, research process and findings we have identified. In the last part of the paper, we will suggest possible action plans and share our reflections.

1.1 Motivation of our research

The focal group of our research is North Korean refugees who are struggling to settle in Germany. Since the North Korean famine of the mid-1990s, North Koreans have defected from their impoverished and hunger-stricken homeland for South Korea. Most of them crossed the border between North Korea and China before fleeing to a third country. Since China is the biggest economic partner of North Korea, the Chinese government does not want to worsen the relations. Thus, the Chinese government has deported the refugees to North Korea with force. Those repatriated were to face harsh interrogations and years of punishment, or even death in political prisoners' camps. It brought worldwide attention to the issue of North Korean refugees' human rights. The precise number of people defecting from the country remains uncertain; estimates range from 20,000 to as high as 400,000.(Lee, 2006:18). According to a survey of the preferences of the refugees concerning their ultimate place of domicile, South Korea has been the most favored destination, followed by the United States in 2006 (Haggard, Noland and Chang, 2006). However, more recently, North Korean refugees flooded into the USA, Canada and Europe. Since the late-1990s, several countries in Europe particularly Germany, Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands have granted political asylum to North Koreans. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics, Germany accumulated 2070 North Koreans as refugees including asylum seekers by the year of 2011. This unexpected number attracted our attention to the North Korean refugees' problem in Germany.

We tried to search for more information about the status of North Korean refugees in Germany, but the previous research and quantitative data concerning North Korean refugees' lives (in Germany as well as in other European states) were rarely conducted. Therefore, we considered that it would be

appropriate to carry out a qualitative research for this topic. Also, we expected that the cases of North Korean refugees in Europe would offer unique insights and advice to Korean society that should solve the unification issue. For the two Koreas to be unified, promoting social and cultural integration is as much important as political incorporation.

1.2 Initial Questions

We started our research with a simple question: “What caused them to come to this faraway place instead landing on South Korea?” According to North Korean Defector Support Law, all potential North Korean defectors are automatically granted South Korean citizenship upon defecting to the country¹. Still, increasing number of North Korean refugees is attempting to obtain the refugee status in Germany as well as in other European countries.

In order to figure out the answer to the question, we strived to find relevant data on them. According to our paper research, there was a high level of discrimination and denial of opportunity against North Korean refugees in South Korea. Their unemployment rate was three times more than the national average. Some surveys suggest that more than half of them experienced depression, and the 25-30% of young refugees have considered leaving South Korea because they felt that they don't fit in. Furthermore, they feel unsafe living in South Korea. Whenever the (North Korean) spy incident occurs, many North Korean refugees begin to feel personal threats. A refugee in South Korea said, *“I was supposed to be hired by a shipbuilding company, but when the spy incident came out, I was suddenly considered suspicious, and the offer was cancelled.”* (Anon, 2014)

We became curious about how much they are satisfied with their choice of immigration to Germany, what would be their challenges and needs, how they deal with them, and what is the meaning of this phenomenon. These questions became our initial research interests.

1.3 Participant Organizations

1.3.1 Herz fuer Korea (HEKO) <http://HEKO-berlin.de/>

For Action Research is a participatory process, we chose an organization called “Herz fuer Korea” (HEKO). One of us was already a member of HEKO, so it was comfortable to ask for cooperation to the organization. HEKO is an international non-profit organization. Based in Berlin, they are working

¹ Through our interview, we found out that this fact (that North Korean refugees can get automatic South Korean citizenship) was the main reason for the German government to reject the refugee application of North Koreans.

under the mission of promoting peaceful unification of Korea. HEKO's main activity is to inform the current situation of divided Korea and human right crisis in North Korea to the international community. They also promote international supports on the human rights improvement in North Korea.

Furthermore, HEKO is also keen on preparing and planning for gradual social cohesion after unification. The vision and activities of HEKO are not only focusing on Korean unification but are also open to other issues related to the improvement of human dignity and social integration. It views that North and South Koreans need to work together and discuss unification. In this aspect, the organization hopes to support North Korean refugees and hold cultural dialogues between North and South Koreans.

HEKO has held several exhibitions and seminars to raise public awareness on their focuses, but its approach to the issue was not a participatory and democratic process that Action Research approach prefers. The members of HEKO need to become 'doers', rather than 'preachers'. It was our leading expectation that HEKO should develop into an organization that reaches out to the field where the North Korean refugees reside.

1.3.2 SARAM <http://www.saram-nk.org/notizen-zu-nordkorea/>

HEKO was closely cooperating with the other organization called 'SARAM', which means 'person' in Korean. SARAM is working for improving human rights of North Korean people. On the contrary to HEKO, most of the members are Germans. They have tried to raise public awareness on North Korean human rights in German society, especially by media. The organization also has helped for North Korean refugees wanting to escape from China. It also hopes to support North Koreans in Germany. Although our main partner was HEKO, SARAM showed great interest in our research as soon as we got introduced to them.

1.3.3 NON Berlin <http://www.nonberlin.com/>

'NON Berlin' is a partner organization of HEKO, especially when planning the cultural symposium due in November. 'Asia Contemporary Art Platform NON Berlin' was founded in this year, under the purpose of building an international network among artists who work in the field of Asian art in Berlin. Furthermore, its goal is to act as a hub for culture and arts exchange in Asia and Europe through organizing sustainable projects, mapping networks, creating archives and providing up-to-date information. By curating special exhibitions, forums, seminars, art performances and inter-media

projects, NON Berlin aims to initiate an alternative discourse different from those controlled by the market.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Asylum policy in Germany

While starting our research, we informed ourselves about the German asylum system in order to learn more about our target group. According to the UNHCR, asylum seekers are people who claim to be refugees, but whose application has not yet been clearly evaluated. Refugees in this context are asylum seekers whose application has been successful. Therefore, our target group can be in both situations. As laid down in article 16a of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, victims of political persecution have a right to seek asylum. Besides, they can be recognized as refugees under the Geneva Convention. According to article 1 of the convention, a refugee is *"A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."* (Article 1(A) (2) of the 1951 Convention) The admission procedure for asylum is governed by the Asylum Procedure Act (AsylVfG). (The Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2014) Furthermore, Germany is a signatory of the "Dublin Convention", which declares the states responsible for admission procedure of asylum seekers lodged on EU territory. Asylum seekers who enter Germany or who are found in the country without a residence status are transferred to the nearest reception centre. There, people are investigated whether their entry to Germany was permitted by border authorities. The application of asylum seekers is then forwarded to the Federal Office of Migration and Refugees (BAMF), which is responsible for decision-making. During the asylum procedure, asylum seekers are preliminary granted to stay in Germany. The decision of the BAMF is based on interviews about their travel route and persecution, as well as other investigations. (The Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2014) On the basis of a positive decision, people are granted asylum or refugee status and receive a temporary residence status. This includes several integration assistances, such as social insurance, child benefits and language courses. On the basis of a negative decision, the BAMF examines whether there are reasons for a deportation ban. If this is not the case, rejected applicants are required to leave the country. The admission procedure can last up to two years, but some refugees even wait for seven years or longer until they receive a final notification of decision. ('Heim-Tüv', 2011:8) In 2013, BAMF took decisions on 43,362 initial and subsequent asylum applications. As a result, next to France, Germany is regarded as

the main receiving country of asylum seekers. However, as in the past years the protection rate was only 22, 3% (BAMF 2013:11).

2.2 Circumstances of refugees in Germany

According to the Asylum Seekers Benefit Act (AsylbLG), adult asylum seekers get a monthly pocket money of 40€ and children 20€. Non-cash benefits, according to article 3 (1) AsylbLG, should cover the necessary requirements such as nutrition, clothing and shelter. This means that refugees in camps are living on food vouchers, hygiene packets and packets of old clothes, which allows them practically no freedom of choice and does not consider the cultural and religious needs. (Fritz, 2004:193) Pursuant to § 61 I AsylfVG, asylum seekers are not allowed to work, to do internships or any kind of enterprise trainings. After one year, they receive employment permission. However, their chance to get a job is very low because of the existing pre-eminence principle of German and European employees. Asylum seekers have no entitlement to an integration course or free German language course. Usually, they are not insured by law and are lacking access to physical and psychotherapeutically treatments. Besides, the entitlement to education for children, as asylum seekers, is not granted in all federal states of Germany. (Siebert, 2010:38) Asylum seekers usually live in shared accommodations mostly far-off from cities and villages that make a connection to a shared social life with locals almost impossible. In some cases, families live separately in different accommodations of different federal states. (Heinhold, 2007:70) Since many nations live together under one roof, a communal life and communication is often difficult. Finally, as per § 56 I AsylVfG, asylum seekers are even not allowed to change their residence or to travel within Germany.

2.3 First Contact and obstacles

After we informed ourselves more about the conditions of North Korean refugees the next step of our research was to connect with North Korean refugees in Germany. First, we asked Joshua who is the director of HEKO. He introduced two people to us, who are working for refugees in Germany, but they had no connection with North Koreans. Secondly, we asked Mr. Jung who is a Ph.D Candidate focusing on the North Korean migration, but neither had he connection with North Korean refugees. So, we searched for contacts via internet and we found several organizations that are organized by North Korean refugees in Europe. We sent emails to the 'North Korean Refugee Association in Germany', as well as to the Council of Foreigners in Dresden, where one of our researchers did an internship before, but no one replied. We were disappointed. At first, we expected that we could connect with North Korean refugees in Germany easily because the UNHCR stated 2070 North Korean refugees in Germany up to 2011. The lack of accessibility was our first obstacle we faced.

2.4 Research Question

While we were reflecting on the lacking accessibility to the North Korean refugees, we evaluated our current research question as not feasible and formulated a new one. *North Korean refugees, people from the most isolated country: How to support them to break the isolation cycle?*

Why is there a lack of accessibility to North Korean refugees in Berlin? Due to our previous knowledge and literature review we were able to form some hypotheses that could answer our elaborated question. We assumed that the North Korean refugees are trapped in a circle of isolation that would explain the difficult access to them. First of all, we were aware of the fact that the North Korean embassy is located in Berlin and refugees might be afraid accidentally to meet officials on the street. Therefore, they might rather choose to stay undercover instead of risking being deported. Because of the controlled surveillance society, where North Korean refugees have grown up, they are more likely to be suspicious and withdrawn. Another reason for their isolated situation could be a mentality gap between North and South Koreans even in Germany. Because of their lack of experience of democracy, they also might have problems with self-expression and socializing. Next to self-imposed isolation, refugees in general are often excluded, as mentioned before.

3. Methodology

3.1. Action Research and Ethnographic Research

The methodological approaches that frame our whole qualitative research are the principles of Action Research and Ethnographic Research that complemented each other. As written by Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (2008:1) "*action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview*" (cited in Coghlan; Brannick, 2010:3)

It means to study a system and simultaneously collaborate with members of the system. An active collaboration requires that researchers and participants trying to identify and resolve a problem together by implementing practical solutions oriented towards social change. (Kemmis and MC Taggart 2007:277) If people are not satisfied with the changed situation, they all try again. Hence, the essence of Action Research is learning by doing, while action and reflection, theory and practice are brought together. (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:1) Eventually, Action Research is also values-based.

Hereof, the approach seemed appropriate to us as we shared the same values with the participants; the *wellbeing of North Korean refugees in Germany*. Besides, the power relations among researchers and participants are equal, which made us to consider participants as experts or co-researchers of the environs and experiences. Still, we openly acknowledged our bias to our participants. However, in order to allow participants being co-researchers, who inform and guide us, we conducted interviews, participatory observation or informal talks.

Our participatory research also empowered the North Korean refugees, as our participants. They belong to a marginalized group, but according to Action Research, they are seen as experts. Our goal was to provide a thick description in the context of North Korean refugees by sharing our understanding with the participants and allow them to judge for themselves if the jointly developed practical knowledge is transferable in their own situations. Reflexive critique on issues and processes as well as dialectical critique, where phenomena are conceptualized in dialogue, were continuously taken into consideration. These two principles of Action Research focused on refining our views. (Rory O'Brien, 1998) In this regard, a research diary, that we shared with Joshua and where we recorded our research process, was very helpful as we constantly went back to reflect on the history of how the project progressed. But next to the cycles of reflection, cycles of planning, acting and also observing emerged during our research. Throughout this cycle of change we chose to review literature, we re-entered planning and acting phases, defined and re-assessed the problem.

Additionally, Action Research attempts small scale intervention to achieve social change in real world situations. Due to our limited time of research, this principle suited our situation, too. Next to the principles of Action Research, we also followed some tenets of Ethnographical approach, which comes largely from the field of Anthropology. Its emphasis is on studying a particular culture, which means to describe relationships, patterns, meanings and understandings and attempt to become clear of a case and place in relation to a social setting. (Emerson, 1995:152). This approach fitted to our research about North Korean people, because we achieved the understanding and thick description of their culture. Besides, our initial research question was formulated before we entered the research field, other than required in Action Research, where the research question is developed with the participants. As to that, we also informed ourselves on the subject matter and the problem before collecting first-hand data. When it came to our case study about the North Korean refugee family in Karlsruhe, we also tested our hypotheses and used inductive reasoning, as is another tenet of Ethnographic approach. Hence, after our trip we were moving from specific participatory observations to broader generalizations and theories. We did not use Grounded Theory, as the approach aims to establish hypotheses at the end of the research process, but we already had assumptions at the starting point.

3.2 Data Analysis

We decided to analyse our data, which consisted of interview transcripts, by chunks of code in relation to our specific interest. Coding is a process of sorting qualitative data. With the help of codes and sub-codes, which are often a word or a short phrase, we were able to identify what is happening within the context, to summarize our data and to produce coherence. (Saldana, 2009) According to Robert M. Emerson (1995), coding proceeds in open and focused coding. Open coding was our first step in order to organize data. Line-by-line, as seen in our coded interview transcripts (see Appendix 1), we identified ideas and themes. Afterwards, we fine-grained our line-by-line analysis based on topics that we identified as our specific interest. Hence, we moved from a general reading to a close coding. After we had established analytic categories, we extended those categories by writing theoretical memos, or that is to say theoretical propositions. Because of our formed hypotheses, we were constantly aware of our confirmation bias, which is a tendency to support the information that confirms our preconceptions. Therefore, ethnographic coding was a useful tool for us to distance ourselves emotionally, because notes, persons or events became textual objects for analysis. (Emerson, 1995)

3.3 Triangulation

In order to increase the credibility of the research data, we used the concept of triangulation with its idea to use multiple methods on the same topic. According to Denzin (1970), we have chosen four different forms of triangulation. With regard to data triangulation, we collected data at different times, on social situations and various people. Referring to the investigator triangulation, we were a group of three researchers in order to collect and interpret data. Compliant with Action Research, we also considered our participants as additional researchers (Rory O'Brien, 1998). Furthermore, we used more than one theoretical scheme in interpreting data, called theoretical triangulation, and we followed the idea of methodological triangulation, which refers to the use of more than one method to gather data.

Concerning the latter, our main methods of data collection have been semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, focus group interviews, passive participatory observation and participatory observations. Finally, these different forms of evidence and perspectives are used to inform and confirm one another and check the validity of the findings.

3.4 Observations

According to John Gill and Phil Johnson (1991), observation is based on watching what people do, how they behave and act but also looking at objects, incidents and interactions. Hereof, we performed two forms of observation. Participatory observation allows interaction and communication of the researcher within the environment. Hence, the researcher can learn about people's activities in real life situation through participating in those activities and simultaneous observation. (Coghlan; Brannick, 2010:132) Beyond, H. Russell Bernard (1994) stresses the importance of interacting within a community and its members in such a way that they will act naturally, while being observed, and nonetheless maintaining a sense of objectivity.

Participatory observation served as an important data collection method during our action research process. Performing participatory observation with the members of our cooperating organization HEKO for around three months reduced the occurrence of reactivity, which means that people act in a different way, when they know about being observed. Therefore, we could identify relationships and feel how things are organized and prioritized. Furthermore, we also observed our focal group in a participatory way. For instance, cooking dinner together with the North Korean refugee family, after the conducted interview, facilitated the involvement in a very sensitive talk.

A more pure form of observation was passive participatory observation. Thereby, the researcher rather takes the role of a 'watcher' and gathers data by observing the activities in the field of study, but without participating in those activities. Moreover, the researcher remains on the edge of the activities and takes precise descriptions of the setting and social interactions and patterns. (Schwartz, 1955)

3.5 Interviews

Qualitative interviews are conversations with a purpose; to obtain knowledge of what is important to the respondent and produce thick descriptions. (Horpe; Holt, 2008:118) As a group of researchers, we divided the interview task into interviewer, note taker and observer and changed the roles at each time. We acknowledged that because of our pre-conceived notions, there was a risk of forcing the data from the respondents in order to confirm our assumptions or to complicate our questions so that respondents feel lost. Still, we tried to focus on the participants' individual experiences, feelings, behaviours, opinions and knowledge. In order to limit the bias and not only to consider our own memories of the interviews, we mostly recorded the interviews after asking the respondents for

permission. Using a recording device also supported our role as an active listener and encourager to open up without losing control over the interview.

Next to informal interviews, we chose the form of semi-structured/open end interviews, whereas one semi-structured interview could not be recorded due to the participant's refusal. Informal interviews are unstructured conversations with the participants in a natural setting and mostly occur in unanticipated situations without any interview guide. (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2008) Those interviews were not our primary data source rather they went hand in hand with our participatory observation. For the semi-structured interviews, we developed and used an interview guide that framed our specific topics, but we were always open for new ideas and open-ended questions brought up during the interviews as a result of the respondent's answer. According to Bernard (1988), this form of interview is best used when there's only one chance to interview someone that complied with our short period of time.

3.6 Focus Group

A focus group interview is an interview with several people on a particular topic. (Flick, 2009:190) Concerning our interview with the North Korean family, we decided to use the dynamics of a focus group, as it's an appropriate method when studying attitudes or viewpoints about taboo subjects. Because of our one time trip to Karlsruhe, we have chosen a group interview, as it is rich in data. Moreover, participants often meet one another's disagreements and provide balances on each other, thereby eliminate extreme or false perceptions. (Flick, 2009:190)

Our interview questions were open, but they all focused on the perception of their living situation in Germany. We were looking for a thick description of their routine behaviours and understanding. The interview was conducted with two participants, who were familiar with each other, and moderated, by two interviewers, while a third person was observing the interview. A group of this size is referred to as a mini focus group. Main tasks of the interviewers during the focus groups were listening, thinking, probing but also mediating and balancing the interview. During the focus group interview, we also experienced how the participants helped each other to activate forgotten specifics of experiences, subconscious ideas or to understand meanings.

4. Research Process and Data Collection

4.1 Expert Interview with Woochang Jung

From the beginning, we were faced with an unexpected barrier: the illusiveness of North Korean refugees. As we searched for more on this topic, we came across that one Korean Anthropologist was working on a similar subject. Woochang Jung was Ph.D. candidate of the Korean Studies at Free University in Berlin. For his master's research project, he conducted ethnographic fieldwork among North Korean migrants in South Korea. We decided to have an expert interview with him hoping to get information about North Korean refugees in Germany.

Through the interview with Mr. Jung, we came to understand why it is so difficult to make contact with the North Koreans. The North Korean refugees were deeply concerned of even the slightest possibility of deportation. Most of them already spent several years in China hiding from security officers (who could have repatriated them). If they had been sent back to their homeland, they could have been treated inhumanely, such as detention, torture, placement in concentration camps, forced labor, and even execution in public. (Margesson, Chanlett-Avery and Bruno, 2007:10)

Furthermore, if their presence in Europe is identified by the North Korean authorities, this would jeopardize the safety of their family left in North Korea. *“Because North Korean refugees are so much worried about their family left behind, they avoid any type of contact with unknown people.”*

However, Mr. Jung gave us useful information about how to get access to North Korean refugees. Although they have a deep fear of being identified as North Korean defectors, they are still in need of support from others. In fact, some North Korean refugees are quite successfully getting assistance from outside. The key actors, Mr. Jung said, might be the Korean Churches in Germany. He also suggested that we should focus on the networks in which the refugees are embedded. Because mostly they construct their identities and characters within the context they are situated.

He goes on to point out that we need to uncover what is the most important issue for their living and how they handle it. In many cases, the legal status as a refugee is the critical problem for them. Thus, asking questions and showing interest in the legal issue will make the interview process easier. He continued:

Jung: There are many levels or stages within the refugee application procedure. Every stage has its own issues and difficulties. You need to research those each legal stages before interviewing them, and it will be also good to have a previous knowledge about which stage they are at in the process.

Finally, Mr. Jung stressed that the financial issues should be questioned and examined carefully. We could raise questions, for instance, ‘where does the money come from, South Korean supporters, Germans, or elsewhere?’, ‘what kind of social resources they depend on?’, or ‘How do they mobilize the resources they need?’ Consequently, all these comments by Mr. Jung significantly helped us to plan the next steps of our research, especially when we formulated the questionnaires of the two interviews in Karlsruhe afterwards.

4.2 Passive Participatory Observation

On May 27 2014, we observed a North Korean old couple, who are running a Chinese-Japanese-Korean restaurant in Berlin, in order to get a first insight into the life of North Korean refugees in Germany. We gained access through Joshua, who also told us that the couple is very withdrawn and probably not willing to participate in our research. This is why we decided to only watch them and take detailed field notes. As we did not plan to make further research with them, our observation was disguised, which means that the couple was unaware of being observed in order to remain a natural condition. With the goal to test and confirm our mentioned hypotheses, we also performed a focused observation where we already focused on indicators of isolation during our observation. It needs to be said, that Minju Kim, one of our member already had a connection with the old couple. Therefore, her observation was more participatory and we decided to split up into two groups, while the other two observers pretended not to know Minju.

After we jointly reflected on our observation, we noticed how different our interpretations were. We all noticed the lack of customers, the Chinese style of the interior, the complex menu or the old traditional Korean music. One of us relatively focused on the aspect of their low self-confidence, how they kept distance by avoiding eye contact and smiling or putting the glass far away from the customer. Other observers more concentrated on their qualities and experiences in gastronomic management. Observations of how long the food took, what kind of music they played or how they served food were rather considered as unprofessional. Even though the couple came to Germany 16 years ago and first settled down in Hanover for a long time, they had difficulties in speaking German. According to Minju’s participatory observation, the couple wanted to rent their basement. Even though they didn’t know her well and knew that it’s illegal, they offered her money for getting a lodger. They shared a sensitive issue with someone they don’t know, as they probably have not many people to depend on. Next to their empty restaurant, unconfident appearance, perceived unprofessionalism, lack of German language this was another indicator that symbolized their isolated position and having difficulties with socialization in Germany.

4.3 Semi-Structured Interview with Joshua (Zizung Yoon)

On June 1, we had a semi-structured interview with the director of our cooperating organization, who is also one of our core participants as he facilitated our entire research process. The interview was held in English in the office at ‘Giving Tree’, a meeting place for Korean community. The purpose of the interview was to find out the meaning of connection between North Korean refugees and the mission of HEKO. We asked about the organizational structure in order to learn about the organization’s resources, networks and capacities towards North Korean refugees in Germany.



We always kept in mind that, according to Action Research, participants are upon equal ground with researchers. Therefore, questions about his personal opinions and experiences, referring to North Korean refugees and challenges they might face in Germany, were important for us. We also asked questions about his personal opinions and experiences referring to North Korean refugees and challenges

they might face in Germany. Another specific interest in the interview was to determine reasons for the difficult accessibility we faced towards North Korean refugees. We immediately reflected on the interview and noticed that the data mainly corresponded to our expectations. This can be seen in one of our established categories of codes ”difficult accessibility” (see Appendix 1). Thus, we saw a mutual understanding of our topic and it strengthened our hypotheses. Moreover, it was a motivation for both, researchers and participants to continue the participatory research. During the interview, we learned a lot from Joshua, and he also changed our perspective in a certain degree. We learned that Koreans are very focused around churches and that they are willing and open to helping North Korean refugees due to their biblical principles.

”It is often jokingly said, if Chinese people go abroad they establish restaurants, but the Koreans built up churches.” Thus, we imagined that the church might be an important context or network for North Korean refugees. Besides, we learned that many North Korean refugees are once located in camps in Karlsruhe. This is due to the fact, that the Federal Court of Justice of Germany is located in that city and its officials already accumulated experiences in the work with North Korean refugees. Therefore, our new perspective was to contact potential gatekeepers in Karlsruhe. All in all, the interview was very helpful to get our topic in a more planned way, to inform ourselves and to subsequently act on our reflection.

4.4 Barbeque Party with HEKO and SARAM

Being part at HEKO's activities reflects well the participatory aspect of Action Research. On June 6, our group of researchers and HEKO members attended a barbeque that was initiated by the partner organization SARAM. SARAM is an organization located in Berlin that also aims to raise awareness about the Human Rights violation in North Korea and to support North Korean refugees. The



barbeque served as a place of encounter, because member's of the two organizations met the first time in person. Their goal at this time was to establish a constant social network together, because they shared same values, ideas and goals. Considering our cyclical steps of Action Research, the barbeque meeting was also a good opportunity for us to report and to share our participatory plans, actions and observations we did so far with our participants. Besides, members of SARAM started to analyze as well

barriers of access to North Korean refugees. Furthermore, they gave us a great insight into their own activities and networks, which later on were helpful for our proposal. It was important for us to keep a relationship with our participants at HEKO in order to generate new knowledge together.

4.5 North Korean refugees in the Netherlands

When we were struggling to search for North Korean refugee's network in Germany, we came upon an online community, called the Association of North Korean Refugees in the Netherlands (ANKN). We sent an email in the hope of getting some contact with North Korean refugee in Germany. Predictably, we could not get any reply from them. We even posted an article asking an online-interview in a very polite manner. However, all our efforts were in vain. The only response we received was full of discomfort and suspicion about our project, doubting that we might use our research as "impure purpose."

Although we were deeply disappointed by their rebuff, we decided to study their past activities and future plans to collect relevant information. Then, we encountered a series of pictures on the website showing that they were actively involved in political campaigns, which were mainly about anti-North Korea protest. This particular activity immediately caught our attention. As we investigated more into it, we found that there were many errors in English on their picket signs. Some words were not so obvious to English speakers, particularly because they seemed to depend wholly on 'Google translator'.

So we once again, sent an email, suggesting that we would like to assist their political activity, especially translating the campaign advertisements. Finally, we obtained a positive answer. Inim Yoo, the director of the ANKN, replied “*we eagerly need translation help. It would be grateful if you could help us to translate some documents.*” First request was to translate a ‘letter of protest’ that will be delivered to the Chinese government. In the very nick of time, it was the United Nations’ World Refugees Day on June 20th. On that day, the ANKN held a protest rally in front of the Chinese Embassy in the Netherlands. After the rally, they carried the translated letter to the embassy.

In that letter, they called for the Chinese government to stop the deportation of North Korean Refugees in China, where over tens of thousands of North Koreans are wandering around.

We, the North Korean refugees who have narrowly survived and settled in various countries, strongly condemn the Chinese government’s brutal deportation of North Korean people. (...) We strongly appeals that the Chinese government should stop the arrest, detention, and the forced repatriation of North Korean refugees. (Letter of Protest, June 20, 2014)

On top of that, the ANKN claimed that the Chinese government should put pressure on North Korea over human rights violation. In the process of helping translation of the letter, we were able to understand their motivation and needs. Also, we got an opportunity to conduct a short email interview with Inim Yoo. Even though we could not get direct information about North Korean refugees living in Germany, we attained some meaningful insights for our next steps.

First, we realized that viewing refugees as ‘active participants’ is of crucial importance to gaining trust in them. The refugees in the Netherlands were vigorously seeking for ‘social and political recognition’. They struggled to draw attention from the public arguing that they have been “*persecuted by the most brutal government in the world.*”² We could also sense that they felt genuinely proud of protesting against North Korea government and criticizing Kim Jung Un, the North Korean leader. They did not want to remain as asylum seekers. They wish to appear as active players not just for their own purpose, but for a larger political context.

According to Axel Honneth (1995), people strive to be recognized in three forms: love, respect, and esteem. Even if one is cared for by significant others (love) and granted fundamental rights (respect), she or he would still pursue the third level of recognition: social self-esteem (Selbsteinschätzung). As

² In his email interview (June 9, 2014), Inim Yoo also emphasized that they are the ‘victims of the division of Korea’. He thereby implied that North Korean refugee problem is the by-product of international conflict. Thus, this is the reason why the international society should bear responsibility to protect them.

he puts it, “one is given the chance to experience oneself to be recognized, in light of one’s own accomplishments and abilities, as valuable to society” (1995:130). That is, individuals can enjoy esteem on the condition that their abilities and achievements are appropriately valued. The ANKN’s energetic activity shows that they wanted to be seen as the one who have something valuable to contribute. Thus, looking back, it was right that we suggested them to work together, instead of asking them to be our respondents.

Second, in spite of their enthusiastic activities, we perceived that they were somewhat inexperienced of communicating with the others, including other ethnic refugee groups. This ‘unsociable’ character made them even harder to receive solidarity from people outside. As far as we observed, the ANKN was completely isolated from the other refugee group’s activities.³ No one would deny that North Korea situation have remained the worst for a long period of time. However, many other conflicts, such as Syrian Civil War, Afghanistan War, are as much important as North Korean issues.

Axel Honneth’s concept of recognition is something goes beyond the individual pursuit. It requires the ability to give and take recognition, to and from others in a web of relations. Through the working together with the refugees in the Netherlands, we concluded that they lacked experiences of mutual recognition and respect. Also, they were lack of experience of developing solidarity and networking. This might pose a serious obstacle for them to achieve their goal, considering this world as a highly interdependent society. Consequently, the case in the Netherlands led us to explore more about their ‘closed character’ later on. We will discuss this in the reflection chapter.



³ We could not further examine whether they intended to work independent of the other groups or not. But in the email interview, Inim Yoo repeatedly said that they were receiving special attention among other refugees. It seemed that they were taking a differentiation strategy to make the most of the advantages derived from the North Korea’ extreme situation

4.6 Presentation at HEKO

A few days later, on the 9th of June we attended the monthly HEKO seminar. This seminar was another opportunity to deepen our relationship with our participants at HEKO. For each seminar they normally arrange presentations with relevant topics related to their organizational vision and mission, such as unification or micro-credits for North Korean refugees.



The seminar was open for everyone, who's interested in HEKO's activities. Some members of



SARAM took part at the seminar, too. During the seminar, we not only presented our planned case study in Karlsruhe, but also we explained the linkage to Action Research and what it means. Through our participatory observation we noticed a strong interest of many people in our research process. Positive feedback, shared discussions and suggestions after the presentation as well as the willingness of being part in the research project and their financial support strengthened us in our purposes.

4.7 Trip to Karlsruhe

4.7.1 Interview with Rev. Lim

Through a Korean pastor of Korean church in Karlsruhe that supports North Korean refugees, we could get access to North Korean refugee family. We visited Karlsruhe for three days; 26-28.06.2014 to interview the family.⁴ All North Korean refugees are sent to the Karlsruhe refugee camp as soon as

⁴ There are the German Federal Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht) and the highest Court of Appeals in civil and criminal cases (The Bundesgerichtshof) in Karlsruhe.

they arrive in Germany. The city already has the know-how to examine the asylum-seekers from North Korea because Technical University of Karlsruhe among German universities only accepted North Korean students who fled from East Germany from the 1960s.

Before an interview with the family, we conducted an interview with Rev. Lim, who is a pastor of Korean immigrant church and supports North Korean refugees in Karlsruhe. The interview was conducted in Korean language, in semi-structured interview. One of three group members observed non-verbal expressions. According to the interview, he has lived in Karlsruhe for 18 years and helped North Korean refugees since 2004. He met over 70 North Korean refugees for ten years. Initially, he did not have any intention of supporting North Korean refugees, but they spontaneously came to his church. Thus, he became to help them with legal, psychological and physical issues such as translation, accompanying to hospital with the church members.

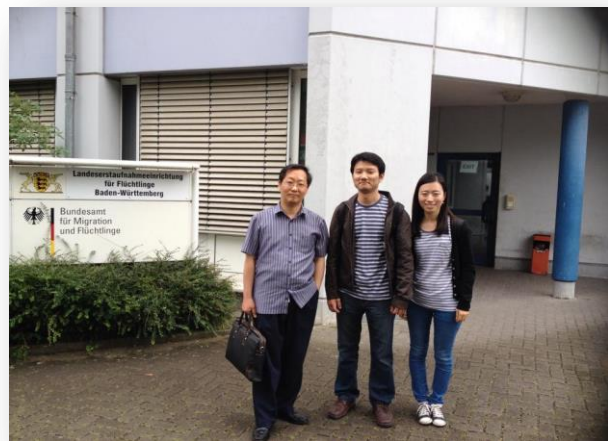
Rev. Lim explained that North Korean refugees' lives remain unstable until they receive the refugee status. Some refugees even came from South Korea, meaning they are those who already have a South Korean citizenship. They left South Korea after experiencing multiple inequalities in the country. In case they are not recognized as refugee in Germany, some people even leave for other countries to seek another opportunity. It seems that they do not have a right place to settle nor belong to any society. He described them as 'wanderers' who moves aimlessly from place to place with no permanent home. Some people begin to feel dull in Karlsruhe. They became to realize that it is a small and quite city. Besides, there are only few Koreans whom they can chat with.

Some have already left for the UK illegally through a broker, and some still dream to live in the richest country, the US. Due to this unstable status, some of them tend not to save money for their future. For example, North Korean family, who has been supported by his church, surprised all members by purchasing a stroller that costs 1,000 euros. Rev. Lim assumes that they might have brought that money from South Korea. However, many church members who used to live in a frugal way like other Germans were shocked by the family's wasteful spending patterns. This was one example of cultural conflicts between North Korean refugees and the church members. The pastor, however, tries to understand them, for they have long been living from hand to mouth. In addition, some North Koreans suddenly vanished without a word. It makes the locals get tired of helping them. We assumed that there was a lack of open and honest communication between them.

When we asked him about the reason of their sudden disappearance, he replied *"They seem to FEEL DIFFERENT to the South Koreans. At first, they get along with South Koreans, so they think they are culturally similar to the Southerners. But, at some point, they begin to feel they are different from*

these people.” Until that moment, it was clear to us that one of our initial assumptions seems to be right; the refugees appear to isolate themselves from others. However, Rev. Lim did not agree with our idea. He believes that it is not their intention to be alienated, especially from the majorities. The minorities always want to join the majority, but it is not that easy for them. He further said that it is up to the majority to reach out and build relationships with minority.

We have felt the necessity of different ways of making relationship among North and South Koreans through this interview. Also, we thought that there should be an open venue for dialogue where the differences and similarities are acknowledged and valued. It would serve as a mutual learning process for all involved



4.7.2 Interview with North Korean Family

We visited North Korean family’s house for an interview. They welcomed us to their home and were very willing to participate in an interview. They are a married couple with a five-month baby. They moved to Germany in 2012. The interview was conducted in Korean for one and half hours. They escaped from North Korea in 1998 and stayed in China for 14 years. Mr. Kim was working as a woodcutter and his wife was in charge of cooking food for workers. In 2012, after Kim Jung-Un took the power, the crackdown of North Korean refugees in China became severe. So, they had to escape from China to Europe through a Chinese broker.

Mr. Kim and Ms. Kim expressed their ‘fear and anxiety’ in China several times during the interview. When they lived in China, they had a deep fear of being deported. He said, *“When we were staying hidden in China, we were so worried that we used to wear clothes and shoes even when sleeping for years.”* When they first arrived in Germany, they felt uneasy about living in a whole new place because they have lived in a deep forest being secluded from outside. They still do not know where exactly they were in China. They came to Germany even without knowing where they were heading. The broker did not give any information about their destination.

Until now, his wife sometimes gets frightened when she encounters police officers on the street. They had a fear of not being recognized as refugees by the German government. They were also worried about their baby would later be discriminated by the peers. Surprisingly (also as expected), they would not show interest to contact with the North Korean refugees' organization (when we mentioned it) because they were not sure who they are. We prepared some questions about the refugees' organization, but could not get any meaningful answer. We only confirmed the lack of trust among North Korean people.

Mr. and Ms. Kim seemed to settle down quite successfully in Germany. After they had come here, the wife got pregnant. Thanks to the baby, they became to live in their own flat. The German government provides them with monthly rent. Thus, they called the baby 'Blessing' as a nickname. Evidently, we could see their strong will to live. When we asked him about the reason for their successful resettlement, he said, *"At least we do not get death threats (here), I can be alive..... I have to (will) live here. I have nowhere to go, even if I don't like to do it, I have to (settle down).....We put down our all desires, so we can adjust quickly."* They seemed to have strived to adapt themselves to a new environment although there might be many difficulties such as a language barrier, cultural misunderstandings.

Kim Hun, the husband, said that when he was in China, he endeavored to learn South Korean language. For him, it was a kind of survival strategy. He said it was not because he liked South Korea, rather he felt he needed to do it to protect his family. Ms. Kim told *"He (Mr. Kim) has always practiced South Korean' accent and idioms watching TV shows, but I can't. It's really hard for me to change my North Korean accent. (laugh)"* It should not have been easy to learn different culture and language, but they tried to assimilate into an alien culture only to survive.



During the interview, they showed gratitude to the churches for their support. (Korean and German church as well). She said, *"Even though we don't know about religions in North Korea, we (North Korean refugees) all know that we could get help from the church. I heard that we could ask help to the building that has the Cross."* A German church helped them to have found a house and Korean migrant church members were helping them with translation and daily necessities.

church members were helping them with translation and daily necessities.

The Kim's family hoped that they would have the right to movement. Since they did not get the refugee status, they do not have the full rights such as moving outside the city. Mr. Kim said, *"We don't want my child to be unfortunate. Because we are ok now, we want to give my child a good education in a developed country and give freedom to our child."* The couple found their sole comfort in taking care of their daughter. They also said that they have never experienced in traveling in their whole life, so they wanted to make good memories with their child. After the interview, when we ask them what kind of support they are in need they requested for second-hand baby clothes and Korean books for their baby.



The family in Karlsruhe was amply satisfied with living in Germany, and they were quite optimistic about their future. In fact, it was somewhat contrary to our expectations. This case showed us there are many possible strategies to intervene the isolation of North Korean refugee. Especially, we became assured that it is important to empower them to have the meaning of life and the future.

5. After the presentation in class

5.1 Workshop with HEKO and NON Berlin

Following the presentation in class, we were invited to share our research results with HEKO members. The meeting was convened in cooperation with a contemporary art organization, called 'NON Berlin'. The members of NON Berlin were also becoming interested in our project. After we completed our presentation, the floor was opened to questions. Many people said that they could understand the living conditions of North Korean refugees and why it was so hard for them to contact with them. Also, some participants expressed their concerns about the refugees' financial status, such as job opportunity, training, and support services.

An old German lady showed her interest, asking whether there is any social security system for North Korean refugees. We said, 'yes, but the problem is a cultural barrier



among North and South Koreans. That's why they don't want to go to South Korea'. Then, she said, *'it reminds me what happened after the German unification. We also experienced the same thing. I would like to pray for them'*. It was a very moving moment for all of us. Furthermore, her remarks reinforced our belief that this project is not just a matter of Korean society, rather it can be applied anywhere there is cultural conflict.



Symposium

Situation und Zukunft Nordkoreas

am Samstag, den 2. August 2014, 15:00 Uhr

in der Technischen Universität Berlin,
Straße des 17. Juni 135, 10623 Berlin
TU Hauptgebäude; Hörsaal H0110

- 15:00 Begrüßung der Teilnehmer
- 15:15 Panel I: Die aktuelle Menschenrechtsslage in Nordkorea
(Yvonne Yung Hee Bormann, Nicolai Sprekels, Saram e.V.)
- 16:20 Pause
- 16:30 Panel II: Wiedervereinigungsfrage der koreanischen
Halbinsel
(Nayoung Lee, Gymnasiallehrerin in Seoul, für das
Fach „Wiedervereinigung“, HEKO e.V.)
- 17:35 Pause
- 17:45 Panel III: Nordkoreanische Flüchtlinge in Deutschland
(Hyuk Jung, Stefanie Kolde, Alice Salomon Hochschule)
- 18:45 Pause
- 19:30 Filmvorführung "Camp 14" mit anschließender Diskussion



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presidents

5.2 Symposium zur "Situation und Zukunft Nordkoreas"

On August 2, we had another opportunity to discuss our research project with new people. HEKO and SARAM co-hosted the symposium for "Situation and the Future of North Korea" and six other organizations participated as sponsors. Considering that the audience was not familiar with Action Research, we framed our presentation with three concepts: cultural difference, isolation, and identity. About 40 people joined the conference, and the majority was Germans who have interested in North Korea's human rights issue. After the presentation, participants asked several questions about living condition of the refugees and the German refugee policy.

All in all, we were very much delighted and grateful to take such a precious opportunity. It offered us the first step to make this project in public. Another thing to note is that the cooperation among the organizations became apparently active. In fact, the members of HEKO and SARAM became more enthusiastic about this project, once they were aware of obvious problems that need to be addressed. We are quite optimistic that this cooperation will further develop in a more organized way in the future. One example is the cultural event already scheduled in this November, which we will explain in the action plan part.

6. The Findings

Action research typically evolves through the following phases: planning, collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, and taking action based on this information. As we have accumulated the snowball of data, we will discuss what could be induced from our research data. Thus, it is required to revisit the research question: *what is the reason for the continuing isolation of North Korean refugees and what can we do about it?* Do they have intrinsic characteristics that separate them from others? Is it the society that hinders them to open up for a new relationship? Especially after we visited Karlsruhe, we became fairly clear about these questions.

Here, we come up with a framework of mechanism to clarify the North Korean refugees' isolation. There are four factors that affect this phenomenon; *psychological anxiety, surveillance society, cultural illiteracy, lack of perspective*. Each element reflects the psychological, social, cultural, and economic aspect, respectively.

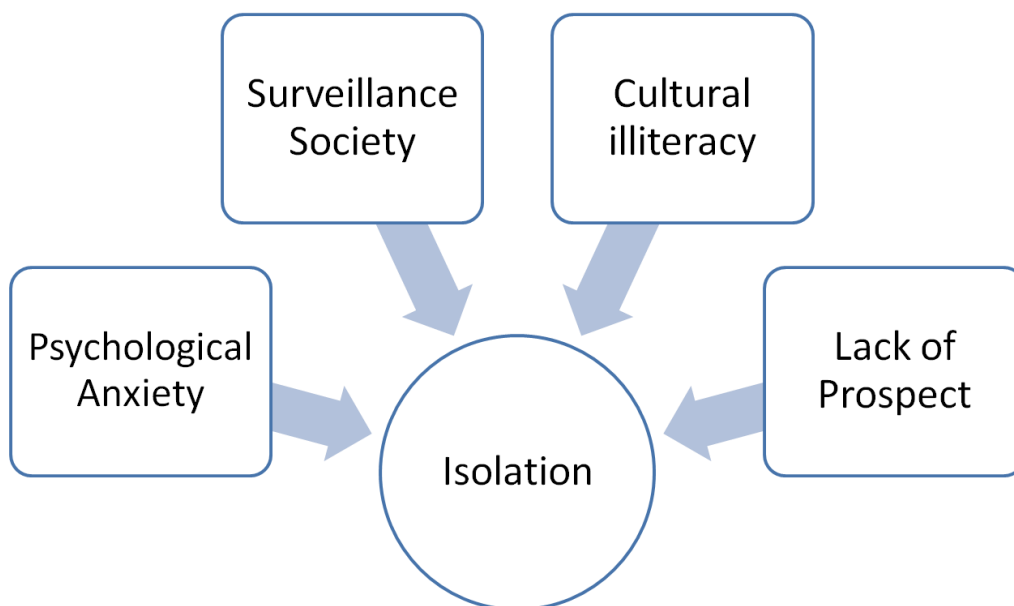


Figure 1. Factors of the North Korean refugees' isolation

6.1 Psychological Anxiety

It is not surprising that refugees are feared for returning home, but for North Koreans it means more than that. Most of them have already spent many years in China before moving into Europe.⁵ The stay in China is very harsh and insecure. Chinese government's official position towards the North Korean refugees is 'they should not be considered refugees according to international standards because many of them fled to China to seek food, not to acquire political refugee status'. (Chan and Schloenhardt, 2007:222) North Korean refugees, especially who cannot speak Chinese should inevitably hide in secret places.⁶

It was clear that the deep-rooted fear of deportation has formed the basis for their secluded personality. In the interview, Kim Hun told us that he was in extreme fear that anytime he could be caught by security police, even though he was working in a deep forest. For over one year since he safely arrived in Germany, he frequently suffered from nightmares. His wife, Hong-Mae Kim also spoke candidly of her difficulty that even now she has a sudden sinking feeling, when she sees police officers out on the street.

6.2 Surveillance Society

Second reason of the isolation is affiliated with the nature of North Korean society. North Korea is infamous for being the most politicized communist state. Even after the Cold War, there has been little change in its totalitarian dictatorship. From early childhood, North Koreans are indoctrinated and conditioned to worship their leader. Being disloyal to the Great Leader, and even the slightest criticizing him constitute a serious offense. In order to secure the oppressive regime, people are trained to report anything that goes against the communist government. Kim Hun said:

⁵ The most common escape route for North Korean refugees is crossing the Yalu or Tumen Rivers, which form the entire length of the border between North Korea and China. Majority of them just stay in China to keep contact with their family. The estimates of them range from 30,000 to 50,000. Some of them risk their lives to flee to other countries, such as Mongolia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. If they succeed to locate a South Korean embassy or consulate in those countries, they finally have a chance to immigrate into South Korea. It is in recent years that a growing number of people attempt to flee from China to the United States, Canada, and European countries.

⁶ In China, security police can stop and question anybody on the street, judging by their appearances. People should show their identity card. If their card turns out to be a fake or if they do not have any, they are immediately arrested and later deported to North Korea. Then, they are likely to be punished, such as torture, detention without trial, or confinement in labor camps, according to the severity of defection.

“We were educated that when a friend or even my parents did something wrong against the law, or spoke something bad about the Great Leader, we should report to the teachers or officers. And people really follow the rule. So you don’t tell the truth what you really think even to your wife.”

In North Korea, they have a saying: "There is an ear, even on the wall." No one can be trusted for fear that they might be reported and then punished. It is a surveillance society in which every citizen is de facto agent, and people are watching the others’ every movement. For this reason, North Korean refugees have a tendency not to open their mind immediately. This closed characteristic creates another potential restriction for them to mingle with locals, rendering them more excluded.

6.3 Cultural Illiteracy

Third element that contributes the isolation is the cultural ignorance or lack of cultural competence. The crippled economy of North Korea has been suffering from chronic shortages of food and fuel. The long-lasting negative growth caused the extreme poverty. After the Soviet Union’s fall, the socialist planned economy does not function like before: the distribution system has already been collapsed, and the other public systems, such as education, health, and transportation are not working properly. Apparently it seemed that time has gone backward in North Korea.

Reportedly, the North Koreans who settled in South Korea have trouble with adjusting themselves to a highly developed society. Some of them had never used credit cards, washing machine, or automatic doors. Opening an account (and managing it, as well) is just one small example of the difficulties they have to cope with. Furthermore, because they were grown up in a totalitarian society, their mind and thoughts are not flexible to different cultures.

Rev. Lim emphasized that the most difficult thing to deal with was a cultural difference. They mostly feel the cultural shock, and it leads them to be more segregated to others. He regards North Korean refugees having less capacity to change their habits and mind, comparing to other minority groups. We decided to describe it ‘cultural illiteracy’. Because illiterate people are less self-confident, they tend not to behave actively, which will eventually bring about additional disadvantages.

6.4 Lack of Perspective

Last factor is related to economic independence. Although the German government provides monthly allowance and accommodation, refugees are struggling to manage to live on a low income.⁷ The bigger problem is, though, that there is a set of rules that limit the freedom of movement. The refugees who are not recognized are not permitted to travel outside the city or district in which they are registered.⁸

Kim Hun's first and foremost need was to get the full right to freedom of movement, so that he can get a job anywhere he can commute. He thinks Karlsruhe is not enough big for him to get a job opportunity, for there is only few Koreans who might be willing to offer a job. He makes every effort to learn German language, but he feels limited accessibility to the job market.

“I don't want to receive allowances from the government. I don't need it. I want to work. I want to earn money, working as hard as I can.”(...) “But there are so many restrictions on working and moving freely outside Karlsruhe.”

Kim hopes to become financially independent as soon as possible. He also told us that he wanted to live like a full-fledged German citizen, working, paying taxes, and enjoying life. However, he considered the current asylum policy pushes him to rely on the Government's subsidy.

⁷ Kim Hun's family receives monthly allowances of 500 euros in total for the three family members. Fortunately, his five month old daughter is also counted as an independent beneficiary.

⁸ Refugees recognized have the right to travel or settle anywhere in Germany. Asylum seekers who are granted tolerated status have their freedom of movement restricted to a local district.

7. Proposal of Action Plan

How can we break the cycle of isolation that besieges the North Korean refugees? Here, we are going to suggest three stages of action plan. The first stage is a short term strategy that was already initiated by HEKO and SARAM. The second and third stage will be further steps to complete a long term goal: *the effective integration⁹ of the North Korean refugees into German society.*

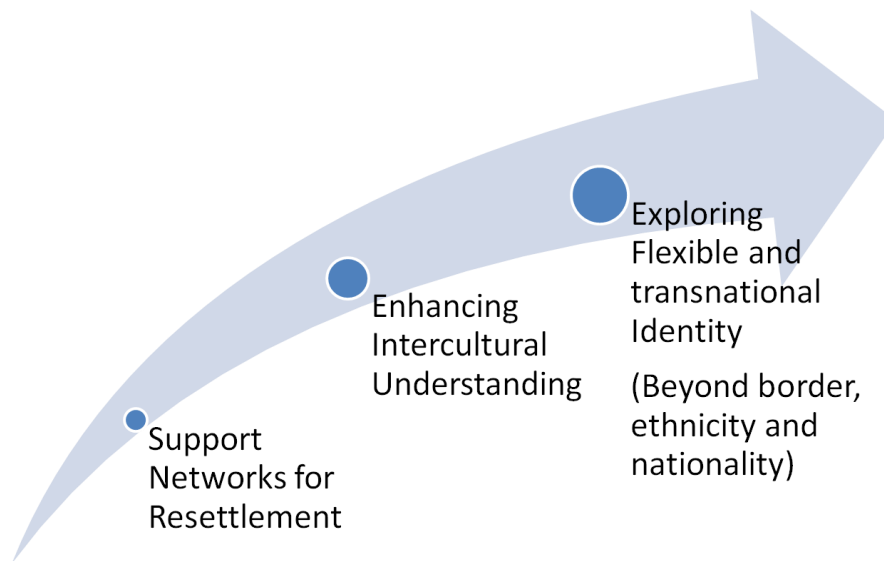


Figure 2. Three steps for effective integration of the North Korean refugees

7.1 Step 1: Support Networks for Resettlement

We discovered that the North Korean Refugees are desperately in need of help even though they seemingly reluctant to plead for explicit help from outside. Thus, building networks for providing practical and psychological supports would be the first step to get accessibility to them. It is crucial that the approach should be performed in a respectful manner that preserves the refugees' dignity and self-reliance. For instance, HEKO can organize volunteers who are bilingual in German and Korean. The language tandem can act as a contact point to provide emotional support for the refugees, not to mention the linguistic and cultural support.

⁹ We define 'integration' as a process that brings together those who are different, while their differentness remains recognizable. 'Assimilation', on the other hand, is the integration of a majority group with a minority group, uprooting the differences.

On top of learning basic skills, the organizations should give strength to the refugees to interact with locals. For this to be possible, SARAM whose members are mostly Germans can act as a bridge to make connection between locals and the refugees. SARAM can play an important role, such as developing a rationale why Germans should pay attention to the North Korean refugees. This first step will establish a starting point that could build a base for between North and South Koreans and Germans, as well.

7.2 Step 2: Enhancing Intercultural Understanding

The most challenging obstacle that we identified through our research was the North Korean refugee's cultural incompetence that originated from the social and psychological factors. Culture, however, is not something that can be imposed or simply learned in a classroom. It is desirable that the North Korean refugees should have the capacity of integrating cultural diversity into their daily lives. Therefore, we propose an intercultural approach that promotes mutual understandings among different cultures.

According to the intercultural theorists, perceptions of different cultures are deepened by “dynamic, open-ended process of transforming a common societal culture through dialogue, mutual understanding, and intercultural contact.” (Maxwell and Waddington et al., 2012: 432) Diverse types of social interactions should be provided so that the North Korean refugees could expand their cultural understandings. Especially, NON Berlin can provide a venue: cultural exchange programs for North and South Koreans. HEKO and SARAM can raise the public awareness of North Korean culture among German citizens.

7.2.1 Cultural event in November: ‘KOREA, ONE NATION, TWO CULTURES’

- Place: (In discussion with Berlin City)
- Date: 8th– 9th November 2014
- Organized by Berlin City, Kulturprojekte Berlin GmbH
- Managed by NON Berlin, Herz für Korea e.V.
- Major Events: Archive Exhibitions, Workshops, Testimony by North Korean refugees (Kim Hun)

This cultural event will be held as one of various programs for the 25th anniversary of Berlin Wall's fall in this November. HEKO and NON Berlin will serve as manager organizations to prepare the event. Kim Hun will be invited to give a testimony on his life in North Korea and Germany. He is now processing the special permission to travel by the refugee authority. *Kim's family will stay in Berlin for a couple of weeks. It will be there first travel.*



7.3 Step 3: Exploring for an Alternative Identity

The ultimate goal of our research is that transforming the concept of identity. We observed that the North Korean refugees are likely to stick too rigidly to their old identity (like the case in the Netherlands) or change their identity as quickly as possible in order to fit in a new circumstance (like the case of Kim Hun's accent practice). In North Korea, where the interaction with different cultures is extremely sparse, people often develop a strong sense of national identity. No wonder that they have a concept of 'fixed identity' which is static and homogeneous.

Nowadays, identity is being regarded as multiple and fluid. It can always be reconstructed through dialogue and other interactions. Through dynamic cultural interactions, we hope that we could explore the possibility of an alternative to conventional identity.

8. Reflections

8.1 Stefanie Kolde

Before we started our Action Research, the topic I did barely inform myself about the situation in North Korea. During the research I became aware of Minju's and Hyuk's bias, because they have a lot experience in working with North Korean refugees. Hence, I think we had a good balance of having an open mind but not an empty head. After revisiting the cycles of Action Research several times, we finally got to our main question of how we can handle or overcome the isolation of North Korean refugees. The 'How' question also underlines one of the main aspects of Action Research, to go into action. Because of the lacking access we faced, this was difficult to implement before.

However, even our final report is not a final conclusion of fact, but a base for ongoing discussion among our participants.

8.2 Minju Kim

Through interview with North Korean family, I recognized that I did not consider vocabulary differences between North and South Korean languages. I took for granted to use “Namhan” which refers to South Korea in the vocabulary of South Korean, but South Korea is called as “Namchosun” in North Korea. The family has never visited South Korea and is used to call South Korea “Namchosun.” It really hit me that we use different vocabulary even if we communicate in the same language. It is not wrong to use any words, but I am not sure that which one is proper in communication with North Koreans. In order to give consideration to difference in vocabulary, I think that it is needed to promote mutual reflection and understanding through intercultural dialogue between the two Korean people.

8.3 Hyuk Jung

In the beginning, we were kind of lost. The reality we supposed to 'change' turned out to be much more difficult one than I thought. Sometimes, you end up not knowing where you should go. We just had to wait for the contact from the refugees. When we finally got the answer, we were incredibly happy and became much more immersed in this project. The obstacles we faced during the process actually helped us to think more calmly about our research questions. I would not be panic again even when my work gets stuck. It's true, “all is data”.

Cooperation was another great advantage of Action Research. All our members have different backgrounds and strong points. It was very interesting experience to see Steffi and Minju's hidden power and strength. Also, I learned about what it means to be working together, especially from our participants. It's true, “everybody is an expert”.

Despite of all our efforts, the reality of North Korean refugee is still difficult to grasp. One thing I can be sure of is that the root cause of their isolation lies on the legacy of the 20th century's conflicts. They are the last victims of the Cold War system, which is why the international society should share the responsibility for this problem. I believe that those some hundred people in Europe would someday play a significant role in bringing peace to East Asia and beyond. I came to have this kind of optimistic hope through meeting Kim Hun. Special thanks to the Kim's family!

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10. Abbreviations

AsylbLG	Asylum Seekers Benefit Act
AsylVfG	Asylum Procedure Act
ANKN	Association of North Korean Refugees in the Netherlands
BAMF	Federal Office of Migration and Refugees
HEKO	Herz für Korea
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

11. Appendices

Appendix I . Interview transcript

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Appendix II . Interview Guides

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Appendix IV . Memos

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Appendix V . Letter of Protest (Translation Activity)

Date: June 20, 2014

To: The Government of the People's Republic of China and the Ministry of Public Security

From: The Association of North Korean Refugees in the Netherlands.

Cc: The Chinese Embassy in the Netherlands

날자 : 2014년 6월 20일(금요일)

수신 : 중화인민공화국 정부 및公安部

발신 : 화란체류조선망명자협회

참조 : 네덜란드 주재 중국대사관

Subject: Calling on China to stop the forced repatriation of North Korean refugees

제목: 중국 정부의 탈북 난민 강제 송환 중단에 관한 요구

Dear the Government of the People's Republic of China,

We are North Korean refugees who settled down in the Netherlands. We are a part of North Korean defectors who have been drifting around the world since 1990s. On behalf of all the North Korean refugees, we are sending this letter of protest to the Chinese Government.

우리는 네덜란드에 정착한 조선난민들이다. 우리는 중국, 러시아를 비롯한 세계

각국에서 류랑하고 있는 조선난민들 중 일부이다.우리는 세계 각국의 조선난민들을

대표하여 이 서한을 발송한다.

Today is the World Refugee Day designated by the U.N. General Assembly in 2000. On this day, we, the refugees in the Netherlands, are here to denounce the Chinese government's inhumane forced repatriation of the North Korean refugees. North Korea or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is infamous for the dictatorship under the absolute rule of Kim Jeon-Eun.

오늘은 유엔이 2000년 12월 4일 지정한 <세계 난민의 날>이다. 난민의 날을 맞이하여 우리들, 네덜란드에 체류하는 조선난민들은 중국 정부 및公安부의 비인간적 탈북자 강제송환에 항의하기 위하여 이 서한을 작성하였다. 우리들의 조국인 조선민주주의인민공화국(DPRK)은 세계 모든 국가와 전체 인류가 공식인정하는 명실상부한 독재국가이다.

North Korean regime has over 200,000 innocent people to be persecuted and imprisoned in political prisoner camps. Over 2.7 million people already have been driven to starve to death by the regime. It also has generated more than 100,000 refugees seeking asylum in the world. In such a situation, about 50,000 to 70,000 people are displaced from North Korea and now hiding in China.

조선정권은 20만명 이상의 죄없는 사람들을 정치범수용소에 가두고 박해하고 있다.

조선정권은 270만명 이상의 인민들을 굶겨죽이는 기아살인을 감행한 범죄인이다.

조선정권은 10만명 이상의 탈북자들을 발생시켜 전 세계 각 국가들에서 난민으로 떠돌아다니게 만들었다. 이와 같은 사태 속에서 중국에는 현재 약 5만~7만명의 조선사람들이 난민으로 숨어지내고 있다.

Those innocent people are the refugees fled from the persecutions of the North Korean government, considering China as a land of hope and salvation. However, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security is arresting and forcibly deporting them to North Korea where the extreme punishments are waiting to fall upon them.

As we all know, China already joined the UN Refugee Convention in 1982. Also, on September 29, 2003, the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declared North Korean defectors as ‘mandate refugees’, referring that all North Koreans shall have the refugee status shortly after they cross the North Korea’s border.

이들 중국에 체류하는 조선난민들은 조선정권의 박해를 피하여 중국을 희망의 땅으로, 구원의 품으로 생각하고 찾아간 선량한 사람들이다. 그럼에도 불구하고 중국 공안부는 명백한 난민지위를 갖는 탈북자들을 체포하고 그들을 분명한 박해가 기다리는 조선으로 강제송환하고 있다. 중국은 1982년 유엔난민협약에 가입한 나라이다. 유엔난민기구는 2003년 9월 29일에 조선탈출자들을 <위임난민>으로 규정하고, 모든 조선사람이 조선국경을 벗어나는 순간 자동적으로 난민 지위를 갖는다고 선언했다

Although North Korean defectors have been recognized as legitimate refugees by the United Nations, the Chinese government is labeling them as illegal aliens and repatriating them against their will. We, the North Korean refugees all over the world, are deeply concerned with the situation. The actions (arrest, deportation, detention, etc.) that the Chinese government is taking against North Korean refugees are clearly the violations of the international law, Chinese domestic laws, and the treaties between China and North Korea.

유엔과 국제사회가 합법적인 난민으로 인정한 조선탈출자들을 중국 정부와 공안부는 <불법체류자>라고 규정하고 체포하고 있으며 그들의 의사에 반하여 강제적으로 조선으로 송환하고 있다. 우리들, 전 세계에 흩어져 있는 조선난민들은 이와 같은 사태를 깊이 우려하고 있다. 중국 안전부의 조선난민에 대한 대응조치(체포, 강제송환, 억류, 등)들은 국제법 및 중국 국내법 및 중국과 조선간의 조약에도 위반되는 명백한 불법행위 이다.

Those who have been forcibly deported to North Korea are now suffering under harsh conditions, such as torture, detention without trial, property confiscation, forced labor, imprisonment in political

prisoner camps for life, and being sentenced to death penalty.

중국 정부와 공안당국의 이와 같은 불법행위 때문에 조선으로 강제송환되는 조선난민들은 고문, 재판없는 구금, 재산몰수, 강제로동, 정치범수용소 종신감금, 사형, 등의 혹독한 처벌을 당하고 있다.

We, the North Korean refugees who have nearly survived and settled in various countries, strongly condemn the Chinese government's brutal deportation of North Korean people. Upon the World Refugee Day, the Association of North Korean Refugees in the Netherlands strongly appeals that the Chinese government should stop the arrest, detention, and the forced repatriation of North Korean refugees.

우리들, 간신히 살아남아 세계 여러 나라에 정착한 조선난민들은 중국 정부와 공안부의 조선난민 강제송환을 강력히 규탄하며 견결히 반대한다. 화란체류조선망명자협회는 <난민의 날>을 맞이하여, 네덜란드 주재 중국대사관을 통하여, 중국 정부와 공안부에, 조선난민들에 대한 체포, 구금, 강제송환을 중지할 것을 강력하게 요청한다.

The Chinese government and the Ministry of Public Security must stop forcing the repatriation of North Korean defectors right now. Furthermore, the Chinese government should denounce the North Korean regime for the grave crimes against humanity, urge the North Korean government to improve the human rights situation, and put all the pressures on the government.

중국정부와 공안부는 중국에서 체류하는 조선난민들에 대한 체포와 강제송환을 당장 중단하여야 한다. 또한 중국정부는 조선정권의 반인륜적인 범죄행위를 규탄하여야 하며, 조선정권에 대하여 인권개선을 요구하여야 하며, 조선정권에 대한 정치/경제/외교/군사적인 모든 압력을 가하여야 한다.

Sending this protest letter, we hereby declare that we shall not stop fighting until our requirements are satisfied. We shall fight from generation to generation in the name of justice as the proverb says,

“Little drops of water make the mighty ocean.” We, all members of the Association of North Korean Refugees in the Netherlands, shall continue to lead the campaign against the Chinese government in cooperation with all the human rights organizations in the Netherlands.

우리들은 이와 같은 요구사항을 담은 항의서한을 발송하면서 우리들의 이와 같은 요구사항이 관철될 때까지 중단하지않고 투쟁할 것을 선언한다. 중국 은나라 사람 우공이 산을 옮긴 것처럼 우리들도 대를 이어 가며 끝까지 투쟁할 것이다. 산샤댐을 막아도 장강이 흐르듯이 우리들의 투쟁은 정의의 이름으로 계속될 것이다. 우리들, 화란체류조선망명자협회 전체 회원들과 임원들은 네덜란드의 여러 인권단체들과 연합하여 중국의 조선난민 박해를 반대하는 캠페인을 지속적으로 진행할 것이다.

The Association of North Korean Refugees in the Netherlands strongly request as follows.

화란체류조선망명자협회는 전세계 조선난민들의 마음을 모으고 대표하여 다음과 같이 엄숙히 요청한다.

- The Chinese government and the Ministry of Public Security must release North Korean refugees that have been arrested so far!
- Stop all kinds of abuses, including delayed payment of wage, human trafficking and illegal detention of North Korean refugees!
- Stop repatriate North Korean refugees against their will!
- Our demands are based on justice, whereas the actions of the Chinese government and the Ministry of Public Security are absolutely illegal!
- History has proven itself that the justice would prevail in the end!
- When North and South Korea are reunified, we will accuse the Chinese government and the Ministry of Public Security of all the persecutions of North Korean refugees!
- Stop the arrest and forced repatriation of North Korean refugees!
- Recognize North Korean defectors as legitimate refugees!
- China must abide by the international law!
- 중국정부와公安부는 자국에서 체포한 조선난민들을 석방하라!
- 중국정부와公安부는 중국에 체류하는 조선난민들에 대한 임금체불, 인신매매,

불법구금, 등 각종 박해행위를 중단하라!

- 중국정부와 공안부는 조선난민들을 그들의 생각에 반하여 강제적으로 조선에 추방하는 행위를 더 이상 진행하지 말라!
- 우리들의 요구는 정의로운 것이며, 중국정부와 공안부의 조선난민들에 대한 조치는 부당하고 불법이다.
- 정의는 반드시 승리한다는 것이 역사의 진리이다.
- 정의가 승리하여, 조선반도 남북이 통일될 때, 우리들 조선난민들과 전체 조선인민은 오늘날 중국정부와 공안당국이 조선난민들을 박해한 모든 행위에 대하여 기억하고 엄중하게 추궁할 것이다.
- 역사의 정의에 반대되는 조선난민 체포 및 강제송환을 견결히 반대하며 당장 중단할 것을 거듭 요청한다.
- 중국정부는 조선난민들을 국제법에 따라 난민으로 인정하고 대우하라!
- 중국정부는 조선난민들을 조선으로 강제송환하지 말라!
- 중국정부는 국제법을 준수하라!