

인류학 연구 - 서울 거주 탈북자의 서술

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Experiences of State, Family and Body Amongst North Korean Defectors Living in Seoul*

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I. Introduction

The *Talbukja*, term used to denote 'escapee from the north', interviewed in this paper have all fled their rural towns along the Tumen river in north-eastern North Korea to find themselves in Seoul, South Korea, one of the most dynamic megacities in the world. What is their view of this change? Do they incur any physical discomfort? How would they describe their relationship with their new surroundings?¹⁾

To explore these aspects, the methodology involved conducting qualitative interviews with questions pertaining to the five senses. I asked questions such as: what sights stand out in Seoul, what sounds are new or different, what tastes and what smells do you like or dislike? From these cue questions, the interviewee would then take the discussion in different directions, freely making associations to his or her personal life and experience as a refugee.

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1) Throughout the paper the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea will be abbreviated to the more informal North and South Korea. In the interviews they will be further abbreviated to NK and SK.

It is the objective of this paper to monitor this stream of associations. The aim is to better understand the life-experiences of individuals that have lived on both sides of the demilitarized zone that divides North and South Korea. From these experiences, we may gain some insights unto the socio-political balance between these two countries. Therefore, this paper seeks to comprehend the situation on the Korean peninsula not from an analysis of the geopolitical strategic interests between various states and stakeholders that have influence on the region, but from the point of view of those who experience the circumstances of a divided Korea first hand. In other words not from the top-down but from the bottom-up.

To do this I use the theoretical approach developed in anthropology that deals with issues of embodiment. This theory will help us understand the connection between the everyday lives of the *Talbukja* and their socio-political situation. This approach considers the way the body is experienced as a metaphor of one's relationship to society. For example Setha Low, in *Embodied Metaphors: Nerves as Lived Experience* (1994) finds that there is 'a kind of metaphoric transparency' between the way individuals' experience their bodies and the 'self/society contract'.

According to this theory, changes in the body reflect the changes in the nature of the individual's relationship with society. It follows that if there are changes in one's social environment - if the 'self/society' bond changes - then these changes will have an effect on an individual's body. By this logic, therefore, by working backwards from the 'embodied metaphors' recounted by North Korean defectors living in South Korea we may be able to reach some insights on the changes occurring in their social environments; that is, in North and South Korea.

This notion will be explored in seven parts. The first is this introduction, in which I have stated my objective. The second will try to specify the context in which we the research was conducted with some introductory comments on North and South Korea. Part three will deal more specifically with the theoretical approach mentioned above and also delineate the methodology in more detail. Part four will reproduce some of the conversations I had with the interviewees. The purpose here is that of giving the reader a sense of the *Talbukja* experiences in addition to having the raw material at hand. Parts five and six will offer some considerations and conclusions by way of making the connections between each account and the larger thematic territory of a divided Korea. The last part will summarise the findings and offer some directions for further research.

Before we continue there are two potential weaknesses of this paper that need to be addressed. The first is the small number of people interviewed. This paper deals with four North Korean refugees; admittedly, these are too few for us to collect any sort of representative data. However, the aim is not to compile a statistically accurate survey of

North Koreans living in South Korea. The aim is to provide an in depth understanding of what it is like for a *Talbukja* to live in a big city like Seoul. In this sense, it was preferable to deploy a more qualitative, rather than quantitative, methodology. Also, this paper is intended as an introduction to the subject rather than as an exhaustive appraisal. The second weakness refers to the type of references used in researching this subject. While there are numerous texts on the subject in many different languages, this paper will be restricted to the English language texts.

1. Context

An important aspect to consider in dealing with the interviewees is that, not only have they changed their environment, but also the new environment in which they find themselves now, Seoul, is changing around them. It is undeniable that change in South Korea, in relation to many other parts of the globe, is occurring at an exponentially fast pace.

From the early 1960s to the late 1990s, South Korea had one of the fastest growing economies in the world (Pecotich and Schultz 2006). Indeed, such rapid transformation has come to be described as an almost supernatural event or, as it is referred to today in South Korean high school history books, the 'miracle on the Han River'. The country's economic expansion has by no means relented in the past decades. After a brief dip due to the Asian financial crisis in 1997, South Korea has consistently recorded annual GDP growth rates well above the OECD average. Today, a country of circa 50 million people, is the world's eighth largest exporter and the 15th largest economy in the world (*The Korea Times* Feb 2010).

In addition to these gross economic figures, South Koreans enjoy a high standard of living. The country ranks very high on the United Nations Human Development Index and one of South Korea's major achievements is in the accessibility and quality of its higher education system. It is, in this regard, ranked first in Asia (*IMF* Oct 2008). This in turn has furnished the brainpower needed to fuel its still booming high tech industrial conglomerates known as the *chaebol*. South Korea today is the world's largest shipbuilder, is home to the world's largest automobile assembly plant, and has the world's largest oil refinery (*ibid*), in addition to being the exporter of a number of world famous high-tech household brands such as Samsung and LG.

The reason I have highlighted these remarkable achievements is because I would like the reader to contextualize the following analysis of *Talbukja* experiences within the background of these massive economic changes. Seoul itself, as the financial and commercial nerve centre of the country, is at the forefront of such changes. The greater

Seoul national capital area, which includes Incheon, reaches 24.5 million inhabitants, making it the second largest city in the world. It ranks first, however, in terms of population density amongst all OECD countries (*OECD* Sept 2010).

Such a dense, continuously shifting urban landscape is bound to have some palpable effects upon the residents of the city. Perhaps exciting and stimulating. Perhaps disorienting and destabilising. While not sizeable, there is an existing body of work in anthropology that deals with the social effects of the rapid economic changes experienced by South Korea in the past decades. Some examples include: Kim's *Class Struggle or Family Struggle?: The Lives of Women Factory Workers in South Korea* (1997), Abelmann's *The Melodrama of Mobility: Women, Talk, and Class in Contemporary South Korea* (2003), Kendall's *Getting Married in Korea: Of Gender, Morality, and Modernity* (1996) and Jones' *Gender and the Political Opportunities of Democratization in South Korea* (2006).

We may note from the titles of these works that Anglo-American anthropology on South Korea has evolved around an emphasis on women and gender issues within the context of global capital and modernity. While this paper would rather opt for a less gender-based perspective, there is an important theme here that we may latch on to: it is the individual that, to various degrees, bears the weight of recent economic upheavals. Now, while the above mentioned works concentrate on the social effects of economic change on South Koreans, I would like to consider the effects of that same circumstance on the relatively new residents from the North.

For example, as I discussed with the interviewees I had occasion to notice how often they mentioned a sense of nostalgia for the serene countryside and 'clean air' of their home towns. The smell of burnt petroleum from exhaust pipes would literally make them 'sick' and 'dizzy', as they considered the idea that perhaps they were in the wrong place.

An interesting description of this type of reaction comes from the book by *L.A. Times* journalist Barbara Demick, *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (2009). In recounting the lives of young defectors from North Korea she finds that many are completely estranged when faced with the sensory overstimulation of everyday life in South Korea. The many neon-lit advertisements and store signs in the streets, the music from the shops, the loud sound of cars and buses, in addition to the unfamiliar accent and the different cultural habits of South Koreans, serve as an impenetrable blanket of new codes and strange symbols. The author finds that 'many if not most' of these defectors, as a consequence, dream of going home.

Home where? Home to what? What do we know of the country these refugees have fled? What immediate comparisons may we make with South Korea? Historian Bruce Cumings, in *Koreas Place in the Sun* (2005) summarises the situation in North Korea in

the following way:

The DPRK was proclaimed on September 9, 1948, but much of it was in place within a year after Japan's colonial rule ended in 1945, and many of the themes visible then remain features of the regime today. Above all this is a postcolonial state, still fighting the Japanese... This is a garrison state with one in twenty citizens in the military, compulsory military service for everyone, an army one million strong, millions more in militias, enormous military bases and arsenals built deep underground, subterranean subway stations with gigantic blast doors recessed into the walls, round-the-clock vigils for trouble along the DMZ [de-militarized zone], a dictator who sleeps in a different place every night for security reasons, and twenty-two million citizens each with a personal reliability rating... The resistance to Japanese imperialism is still so prominent that one would think the war had just ended. (406)

He continues, describing North Korea as a 'a kind of socialist corporatism, a tightly held, total politics, with enormous repressive capacity'(ibid). In a corporatist state, there is little distinction between the political and the social; indeed, the state is one and the same as the society. The very word corporatism, from Latin *corporare*, which means 'to form into a body', clearly implies that there is an organic connection to be identified between the state, the economy, and the personal lives of its citizens. Walzer describes it as a 'chain of being' that 'might be imagined as an immense organism, animated by its divine source' (1970: 149). In North Korea, this chain of being connects all aspects of life, all the way up to 'the divine source', in this case none other than the Supreme Leader Kim Jong Il himself.

Such corporatist setup can be found in numerous historical examples. From Mussolini's fascist Italy to interwar imperial Japan. The similarity between North Korea today and imperial Japan is not accidental. Brian Myers, in *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why it Matters* (2010) finds that North Korean ideology, far from being Marxist (as outside observers are prone to believe), is in no small part borrowed from the Japanese ex-colonisers. Ironically, the same imperialist nation it purportedly is still fighting against. This ideology is described by Myers as a race-based, military first sort of nationalism that is articulated through an ubiquitous and unforgiving propaganda machine.

In this he makes a necessary addition/criticism to existing texts on the subject. Now, without getting into the debate over whether the ideological roots of North Korea are Marxist, Nationalist or even Confucian-Monarchical (see Harrison 2002), what we can take from these studies is a sense of everyday life in North Korea as completely controlled by state power.

Such descriptions of North Korea helps us contextualise the opinions and views of the defectors interviewed in this paper. For example, one of the interviewees was surprised to learn that in South Korea you had music and songs which *did not* praise the figure of the president, or *did not* tell you to 'love your life' as a grateful citizen. She was pleased and surprised to hear songs that talked about such personal emotions like romantic love, drama and sentimental turmoil. In a corporate state the emotion of love is to a certain degree monopolized by the state or by its 'divine source', the dictator. All emotions are to be projected outward toward the collective or upward toward the leader.

The article by Ryang in the edited volume *North Korea: Toward a Better Understanding* (2009) provides an interesting perspective on this aspect of life in North Korea. She advances the notion of 'biopolitics' to explain the encompassing nature of sovereignty in North Korea. The term, put forth by historian Michel Foucault, describes a style of government that articulates its power through all aspects of human life. This view fits well with both Cumings' understanding of North Korea as a corporatist state and Myers view of North Korea as a nationalist one.

We will have occasion to consider these themes in more depth in the next parts; for now, let it suffice to demonstrate the sheer distance these migrants have travelled. These young men and women have gone from a state in which even the emotions are monopolized by an omnipresent 'corporate' entity, to the bustling hub of one of the fastest growing free markets in the world. A market economy that, by definition, necessitates a large population of atomized, individual consumers to keep the wheels of the system turning.

2. Theory and Method

With what authority may we say something about Korea by deconstructing the *Talbukja's* sensual experiences? While the space provided does not allow for a complete treatise on the theoretical premises of this paper, a few words of orientation are nonetheless necessary. The theoretical approach developed in anthropology that deals with issues of embodiment may help us understand the connection between the body and society. As mentioned above, this approach considers the way the body is experienced as a metaphor of one's relationship to society.

If there are any changes in one's relation to his or her social environment, then these changes will manifest, or materialise, through that individual's body and his or her senses. For example, if one experiences a break with society, then one's health may break down too, or one may suffer psychological disorders. Similar approaches have been of much use in the anthropological understanding of illness (see Aho 2008) of the senses

(Classen 1997, Howes 2004) and have long been promoted as a paradigm in anthropology by the likes of Csordas (1994) and Low (1994).

How might analysis of *Talbukja* experiences in South Korea benefit from this approach? It is undeniable that their social environment has changed dramatically. We considered above how these defectors have travelled the distance from the North, probably the most centralised, corporatist state in the world, to Seoul, one of the most vibrant cities in the 'free' world. These changes will affect their relationship with the social environment, which in turn might manifest upon their bodies. Therefore by understanding the body, we may understand their relationship to society, and by extension, that society in general.

This theoretical setup allows us to go from the particular of personal sensations to the general of the socio-political context. In sum, we need to consider how the parts create the bigger picture. In many ways this represents an 'inverted' methodology. Instead of starting from the general (for example, of a divided Korea) to then explain how individual agents behave within that picture (for example, as refugees), we will try to start from the individual's unique sensations to gain a view upon the bigger picture.

This perspective is considerably different than that of other works concerning North and South Korea. Work on this subject tends to take its cue either from the viewpoint of human rights themes or security issues. For example, the passionate book *Escaping North Korea: Defiance and Hope in the World's Most Repressive Country* (2008) by the founder of human rights NGO Crossing Borders, Mike Kim, gives us a detailed account of the lives of those who have fled through China with the aid of the semi-clandestine network of Christian missionaries. Kim, having operated at the China-North Korea border for years, offers a good, yet necessarily opinionated account of the situation.

Hassig and Oh's *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (2009) also attempts to penetrate the enigmatic north, this time with an extensive account of life behind the iron curtain. Their conclusion, that the regime is about to end, however, has a vaguely politicised ring to it. It may be the case that a certain 'Washington angle' has seeped into their analysis for the book's descriptions of North Korea are cast in terms of larger security concerns.

These two perspectives are understandable given the political tensions emanating from the area and are amongst many informative works on the subject. Nevertheless, I believe they also present some limitations. The human rights/security issues prism may serve as a biased interpretative framework to understanding the situation. There might be some advantage to be had from avoiding the familiar discourses of 'the oppressed', or 'the enemy', and concentrating instead on what it is that our interviewees (the actual participants to this drama) are trying to say.

This requires an appropriate methodological approach. As mentioned above, the methodology will be that of conducting a small number of qualitative interviews. To avoid any interpretative bias, the questions will be centred on the 'politically neutral' subject of the five senses. After some introductions concerning the individual's personal history, the bulk of the interview will seek to describe his or her sensual experiences of life in Seoul. The interviewee can take it from there in whichever direction he or she wishes.

The next part will transcribe large chunks of the interviewee's answers directly into the text so that we may get a closer look at their explanations. Part five to seven will then examine the metaphoric connections each individual made between their sensual experiences and various themes and incidents that came up during the course of the interview.

In order to conduct these in-depth interviews, I needed to be introduced to a community of defectors living in South Korea. I looked up NGO's on the internet that dealt with North Korea and learned that PSCORE, an NGO in Seoul, was giving free English language lessons to young defectors. I contacted them and arranged to participate in this initiative as an English teacher. Having gained a measure of trust, the organizers welcomed my research objective and arranged a series of meetings with four young North Korean defectors, three females and one male.

The meetings took place in the cafe at the ground floor of the Hamilton Hotel in Itewon. Here I met with my interviewees after a brief telephone conversation. Each were informed about the nature of my research and we agreed not to take any pictures and not to use any names. I had set aside an hour for each interview, yet the conversations went well beyond the time allotted. Below follow some transcriptions of the most salient parts of the interviews.

II. Interviews²⁾

Interview number 1. Age: 19. Sex: Female. Departed NK: March 2006. Family: Lives with mother in SK, father and brother still in Onsong (온성), a border city between NK and China.

Personal History: They took me through China and Mongolia to get to SK. There are different routes to SK, through China or another country. Mongolia is just one of these

2) Topics discussed: personal history and the five senses in NK, SK and China. The following answers are direct transcriptions from the interviews. Minor modifications have been to improve readability.

routes. I came with my mom. Before leaving NK, my maternal grandpa, grandma, uncle and his wife already lived in SK. My uncle found the way to help my mother out from NK through Mongolia.

One day my mom said to me, 'let's go to SK'. I said ok. So we came to SK hand in hand. My mom gave me a chance to choose. She said, 'I will go to SK, but I will not force you to come with me. If you want to come with me, we will go together. If you don't want to go, you can stay here'. Actually, I was confused when my mom told me that. Although she gave me a chance to choose, I didn't know the situation well. I just said to her, 'let's go'. My father and brother still live in NK. Sometimes I miss them.

Sight: When I arrived in China, I saw a lot of cars. In my hometown it is very hard to see a car. It was very quiet in my hometown. When I came to China, it was night, and I saw much lighting and heard many cars. It was the first time for me to take a car. I saw many new things in China. Light came from the street lights. The streets were paved. The streets in my hometown were not paved. When a car passed by you got covered with dust. But in China you could see the cars' headlights as they passed by on the paved street. Seeing China, I felt that NK is black, without light, and China is white. I don't remember the first city we went to in China. I just remember the second city was Beijing.

Sound: I like music here such as Girls Generation's 'Oh'. I like new songs or ballads. When I first came to SK, I could not understand the songs. Sometime the music is too fast to understand it. However, living here longer and longer I came to understand the songs. I especially like sad songs and separation songs. We could never listen to romantic songs in NK. Some songs were ballads; but they were for praising Kim-Il-sung and Kim-Jong-Il. Or talked about how you should be happy with your life. There were no pop songs, sad songs, separation songs or songs about love between a man and a woman.

In SK, people have MP3 or PMP, and you can download songs from the internet by yourself. Whereas there was only one TV channel in NK, and it was controlled by the government. Most of the time we listened to music on TV. However, since the music was broadcast by the government, there were no love songs. We didn't have MP3 players and could not download from the internet, so people did not know about romantic songs. I like ballads very much, such as Chang Won Han's songs. When I listen to a sad song, I think the sad song is appropriate for my situation, I think about my father, my brother and my friends in NK. These sad songs catch my heart.

Taste: When I was in NK I ate a lot of corn. We dried out the corn in the sun, grinded it into meal and then made it into rice. When I arrived in China I ate much rice. The rice in NK is made of corn meal, but rice in China is made of rice meal. The taste

of rice meal rice is much better than corn meal rice. I also like apples very much. I didn't eat apples in NK. But I ate a lot of apples in China.

Smell: At first, I didn't like beef and duck because of the smell. When I came to SK, I got to know the hamburger. I don't like the smell of hamburger and pizza. I think the air in SK is not so good, it is not clean or fresh because of these smells. Also, there are so many cars that make the quality of the air so bad. From the beginning until now, I dislike the smell and suffer from the smell.

Interview number 2. Age: 29. Sex: Female. Departed NK: 2000. Family: Mother, two elder sisters and one elder brother still in Chong-jin (청진), NK. Alone in SK.

Personal History: In my family I am the youngest child. My father died when I was five years old. So my mother supported the whole family after that. By the time I was 19 years old, my family was badly-off. I heard that if you went to China you could earn much more money. So I decided to go to China to earn money and left home.

I arrived in Helong first. There, I was sold to a Chinese man living in Dunhua. I stayed there for two years. Finally, I escaped from that house and went to Yungil. There, I met the preacher at a Church and started my Christian Life. I lived in the Church for almost five years. Since we did not have refugee status in China, I could not do long-term work there. I would work for one month and then moved to another job. At that time I heard that a preacher who had lived in America knew the route to get to SK. He also would like to help us. So thanks to him I finally came to SK.

Sight: When I arrived in China it was night time. I was taken into a car and couldn't see outside very clearly. Since I was sold to a man who lived in the countryside, his house was a mud hut, almost collapsing. I used to think that China was a rich country. I thought the Chinese lived well, so was wondering why this guy's house was even worse than my house in NK.

Meanwhile, in order to stop me from escaping, they didn't let me go downtown. So for two years I didn't know real China. But when I escaped to Yungil, I saw many high buildings, big markets and a huge church. I realized China was a good country where people lived well. However, due to my status I didn't have any freedom. I was constantly afraid to be arrested by the Chinese Police. If it were not for the lack of freedom, I was content with my life in China.

But then I arrived to Incheon international airport. I felt the big difference between China and SK. SK was very clean, and had even higher buildings. Because we are the same nationality, I could communicate with people in SK by using our language. It was so good for me. I felt I came to a free world. I remember that the inside of the airport was so bright. It was so big and there was so much glass and it was so transparent.

When I arrived in Incheon, I finally felt I was in safety, and had freedom from now on.

Sound: In China, every time I heard the sound of a car I felt danger and dread. Especially the sound of Chinese Police cars. I would feel fear and just wanted to flee. I had a feeling of unease when I heard this kind of sound. In addition, I didn't know Chinese, could not understand what the Chinese were talking about. When I heard Chinese I used to be suspicious about what they were talking about, and wondered if they were talking about me, or swearing at me. Also, I could not understand Chinese songs.

But when I came to SK, we use the same language so I could communicate very easily. I felt very peaceful in SK because of this. The music and the songs in SK are the right fit for me. The ballads are very good. I like ballads and *teuroteu* [traditional Korean pop] songs in SK.

Touch: NK is located in the North, so the weather is cold. SK is located in the South, so the weather is warmer. But the feeling in my heart is very different. Even if I had a hard life in NK, I could live with my family, and that was good for me. I am alone here and I was alone in China. Nobody waits for me when I come back home at night. Nobody takes care of me when I get sick. I have nobody to talk with when I want to chat with somebody. In a sense the feeling in the heart here is colder than the cold in the North.

When I left my family, when I was having hard times in China, I didn't feel happy. I asked myself why I left my family and suffered many hardships. Still today my heart suffers hardship. But now I have freedom and can do what I want, I can go to school and I can have a dream to follow. I am working hard for my dream now.

I feel like I'm living a life that is like the life of South Korean people. I am working hard for the future. There are many people during the rush hours, when I move along with them in a crowd, and we take the subway or the bus together, I feel I am working hard for the goal of living a busy and diligent life. I am doing something now that is for the future.

Interview number 3. Age: 20. Sex: Male. Departed NK: September 2009. Family: Only son, lives with his father in SK. Not sure where his mother is, left 12 years ago for China. Originally from Hoeryong (회령), a border city in NK.

Personal History: I crossed the Tumen River to China last September. I stayed in Yungil for one month. Then I took an airplane to Incheon airport. The SK government paid for the plane ticket.

Sight: In China, I feared to be arrested by the Chinese Police, so I just hid in the house and did not go out. When I arrived in Incheon, I saw many modern facilities that I

had never seen before. I saw an escalator and was amazed. Everything was very clear. I felt a kind of sanitation, everything was modern, everything looked like it was brand new.

Now I have already adapted to this society, so I do not have any special feelings about the way girls dress here. But, when I firstly came to SK and saw how girls dress, I felt it was sexual. In a communist society, the style of dress is controlled by the government. It's very hard to see NK's girls dressed like SK's girls. SK girls wear beautiful clothes. Makeup for girls is also interesting. It's very common for girls to use make up. In NK girls also wear makeup, but here girls use much more and do it more sexually. [Pause...] Some girls use too much makeup.

Taste: The food in SK is ok. I like hamburger, pizza and bread. There are many different types of bread to choose from. NK also has bread. The taste of bread in NK was original and pure. In NK people made bread by themselves. We also had bread that was made in China, but the taste of our bread is the original flavour.

Smell: The air and the environment in SK are much worse than in NK. Sometimes I take a breath and I feel some strange things are in the air. There is an odd odour in the environment. NK is not developed. There are not so many cars in NK. SK has a lot of cars and many buildings. SK is filled with the smell of cars. There is not so such smell of cars in NK. But in SK there is also the nice smell of perfume that comes out from the buildings. I also use the perfume at my home.

Interview number 4. Age: 19. Sex: Female. Departed NK: February 2008. Family: Lives with mother in SK. Mother was already in SK. Father is somewhere unknown in NK.

Personal History: When I was five years old my parents divorced and then my father went to work in another city. My father never came back to see me. So I didn't know him very well. I lived with relatives in NK.

The reason I left NK was because my dreams could not come true if I stayed in NK. My goal was to go to school and study hard. But I had to give it up when I was in grade 4 of middle school. I was good at school, but did not have much money. My friend did not work hard but her family was well off. The headmaster of our school just cared about my friend. That burned me up inside so I gave up studying. I escaped by crossing the Tumen River by myself.

I did not work when I was in China. I met a good man and lived in his house. I stayed there for one and a half years. Through reading books, I taught myself to write and speak Chinese. They are my relatives' friends. I then took trains and buses across China to Kunming city, in the Yunnan Province of China. From there we started climbing through the villages in the mountains. We would depart at midnight and climb until eight

in the morning the next day. We arrived to the Lantsang River. After that we took a boat and went to Thailand.

We were told that if the boat capsized, all the people in it would die. There were many crocodiles in the river. Before us, a grandma and a child fell into the river, and never came out. When we were in the boat crossing the river, we saw the crocodiles in the water. Once I arrived in Thailand, we gave ourselves up to the Thai Police. We told them we were from NK and that we wanted to go to SK. They arrested us and interrogated us. Then they moved us to Bangkok. We were interrogated again in Bangkok, and then taken to SK. In SK, we went to the immigration office and were interrogated again. The interrogation period lasted three months.

Touch: The escape process was hard. I feared continuously to be arrested by the Chinese Police. Because of this, my body reacted after I arrived in SK. I was in the hospital for one month. I received special treatment in the hospital, and am still receiving treatment twice a week. The disease I have is called Allergic Purpura. It has affected my leg, my kidneys, and my stomach. My leg had swollen so much that I couldn't walk for three days. The capillaries of my leg looked like they were breaking and caused red patches on my skin.³⁾

Sight: Once I went downtown to Yungil city. I saw many cars, to the extent that I could not see where they ended. I felt like I did not know where I was, and I was shocked by that. When I went from NK to China I felt I like I was in a foreign country. Whereas when I arrived in Incheon airport, I didn't feel like I was in a foreign country. I am not sure why, but I felt very peaceful. Also, here you can see many foreigners in the streets. I had never seen foreigners. In NK, we saw some black people on a DVD which was smuggled from China.

Smell: The smell of SK food is good for me. But Chinese food is not right for me, it is greasy food. They put some aniseed when cooking meals, so I just could not eat it. In SK, the air is filled with an oily odour. I think it is the smell from the buses. After I came to SK, little by little, I adapted to the smell of the buses. But it still causes me headaches, I get dizzy and sometimes faint. If I spend too much time in the street, I get headaches and feel like in a daze. Then I feel down in the dumps all day.

3) 'Allergic Purpura (AP) is an allergic reaction of unknown origin causing red patches on the skin. It is a bleeding disorder that occurs when capillaries rupture, allowing blood to accumulate in the surrounding tissues. This occurs because the capillaries are blocked by protein complexes formed during an abnormal immune reaction. The skin is the most obvious site of reaction, but the joints, gastrointestinal tract, and kidneys are also often affected... The source of the antigen causing AP is unknown. Antigens may be introduced by bacterial or viral infection' (*Medical Dictionary* 2010).

1. Metaphor Analysis

One thing that immediately stands out is that no two defectors' experiences are the same. It can be a short trip, like the young man that only stayed for a month in China, or it can take years of hardship and even slavery. Escape can take one through the Mongolian tundra or through the forests of Thailand. It can be done alone, or in a group.

Nevertheless, it is possible to point out some recurrent themes. For example, it is interesting how each, in his or her own way, was somehow surprised by the sight, smell, or sound of automobiles. Three out of four lamented the smell of 'burnt oil' in the Seoul atmosphere. South Korea is one of the major producers and exporters of automobiles in the world. In retrospect, it seems almost logical that this aspect should stand out for newcomers to the country.

Another recurrent theme was the role of China as an ambiguous middle ground between freedom and continual danger. China was a place - and a phase - of transition between an effected separation and a hoped for rebirth. In addition, the sensual shock the escaping North Koreans had, if indeed they had any at all, occurred in China. According to the considerations made in part two of this paper, in which we noted the vast difference between a corporatist and capitalist setting, we might have speculated that entry into South Korea would have been a sensual shock. It appears, however, that it was mostly China that shocked the *Talbukja's* senses.

It is also apparent that it did so not so much because of its more advanced stage of development, nor because of the dangers of being clandestine, but principally because China is a foreign country. The language, the food, the music, all upset the senses of these young men and women. Therefore, arriving in Seoul becomes a matter of re-patriation. It is telling how arriving at Incheon was often described as a 'peaceful' event.

In the section discussing the sense of sight in the fourth interview, the young girl expressly associated seeing Incheon airport with a sense of homecoming when she admitted that 'I am not sure why, but I felt very peaceful'. Incheon airport left its mark on the young man from interview number three, also. He described it as 'very clear... a kind of sanitation'. This feeling was perhaps even more acute in the case of the young lady from interview number two. Also in the section discussing sight, she stated that 'the inside of the airport was so bright... when I arrived in Incheon, I finally felt I was in safety'.

One thing that stood out from her explanations was the stark contrast between her descriptions of life as a slave wife in 'a mud hut, almost collapsing', and the wording she used to describe Incheon airport. Impressions of the airport as 'bright' and 'transparent'

stood out against the fact that she 'couldn't see outside very clearly' during her first, fateful car ride through the Chinese countryside.

We are introduced to an added element to this dark-light binary when we consider her descriptions of the 'huge church' she discovers in Yungil, the 'preacher 'from America', or her new 'Christian life'. Having passed through the gates of the church may help explain the symbolic associations between Incheon airport and what is perhaps even a sort of salvation. Incheon is a giant monolith of steel and glass, a true monument to South Korea's economic achievements and international stature. But here, for someone coming from years of hardship and fear, Incheon becomes a shining gateway to a much sought after rebirth.

This rebirth however, is never really complete. Memories of her old life before the transition through China still weigh heavily on her. When I asked whether she was happy she left, she took a deep breath, as a shadow ran visibly through her and over the table to me. She explained how she was suffering from the absence of a family. A family that she had in North Korea. A family that, albeit poor, was numerous (two elder sisters and an elder brother).

It is interesting to note that, again, Seoul's transportation infrastructure assumes a healing symbolic function. She explains that now she is allowed to live 'a life that is like the life of South Korean people'. She continues, describing how 'there are many people during the rush hours, when I move along with them in a crowd, and we take the subway or the bus together, I feel I am working hard for the goal of living a busy and diligent life'.

Lett's book *In Pursuit of Status: The Making of South Korea's "New" Urban Middle Class* (2002) offers a helpful insight into the words of this young lady. Her book's conclusion is that behind the economic boom of the recent decades there lies the hard working nature of the Korean people, a kind of collective, workaholic ideology that presses each member to do his or her part in the hope to achieve an ever-higher social status. This same work ethic takes on an even more profound role in the life of this particular refugee.⁴⁾

After the sense of homecoming and sanitization offered by the shining structure of Incheon International Airport, a crowd of hard working people, and herself amongst them, has the capacity to actually ease her suffering. Apparently, feeling part of that crowd goes a long way to neutralising the pangs of separation and even the guilt of abandon. Yet, we could hardly have suspected something as simple as men and women getting on and off a bus to be able to offer a renewed role - to act almost as an extended family. Here, 'the crowd' becomes the antidote to the metaphoric cold of having abandoned 'the

4) Interestingly, Lett identifies the roots of this drive in Chosun era ideology.

family'. The next part will look into the role of the family in the *Talbukja's* experiences in more depth.

2. The Body Politic

On multiple occasions, the *Talbukja* interviewed would mention how he or she left North Korea either because of family ties in the South, or because of a lack of family ties in the North. Behind these individuals' choice to migrate, there often lay a broken family. Even in the case of the young man from interview three, who was lucky enough to make it to Seoul within a month, we note that his parents had been separated for a long time.

He explained that 12 years ago his mother had left for China, her whereabouts unknown. In 2002 his father left for South Korea, while he departed in 2009. This means that he must have been staying with relatives or with another family at least for seven years. In addition, while it was not said explicitly, we get the impression that his father had something to do with the easy escape, reuniting what pieces he could of his family.

This issue of separating and uniting families is not simply a matter of emotional appeal, but has some far reaching sociological implications, too. The role and function of the family in Korean society is viewed differently than in western societies. Anthropologists Janelli and Janelli (1982) found that Koreans actually see themselves primarily through the prism of family ties and obligations. Cumings (2005) elaborates further, noting that in North Korea the notion of family takes on an even more fundamental role. His argument, in sum, is that at the root of social and political organization in North Korea, there lays the family.

In the light of the importance the defectors gave to their families, I should like to consider Cumings' ideas in more depth. We already saw how Cumings deems North Korea to resemble most closely a corporatist state. He further explains that a corporatist state has 'three great images that correspond to it - political fatherhood, the body politic, and the great chain'. Now, what ties everyone and everything together so tightly in a corporate state is the 'body politic'.

He describes this body politic as 'a living organism' where all 'are interconnected and functional to the whole'. For Cumings, the most significant aspect of the body politic is that it resembles a large family. He thus finds that in North Korea, the organic unity of the family is the basic metaphor for the national unity of the state. The family is the 'building block' upon which the North Korean state is constructed (409-419).

Myers' (2010) observations also point to a political role for the notion of the family. His appraisal of North Korean cultural output finds that the leader is often presented as

a beneficent parent figure, whose family is the entire nation. Again, this aspect is similar to the arrangement used in imperial Japan, in which the entire population was conceived as one big family lead by a father-like emperor. Only this time, the leader is presented as slightly more maternal than paternal. In both cases the family is used as the basic metaphor to describe the sovereign's relationship to his/her child-subjects.⁵⁾

What happens if this 'building block' of the family is broken? What happens if one's family is fractured or dispersed? Does the connection to the North Korean state and sovereign also come loose in that case, allowing individuals to muster the wherewithal to get up and go? We are led to consider that it may be easier for one to renounce citizenship if that basic bond of kinship is, for whatever reason, severed first. In interview two, the young lady was brought up in a fatherless home ever since she was five. In interview three, the young man had not seen his mother in 12 years. In interview four, the young girl lost contact with her father when she was a child, while her mother left much earlier for South Korea.

It would seem that, at least according to the accounts of this limited sample, it is indeed easier to defect the country if the bond of the family is broken first. We may therefore posit that the experience of defecting the country is similar to the experience of leaving one's family. We have seen that this connection between the country and the family is provided by, in Cuming's opinion, the existence of 'the body politic'.

The key factor of the body politic is that it is cast as a 'corporate' entity, in terms of it being a *large body*, 'where everything is interconnected and functional to the whole'. This creates an organic connection between the state and the family. Such mechanism operates a projection of the human body unto the political and familial spheres. In other words, there is a strong symbolic connection being made between the human body and the social body. At this point, the metaphor can be extended: leaving the country is like leaving the family, which is like compromising the integrity of the human body.

Unfortunately, the limited scope of this paper does not allow us to gather comprehensive data on the health of *Talbukja* residents in Seoul. However, we are allowed to examine in depth the experiences of the four people interviewed. There was in fact a metaphoric connection between leaving North Korea and suffering a trauma upon the body. This connection to the body was evident in the story told by the young girl that escaped through Thailand. The girl from interview four recounted the travails of leaving North Korea as if they were a physical thing occurring upon her body.

Could it be that the separation of *her* body from the body of North Korean corporatism was for her a matter of physical pain? It should be pointed out that she was not asked

5) For such relationship to work it must be harmonious. Myers, in fact, notes that there is a conspicuous lack of conflict in North Korean films and novels.

about her physical or health conditions in the interview. She was instead asked about her experiences of food, smell, music, etc., in South Korea. The fact that she automatically and instinctively went into the details of her health conditions illuminates us on the metaphorical connection that exists in her mind between a separation from her country and a trauma on her body.

III. Conclusion

The girl from interview four was still suffering from Allergic Purpura. Her disease had not subsided completely and she was still seeing a doctor for it. During the interview she was sweating, her breathing heavy, her stare slightly askew. She explained that the experience of escape was so tremendously hard for her that it took this heavy toll on her body. For her the cause was clear: it was the escape from North Korea that did this. Yet, according to the official medical dictionary cited above, the 'source of the antigen causing Allergic Purpura is unknown'. The dictionary then hypothesises that the 'antigens may be introduced by bacterial or viral infection'.

There is a considerable discrepancy between these different perspectives. For all we know, she might have contracted 'an infection' somewhere along the route through the border between China and Thailand. However, that is not the point. The point here is not to identify the actual cause of the disease as much as it is to consider her perceptions of the cause and of the disease. She had no difficulty identifying the cause of her bodily dysfunctions in the experience of her escape. To further analyse this perception it may be helpful to momentarily turn to some authors in social psychology.

Nisbett explains that East Asians have a more holistic view of the self and the environment than westerners do. His book, *Geographies of Thought*(2004) demonstrates how East Asians see themselves as a part of their environment, so that when something in that environment is upset, everything else is upset. Therefore, where a western observer would much rather see the cause of disease in the introduction of some external pathogen, picked up via a 'viral or bacterial infection', to an East Asian it is a matter of a fundamental disharmony in the environment at large.⁶⁾

6) It must be recognised that this view of East and West might be a slightly stereotyped one. Nevertheless, there is some validity to it. This 'East Asian' capacity to see things as a whole is indeed very different from the 'Western' tradition of atomization that descends from ancient Greek thought. For the Greeks, nature was chopped up into identifiable categories, each with a definite set of properties. Therefore, *a thing could never be another thing*. This allowed for the non-contradictory rule of propositional logic to develop and influence all of western thought for millennia. In contrast, the world for ancient Asian thinkers was a continuous matrix within

Markus and Kitayama similarly claim that 'if one perceives oneself as embedded within a larger context of which one is an interdependent part, it is likely that other objects or events will be perceived in a similar way' (1991, see also Rosemont 1991, Munro 1985 and Hall 1976). The holism intrinsic in the young girl's point of view 'suggests that for her every event is related to every other event. Thus, her diseased condition is ultimately intrinsically related to her condition as an escapee.

In conclusion, this holistic view of the self and the environment reinforces the point made above about a metaphoric connection between the state, the family and the body. For the *Talbukja* interviewed there is no real separation between these three loci. So if any one of these falter, so may the others. Their explanations therefore seamlessly embedded the details of their sensual lives within the broader context of their environment. This may also explain why the interviewees would constantly cast their impressions of Seoul in terms of health related issues (like the bad air), their dreams for the future in terms of surrounding objects (like the airport and the subway), and their deepest fears in terms of sights and sounds (Chinese police cars in the night).

I should like to explore this phenomenon in more detail in further research. In particular, it is clear that four interviews are not sufficient. This paper was intended as an introduction to the subject, and I hope it served that purpose. However, for us to seriously corroborate the claims made it will be necessary to interview many more *Talbukja*. Especially of different age groups and from different regions of North Korea. Also, it might be helpful to add a control group. This group could be composed of young South Koreans living in Seoul. We could thus compare and contrast their experiences in order to gain further insights.

For now, we find that the theoretical premises of this study as discussed in part three may be appropriate for the subject matter at hand. In fact, the holistic perspective described above fits in smoothly with both the theory of embodiment and the method of exploring the metaphoric connections between the particular of an individual's sense-experiences and the general of his or her socio-political context.

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【 논문초록 】

키워드 (Key words)	인류학, 북한, 남한, 망명자, 가족, 정치적 통일체 Anthropology, North Korea, South Korea, Refugees, Family, Body, Politics.
<p style="text-align: center;">Experiences of State, Family and Body Amongst North Korean Defectors Living in Seoul</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Eduardo Zachary Albrecht</p> <p>This paper will investigate the experiences of individuals who have escaped North Korea and that now find themselves in the dramatically changed environment of South Korea. The methodology used involved conducting a small number of in-depth, open ended interviews with recently escaped refugees. From the explanations collected in this paper it emerges that the experience of defecting from North Korea is similar to the experience of leaving a large family. In addition, this family is cast as a 'corporate' entity, in terms of it being like a large 'human' body. The hypothesis is that leaving the country is like leaving the family, which is like damaging the integrity of the human body. In this paper we find that the subjects interviewed, in fact, metaphorically connected their health problems and physical hardships to the fact that they left their families and country. To adapt to their new home country and recoup their wellbeing, therefore, the refugees must also seek to regain a sense of familial ties.</p>	
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