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TRANSLATING NORTH KOREAN REFUGEE POETS: IMPLICATIONS FOR DPRK COUNTRY IMAGES

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Like many other refugees, North Korean (NK) intellectuals, i.e., poets and writers did witness the NK reality. After having left their home country, they quite conceivably turn to their homeland in their works.

Literary image shaping studies have discovered a notably varied significance in presenting the images of native countries. In this regard, the North Korean writers living outside DPRK have an extraordinary role in addressing the universe of North Korea. Their literary works convey complex inner issues to the wider world outside, introducing them in a more forceful and apparent for reader way.

In this light, this here paper is an endeavor to analyze how and by what means North Korean refugees refer to DPRK in their works. At the same time, this study will help us grasp whether refugee poets' literary interpretations are advantageous for the DPRK official country image generated by propaganda for domestic and foreign consumption.

On the way to the stated goal the paper aims at examining of the images of DPRK met in literary discourses. The verses of various refugee poets published in South Korea served material to achieve the purpose of the study, as well as appropriate examples were translated from Korean.

Keywords: DPRK image; image shaping; Korean literature; literary image; North Korean refugee poets; North Korean refugee poetry; translation

Introduction

North Korea (NK) and its media image

Beside the triumphant expansion of globalization all over the globe, there still remain dead ends and nooks on the world map keeping off this process, criticized and stigmatized as “the axis of evil”. It is impossible to gauge all the empirical reality there, and such possibility is even less for North Korea given the scale of its isolation from the outer

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world. So far, media featuring has been a major channel of delivering information on DPRK. Some academic works in the area of communication and mass media indicate that the respondents' impressions and opinions are shaped largely by common news media [Zhu 2013, 277]. There are many studies on stereotypes broadcast by mass media to public, but only few of them focus on North Korean imaginariess¹.

However, mass media highlights have their own shortcomings. News presentation is often criticized for misleading the audiences [Tolson 1996, 19]. Whatever is presented in the news is selected according to a set of criteria and values, which are carefully constructed in order to support a certain interest; hence, news, according to Kyung Hye Kim, is not a "value-free reflection of 'facts'" [Kim 2014, 1]. According to Kiouisis *et al*², agenda-setting effects could vary across media outlets depending on their focus as well as the target audience they serve. In this light, the South Korean and the U.S. media outlets that largely control representation of North Korea around the globe [Stallings 2013, 23], have their limitations in reporting on DPRK.

Country image and the image shaping

However, news programs cannot bring about response of the same magnitude or go into details the same way artistic works do. The impact of the latter has longer duration than those of mass media framing, which is often subject of change depending on the set agenda. Producing of artistic images since long has become another way to emphasize hot international or regional issues. For instance, once fervently anti-communist, South Korea's film industry was engaged in producing stereotypes about DPRK. However, the sunshine policy period saw the shift to more liberal cinematographic portrayals of North Koreans³.

A country image is the center notion in the field of the image shaping, "rules our opinion of others and controls our behavior towards them" [Beller 2007, 4]. Literary image shaping studies have discovered quite a number of its important implications. In academia, for example, Dyserinck demonstrated both the intrinsic literary function and the general ideological importance of national images; Leerssen offered a historical study of the interaction of the discourse and the political invocation of national characters and their rhetorical representation in literary texts [Beller 2007, 9]. Writers – however generalized their stories can be – have their own special mission and role in the dissemination of the underlying facts. Milan Kundera states:

The incompatibility between the novel and totalitarian universe is deeper than the one that separates a dissident from an apparatchik, or a human-rights campaigner from a torturer, because it is not only political or moral but ontological. [...] Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, questioning; it can never accommodate what I would call the spirit of the novel [Kundera 1988, 13–14].

In this regard, the role of Korean writers is unprecedented in addressing the aforementioned "totalitarian universe" of DPRK. There have emerged literary works by South Korean writers and North Korean refugees addressing complex issues about North Korea in a more powerful and moving for reader's perception way.

Literature of "escape from NK"

One of the aspects questioned by pragmatic-functionalist perspective of the image shaping studies is whether there exists any evidence of the textual impact [Leerssen 2007, 28]. This aspect is closely related to the emergence of Korean literature of "escape from NK", in Korean referred to as 탈북문학 *talbungmunhak*.

Dukkyu Park, South Korean poet, critic, novelist and scholar, states, "North Korean refugees first appear in South Korean literature from the mid-1990s [...] following this initial stage in the 2000s, North Korean refugee fiction began to diversify in terms of characterization and setting" [Park 2014, 25–26].

Prosaic forms of *talbungmunhak* by South Korean writers, as D. Park [Park 2015, 98–99] points out, have several purposes, two of which are as follows: 1) featuring the escape from NK not as a inter-Korean relations, but in the context of changes in global society, thus extending the horizons of awareness for Korean literature; 2) revealing the ideological disagreement about the escape. According to Park, the term 탈북문학 *talbungmunhak* is employed to refer not only to the novels written by South Korean authors with NK refugees as protagonists, but it also includes literary works of NK refugees [Park 2015, 89–91]. However, in recent decades, debates about North Korean literature have mainly focused on novels produced for the most part by major South Korean writers about North Korean escapees [Park 2018, 85].

The appearance of NK refugees in the literary circles of South Korea marks a very important point – they take the agency in telling their own story, they turn from the object into subject. In this way, the North Korean people can begin to represent themselves, taking apolitical or nonideological stances to identity formation (Stallings 56). This means focusing on universal human rights, rather than on divisive ideological discourses charged with political and historical baggage [Stallings 2013, 57].

Thus, literature becomes the forefront for NK refugees to represent themselves. Still, it's rather recently that South Korean academia started to approach *talbungmunhak*. Noteworthy, the verses picked out for our analyses have been touched in too few scientific works. It may be stated that the images of NK in refugees' poetry have not been studied properly as of yet.

On the other hand, the works of refugees “are part of Korean literature, and can be defined as North Korean literature in exile, and therefore, as a sort of refugee literature and resistance literature” [Bang 2018, 28]. Regrettably, the discussion about refugees' literature and poetry is still in its kick-off stage in academia, according to Lee Sang-sook [Lee 2018, 162]. But why is it important to study this literature of escape? As Bang Min-ho puts it, “the reason why we should read attentively *talbungmunhak* [...] is because it goes beyond simple criticism and accusation and since it makes us realize the barbarity, paradox and irony of our present, it makes possible to follow the literature's quest for the essence of life” [Bang 2018, 27]. Yet, Bang Min-ho's evaluation of the “level of integration” of NK refugee writers into South Korean literary process is rather harsh and honest: “the NK refugee writers belong to a sort of literary ghetto in the South Korean literary world” [Bang 2018, 28]. Thus, the general under-representation in publishing is felt by native speakers of Korean as the lack of attention.

NK refugees' poetry

Now, the “escape from North Korea” is addressed both by South Korean writers and their North Korean refugee colleagues. Interestingly, novels representing *talbungmunhak* is of South Korean writers' authorship, while verses are exclusive domain of poets from North Korea. Is that due to the fact that aesthetics offered by the poetic and prosaic forms are targeting different goals? A novel is in many ways a dialogue with the society⁴, whereas poetry is an intimate space of its creator, it is much more personal and therefore, more charged emotionally. It seems that for NK refugees poetry is the most natural way to express their personal sentiments, meanwhile, as pointed out by D. Park, their South Korean colleagues rather tend to deal with rational and global aspects of literary perceptions of the “escape from North Korea” articulated through novels [Park 2015, 98–99].

The artistic vision and feelings in regard of the escape from NK hold by South Korean writers and their colleagues from the North might be complementary, they do not necessarily need to coincide due to the simple fact that the works of refugees – beyond their artistic value, purpose, focus, scope, idea, etc. – are based on personal experience. Therefore, it is clear that NK refugees' poetry and SK novels on the “escape from NK” – being

commonly denominated as 탈북문학 *talbungmunhak*, represent reverse sides of the same coin.

Recently, the following notions and evaluations of the North Korean refugee verses can be found in South Korean academia:

Even though the horrors of hunger and death are being vividly depicted, they nonetheless are neither persistent, nor sharply concerned with the main reason for those horrors. The number of verses criticizing the hereditary regime of Kim family, contradictions of socialism or DPRK power class is unexpectedly limited. This is probably due to the fact that North Korean refugee poetry has not yet reached the point of rational criticism and analysis, being overwhelmed by emotional trauma [Lee 2018a, 164].

At this juncture it is important to bring up the following observation about the discourse on the NK refugees:

Refugees' experiences as minorities cannot be discussed with the South Korean narratives alone. Rather, the incompatible worldviews between the South Korean rendition of reality and the refugees' perception of reality are what causes refugees' disillusionment. [...] Concerns about human rights voyeurism toward refugees exist because refugees are considered to be mere topics or interviewees of the South Korean narratives, not independent creators of their own. [...] First, it has to be acknowledged that South Korean narratives on refugees are restricted by geopolitical environment and social boundary. Second, refugees must be understood as humans rather than as tools or topics. Without the self-reflection of the South Korean media's narratives and the recognition of the refugees' own narratives, there cannot be a just and lasting peace on the Korean peninsula – not to mention in South Korea [Yi 2015, 81–82].

In this context, South Korean novels and NK refugees' poetry can hardly be considered within the same framework of analysis, the latter should be treated separately, and any impositions should be avoided, since they are just inapplicable. NK refugee literature is only starting to gain attention in academia, therefore a profound and thorough analysis should be based on a sincere desire to listen and hear the other party, putting aside pre-judgments. After all, we should not forget that “the poet has no need to prove anything; the only proof lies in the intensity of his emotion” [Kundera 2000, 180].

Focus and goals of the research

As mentioned before, the image of DPRK is reflected in media and novels. Considering literature as an expression of culture, this paper focuses on examining representations of DPRK which can be found in verses.

The country image presented in poetry of North Korean refugees has not been studied and remains a blind spot. Firstly, the need for this sort of analysis rises from the necessity to examine their standpoints, more so if they are considered “foregoers of reunification” [Yi 2015, 81], their literature “comes to help build a cultural foundation for preparing for unification” [Park 2015, 113] or “provide an opportunity to reflect on South Korean novels which seem overly-internalized” [Park 2018, 86]. On the other hand, NK refugees' poetry represents a very fruitful object of analysis due to specific characteristics of this literary genre and uniqueness of experience of its creators.

Of course, images of North Korea generated by refugee poets co-exist in space and time with the aforementioned media and South Korean prosaic works, which might have stronger positions and larger audiences, yet the analysis of refugees' verses turns essential beyond political implications, economic revenues or other factors.

As far as the literary image studies concerns, NK refugees' verses certainly create perceptions of DPRK in readers' minds. To this end, this paper analyzes how and in which terms North Korean refugees refer to DPRK, employing discourse analysis of the original poems. At the same time, the study will help us understand whether refugee poets'

literary interpretations diverge or converge with the DPRK country image disseminated by media.

Where appropriate, the methods of critical discourse analysis (CDA) were applied as well. The notion of context is crucial for CDA, since this explicitly includes social-psychological, political and ideological components and thereby postulates an interdisciplinary procedure; CDA uses the concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity and analyses relationships with other texts [Wodak and Meyer 2009, 21]. The term “critical” in this work does not have any negative connotation – it refers to making visible the interconnectedness of things [Wodak and Meyer 2009, 7]. CDA is analysis of the dialectical relationships between discourse and other elements of social practices [Ciapello and Fairclough 2002, 185].

In order to achieve the noted goal, this paper aims to examine the images of DPRK found in literary discourses. For that purpose the works of various refugee poets published in South Korea has been selected as material for the case study, and corresponding examples have been roughly translated from Korean into English by the author of the paper. Therefore, this study focuses on 43 poems of 14 poets⁵, once dispersed in diverse publications, but then selected in a single anthology and published in 2018 by The Institute for Peace and Unification Studies of the Seoul National University in the Republic of Korea.

Results and analysis

The descriptions of extreme life conditions in DPRK can be found throughout works of many authors:

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
[...] 그러나 아직 북녘에선 날마다 고통의 사진들 생생히 찍힌다 [...]	[...] Yet Still in the North The vivid pictures of anguish Are taken every day [...] [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 30]

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
[...] 여긴 지옥인데 거기 누구 없나요 [...]	[...] Here is the hell Isn't there anyone out there? [...] [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 150]

In the light of the quest for help perceived in the excerpt above, it is worth mentioning of South Korean writer Seok-yong Hwang, who also turns to the “outer world” in his novel *Baridegi* [Ryzhkov, López Rocha 2018, 314].

Some verses make the reader perceive exhausted peoples groan thirsty for humanly warmth:

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
[...] 작은 내 손이 지켜주라고 지친 삶들 온기로 안아주라고 북한 땅의 신음이 나를 흔든다 [...]	[...] The moan from North shakes me Pleading for protection in my little arms, Begging for a warm hug for exhausted lives [...] [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 81]

[Korean original]

[...]
어미를, 오라비를,
누이를 잃은 눈이다
버림을, 모멸을,
학대를 당한 눈이다
[...]

[Our translation into English]

[...]
Those are the eyes of people
Who lost their mothers, brothers and sisters
The eyes of humans who suffered
Scorn, contempt, abuse
[...]

[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 91]

Daily life of ordinary people in NK is perceived as full of despair and apathy:

[Korean original]

[...]
지저리 못 살고
갯더미 같은 그 곳에서
[...]
나를 내쳤던 그곳을
나를 외면한 그곳을
[...]
뒤로 하고
[...]

[Our translation into English]

[...]
In that terribly poor place
Like a heap of ashes
[...]
That place which abandoned me
That place which turned away from me
[...]
I leave it behind
[...]

[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 146–147]

Naturally, such situation brings devastation and the only wish is to abandon the place that neglects its people:

[Korean original]

텅 빈
방구석에
틀어박혀 있다
두 눈만 반짝이며
출입문만 본다
[...]
이젠 더 잃을 게 없다
빈 몸이니 가볍다

[Our translation into English]

I stay secluded
In an empty
Room
Only two eyes are twinkling,
Looking at the exit
[...]
There is nothing more to lose
I feel light since my body is empty

[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 126–127]

Despite Article 25 of the DPRK Constitution declaring that “the state provides all the working people with every condition for obtaining food, clothing and housing” [Socialist Constitution of DPRK 1998, 171; Korea’s Constitution of 1972 2016, 8], NK suffers “high rate of malnutrition that at times tips over into starvation, as was the case in the mid-to-late 1990s” [Weingartner 2013]. According to Andrew Natsios, the former head of USAID, Great Famine, would eventually claim up to 2.5 million lives [Philips 2011].

The poetry explains what hunger is and how it affects people’s lives in the North. It depicts not only the quality of food, starvation and a firm desire to live:

[Korean original]

삼 일을 우려낸 푸성귀 산짐승이 훑다가 만
나무뿌리들 미궁 같은 가마 속에서 한 되의
보리쌀이 버무려진다. 누이의 정조와 맞바꾼
것이다. 매운 눈을 비벼가며 저녁언기를 피워
올려라 자식을 굶겨 죽인 아버지면 어쩌냐.
원수 같은 삶과 역세계 악수하며 죽지만
말자, 죽지만 말자 [...]

[Our translation into English]

A *doe* of barley disappears into the mysterious
pot, getting mixed with greens brewed three
days long and tree roots, as if licked by wild
animals. This is something traded for sisters
chastity. Hey, rub stinging eyes, making rise
the smoke of evening cookery! Hey, how do
you like a father who made his children starve?
Giving a strong handshake to this hostile life,
let’s only stay alive, only let’s stay alive [...]

[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 9]

The entire economic framework of the country, and in particular the Public Distribution System was an important means of social, economic and political control [Kirby, Marzuki and Biserko 2014, 30]. Its collapse accounts for this tragedy.

Malnutrition triggered by scarce food possibilities makes reflect upon human dignity:

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
한 겹 한 겹 빠알간 속 껍질을 칼로 긁어냅니다 [...] 소나무는 울면서 아프다 소리치지만 배 가죽이 등에 붙은 내 귀에는 들리지 않습니다. 이성을 잃은 듯 정신없이 영혼이 빠져나간 듯 미친 듯이 벗겨냅니다. 그리곤 양젓물에 우려서 한 끼 식사 준비합니다. 냠냠 밥인 양 먹고 있는 내 모습은 들짐승과 뭐가 다를까요.	Digging into red derma, one layer after another, I rake it out with a knife [...] The pine tree screams in pain, all tears But my ears Stay deaf For my stomach and my back are stuck together. As if it is not me, feverishly, As if the soul has left my body, wildly, I keep peeling And then I brew it in lye And make my meal This is me eating, as if it was a yummy food, So what makes me different from a wild animal? [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 40–41]

Inefficiency of the socialist economy led to hunger. As a consequence, “the effects of food shortages are felt more acutely by more vulnerable categories of populations, which was particularly the case during the famine of the 1990s” [Kirby, Marzuki and Biserko 2014, 94].

The following excerpts question (un)human nature put into extreme conditions of survival:

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
[...] 요즈음은 잠만 자고 일어나면 파다하게 나도는 끔찍한 소문 어디가나 공포스런 인육이야기 흉흉한 파장을 몰아온다 [...] 사람이 사람을 먹어야 사는 그 처절한 최후의 몸부림 앞에 사람들은 저마다 할 말을 잃어간다 사람들은 이미 더는 사람이 아니다	[...] These days, every single day, Is full of dreadful rumors Horror stories of cannibalism everywhere Wreak havoc [...] In front of a desperate ultimate agony of a human Pushed to eat fellow humans to live Any person would become wordless. People are not humans any more. [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 69–70]
[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
옆집 연희네 가족은 온 가족이 굶어 죽었다 [...]	The family of Yeonhui living next door, The entire family starved to death [...] [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 115]

The mass starvation and deaths resulting from the food crisis and the breakdown of early childcare, education and other public services produced an entire generation of children who were orphaned, abandoned or for other reasons no longer under the care of their parents [Kirby, Marzuki and Biserko 2014, 103]. These street children are euphemistically referred to as 꽃제비 *kkotjebi*⁶ “flower-swallows” [Kirby, Marzuki and Biserko 2014,

104], also known as “fluttering swallows”, “wandering swallows”, despite this has nothing in common with the awful conditions of starvation and daily struggle for survival which North Korean orphans endure.

The topic of “flower-swallows” has a special place in the poetry of refugees. One of the analyzed poems reads:

<p>[Korean original]</p> <p>제비 제비 무슨 제비? 청제비 구제비도 아닌 우린 꽃제비 [...] 꽃제비 우리는 돌아갈 집도 없고 날개도 없어 이 땅 위 여기저기 떠돌며 꿈도 버렸다! [...] 눈 오는 이 추운 겨울밤 어디서 잘까 [...] 차가운 네거리에서 오락가락 정처없이 헤메인다</p>	<p>[Our translation into English]</p> <p>Swallow, swallow, What kind of swallow? Neither blue swallow, nor a swift We are flower-swallows [...] For us, the flower-swallows, There is no home to go back Wingless we are Wandering from place to place over land Not even dreaming any more! [...] This snowing cold winter night Where should we sleep? [...] On this freezing cross-road Wandering aimlessly back and forth [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 63–65]</p>
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To stay alive, they have nothing else left, but dream:

<p>[Korean original]</p> <p>별동네 아랫집엔 꽃제비 가족이 산다</p> <p>먹을 것이 부족해 꿈을 벗겨 먹고 꿈을 캐서 먹고 살아간다 [...] 인간의 내일은 꿈이 낳은 생명이기에 하루를 살 수 있고 하루를 견딜 수 있다 꿈은 꽃제비들의 밥이다</p>	<p>[Our translation into English]</p> <p>The house below, in the Starry Valley Is where a family of flower-swallows lives</p> <p>With almost no food to eat They live peeling dreams And reaping dreams [...] A tomorrow of a human Is a life of better dreams, So we can live one day more, We can stand one day more. Dreams are the food Of the flower-swallows [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 116–117]</p>
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Under such circumstances people are forced to leave the country. There are studies, which indicate various reasons they defect NK. Here are some extracts of verses where refugee poets mention about their memoirs with autobiographical overtones in first person:

<p>[Korean original]</p> <p>[...] 자식을 사랑한 엄마였기에 배고픔에 지친 자식을 위해 탈북을 선택한 엄마 [...]</p>	<p>[Our translation into English]</p> <p>[...] This your mother chose to escape North Korea For the sake of children exhausted of hunger For she loved her children [...] [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 49]</p>
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[Korean original]
배고픔에 지쳐 탈출을 했다
한 끼 밥을 위해 기꺼이 빠져 버렸다
피가 맺히도록 입술을 깨물고
수난의 강에 거꾸로 처박히었다
[...]

[Our translation into English]
Exhausted of hunger, I escaped
For a rice meal I gladly dropped out
Biting my lips to blood
I struggled backwards in the River of suffer
[...]
[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 86]

[Korean original]
[...]
나는 엄마를 떠났다.
돈이 필요해
가족을 떠났다.
고향을 떠났다
[...]

[Our translation into English]
[...]
I left behind my Mom.
I left behind my family
For I needed money.
I left my homeland.
[...]
[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 108]

For poets Lee Subin [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 124] and Ji Hyeon-a [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 147] the motive to escape is pursue of freedom.

The poet Seol Song-a perceives the escape as an obligatory condition to secure basic conditions for human development:

[Korean original]
아빠 엄마 남쪽으로 이사 가자요
이밥 먹는 지방으로 이사 가자요
거기 가면 별 빵도 내가 만들고
초콜릿 과자도 쌓여 있대요
[...]
사람 사는 도시로 이사 가자요
[...]
거기 가면 벽돌집 학교가 있고
어른으로 썩썩 클 수 있대요

[Our translation into English]
Dad, mom, lets move to the South
To the places where one eats rice
If we go there, I can make all sorts of bread
They say, its where chocolate sweets are
countless
[...]
Lets move to a city where humans are living
[...]
If we go there, we can find schools made of
bricks
They say, its where one can grow fast
[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 82]

Ostensibly Article 75 of the DPRK constitution states that “citizens shall have freedom to reside in and travel to any place” [Socialist Constitution of DPRK 1998, 178; Korea (Democratic People’s Republic of)’s Constitution of 1972..., 14]. In reality, freedom of movement is criminalized in the Criminal Code despite of superiority of Constitution with regard to any other legislation. For that reason, “in North Korea, Manchuria, Siberian areas, and other border areas and Asian states, where the North Korean security forces extend their forceful pursuit of refugees routinely employing torture and cruel treatment against them” [Hong 2010, 5].

The experience of being uprooted from one’s homeland is one of the motifs of the refugees’ poetry. Song Si-yeon warns about changes awaiting those who decide to leave NK:

[Korean original]
[...]
그리고
탈출, 방랑, 수감, 치욕, 죄인, 죽음
이런 단어들과 익숙해졌다
[...]

[Our translation into English]
[...]
And then
I got used to the words like
“Escape”, “wandering”, “jail”, “humiliation”,
“criminal”, “death”
[...]

난 그 나라의
불온한 딸이어서
아무 데나 던져졌다
온몸이 너털너털 찢기었다
[...]

I am a rebellious daughter
Of that country,
So I was thrown here and there
My entire body is torn to pieces
[...]

[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 86]

Here is an excerpt of documented evidence about forced repatriation:

North Korean refugees in border areas, whose numbers reach between 50,000 to 300,000, are routinely subjected to detention in concentration camps, security facilities, and other torture cells upon their forceful return to NK. [...] Public execution, enforced abortion, slave labor, torture and sexual assault, and cruel and degrading treatment are commonly applied to the refugees upon their repatriation and arrival in North Korean territory [Hong 2010, 3].

Poetess Ji Hyeon-a, who had survived forced repatriation to NK in three occasions before eventually arriving to South Korea [Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 155], describes her own experience:

[Korean original]

[...]
이국살이 얼마던가
설음으로 배를 채워
숨어 산 지 어언 구 년...
오늘도 잡혀간다
갑자기 달려든 공안에
앞집에선 영희
뒷집에선 임신한 순희
[...]
조국은
임신한 순희의 야윈 등에
시멘트 포대를 지워
뱃속의 아기를 죽였다
[...]

[Our translation into English]

[...]
How many years of the alien life have I led?
Filling up the stomach with sorrow
Already around nine years of life spent hiding...
In a sudden police raid today
They took people again
Yeonghui, living next door
Pregnant Sunhui, from the house behind
[...]
The Motherland
Loaded a sack of cement
On pregnant Sunhui's gaunt back
Killing the unborn child
[...]

[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 152–154]

According to documented evidence, the regime applies the principle of 연좌제 *yeon-jwaje* “guilt by association” to the rest of the family [Kirby, Marzuki and Biserko 2014, 227]. There is evidence that people were incarcerated in political prison camps because their family members fled to the Republic of Korea [Kirby, Marzuki and Biserko 2014, 229]. Poet Baek Imu gives an example of what would happen to the rest of the family left behind:

[Korean original]

[...]
아니면 열흘이고 보름이고
도주자가 다시 앞에 나타날 때까지
그렇게 나무에 매여달린 채
참담하게 죽어야 할 가족의 운명...
[...]

[Our translation into English]

[...]
Otherwise the family will pay a terrible sacrifice
Hanging on a tree and suffering in pain
for ten or fifteen days
Until the fugitive shows up again
[...]

[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 61]

But those who succeeded to reach South Korea are condemned to suffer another psychological trauma. The long separation and impossibility to reunite with the family naturally results in a poetic lament:

[Korean original]
휴전선만 걷어내면
반나절 길 지척에
안기면 목 놓아 울어버릴
울 엄마가 있습니다
[...]

[Our translation into English]
The day the truce line disappears
A short trip brings me home
To hug my mom,
To feel her hug and burst in tears
[...]
[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 42]

[Korean original]
[...]
가슴 저미는 아픔을 안고
오늘도 엄마는 고향 하늘을 바라본다
마음속 깊은 곳에 묻어 둔
잊을 수 없는 아들의
모습을 그리며
[...]

[Our translation into English]
[...]
With a poignant pain,
Again
Your mom beholds the home skies,
Deep in her heart, away from strangers eyes
She keeps her memories of son,
She thinks of him until the dawn...
[...]
[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 50]

Many of the poets feel awfully guilty, and this feeling comes not from the fact of lifelong separation due to practically nonexistent possibility to reunite with their family, but rather of being conscious of what is awaiting their family back home. This is the point where the long-awaited freedom turns for them *mea culpa* about abandoning their homeland.

Lee Gayeon describes remorse about irrevocable separation in a letter to her mother, which will never be delivered:

[Korean original]
[...]
엄마 나 서울에 있어
많이 보고 싶어
두 번 다시
엄마 두고 떠나지 않을게
[...]

[Our translation into English]
[...]
Mom, I am in Seoul
I miss you so
And I promise: I will never, ever
Leave you again, mom.
[...]
[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 109–110]

The long-awaited freedom turns unbearably painful without family left behind:

[Korean original]
[...]
미안하다, 애들아!
너희들 신음이
나의 명치에 호느적거리
누려보는 자유가
이다지도 아플 줄 몰랐구나
[...]

[Our translation into English]
[...]
Forgive me, children!
Your agony
I feel it in my body
I never thought the freedom to rejoice
Would hurt so much
[...]
[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 147]

The image of the state or regime is associated, for example, with DPRK leader, as seen in Do Myeong-hak's verses:

[Korean original]
[...]
눈물로 빚어진 생존의 등짐보다는
만세 소리에 취한 똥똥이가 더 무거워
누구 때문에? 언제까지? 무슨 죄로?
[...]

[Our translation into English]
[...]
The fatty drunk of hoorays is heavier
Than the burden of survival made of tears
Because of whom? Until when? For what?
[...]
[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 28–29]

The regime requires constant human sacrifices to subsist:

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
[...]	[...]
밥에 굶주린 인민과 인민의 피에 굶주린 조국을 보았다	I saw people hungry for food And Motherland thirsty for people's blood
	[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 154]

Therefore, it is incompatible with a normal human life:

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
[...]	[...]
아, 다시 태어난다면 독재가 없는 세상에서 사랑으로 태어나고 싶다	Oh, if I were to be born again I want to be born in a world Full of love, without dictatorship
[...]	[...]
진정 사람이고 싶으니까	For I want to be a true human
	[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 87]

Who is accountable for this? Of course, not only the regime, but also those who serve the repressive machinery of the state, even being aware of the existence of the alternative realities. Do Myeong-hak describes a situation in which guards, faithful servants of the regime, but thirsty for the news from abroad, are interrogating a prisoner:

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
[...]	[...]
죄인이 쏟아내는 지구촌 얘기에 군침을 흘리며	Thirsty for more stories from outside Spitted out by their prisoner
[...]	[...]
룸살롱을 묻고 햄버거를 묻고 휴대전화 사용법을 묻고 상하이를 묻고	They ask about hostess bars They ask about hamburger They ask how to use a cell-phone They ask about Shanghai
[...]	[...]
내가 철창 속에 갇힌 것이 아니라 철창 밖의 군복들이 갇혀 있는 것을 깨달았다	I realized: the one in jail is not myself, Behind the bars are those in uniforms
	[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 32–34]

The poet also questions ordinary people who kowtow to the regime, but cannot avoid the sort of existence the latter imposes on them:

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
[...]	[...]
먹기 위해 등짐을 졌고 살기 위해 권력 앞에 허리 굽힌 사람들	They shoulder the cargo to eat, They kneel in front of power
[...]	[...]
	[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 28]

Song Si-yeon also questions people's attitude towards authorities that alienate the nation from the fundamental conditions and freedoms and leave people isolated and in pain:

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
[...]	[...]
침침한 눈과 막힌 귀로 입마저 굳게 닫고 자유를 잃은 사람들	With blurry eyes and ears blocked With mouth tightly shut Those are people who lost their freedom
[...]	[...]
	[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 89]

On the other hand, however painful experiences of the poets could be, the verses sometimes are full of homesickness, good memories of childhood and nature, and also desperate hope for reunification.

Do Myeong-hak writes:

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
[...]	[...]
나서 자란 고향이 그리워도	Even though I miss the place
휴전선 철조망에 냥마처럼 걸리는 마음	I was born and raised in
[...]	My heart is just a rag on
	The barbed-wire of the truce line
	[...]
	[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 35]

Yet, in reality the only way people can get back home is in their dreams:

[Korean original]	[Our translation into English]
[...]	[...]
꿈속이라도 구름을 타고 넘어	At least in dreams crossing with clouds
고향으로 영혼이 다녀오네	The souls go back home
[...]	[...]
	[Eomma bal nae bal 2018, 125]

As far as images of NK concern, for refugee poets there are two homelands. One is official, perilous for and incompatible with human life, and the other, where they aspire to return some day to reunite with their families. The first one is hostile to an ordinary man and his aspirations and perceptions of what a normal life is.

Needless to say, life of each quoted poet is deeply maimed by the rule of DPRK regime. Their works have the power to shock by details of crude reality and, of course, by sincerity and suppressed emotions. A motif of retaining in memory things, which cannot be forgotten, is strongly present. It is a reminder of reality we should be aware of, which is present right here and now, just on the other side of the Demilitarized zone.

DPRK is their homeland, but the idea of alienation comes from the rupture caused by state violence, which changed the course of poet's lives. Verses are an attempt to create poetic forms assuming North Korea as a totally strange place. Individual, but at the same time shared experiences testify hunger, escape, pain of separation with family, poignant scruples and sense of guilt.

Conclusions and discussion

South Korea is probably the only country whose society is aware of NK human rights violations more than elsewhere in the world. Beyond a doubt, *talbungmunhak* written by South Korean prominent writers has played its positive role, yet until recently the image of DPRK is still being disseminated to the rest of the globe community mostly by means of mass media.

NK refugee poets deserve a very special attention as people who have first-hand information on NK realities and kindle the emotional response of their audiences by their works. At the same time, the poems they write should be considered not as revelations of truth for future possible trials, since they definitely have another very important mission. For NK refugees literature is one of the spaces where they can speak for themselves. Yet, their voice is practically lost in other aforementioned discourses. Besides, the verses are created in Korean language that limits their reception to a particular country or linguistic community.

Definitely, introducing poetry to wider audiences would help to receive more recognition of the problem and make the poets' voice more forceful. Translation of the verses

into other languages would certainly be crucial for this end, but there is another obstacle. These days the international community seems gapingly fascinated by the products of South Korean cultural industry, and their most sophisticated international tastes are quite happy with K-literature translated into multiple languages with generous support from ROK government-related institutions. Under these circumstances the refugees' poetry can count only on professional attention of a handful of South Korean literary critics, and the chances of being noticed by international community are not too promising as of yet.

Through the eyes of the inspected verses we can perceive North Korea as a space in a state of a deep humanitarian crisis. This is something totally different from the way the international news outlets traditionally describe the communist country under the investigation. The verses represent the voice coming from the depths of DPRK society, representing ordinary people, whereas NK images generated by media, as demonstrated in various scientific papers, are mainly means of political and/or ideological propaganda. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the admonition posted on April 9th of 2013, by LiNK on its Facebook page:

It's easy to forget about the millions of innocent North Koreans during the time when media is obsessed with every move and threat coming from the regime. Don't let the regime define North Korea! The biggest threat the North Korean regime poses is not to the outside world. It's to its own people [Stallings 2013, 46].

Now, it is more than obvious that NK refugees' poetry is not in unison at all with the communist desirable imagery. It is a manifestation of a strong protest and refusal of the crooked reality. The tone of their inquest and protest is as sharp as that of South Korean writers. Even if it operates not on the accustomed frequency of political discussion or philosophical contemplation, it still deeply affects the reader's mind by its emotional impact. Which contrasts lyric verses abysmally.

Various studies prove that public opinion framed by mass media tends to shape even foreign policy agenda. Similarly, literary works play a key role in forming conceptions about North Korea. After all, stereotypes are definitely not always confluent, and acting forces influence each other.

¹ See, for example, the works of Jeongsub Lim and Hyunjin Seo [Lim, Seo 2009, 204–223], Kyung Hye Kim [Kim 2014, 221–244], etc.

² Quoted in Jain and Winner [Jain, Winner 2013, 121].

³ For more information on North Korean image liberalization in perceptions of South Korean films industry see Kyung Hyun Kim [Kim 2008, 221–244].

⁴ Literature critics positively evaluate skills of some South Korean authors to depict the North Korean reality. For instance, Hwang Sok-yong is a writer unanimously considered faithful to the realist principles. This statement is advocated in the following papers: Jinim Park [Park 2004, 100], Chul Ha Shin [Shin 2009, 189–211], In-hwan Ko [Ko 2009, 215–245], Young Kim [Kim 2011, 194], Jae-young Kim [Kim 2012, 267–288], etc.

⁵ It's worth mentioning that as of the year 2018, there were 30 poets of North Korean origin residing in South Korea [Lee 2018b, 134].

⁶ The expression *kkot-jebi* – which literally translates to “flower swallows” – sounds poetic, but is actually something much cruder. The North Korean term refers to homeless children, who stand on their own without the support of family or the state. The origin of the word comes from the consequences of the Korean War, a distorted pronunciation of the Russian word “kochevji”, which means “wandering”, and refers to those who were displaced by the conflict occurred between 1950 and 1953 [Schwarz 2015].

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**ПЕРЕКЛАД ВІРШІВ ПІВНІЧНОКОРЕЙСЬКИХ ПОЕТІВ-БІЖЕНЦІВ:
ЧИННИКИ ФОРМУВАННЯ ЛІТЕРАТУРНОГО ОБРАЗУ КНДР**

Як і багато інших біженців, інтелектуали з Північної Кореї – у цьому конкретному випадку поети та прозаїки – на власні очі бачили північнокорейську реальність. Цілковито природно, що за межами країни свого походження вони звертаються до батьківщини у своїх творах.

Дослідження в галузі формування літературних образів виявили широкий спектр чинників, що мають значущість у розкритті художніх образів конкретних країн. З огляду на ізоляваність Північної Кореї від решти світу, північнокорейські поети та прозаїки, які живуть поза межами КНДР, відіграють надзвичайно важливу роль у висвітленні дійсності, що панує на півночі Корейського півострова. Завдяки їхнім літературним творам, що звертаються до читача у простий та невимушений спосіб силою літературного слова, зовнішній світ дізнається про непрості реалії від перших осіб.

З огляду на зазначене вище, стаття є спробою проаналізувати, у який спосіб і за допомогою яких образів північнокорейські поети-біженці звертаються до КНДР у своїх творах. Водночас розвідка допоможе зрозуміти, чи виявлені літературні інтерпретації йдуть на користь офіційному іміджу КНДР, що продукується державною пропагандою для внутрішнього та зовнішнього споживання.

Паралельно у статті приділяється увага розгляду образів КНДР, які зустрічаються в аналізованому літературному дискурсі. Матеріалом дослідження стали вірші різних поетів-біженців, опубліковані в Південній Кореї, всі наведені приклади були перекладені з корейської на англійську.

Ключові слова: корейська література; літературний образ; образ КНДР; переклад; північнокорейські поети-біженці; поезія північнокорейських біженців; формування образу

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