

North Korean Ideological Discourse Hwang Sok-yong's Novel *Baridegi* as a Mirror of Reality

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In the first three chapters of his famous novel *Baridegi*, which is translated into many languages, the eminent South Korean writer Hwang Sok-yong describes the upbringing of his later migrant protagonist in North Korea. One characteristic feature of Hwang's narrative about North Korea is his abundant use of specific terminology in which ideology and reality of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are crystallized. This creates an effect of authenticity and reflects the author's concern for the living conditions in the DPRK. We also learn how the author depicts the plight of North Korean defectors as one of globalization's dark side.

“In the North Korean city of Chongjin, a seventh daughter is born in 1983 to a couple longing for a son. Abandoned hours after her birth, she is dragged away by the family dog and eventually rescued by her grandmother. The old woman names the child Bari, after a Korean legend telling of a similarly forsaken princess who undertakes a quest for an elixir that will bring peace to the souls of the dead. Bari, who has inherited her grandmother's extraordinary intuitive powers and the ability to see apparitions, escapes famine and desolation in North Korea as a delicate but brave adolescent. She finds refuge in China before embarking on the sort of journey made by thousands in our time: across the ocean in the hold of a cargo ship, bound for London and, it is hoped, for a better life”.¹

It is impossible to experience all the empirical reality, and this possibility is even minor for North Korea given its isolation from the outer world. So far, media featuring has always been a major channel of delivering information on DPRK. However, mass media highlights have their own shortcomings. News is often criticized for misleading its audiences.² The South Korean and the U.S. media outlets that largely control representations of North Korea around the globe,³ have limitation in reporting on the communist country.

Yet news alone cannot project the same magnitude or go into details the same way as any artistic work does. The impact of an artistic achievement has longer duration than those of mass media framing, the latter being subject of change depending on agenda setting. The construction of artistic images since long time ago has been another alternative to foster salience of hot international or regional issues.

In this regard, a closer analysis of South Korean fiction “may reveal ways in which a new relationship might be developed between North Korea and the rest of the world”.⁴ There have emerged literary works by South Korean writers and former North Korean defectors communicating complex issues of North Korean reality to the outer world, addressing existing problems in an impacting way.

Hwang Sok-yong, one of the novelists who write about North Korea, is considered “an author faithful to the realist principles”.⁵ Many researchers agree with this statement. Literature critics positively evaluate Hwang's skills to depict the North Korean reality.

¹ The summary of *Baridegi* retrieved from: Periscope, “Princess Bari”, *Periscope*.

² Andrew Tolson, *Mediations: Text and Discourse in Media Studies*, London, Arnold, 1996, p. 19.

³ Bethany Ann Stallings, “Discourse of Defection: Political Representation of North Koreans”, MA thesis, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2013, p. 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵ Jinim Park, “Historical Truth and Literary Representation”, *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 36(3), 2004, p. 100.

Sok-yong Hwang was born in 1943 in Manchuria. At age 30, he released his first novel, "The Stranger Earth," which immediately attracted the attention of Korean literary circles. The author himself emerged as a writer interested in the historical and political events of his people.

In 1989, Hwang Sok-yong, without the permission of the government of South Korea, went to North Korea and met there with Kim Il Sung. After that, by violating the South Korean law on state security, he was unable to return to his homeland and lived for a time in Germany. He even considered the possibility of political exile. Finally, he returned to South Korea in 1991 and spent five years in prison. In various works of the author such as "The Guest", Hwang reveals the causes and consequences of the division of Korea. In his novel *Baridegi* he represents the brutal reality of life in North Korea, while the tragedy of the national division is depicted through the plight of the protagonist who fled the communist country.



Hwang Sok-yong meeting with Kim Il-sung

The characteristic feature of Hwang Sok-yong's narrative about the North Korean reality is that the analyzed discourse is abundant in DPRK-specific terminology. At first glance, those elements may seem inorganic for a novel. However, those insertions are necessary and even inevitable for reflective description the professional activities of the characters, the ideological background of the plot, daily life of characters, among other aspects.

DPRK-specific terminology salient in *Baridegi*, is attested in other discourses too. Hence, the analysis of significant lexis and lexical units was compared with that in other texts – official reports, articles, etc. about the “state of art” in the communist country. This analysis moves from lexis and its context within *Baridegi* to the examination of their expanded coincidences in other discourses. Therefore the words' connotation inside the novel is contrasted with that used in other discourses where they are linked to reality.

Sŏngbun

The part of *Baridegi* about the friction between Bari's parents and her grandmother because of latter's shamanism is where the author mentions about the discriminatory *sŏngbun* system officially launched in DPRK by the May 30th Resolution. *Sŏngbun* literally translates as “ingredient”, but effectively means personal background.

It is a system through which the state categorizes citizens of the DPRK into classes based on their perceived political allegiance to the regime, ascertained by reference to family background and particular actions taken by family members. Based on this assessment, citizens fall into three broad classes: core, wavering and hostile.⁶ Detailed records are kept by party cadre and security officials of the degree of goodness or badness of everyone's *sŏngbun*.⁷

As an apparatchik, Bari's father is well aware of a strict ban on any spiritual rituals and religious activity. So before the verbal skirmish with his spouse about practices of his mother goes too far, he cuts short his wife's claims about the shamanic origins of the female ancestors in his bloodline, reaffirming that the family belongs to the social stratum of peasants:

⁶ Michael Donald Kirby, Marzuki Darusman y Sonja Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*, A/HRC/25/CRP.1, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2014, p. 30.

⁷ Helen-Louise Hunter, *Kim Il-song's North Korea*, Westport, Connecticut, London, Praeger, 1999, p. 3.

*Shut up! We come from ordinary peasants, so we are the core class of our society!*⁸

The term 기본성분 *kibonsŏngbun* which roughly translates as “basic (primary) element”,⁹ as mentioned in the novel, in a totalitarian society stands for workers and peasants, the driving revolutionary force and loyal “core class”.¹⁰ Noteworthy, in DPRK only identification with this principal class defines one’s life conditions.¹¹

So any suspect about rituals of Bari’s grandmother could destroy the favorable *sŏngbun* of the entire family, since the “practitioners of superstition” are classified as lower caste. By the way, it was from the grandmother that Bari inherited her gift to see ghosts, to hear their conversations and even to communicate with the animals.

Forms of control: Neighborhood Watch and its structure

The DPRK has established a vast surveillance apparatus to become aware of the expression of sentiments deemed anti-state or “anti-revolutionary”.

This includes the setting up of a large network of secret informers, who operate in all areas of life. In addition to the monitoring carried out by the officials of the mass organizations, of which membership is compulsory for all citizens, there is also the “neighborhood watch”¹² (also translated as “people’s unit”, “residential unit”, “people’s group”, etc.). It has been described to be responsible for registering residents, monitoring their activities, providing ideological education, and mobilizing people for various campaigns with leaders appointed by local party committees.¹³

In *Baridegi* the aforementioned organization is referred to as 인민반 *inminban*¹⁴. It is in essence a mutual surveillance group, which operates in people’s places of residence, including between 20 and 40 households. It is also an institution for labor mobilization – at least so far as full-time housewives and others without full-time employment in the state sector are concerned.¹⁵

Cinema is also directed, under the instructions of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, “to play a mobilizing role in each stage of the revolutionary struggle”.¹⁶ Once Bari’s father recalls his experience of collective indoctrination by watching a movie with other members of neighborhood watch group where he belonged:

[...] *Do you remember us going with all people’s unit to watch a movie?*¹⁷

⁸ Sok-yong Hwang, *Baridegi*, Seoul, Changbi Publishers, 2007, p. 16. Hereinafter all translations from Korean into English, cursive and underlining of terminology in focus are our own. We use McCune-Reischauer Romanization system for analyzed terminology in focus.

⁹ Compound term with following constituents: 기본 *kibon* “basics, basis, foundation” + 성분 *sŏngbun* “ingredient, component, constituent”.

¹⁰ For more information about the categories and classes refer to: Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

¹¹ Decisions about residency, occupation, access to food, health care, education and other services have been contingent on *sŏngbun*. *Sŏngbun* is also reflected through geographic segregation: *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹³ For more information, see: *Ibid.*, p. 64, p. 106, p. 314.

¹⁴ 인민 “people, public” + 반 “group”.

¹⁵ Andrei Lankov, “The evolution of North Korea’s ‘inminban’”, *NK News*, abril 28, 2015.

¹⁶ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁷ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

One of the reasons why the component 인민 *inmin* “people’s” has been employed by the regime, is probably because its meaning has gained an euphemistic effect through its recontextualization, thus, justifying the “humanly face” of the authoritarian system. Though in reality it has little to do with citizens’ voluntarily self-organization.

Each *inminban* is headed by an official whose duties involve neighborhood-related issues (garbage-removal), while many others are related to surveillance.¹⁸ The term to refer to a head of organization is 인민반장 *inminpanjang* “chief of neighborhood association”.¹⁹ It is an official body that technically represents a group of people dwelling in a particular area, yet in reality controls the social life of the entrusted territorial unit. This is a position almost always occupied by a woman.²⁰ It is noteworthy that the cobweb of “chiefs” encompasses the entire nation, and they provide the necessary information to the security organs and thus help to maintain control of the domestic situation. However absurd it may sound, but an “*inminpan* head should know how many chopsticks and how many spoons are in every household”.²¹ Ironically enough, but being part of the system and belonging to neighborhood watch head’s family does not imply any protection from epidemics, given weakness of state medical welfare system. Once Bari’s mother tell the news:

*The residential unit chief’s granddaughter has died [...]*²²

As a matter of fact, the population of the DPRK is indoctrinated from a young age in accordance with the single state ideology.²³ Hence, special positions engaged in work with students exist even inside universities.

Describing the part when grandmother was trying to force Bari’s father get married while still a student, Hwang Seok-yong uses the term 생활지도를 맡은 주임교원 *saenghwaljido rül mat’ün juimkyowŏn* “academic (staff) in charge of student’s guidance”²⁴, which stands for student supervising activities. Inside the socialist context, this sort of “guidance” is reduced to “disciplinary work” or monitoring the concordance of students’ behavior with the established ethical or ideological principles. Obviously, the term 생활지도 *saenghwaljido*, though used in both Koreas, is understood differently in the South – there it may refer to the tutoring of students, the work usually distributed among the professors rather than being the responsibility for a specific university office. So Bari’s father was summoned to the office, a fact that usually promises nothing good for the student. Hwang narrates:

*One month passed, and one day he was summoned to the curriculum office, so he went, and the disciplinary work mentor...*²⁵

The reason why young man was unexpectedly summoned was a part of his mother’s plan. Practically, she forced her son into marriage by using the authoritarian system. Ironically enough, the woman was inspired by her shamanistic visions.

¹⁸ Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia*, Nueva York, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 40.

¹⁹ Compound term with following constituents: 인민 *inmin* “people’s” + 반장 *panjang* “group leader.”

²⁰ Lankov, “The evolution of North Korea’s ‘inminban’”, *op. cit.*

²¹ Lankov, *The Real North Korea...*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²² Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

²³ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

²⁴ 생활 “life, living” + 지도 “guidance, instruction” + 맡다 “to take on, to undertake” + 주임 “chief” + 교원 “teaching staff”.

²⁵ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Likewise other citizens, university students are also “voluntarily” participating in public works. Hwang uses the term 노력동원 *noryŏkdongwŏn* “labor mobilization”²⁶ to refer to activities of student units administered by the regime during vacation period. This form of compulsory work for the “good of the state” is considered essential to improve infrastructure. The term is used to describe the situation when Bari’s father first met the mother of the protagonist when coming back home for vacations after compulsory labor:

*In the summer of the first year that father entered university, after labor mobilization period had finished [...]*²⁷



Labor mobilization

By the way, a chance of becoming a university student is granted only to those who belong to privileged *sŏngbun*. Bari’s father was applicable, probably because he was a son of a soldier who died in the war defending motherland. Yet, even an insignificant mishit can be enough to be expelled from the university followed by drop to the bottom of *sŏngbun* hierarchy.

As mentioned before, all university students obligatorily participate in various activities of mass association. Those are overseen by officials of the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League, which is made up of DPRK citizens aged between 14 and 30 and acts under the oversight of the Workers’ Party of Korea.²⁸

More often than not the methods of work of aforementioned university mentors lag far behind the persuasion or any other “democratic” ways of convincing. Bari’s grandmother perfectly knows it and takes advantage of the situation. To force her son into marrying a girl indicated by her shaman deities, she manages to convince the university official that her son was already married, but was escaping his family life. As expected, the functionary starts threatening Bari’s father, suggesting him to choose either to obey or being expelled from the educational establishment. In case of student’s refusal the mentor apparently can not enforce his verdict personally and technically needs to pass the case to 민청 *Min-Ch’ŏng* (“Democratic Youth”)²⁹, the latter in this case would act as a disciplinary commission.³⁰ Significantly, the Kim Il-sung Socialist Youth League spoke of four categories of basic duties to be discharged by members of the Youth League one of which was monitoring and assessment of loyalty.³¹ The mentor expectedly blames Bari’s father of improper behavior and uses a proven and rather “convincing” argument:

*If I put the issue to the Youth League’s agenda [...]*³²

²⁶ Compound term with following constituents: 노력 *noryŏk* “effort, endeavor” + 동원 *dongwŏn* “mobilization”.

²⁷ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

²⁸ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

²⁹ 민[民] (the first syllable of 민주주의 “democracy”) + 청 [靑] (the first syllable of 청년 “youth”).

³⁰ Probably it is a North Korean equivalent of USSR’s “Young Communist League”.

³¹ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

³² Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

The expression 품성이 나쁜 분자 *p'umsöngi nappün punja* “element of bad (ill) nature”,³³ in North Korean context better understood as “untrustworthy (unreliable) element” of communist society, refers to anyone who thinks otherwise than stipulated by official ideology. In terms of aforementioned “disciplinary work” with students, this is something or someone a watchful eye of university mentor would detect to take relevant measures. Therefore, the official informs Bari’s father about the consequences of reporting his “improper” behavior to the “Democratic Youth”, concluding:

[...] *You will be announced unreliable element and expelled from the university.*³⁴

This speaks for a developed system of social control, deeply rooted in all walks of life – education, work, personal affairs, etc. Besides, suspension from the university would leave a black mark on Bari’s father’s personal dossier and thus reduce his political and social prospects. At any point when an individual’s loyalty “score” appears low, that individual would be criticized harshly, monitored even more closely, and, in the worst cases, sent for training through labor.³⁵ The young man perfectly knew it, so he obeyed.

Other family member, Bari’s maternal uncle once in his life also was engaged with agitation activities during his military service period. Given that propaganda units exist even in DPRK army, for his musical skills the youngster is assigned to travel from one garrison to another in a status of 선동일꾼 *söndongilkkun*³⁶ (“member of agitation brigade”).³⁷ Improper in countries of otherwise ideology, this sort of indoctrination is considered in the mainstream of DPRK state policy. In a speech to “Party Propagandists” in 1981, Kim Jong-il spoke of “verbal agitation”, “agitation by artists”, effective use of visual aids and officials setting personal examples as different forms of agitation that are powerful and influential.³⁸

Once discharged from the army, the youngster turns up at the house of Bari’s family and later with the assistance of protagonist’s father gets employed at a state-owned company trading foodstuffs. It is around this time when the country starts to face serious food shortages.

Enduring food shortages and famine

After Kim Il-sung’s death the situation with alimentation grew worse and people started to abandon their workplaces in search of food. Bari and her sisters see corpses floating in the Tumen river and dead bodies all around the city. Great Famine, which would eventually claim up to 2.5 million lives, according to Andrew Natsios, the former head of USAID, was beginning to take hold.³⁹ The collapse of the state-managed food distribution system, referred in *Baridegi* to as 배급⁴⁰ *paegŭp* probably accounts for this tragedy.

³³ The elements of the phrase roughly read as follows: 품성 *p'umsöng* “character, nature” + 나쁘다 *napp-* “bad, wicked” + 분자 *punja* “molecule, element”.

³⁴ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

³⁵ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

³⁶ 선동 “instigation, incitement” + 일꾼 “worker”.

³⁷ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

³⁸ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

³⁹ Tom Philips, “Escape from North Korea: 'How I escaped horrors of life under Kim Jong-il'”, *The Telegraph*, November 11, 2014.

⁴⁰ A combination of syllables with synonymic semantics where the character 배 [配] stands for “to share” and 급 [給] means “to give, to provide”.

North Koreans have traditionally been dependent upon the public distribution system in order to have enough food to survive.⁴¹ Article 25 (3) of the DPRK Constitution declares: “The state provides all the working people with every condition for obtaining food, clothing and housing.” Since the entire economy is state-owned, this implies that the state has an obligation to provide each and every citizen in the DPRK with enough adequate food.⁴²



Distribution of food in NK

Control over food becomes a power argument to suppress any insurgence in a country where most population lives in a disadvantage.

As the DPRK was highly urbanized, an estimated 60 to 70 per cent of the population relied on the state for these food distributions. The public distribution system suppressed private production and monopolized distribution of food and household necessities. The entire economic framework of the country, and in particular the Public Distribution System, became an important means of social, economic and political control.⁴³

This consciously planned strategy of state determined rations depending on rank or workplace, gender, age etc., is an essential element of regime’s power.

The effects of food shortages are felt more keenly by more vulnerable populations, which was particularly the case during the famine of the 1990s. The public distribution system, which allocated all legal rations of cereals, determined people’s entitlements to food on the basis of their age or professional status.⁴⁴

In a country with planned economy unable to sustain the population biologically and corruption, the collapse of any state initiative is only a matter of time. Expectedly, the distribution became increasingly unreliable in the 1990s.⁴⁵ Bari’s family immediately faces the consequences:

*Sometimes there were no supplies during two or even three months [...]*⁴⁶

Men had to find ways of circumventing the rigidity of the state-assigned employment to be able to engage in commercial activity on the side.⁴⁷ Hwang portrays this, using the example of Bari’s father and uncle. Under these harsh circumstances the first uses his status to provide for the family, while the latter engages in black market dealings with Chinese merchants. Eventually Bari’s uncle gets into troubles and is denounced after fleeing to the South and leaving behind his debts. Given the fact that the state cultivated the conduct when neighbors are eagerly denouncing each other,⁴⁸ this in fact was impossible to pass unnoticed, for instance, by chief of

⁴¹ Mike Kim, *Escaping North Korea: Defiance and Hope in the World’s Most Repressive Country*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008, p. 55.

⁴² Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁶ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

⁴⁷ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

corresponding residential unit. The author employs the word *고발 kobal* “denunciation”,⁴⁹ a term that in South Korea would mean a normal reaction to an illicit act. Yet in communist society this word has implications of wicked intentions triggered by envy or personal interests:

[...] *He was denounced, since his whereabouts are unknown [...]*⁵⁰

Crime and punishment: North Korean style

Bari’s uncle shipped foodstuff to a Chinese company, which simply disappeared without paying. Given the fact that in the light of North Korean penal legislation he recklessly caused damage to state property through black market deals. Amid hunger, this would qualify as even more serious guilt. It should be noted that “extremely grave” cases such as smuggling or intentionally destroying state property are now subject to the death penalty.⁵¹ Instead of giving himself into the hands of state “justice”, the man decides to challenge his destiny to stay alive by crossing the border.

Once Bari’s uncle ran away without resolving his entrepreneurial equivocations, the family was paid a visit by *보위부 powibu* “security department”⁵², a North Korean analogue of the famous KGB. The full name of the agency is the State Security Department, reputed to be one of the most brutal secret police forces in the world. The author gives reference to it through Bari’s father’s discourse, when he addresses the queries about the visit of the agents:

*Those are from State Security Department. I was wondering when they would show up.*⁵³



State Security

Rigid ideological tenets loosely based on socialist Marxist-Leninist theory and an extensive security apparatus sustain this regime.⁵⁴ This state security department,⁵⁵ being one of the main pillars of state power, is the primary political police legally mandated to investigate crimes against the state or the nation and entrusted to identify and suppress threats to the political system. To this end, the agents are authorized to take people away without notification. Bari’s father is the first to be arrested.

Soon afterwards the rest of the family is handed over a *소환장 sohwanjang* “summons”⁵⁶, meaning the state’s decision to requisition the house where they lived:

*Here, we have orders to hand you over this summons.*⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Actually, the full phrase reads as follows: *고발이 들어오다 kobari tŭrŏo-* “to be denounced”. The syllable *고* [告] stands for “to tell, to inform”, whereas *발* [發] means “to reveal, to disclose”.

⁵⁰ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁵¹ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 262.

⁵² *보위* “protection, defense” + suffix *부* “department”.

⁵³ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

⁵⁴ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁵⁵ In English also referred to as “national security agency” or “ministry of state security”.

⁵⁶ *소환* “summon, call” + suffix *-장* “paper, sheet”.

⁵⁷ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

Eventually, all the privileges are taken away from Bari's father. Apparently the whole family was labeled "anti-state traitors", condemned by association.

Hwang Sok-yong refers to 교화소 *kyohwaso* "re-education facilities"⁵⁸ to specify the penitentiary installations Bari's uncle would theoretically have been sent if he had not run away. The term stands for prison for political and criminal offenders operated by the police for detainees who face lengthy sentences of reform through labor.⁵⁹ Many inmates of the *kyohwaso*⁶⁰ are perpetrators of common crimes, including violent and economic crimes.⁶¹ Hwang narrates about this part as follows:

*If he fails to repair damages, a severe reprimand from party awaited for him and then, a reeducation camp.*⁶²



Reeducation camp

Yet, the punishment might be even more severe. There is evidence that people were incarcerated in political prison camps because their family members fled to the Republic of Korea.⁶³ Once accused of state property squander and desertion of the country, Bari's uncle at best would have been sentenced for life or executed in the worst-case scenario.

In North Korea it is possible that punishment may not be personalized. Therefore, in the best traditions of the authoritarian regime, the action of one person condemned the rest of the family.⁶⁴ This happens according to the principle of 연좌제 *yŏnjwaje* "guilt by association".⁶⁵ Obligated to pay for the actions of his relative, Bari's father eventually was sentenced to labor 혁명화 노역장⁶⁶ *hyŏkmyŏnghwa noyŏkjang* revolutionizing zone⁶⁷ (literary, "revolutionizing labor camp"), also known as a "long-term labor camp".

In those places adult family members are often reassigned to the most arduous and dangerous types of work, such as mining, logging or farming.⁶⁸ So this is a plausible explanation why Bari's mother sets out with the two older daughters immediately after the head of the family was detained. Thanks

⁵⁸ 교화 "reformation, edification" + suffix -소 "place".

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch, "North Korea: Private Commerce Brings Arbitrary Arrests, Abuse," *Human Rights Watch*, June 7, 2015.

⁶⁰ The term in focus is also translated in English as "ordinary prison camp".

⁶¹ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

⁶² Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁶³ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102. If a family member commits an act deemed a political wrong or a serious non-political crime, the entire family is usually banished to a remote province and reassigned to other work.

⁶⁵ When the "entire family of those purged frequently also ended up in the political prison camps": *Ibid.*, p. 227.

⁶⁶ 혁명화 "revolutionarization" + 노역장 "prison workshop, labor house".

⁶⁷ It refers to a space within a camp, in which prisoner families live in work teams and from which it is possible to be released. Jasper Becker, *Rogue Regime: Kim Jong Il and the looming Threat of North Korea*, Nueva York: Oxford University press, 2005, p. 91.

⁶⁸ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

to her supernatural abilities, later Bari realizes that her mother and two elder sisters have died – killed either by hunger, or hard work.

As the situation in the North worsens, the family’s luck runs out. Bari, her grandmother and sister Hyeoni eventually end up on the Chinese side. Protagonist’s father finally manages to escape the *gulag* and joins his mother and two daughters in China. It’s no wonder that once strong and enduring figure had been transformed into a ghost of a man. Kept in inhumane hygienic conditions, prisoners have to engage in forced labor while receiving so little food that they face starvation.⁶⁹ Here is how Hwang describes it:

[...] *Later grandma, all in tears, told that revolutionizing camp had changed him a lot.*⁷⁰

After Hyeoni freezes to death, father makes up his mind to leave in search of his wife and other daughters, never to be seen again. Soon afterwards Bari’s grandmother dies, and the protagonist decides to cross the border herself to see if any of her family members are still alive. She faces a ravaged DPRK landscape – ghosts, corpses, orphaned children etc.

On her way Bari spots an old woman picking up food around the train station. In a conversation the latter advises her to become a 꽃제비⁷¹ *kkotjebi*:⁷²

*You might also go to Cheongjin station and turn into a flower-swallow.*⁷³



Flower-swallows 꽃제비

Given the starvation and daily struggle for survival which North Korean orphans endure, these street children are euphemistically referred to as “flower-swallows”,⁷⁴ also known as “fluttering swallows”, “wandering swallows”. In order to survive they are engaged in begging or sometimes stealing food. When they cannot snatch some edibles in the markets, they eat dead dogs and rotten food.⁷⁵ Despite people were willing to share food with homeless children,⁷⁶ yet the advice of the old woman was not an option for Bari for objective⁷⁷ and personal reasons.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁷⁰ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

⁷¹ The expression *kkot-jebi* - which literally translates “flower-swallows” - sounds poetic, but in reality it is something much more rough. That North Korean term refers to homeless children, who are self-reliant without the support of family or state. The origin of the word is traced back to the consequences of the Korean War, an imaginative pronunciation of the Russian word “kochevyi”, which means “wandering” (Schwarz, 2015).

⁷² 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, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁷³ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁷⁴ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁷⁵ The Economist, “Deprive and Rule,” *The Economist*, September 7, 2011.

⁷⁶ Kirby, Darusman y Biserko, *Report of the detailed findings...*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁷⁷ Because of the restrictions on residence, their presence is not tolerated and they constantly have to evade capture by the security agencies. Those captured are brought back to their home counties where they are forcibly institutionalized in poorly supplied holding centers or just left to survive by themselves: *Idem*.

Unable to find anyone and exhausted to fight against the hellish reality, Bari steps back to China. After learning some Chinese she wants to find at least her sister Mi, who came over to China before Bari. Uncle Loach tells the protagonist that her sister fell victim of human trafficking. Many women from North Korea are sold to Chinese “husbands” who hold them captive for reproduction and work.⁷⁸ In a similar way, Mi was sold to a house of a Chinese famer in a distant rural village.

Conclusion

Seok-yong Hwang assumes his role and considers North Korean sufferers as a dark side of globalization.⁷⁹ The mission of his works, as author puts it himself, is to tell the world about the current situation in the country. To this end, the analysis of DPRK-related terminology detects violations of the right to food, those related with prison camps, torture and inhuman treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention, discrimination, lack of freedom of expression, the right to life, freedom of movement, etc.

The writer, rather than directly criticizing the leaders of North Korean regime as guilty of the situation inside the country, turns to the “outer world”.⁸⁰ Hwang states through the protagonist: “When I later went to distant lands, and there has seen many cities, bright lights and a lot of happy people, I felt disappointed and shocked by realizing they all left us and pretend that nothing special is happening”.⁸¹ This sort of criticism is perceived throughout the novel.

The analysis of lexis in focus also allows perceiving that North Korean people are the ones who are truly at risk or threatened by the regime’s actions. In this regard, the fact that *Baridegi* employs the DPRK-specific terminology indicates writer’s will to focus on alternative “awareness raising” – of humanistic nature – contrasted with the chorus of voices criticizing North Korean leaders. Rather than labeling the regime as a threat, the writer is concerned about human rights and security of ordinary people exposed in their vulnerability.

Various studies prove that public opinion framed by mass media tends to shape foreign policy agenda. The same way literary works plays its role in forming imaginaries about North Korea. Frames definitely do not flow one direction, hence actors influence eachother.

The role of Hwang’s *Baridegi* is indispensable, since his literary narrative addresses human hearts, achieving the truth be told to many more people around the world, not only decision-makers, lawyers or scholars. The more people get familiarized with the real situation enveloped in artistic story, the more it will garner immediate interest and attention to the stories of many thousands of NK victims. In this sense, *Baridegi* is a whistle blowing about the reality of DPRK citizens, aimed at alerting South Korean and Western audiences.⁸²

One of the aspects questioned by pragmatic-functionalist perspective of imagology is whether there exists any evidence concerning the text’s impact.⁸³ A relatively little time have passed since “Princess Bari” was published in foreign languages. Yet, looking at *Goodreads* webpage reviews one can find out that so far the readers refer to Bari’s life in North Korea to as “harsh realities”, “impoverished North Korea”, “living hell”, “great hunger”, “devastating famine”, “death”, “battle for survival”, “hardships and hunger” etc. Over time the level of awareness of how things are in DPRK and why they are that way will definitely grow.

⁷⁸ See more about the issue in: *Ibid.*, p. 99, p. 128, pp. 132-39.

⁷⁹ See the interview with the author: Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

⁸⁰ Insook Kim, “The national problem in *Baridegi* by Hwang Seok-young”, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

⁸¹ Hwang, *Baridegi*, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁸² Kim, Insook, “The national problem in *Baridegi* by Hwang Seok-young”, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁸³ Joep Leerssen, “Imagology: History and method”, en *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: a Critical Survey*, Manfred Beller y Joep Leerssen (eds.), Amsterdam – New York, Rodopi, 2007, p. 28.

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