Article

Asylum Seekers, Asylum Workers—The Neoliberal Humanitarianism of the Humanitarian Resident Visa in Sou

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Abstract: In 2018, around 500 Yemenis escaping their war-torn homeland suddenly arrived on South Korea's Cheju Island via Malaysia. Their arrival sparked contested debates over whether South Korea should accept or deport them. In the wake of heated anti-refugee sentiment across South Korea, the South Korean government granted refugee status to only two applicants. The rest were given humanitarian resident visas that permitted them to stay by working in South Korea until their homeland becomes safe to return to. Even though those Yemenis are called "Yemeni refugees," in reality, it is rare to find one with that legal status. This paper examines the conceptual shortcomings of the term "refugee" and analyzes differentiated legal and practical categories of displaced people, in particular, by looking at the "humanitarian resident visa" that offers a unique hospitality to the asylum seekers, a hospitality that includes physical protection from the brutality of war and the opportunity to live as a self-reliant worker in a foreign country. Based on two summers of ethnographic field research in South Korea from 2021 to 2022, this paper argues that the humanitarian resident visa, as a form of neoliberal hospitality, has transformed asylum seekers into asylum workers. This ethnography highlights the emergence of a particular hospitality that shows an interplay between protection and productivity, between humanitarianism and neoliberalism—embodied in the concept of the "humanitarian resident visa."

On a hot, humid day in July 2022, I met three Yemeni men in their thirties in a civic organization office in Itaewon, one of Seoul's hip cosmopolitan neighborhoods, where old narrow alleys are juxtaposed with dilapidated buildings. The office manager, Mr. Kim, a warm and kind Korean man in his late fifties, was sharing legal advice and practical information necessary for running businesses or working as migrants in South Korea. The three Yemenis listening to Mr. Kim had left Yemen for Malaysia in the wake of Yemen's civil war and eventually reached South Korea. But their arrival in South Korea was not quite premeditated. Starting in early 2018, Air Asia (a Malaysian airline) launched direct flights from Kuala Lumpur to Cheju Island, one of South Korea's showcase tourist destinations. To encourage tourism, the island, unlike other parts of South Korea, requires no visa. The rapidly spreading news regarding direct flights to the visa-free island shook the Yemeni community across Malaysia and prompted some of them to quickly book flights to Cheju Island. In the first five months of 2018 alone, 561 Yemenis set foot on this completely unfamiliar island as asylum seekers applying for refugee status. The sudden massive influx of Yemenis to Cheju Island provoked a critical social debate and controversy across South Korea—"whether we have to accept the Yemenis as refugees or deport them"—that the South Korean media called the "Yemen Incident." However, in stark contrast to concerns that the government too generously accepted the Yemenis as refugees, only two Yemenis out of 561 were approved as refugees after the exceptionally expedited six-month review process. The remaining 550 Yemenis were granted a G-1 visa, a "humanitarian resident visa" that allows the visa holders to stay in South Korea and renew their visa annually, without reuniting with their family, until it becomes safe to return to

their home countr. Even though the Yemenis are still referred to colloquially as "refugees," in practice it is rare to find an actual Yemeni refugee who has that legal status. How, then, have "Yemeni refugees" reconciled themselves to their existing status and their resettled lives in South Korea since they were granted humanitarian resident visas in 2018—as neither refugees nor deportees? This paper examines the process and principles by which Yemeni humanitarian residents (asylum seekers) have transformed into asylum workers under the G-1 visa in the South Korean neoliberal market.

In *We Refugees*, Hannah Arendt defines a refugee as someone who

> used to be a person driven to seek refuge because of some act committed or some political opinion held. Well, it is true we have had to seek refuge, but we committed no acts and most of us never dreamt of having any radical political opinion. With us the meaning of the term of refugee has changed. Now "refugees" are those who have been so unfortunate as to arrive in a new country without means and have to be helped by refugee committees (Arendt 1943: 264).

Arendt's notion of refugee stemmed mainly from the context of World War II and her witnessing of how Jewish people were displaced simply for being Jewish.[1] In response to the growing numbers of displaced people after the war, the UN Refugee Convention was enacted in 1951. It defined a refugee as a person "who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such a fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." Whereas Arendt's refugees were defined as those who do not have the basic means of life and therefore have to live outside their home country, the 1951 convention focuses on political persecution, thereby excluding those who were displaced by civil wars, lack of vital subsistence, and/or natural calamities (Shocknove 1985: 277). Current critical refugee studies also point out that the 1951 convention posits a fixed distinction between economic hardships and political situation—such as economic migrants and political refugees—without accounting for the multiplicity and complexity of refugee-producing conditions and refugee claims (Epiritu 2022: 51). For example, refugees have been politically produced, especially in the context of the Cold War, for the sake of humanitarianism. This was seen, for instance, in the case of Vietnamese refugees who were rescued and resettled by the US military—"militarized refugees" requiring military operations (Epiritu 2014).

The persecution-centered refugee concept is not quite applicable to the Yemeni asylum seekers coming to South Korea either, given that only two Yemenis could prove, with solid evidence and coherent narratives, that they faced the danger of political persecution. In other words, the majority of those who fled war-torn Yemen were not political refugees but escapees who needed to secure physical protection and a stable livelihood for themselves. They were fleeing a broken relationship between the state and its citizens. The term "Yemeni refugee" shows the limits of the "refugee" label in that it does not indicate a particular referent but rather clusters of terms (Cole 2017; Barsky 2016). Here, I focus on an alternative legal status, "humanitarian resident," which shows the hospitality that the South Korean government shows asylum-seekers, as well as the limits to that hospitality. Hospitality has been considered not a privilege but a right that everyone should have, not

[1] Arendt wrote in *The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man*, "The trouble arose when it appeared that the new categories of persecuted were far too numerous to be handled by an unofficial practice destined for exceptional cases. Moreover, the majority could hardly qualify for the right of asylum which implicitly presupposed political or religious convictions which were not outlawed in the country of refuge. The new refugees were persecuted not because of what they had done or thought, but because of what they unchangeably were—born into the wrong kind of race or the wrong kind of class or drafted by the wrong kind of government" (Arendt 1976: 294).

being treated as an enemy, since we, as human beings, share the surface of the earth (Benhabib 2005). But the host's giving a space to a stranger as a gift and the host's opening to strangers may simply preserve the host's identity as a host and the stranger's as a stranger (Derrida 2000). The host's boundary-making and gate-keeping strategies toward strangers have become more nuanced and diversified, especially in the wake of the global refugee crisis, by deploying new methods to grant and reject the suffering bodies as "refugees," based on their innocence, sickness, and sexual orientations, for humanitarian reasons (Fassin 2011; Tickin 2006, 2017). Suffering bodies are considered the most legitimate evidence for refugee claims, since they show "bio-legitimacy" (Fassin 2009) and spread a shared sense of humanity (Bourdieu 1999). In response to the intrinsically transnational refugee issues, the anthropology of humanitarianism has, since the 1980s, shifted its interest from the "savage slot" based on the cultural difference of the Other to the "suffering slot" based on universal human suffering and global connectedness (Robinson 2013).

Human suffering in the name of humanity has brought about the humanitarian intervention that the transnational NGOs have practiced (Ticktin 2014) and the politics of pity for the unfortunate, which generates individual engagement with global human suffering (Boltanski 1999).[2] But the legal status of refugee has become harder to earn. For instance, South Korea's refugee acceptance rate is 3%, and the global average is around 30%. This means that the rest of them—97% and 70%, respectively—have remained under unidentified legal status in the host countries. In that sense, the majority of refugees in the refugee studies are technically not refugees but asylum seekers, humanitarian residents, or the undocumented, suffering from a long-pending legal status, temporal traps, sickness, immobility or sometimes unwanted repatriation. Given the difficulty of gaining refugee status, a refugee could increasingly be considered not a victim but rather a "privileged displaced being" who is able to secure settlement in a host country (Zetter 2015). In relation to and in contrast with the ambiguous legal and practical category of "refugee," how can the concept of "humanitarian residents" comprehend the growing population displaced by the wars, poverty, and natural disasters around the world? What kind of hospitality does the South Korean government offer, or not offer, to humanitarian residents? How should we understand the social location of humanitarian residents in the context of the global migration regime, as a group that transgresses categories such as political refugees, economic refugees, or migrants?

Based on two summers of field research in 2021 and 2022 in South Korea, I explore the work experiences of Yemeni humanitarian residents under the G-1 visa as *free and active* job seekers, workers and entrepreneurs in the context of the neoliberal South Korean labor market. Neoliberalism includes the values of self-interest, self-responsibility, and self-sufficiency (Barry, Thomas and Rose 1996; Foucault 2008; Ong 2006; Rose 1996), which aggravate economic inequality through "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2005) and "economization" (Brown 2015). As market logic has encroached upon nearly all social domains, individuals have been forced to cultivate certain modes of behavior, bodily discipline, and personhood in order to properly cope with market logics and produce autonomous and self-regulating subjectivity—that is, an action of the "self on self" (Dean 1999). In other words, neoliberalism involves the extremely flexible labor exploitation that aggravates the individual's insecurity and precarity; at the same time, it does not take the form of the domination of subjectivity but comes to depend upon a web of technologies for fabricating and maintaining self-government (Miller and Rose 1990: 26–28). As seen with the humanitarian resident visa, which requires visa holders to become a productive self-reliant worker through self-responsibility and self-management, humanitarianism does not simply assume humanitarian intervention, which aims to alleviate the human

[2] Boltanski drew a distinction between compassion and pity. The first is directed to a particular object to offer an immediate and practical help with special emotional attachment. The latter is used more to express emotions and words on behalf of distant and general unfortunates, which is called the "politics of pity" (Boltanski 1999).

suffering by offering necessary aids; rather, it transforms refugees from humanitarian aid recipients to exploitable workers—a system known as "humanitarian exploits" (Ramsay 2020). Or it blurs the boundary between refugees and immigrant workers, creating "humanitarian immigrants" who can negotiate the stasis and engage in humanitarian migration (Moulin and Thomaz 2016).

In response to the increasing intersection between humanitarianism and neoliberalism, this paper argues that the humanitarian resident visa, as a form of neoliberal hospitality, has transformed asylum seekers into asylum workers, as the South Korean government offers protection from the civil war as well as requiring visa holders to be productive, self-reliant workers to stay afloat on the neoliberal South Korean labor market. In particular, I pay attention to the temporality imposed by the visa that mandates an annual renewal without having any family reunion. I call it "temporal camp." Instead of living in a physically confined camp waiting indeterminately for one's destiny, humanitarian residents continue to plan and organize new movements within and beyond the boundary of South Korea, in the form of self-management. They make this effort not to limit themselves to "3D" jobs ("dangerous, dirty, and difficult") but to extend their global niches—generating more mobility within immobility. Reflecting the refugee regime and the way it overlaps with labor migration, human rights, security, travel, and humanitarianism (Betts 2010), this article rethinks the concept of refugee—the rightless and stateless, as Arendt suggested[3]—through the eyes of Yemeni humanitarian residents who refuse to be what refugees are supposed to be and who are eager to learn about their new "rights" to live in the host country. This ethnography highlights the emergence of a particular hospitality that shows an interplay between protection and productivity, between humanitarianism and neoliberalism—as embodied in the humanitarian resident visa.

Temporal Camp

Since the early 1990s, immigrants have moved to South Korea for work and marriage. Currently, around two million foreigners are working and living in the country. Despite the ordinariness of and familiarity with the foreigners' presence in South Korea, the refugee issue never generated social debate until 500 Yemenis landed on Cheju Island in 2018. South Korea signed the refugee treaty in 1992, and the government enacted a refugee law in 2013 in order to meet the global trend. But incoming refugees were rare until the law was enacted. In response to the sudden influx of Yemenis from Malaysia, 700,000 South Koreans petitioned the president to repeal the refugee law. They urged the Yemenis not be accepted, in the interest of national security and public safety. Above all, the appeal raised public concerns about "fake refugees"—those coming to South Korea not to flee political persecution but to seek economic opportunities in the seemingly promising South Korean labor market. The petitioners insisted that citizens' tax money not be wasted on "fake refugees."[4]

South Korean scholars and media analysis discussed this securitization of refugee issues at great length through the lens of Islamophobia and the racialization of Arab male bodies (Jeon 2020; Kim 2018; Koo 2018; Oh 2019; Yoon 2022). In particular, as explained by Sunyoung Seo, who followed the Yemenis' trajectory after they landed on Cheju Island,

[3] Arendt addressed the condition of the stateless: "Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; not that they are oppressed but that nobody wants even to oppress them. Only in the last stage of a rather lengthy process is their right to live threatened; only if they remain perfectly 'superfluous,' if nobody can be found to 'claim' them, may their lives be in danger" (Arendt 1976: 294).

[4] When I interviewed South Koreans regarding the Yemeni refugee issue, one of them claimed, "I am a refugee in my own country, since nobody secures my economic life and future." Anthropologists echoed the fact that precarity was aggravated by the withdrawal of state protection (Allison 2016) and the ruination of life by the global economy (Tsing 2015). Thus, refugee status is not exceptional but emblematic of the type of global capitalism responsible for the insecurity of citizens around the world (Cabot 2019; Ramsay 2020).

the Yemeni refugees' mobility was tightly restricted. They were not allowed to leave the island for the first six months, until they gained legal status. Yemenis on the island expressed anxiety over their livelihoods; one stated, "I cannot move at all" (Seo 2022). At the same time, certain refugee-related discourses suggested that the government should accept the incoming refugees as an expression of national decency, as South Korea was a proud member of the global refugee regime (Kim 2019), and that it was time to consider the necessity not only of the refugees' acceptance but also their resettlement and integration into South Korean society (Cho and Park 2018; Hong and Kim 2019).[5]

As I mentioned earlier, these "Yemeni refugees" in the South Korean refugee discourses and media portrayals ended up, for the most part, receiving not refugee status but humanitarian resident visas. The two categories—refugees and humanitarian residents—are vastly different in the process of resettling and future-making. For instance, those who have acquired an F-2 visa and become a refugee would be able to apply for South Korean citizenship if the time and conditions were met. Yet those who have been granted a G-1 humanitarian resident visa must annually renew their visa without being allowed to reunite with their family for the indefinite term. They are "just waiting" (Kwon 2023) without knowing what they are waiting for, until luck somehow strikes them, allowing them to reunite with their family. I call this indefinite waiting situation "temporal camp."

Camps can be defined spatially and temporally, in that camps always have boundaries and temporariness may become permanent (Turner 2015). The physical camp is set apart from the ordinary space of life (Agier and Bouchet-Saulnier 2004) and space of exception (Agamben 1998), where refugees have been in transit, waiting to be settled in a country that will accept them. Here, I would like to rethink Agamben's well-known definition of camp as a "permanent state of exception" (Agamben 1998: 175) and refugees as a "pure expression of bare life" (Agamben 1998: 144). Even though camp is an exceptional space, camp cannot be reduced to a sole rationality of bare life, given that ordinary life such as schooling happens in camp in order to discipline and include the refugees, leading to a production of normalized subjects (Fresia and Kanel 2015). In addition, camp can turn into a highly politicized place in which to resist humanitarian government and form political subjects (Agier 2008: 221). Since the distinction between sovereignty and exception is not clearly drawn in camp (Redfield 2010: 190), and refugees or displaced strangers become part of the national order of things (Malkki 1995), the state of exception and the state of being bare life is neither permanent nor fixed. By looking into the everyday life of "temporal camp" where Yemenis are confined due to their humanitarian resident visa, I would like to highlight the unknown temporariness that the Yemeni humanitarian residents are facing—as people free to move around and seek jobs in South Korea. Yet they cannot imagine their future any further ahead than one year, the period of validity of their (indefinitely renewable) visa. Moreover, the kind of job they can find does not allow them to create a viable future.

Omar, who I met in the Itaewon office, is the one who made the greatest effort to get out of the temporal camp. In his mid-thirties, Omar is quick, smart, and passionate about his life. As a representative of the Yemeni community, he spoke in fluent English to the press and social media, persuasively explaining the Yemenis' struggles. When I arrived at the Itaewon office (as depicted in the opening of this article), Omar was discussing his temporal camp situation with Mr. Kim. Since he acquired a G-1 visa and moved from Cheju to Seoul, Omar has worked hard. He used to do food delivery, especially to foreigners in the Seoul area, and has now been certified as an auto mechanic. Omar seemed deeply frustrated that he could not reunite his family by bringing his wife and two children to South Korea. But because the Houthi rebels have dominated his hometown's government and school system, Omar has been seriously worried that his children will be

[5] Humanitarian intervention is initiated and practiced by the transnational NGOs. Yet Yemenis' applications for refugee status in South Korea were dealt with solely by the South Korean government.

brainwashed by the Houthi ideology fed to them at school. He asked his wife to homeschool their children, but the homeschooling seems to have reached its practical limits now that they are in their teens. Omar believes that Yemen would not be a livable place any longer under the Houthi rebels' control and with constant conflict between different domestic political factions.

In his hometown, Omar was an independent and capable businessman, renovating and decorating houses, and had a comfortable life. But when the war broke out, he decided to leave his wife and children behind in Yemen, since the journey was unpredictable and potentially very dangerous. He departed with his brother, Ahmad, with more than US $10,000 in cash in his pocket, planning eventually to get to Europe. But on the journey arranged for them by a "broker," the two brothers, while crossing from Iraq to Turkey, were caught by the border patrol. Omar and Ahmad were given two options: to be sent back to Yemen or to find a country that would accept them without a visa. Returning to Yemen was not a viable option for them. Omar and Ahmad decided to go to Malaysia, the only country that would accept them without a visa at that time. Going through Saudi Arabia and Egypt and waiting for the connecting flights for days, they finally arrived in Malaysia. He laments his last four years in South Korea:

> I do not want to be depicted as a refugee—poor, desperate, displaced, and miserable. I have never been poor or begged from anybody. I made my choices on my own. I have been always capable of moving my life forward. But under the current situation—without having refugee status and a reunited family—I can only think of today, not of any future. The humanitarian resident visa saved my life. But it also limits my life. I really cannot think of what to do to make any changes at the moment.

Even though he keeps joking about his appearance, saying, "What is the point of getting a haircut, since I cannot imagine any future?" Omar often shared possible plans to reunite his family. He cannot change his visa status in South Korea unless he becomes an investor and establishes a company—half a million is required to apply for an investment visa in South Korea. Omar could not secure that much money in a short period of time. He also could not wait until he saved that much money. As he said, laughing sadly, "It may take me ten or twenty years. Or I will never be able to save that much in this lifetime." Because of his desperation to bring his family out of Yemen and to reunite with them, he was attracted to the idea of acquiring an investment visa in Indonesia. If he invested around US $2,000 to establish a company and spent US $5,000 on an apartment, he could get a visa to invite his wife and children to Indonesia. The visa would be renewable by paying an additional US $10,000 in fees every other year. He said confidently, "I can do it." Since a typical income in Indonesia is too low to maintain the high cost of transnational living, Omar was thinking of trying to earn money in South Korea and sending money to his family in Indonesia. His wife could take care of their children and send them to Arab schools in Indonesia, where some Arab people have already built a life. He would be able to travel back and forth between Indonesia and South Korea much easier than between Yemen and South Korea. Omar has been working with several friends in Indonesia and Yemen to make this plan happen, in order to get out of the "temporal camp" that ironically gives him freedom, protection, and a productive life to survive in neoliberal South Korea even as it limits his imagination about how to make a future.

Dispersal as Currency

In her article "From Migration Hub to Asylum Crisis," Helene Thiollet explained that Yemenis have a long history of emigration, mainly to neighboring oil-rich countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar,[6] and remittances have

[6] Even though limits on migration by Saudi Arabia have decreased the population of Yemeni migrants, around 22.6 million Yemenis are working abroad and sending remittances back to Yemen; the portion of remittances in gross national income has ranged from 15.7% (2000) to 6.25% (2010). The influx of people from the Horn of Africa remained undocumented and in transit to other countries, according to Thiollet (2014).

played a key role in sustaining the nation's economy (Thiollet 2014: 275). Since the early 1990s, however, Yemen has been "a land of haven, exile, and transit" for people from the Horn of Africa, including Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, where civil wars have displaced people en masse. In 2011, Yemen—the only country on the Arabian Peninsula that has signed the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees—hosted around 500,000 foreign residents (272). Yet since Yemen's civil war broke out in 2015 between the Houthi rebels and government forces, Yemenis have been leaving again as asylum seekers. Statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) show that 4.5 million Yemenis were forced to flee their home country, and 21.6 million have been in dire humanitarian need.[7]

I heard the stories of the fleeing Yemenis. The history of their dispersal across the world was older and more dynamic than simple labor migration or fleeing the war. My informants mentioned that their families are living as refugees or as citizens not only in the Arab countries but also in the United States, the United Kingdom, Greece, Germany, and the Netherlands. They have received a decent support network to help siblings and relatives leave war-torn Yemen. Mohamad, another man whom I met in the Itaewon office, has a father and an uncle who went to the US in the 1990s as asylum-seekers; both of them gained refugee status without having to wait long. His uncle decided right away to bring his wife and children from Yemen to the US. But his father came back to Yemen, lived there for a while, and decided to move back to the US, as by 2014, Yemen's political situation had become dire. This time, Mohamad's father brought Mohamad's mother and two youngest siblings, who were under 20 years old. Mohamad and his older brother were over the age limit (20 years old) for refugee family migration to the US. Mohamad's parents and siblings, as US citizens, ended up settling in Michigan, which has a large Arab community. But Mohamad and his brother came to South Korea as asylum sekkers workering for a shipbuilding company.

Najila's family seems to be more dispersed than Mohamad's.[8] Najila is one of the few women coming from Yemen (via Malaysia) to South Korea in 2018; she is the only woman who came to South Korea all by herself. In her late thirties, Najila met her now-husband in Cheju; he was a fellow Yemeni, and together they waited six months to get legal status—a G-1 visa. Even though she feels relieved and happy to be living in a safe country and holding a stable job in a flower shop in Cheju, she has been struggling with heart issues for the last couple of years. But after several surgeries and multiple trials and errors on her medications, her condition is finally under control; a G-1 visa covers medical insurance in South Korea.[9] Najila started our lunch conversation by saying, "I just came back from vacation with my two younger sisters, who were visiting me from the Netherlands. My family is all over the world: in the Netherlands, Malaysia, the US, and Yemen. I am here in South Korea."

Her family has been dispersed for longer than Yemen's civil war has been raging. Both her mother and father are Somali-Yemenis who used to live in Somalia but moved to Yemen as children. Back before Yemen's war started, people frequently moved between Somalia (which was struggling with its own civil war) and Yemen by importing and exporting needed goods to each other—unlike nowadays. When Najila was growing up, her parents were not around much, because they were busy with their own businesses and finally divorced when she was twelve years old. After that, Najila, as the oldest daughter (and the second child out of eight), quit school and took care of her younger siblings. She filled in for her mother, who, due to deep engagement with her international business, was always traveling abroad. After the divorce, her mother left for the US, married an

[7] https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/yemen/

[8] Peutz examines what led Yemenis to seek refuge in the Horn of Africa based on their family histories of transnational migrations and interethnic marriages, arguing that their "mixed" Arab and African parentage have resulted in alienation in Yemen across generations (Peutz 2019).

[9] Medical humanitarianism was not applied to Najila's case, even though the body can be used as legitimate evidence to apply for refugee status.

American man, and gained US citizenship. Then her father left for the Netherlands, took her four youngest siblings with him in seeking asylum, and gained refugee status (and later gained EU citizenship) there. The four oldest children, including Najila, could not leave for the Netherlands with their father, since they were over the age limit to apply for "family refugee" status, as in Mohamad's case. Najila's parents, who lived separately overseas, had at times supported their children whom they had left behind in Yemen, but Najila mostly raised herself.

The brutal and prolonged civil war in Yemen caused severe hardships for Najila and her three other siblings. The constant bombings and lack of electricity made ordinary life impossible. There was no reliable way to generate income. But Najila was afraid to leave Yemen by herself, since she did not have enough money in the first place and had to go through strictly patrolled military checkpoints. Yet, when Najila divorced her (then-) husband in 2015, living in Yemen became harder and harder; divorce is rare there, and divorced women live under a social stigma. Most of all, she was fed up with being bullied and ridiculed by Yemenis on the street as a "fat and dark pig," due to her body being bigger than that of most Yemeni women and her skin tone being darker as a result of her Somali ethnic background. As Najila struggled in these ways, her mother in the United States offered her money to help her leave Yemen. After transiting through Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, Najila, in desperation, finally got to Malaysia all by herself, where many Yemenis, including her younger sister, had already stayed prior to her arrival.

Najila's time in Malaysia was much harder than she expected. First, no work permits were issued for Yemenis. Najila had a hard time getting a job without a work permit and frequently got fired because her bosses considered her too "dark and fat" for service work. Since she did not have a good relationship with her sister, Najila wanted to find her own place, but she could not afford to live alone. Without a job or money, and socially marginalized and ostracized, Najila lived under severe pressure. One day in May 2018, Najila heard about the direct flights to South Korea. She immediately decided to leave Malaysia for Cheju Island, believing the risk was worth taking compared to returning to Yemen or staying in Malaysia. This time again, her mother helped her leave to South Korea to seek asylum. Najila filed her refugee application as soon as she arrived on Cheju Island, although she did not put much hope into getting admitted as a refugee in South Korea. Najila's English is exceptionally good, and she has helped many fellow Yemenis fill out the application materials, including descriptions of their war experiences and political persecution—if any. Najila saw many Yemenis making up their stories and heard about the unfairness of the interview process, especially with South Korean interviewers. She just submitted her application without dramatizing her stories. After six months of waiting, Najila earned a G-1 visa, not a refugee visa.

Najila's family's dispersal is unique as well as conventional in a place like Yemen, where many displaced people end up hoping to live overseas. Despite the constant uncertainty they have faced, most informants, including Najila, stood firm on one aspect of their plans: "it is not an option to return to Yemen." Someone like Omar was originally planning to go to Europe or the US. Once the plan failed and he landed on the unfamiliar island of Cheju, Omar tried to find a way out of "temporal camp" by inviting his wife and two children from Yemen to Indonesia, a compromise mid-point for the children's education and the separated family members' frequent meeting. Someone like Najila has no plan to leave South Korea, keeping a stable married life as an ordinary foreign citizen while staying in touch with dispersed family members across the world. Someone like Mohamad looks forward to hearing back about his visa application for the US in order to reunite with his family in the US, saying that he needs a visa that offers more freedom than a G-1 humanitarian resident visa. The war displaced Yemenis. And the war dispersed Yemenis by fueling other aspirations to maintain transnational family ties to leave South Korea for another place in the hope that the dispersal network would create a certain currency that could help with their exit from the temporal camp.

Let Me Work, Let Them Work

While waiting for approved status, the Yemenis were not allowed to leave Cheju Island, let alone allowed to work (Seo 2022). But the sudden influx of 500 Yemenis to Cheju ended up gradually becoming a burden, not only to the local organizations that hosted many of the Yemenis across the island but also to the central and regional government that was supposed to provide welfare to the asylum seekers for six months. The Yemenis' months-long unemployment and minimum welfare raised questions—what if their poor economic situation led to growing homelessness and threatened public safety on Cheju Island? In response to the increasing concerns, the South Korean government made an exception, letting the Yemenis work on the island in order to make the Yemenis self-reliant asylum-seekers and not dependent on South Korean tax money. Yemenis also needed some work to feed themselves, since the welfare payments were not quite sufficient and, in any case, stopped three months after their arrival. Though the media portrays South Koreans as being rampantly anti-refugee, the response from the Cheju labor market was quite surprising. One civil activist who played a core role in supporting the whole process of Yemeni settlement in Cheju island revealed the other reality—how the Yemenis were perceived and accepted by the people of Cheju.

> When I led several Yemeni men to the Cheju countryside to introduce them to some farms, several old ladies gladly greeted them with a big wave from afar, and they came to us asking if the foreigners could work with them right away. The ladies did not ask where they were from or what their legal status was. They seemed so happy to find young, healthy possible workers to help with their farm work. Regardless of their different skin color, religious differences, and lack of legal status, the farms needed workers who could make up the long-term labor shortage in the countryside.

In the Cheju labor market, which is struggling from a labor shortage, Yemenis are not viewed as refugees who will drain Korean tax money or intimidate South Korean citizens. Rather, they are perceived as a young, healthy male labor force, something the farms have so badly needed. I heard Yemeni men reflect that they used to work on the carrot farms, green onion farms, and tangerine farms, saying with a laugh, "We had to follow the old ladies' commands at the farm. They were very nice to us, like mothers." Whatever jobs were available to them, Yemenis did the work on the island while waiting to establish their legal status. Even though the Yemenis came to South Korea to seek safety from their war-torn country, the majority of them testified that they were desperate to work and earn money as soon as possible so that they would be able to send money back to their families in Yemen. Six months of waiting without earning money seemed too long for them to sustain themselves—so many people in Yemen are anxiously waiting to receive the remittances. Abdo(I met in the Itaewon office), a thirty-three-year-old man with a wife and two kids back in Yemen, was one of the Yemenis willing to find work to send as much money back to Yemen as he could. The first job available to him was on a fishing boat. Though many Yemenis are unfamiliar with maritime work such as fishing or being on a boat, Abdo was willing to take the risk. When he was sent to a "labor recruiting market" in a fishing town in Cheju, the boat owners examined his body to see if he had the strength and endurance needed to do heavy labor on the boat. Abdo remembers the moment:

> It was almost like an old slave market; we were half-naked, showing our body so our strength and health could be checked. There was a very skinny Yemeni man there. He wanted the job too. But the owner did not want him, since he looked too weak. After the results of the blood test we were supposed to take to be recruited came back, we heard that one man had hepatitis and could not get a job. Everybody thought the skinny man was the one. But it turned out to

> be me, not a skinny one [laugh]. I looked strong, but he didn't. I was hired, but he was not.

The appearance of a healthy body matters. The ability to endure seasickness matters more. The boat owner liked Abdo, since he was a hard and healthy worker for the fishing boat—despite the hepatitis. It is a physically demanding job that requires long hours of being on the ocean. But Abdo realized that the boat, which had multiple foreign workers from Indonesia and China, was not the safest place for him to work. One day, Abdo got into a fight with an Indonesian guy who had strong bonds with other Indonesian men. For his safety, Abdo found a local job on land, working for a Korean bulgogi restaurant. This time, the South Korean owner was not only rude to the foreign workers in the restaurant but also subjected them to verbal abuse, long hours of labor without extra pay, and obvious discrimination in favor for South Korean workers. Work opportunities on Cheju Island are very limited and not promising for Abdo. As soon as the ban on leaving Cheju Island was lifted and he got a humanitarian resident visa, Abdo left for Mokpo to work with a mostly-Yemeni crew from Cheju on a shipbuilding station—another sector that has been struggling with a labor shortage. Another 3D job—dangerous, dirty, and difficult[10]—awaited Abdo. But he was relieved to have found a source of steady income to support his wife and two children in Yemen.

Here we can see how the South Korean government's decision, "let them work," and the Yemenis' eagerness, "let me work," are closely related on the South Korean labor market. The mutual desperation on both sides—South Korea's labor shortage and Yemenis' labor opportunities, respectively—fed each other to support the neoliberal ideal by making these asylum seekers self-sufficient foreign workers. In particular, fields such as shipbuilding and farm work welcome the humanitarian residents to make up for the labor shortage that was aggravated due to the Covid pandemic. At work, the kind of visa—whether for humanitarian residents, refugees, or foreign immigrant labor—would not make much difference among workers as long as they are "legal." The distinction between migrant workers and refugees, or between refugees and humanitarian residents, likewise becomes blurred.

Marwin, a 45-year-old Yemeni man, made a similar point. Marwin has been working at one of the largest shipbuilding companies in Mokpo. Despite the extreme flexibility of his work schedule, since he arrived in South Korea, he has never taken an extra day off except for weekends. But a few days before he spoke to me, at his shipbuilding workstation, he had a back injury carrying metal and felt bad about having to lose income due to having to take the day off. Marwin's diligence and dedication to his job derives not only from his solid work ethic but also from his deep urgency to send money back to Yemen in order to take care of twenty family members in his war-torn home country. The twenty include his wife, two kids, his parents, a brother (and sister-in-law), two sisters (and two brothers-in-law), and his nieces and nephews, none of whom could participate in economic activities in the war-ruined economy. The bomb attacks destroyed the entire capital city, Sana'a, not to mention many buildings in his immediate neighborhood. Marwin was terrified of being killed by the rebels or hit by one of the random bombings. But he could not leave Yemen right away, because he needed to earn enough money to manage the essential costs and potential dangers that could occur on the road—including multiple airfares, documentation fees, ground transportation, accommodation, food, and covert bribes to the guards at military checkpoints. With a strong mind to leave, Marwin, a former IT worker, had saved some money and sold his car before he departed Yemen with five other male friends who also left families behind in Yemen. After days in transit in

[10] In the article "Korean Ships Made by Migrant Workers," Kim et al. showed that skilled migrant workers play a critical role in maintaining the competitiveness of the Korean shipbuilding industries (2020).

Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Egypt waiting to find the right flights to the next destination, Marwin finally made it to Malaysia and eventually to South Korea. Marwin, who also earned the "humanitarian resident" visa, reflects:

> I knew I would not be admitted as a refugee, since I did not have sufficient evidence to prove political persecution and my story was not dramatic enough. I could appeal and reapply to get my application reviewed again. But I decided not to do it because I have no room to wait for more months to be re-examined. I waited to get the status for five months without working any regular jobs. I had to get legal status immediately and begin to make money so that I could support my family back in Yemen. It does not matter much whether I am accepted as a refugee, because I am relieved not to get deported. I would do the same work regardless of my legal status anyway here in South Korea. There is no chance for me to reunite my family under the current humanitarian visa. I am worried about the situation. I cannot fall asleep without first drinking one bottle of beer. Now even one bottle of soju is not enough to help me fall asleep [laughs]. But I also feel lucky and thankful to be able to work and support my family for the time being.

Marwin's ambivalence about the current situation is not unique to Yemenis. As I mentioned earlier, in the "temporal camp" with humanitarian visas, Yemenis have gotten protection from the ongoing war in their home country, while at the same time, they have been productive, as they are integrated into South Korea's extremely neoliberal labor market. Marwin is also thinking about leaving for another country that can give him freer mobility and wider opportunities, including allowing him to reunite his family.

Despite the South Korean government's neoliberal hospitality, government regulation is tight, as seen in the process to be registered as a legitimate humanitarian visa holder; they first have to pay medical insurance promptly in order to renew their annual visa. The humanitarian residents are free and safe. But they are registered and regulated, not treated as external to the nation-state. The humanitarian resident visa seems to show a hospitality expressed by the South Korean government toward the displaced Yemenis. But their work life is free and extremely flexible; they could choose to work today and choose not to work tomorrow under the temporal camp as they live with an unforeseeable future. As Ramsay showed with the livelihoods of self-reliant refugees in Uganda and Australia, in which protection is intertwined with production (Ramsay 2019), Yemeni humanitarian residents are not aid recipients but self-reliant asylum workers who are able to navigate their own work opportunities and have the chance to move to another country, which may treat them better than South Korea.

Global Traders

Marwin seems satisfied to have a stable job in the Mokpo shipbuilding industry and relieved (and proud) to be able to send money to his family on a regular basis. But some of the Yemeni informants have tried very hard to go beyond working simple and tedious jobs, since they are desperate to start their own business and harness their distinct advantages—such as their Arabic-language skills and international commercial network. Besides 3D labor, global trade seems to be one of the popular career fields for Yemenis. Adnan, in his mid-thirties, is one of the leading figures among Yemenis in South Korea. Since he arrived, he has been running his own business. Adnan's family moved to the United Kingdom when he was seven years old, as his father became a professor there after getting his degree. Adnan had all his schooling in the United Kingdom. After graduating from college, he got a job in an oil company in Yemen. It was a well-paid job involving global multinational firms. When the war broke out, however, he could not keep his job and had to leave Yemen. But he could not go back to the United Kingdom to reunite with his family in time, because his UK visa had expired. Instead, Adnan had to find another route to Malaysia. Adnan's experience is unique in that he stayed in Malaysia for more than three years and actually made decent money there. Granted, he was not permitted

to work in Malaysia, but he was easily able to find under-the-table jobs. Many wealthy Saudis have traveled to Malaysia in order to do things they could not do in their own country. For example, many Saudis want to go to movie theaters and shop around freely. As a fellow Arab, Adnan served them as a tour guide, which netted him quite good money to survive in Malaysia. But in his view, the police corruption was so deep that he did not feel safe living there. Like other Yemenis, he flew directly to Cheju right after he heard about the possibility to do so.

Adnan also applied for refugee status as soon as he got to Cheju Island. But Adnan was one of the few who was denied the chance to stay in South Korea because his case was not "miserable" enough. He has family in the United Kingdom and had a good job in Yemen. He seems to be better off than most Yemenis. His case reviewers thought that he might not deserve to be issued a humanitarian resident visa, let alone refugee status. After his first application to stay in South Korea was turned down, he appealed to get his application re-reviewed. It took at least another six months. At that time, Adnan was dating a Korean woman who supported the refugee settlement process working for a Cheju NGO, and they ended up marrying in 2019. The marriage changed many things. First, Adnan was able to acquire a marriage visa without having to wait for the long refugee review process. After he earned a marriage visa in a couple of months, his job options became wider than those of the humanitarian residents under a G-1 visa.

Thanks to his fluent English, leadership skills, and stable visa status, Adnan spoke to the media regularly as a representative of the community and was prominently featured in a Korean documentary about the Yemenis' struggles in South Korea. And he has built a strong reputation as a kind and capable man who listens to fellow Yemenis' problems and finds wise solutions for them. Most of all, he was able to help many Yemenis open a business and handle the associated legal hassles, because Adnan has been quite successful in navigating the process to run his business—exporting secondhand cars to Arab nations, a trade that is heavily dominated by Arabs living in South Korea. Decent but not pricey South Korean cars are quite appealing to Arab countries, and the demand has been always high. In particular, as the Saudi government began allowing women to drive, demand for secondhand cars in Saudi Arabia spiked. Most of Adnan's clients are based in Saudi Arabia; they give Adnan money to buy good cars from auctions and export these to them. The connections were made through websites, and Adnan has been lucky to be able to build trusting relationships with clients. Adnan takes a commission in the process. The amount of commission varies, but Adnan's total monthly income is usually over US $10,000. Given the lively market and highly lucrative sales, many Arabs, including Yemenis, want to join the field, but foreigners find it hard to enter the trade, given the citizenship requirement and the company ownership with decent property.

The limit is exactly applied to Ghamdan, who also has been working in the secondhand-car business. Ghamdan is a very ambitious, highly educated, and accomplished man in his late thirties with a strong business background from Yemen. From Yemen he has one master's degree in business and another in international development. He also completed another master's degree in NGO studies (taught in English) in South Korea. He is well rounded. His mind is sharp. He is articulate and persuasive. Despite his intellectual engagement with social and global issues, he has found it hard to make ends meet in South Korea. Ghamdan may be the Yemeni struggling the most (out of those whom I met) as he navigates the gap between what he wants to do and what he can do in South Korea. After he gained humanitarian resident visa Ghamdan left Cheju first for a Mokpo shipbuilding company with a majority of Yemeni men. But he was not able to keep that job. Not only was it too physically demanding, but it was also too menial of a job and did not give him a viable future. Ghamdan was not politically engaged in Yemen and did not write about facing political danger in his refugee application either. But since he came to South Korea, Ghamdam has been very active in working with NGOs that deal with refugee issues. While doing so, he was hoping to find any way he could to change his visa status to be able to participate in social activism, as well as to own his own business.

But a G-1 visa does not allow him to run his own business in South Korea, since it is designed only for temporary residence. Since he cannot establish his own company, in order to run his secondhand car business, Ghamdan has had to rely on Koreans or other Yemenis who can lend him their names. Almost half of each sales commission goes to the name lenders. In addition, without owning a company under his own name, he is in a less competitive position to get cars in good condition; he can buy used cars not from the large first-tier auction market but only from the second tier, which sells fewer quality cars. Most of all, he has been socially isolated. As a committed Muslim, he does not want to date Korean women, whom he sees as quite "Westernized." Ghamdan deeply believes that both women and men should avoid sexual relations until they are married. But Korean women or "Westernized" women do not agree with such mores. Thus, Ghamdan thinks marrying a Korean woman for a marriage visa would not be an option. As a single male, he has a hard time finding a date. As an ambitious businessman who had a successful track record but was suddenly ruined by the war in Yemen, he could not achieve his full potential in South Korea. As a graduate student in South Korea, he studied Korean. But he has not been able to improve his language proficiency over time because, without Korean friends, he has few chances to practice. The Covid pandemic worsened his isolation and severely impacted his global business. In order to overcome the obstacles he faced, Ghamdan has been considering moving as an investor to a peaceful Southeast Asian country whose bar to entry is lower than South Korea's. Ghamdan keeps thinking of exiting the temporal camp. He has been protected from the war but is not as productive as he wishes to be. He should help himself in the temporal camp, under the South Korean government's neoliberal hospital.

Conclusion

This paper examines the conceptual shortcomings of the term "refugee" and develops an analysis of differentiated legal and practical categories of displaced people, in particular, by looking at the "humanitarian resident visa" that offers a unique hospitality to the asylum seekers, a hospitality that includes physical protection from the brutality of war and the opportunity to live as a self-reliant worker in a foreign country. I reveal the neoliberal characteristic embedded in the humanitarian resident visa, which has transformed asylum seekers into asylum workers active and free to seek work but limited by "temporal camp" as they wait indeterminately for their destiny. South Korea's "Yemen Incident" also prompts us to rethink the intense contention and competition surrounding the concept of "refugee." The sudden influx of "Yemeni refugees" (who were not actually refugees) exposed the desire of multiple actors in the heated debates between the nation's obligation to become humanitarian as a member of the global refugee regime and the people's refusal to become humanitarian by sharing (or wasting) tax-generated resources with strangers who could potentially become South Korean citizens. When I interviewed South Koreans regarding the Yemenis' refugee issues, one of the interviewees, a small-business owner in his mid-fifties, claimed, "I am a refugee in my own country, since nobody secures my economic life and future." As anthropologists already echoed the fact that this precarity was aggravated by the withdrawal of state protection for "ordinary refugees" (Allison 2016) and the ruination of life by the global economy (Tsing 2015), refugee status is not exceptional but emblematic of the type of global capitalism generating insecurity for citizens around the world (Cabot 2019; Ramsay 2020). The precarity that people face every day in neoliberal global capitalism—whether they are citizens or non-citizens—makes it possible to extend hospitality to strangers only in the form of neoliberal hospitality.

The humanitarian resident visa holders, as neither refugees nor deportees, are organized in and subject to the national order and the market needs under ambiguous terms of acceptance and refusal, inclusion and exclusion, freedom and confinement. However, instead of solely relying on the unreliable neoliberal hospitality, the displaced Yemenis have utilized their potential currency through the dispersal network to move to another

country or to expand their business network as global traders. Moreover, they steadfastly refuse to become refugees—"the pure expression of bare life," in Agamben's words—instead making a great effort to break the temporal trap and occupational limits and opening new frontiers so they could push forward. The observation on the humanitarian resident visa allows us to illuminate the complexity and multiplicity about the kinds of displacement and the aspirations of the displaced. The visa's ambiguity and temporariness helps us to capture the transformation in the livelihood of the "refugees"—as asylum seekers as well as asylum workers who are navigating neoliberal humanitarianism and neoliberal hospitality.

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