

Article

Rupture and shifts in Refugee Norms: Focusing on the civic experience of Yemeni refugees in Jeju in 2018.

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I . Introduction

In 2018, approximately 500 Yemeni refugees arrived in Jeju, igniting controversy in the nation as heterogeneous and unfamiliar beings to the local people. Butler(2015) explains norm as a yardstick and means to produce certain criteria. Norms about "refugees" worked as a set of criteria for South Koreans to read their encounter with the Yemeni refugees according to some yardsticks, producing some kinds of practice and act fit for them and, at the same time, functioning as power to create an encounter in a certain form. Simmel(2005) and Schutz(1972) argue that strangers have a completely different diagram to interpret the world from the old community, thus shaking up the validity of usual ideas. Norms as the old thoughts and interpreting diagrams work on the form of relationship between the Yemenites and the Koreans to be organized and practiced, causing a crack in the established norms of the Korean people. This study sets out to examine the norms that worked on relationships between the Korean people and the Yemeni refugees, cracks to the norms after a real encounter, and changes to those who experienced a crack to their norms. The study will examine the norms that had impacts on those who participated in the activities to help the Yemeni refugees in 2018(hereinafter, activists) and delve into how they worked and caused a crack in an encounter and relation with real refugees and what changes they brought.

2. Operation of Norms

1) Norm of Dispensations

The norms of protecting refugees have been taken for granted at the level of human rights, emphasizing the emotions of sympathy and compassion amid the humanitarian discourse about refugees and being organized in a "non-political form" distant from structural issues including the causes, inequality, and violence of refugees. As they are connected to the casualty/victim discourse, refugees are objectified as bodies that are victimized, suppressed, and in pain(Kim Hyeon-mi, 2020: 293-297). In a relationship based on dispensations, those who gave get to have a moral high ground and control, which led to the formation of a power relation of some sort. Once their moral high ground was established, it was difficult for them to doubt that their goodwill and assistance might not be helpful to those who received it and take them in the same position as themselves. As the power of "dispensation" was combined with the "goodwill" to help refugees, any questions raised about the negative aspect of dispensations felt like an attempt to deny "goodwill." Once they felt their "sincerity" and "goodwill" misunderstood, their emotions would convert into anger and discomfort. Once others become victims, it covers a fact that others can be wrong and pursue their own interests(Viet Thanh Nguyen, 2019).

Activists had an encounter with the Yemenites different from their image of victims, and it gave them a chance to question and contemplate the significance of their supportive activities. The moment it is confirmed that refugees are not completely good and poor victims, the logic to reject refugees emerges that "Fake refugees should be sorted out and excluded." The logic that refugees should have an image required by a society in order to be embraced into it degrades others to a simple and subordinate position opposite to us

with a complicated ego. This norm starts to shake in continuous daily relations. As the image of victims turned out to be an illusion, the Yemenites reemerged as three-dimensional people rather than flat others amid the formation of continuous relations.

2) Norm of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is oriented toward a position that accepts the fact that various types of cultures coexist based on their unique values and meanings and argues that their unique values and lifestyles should be recognized normatively according to the principles of equality and mutual respect (Song Jae-ryong, 2009: 83). This norm worked importantly as a guideline that "The Yemeni culture should be respected as it is" to many people that decided to support the Yemeni refugees. Following many types of conflicts and clashes, however, it became increasingly difficult to interpret the clashes according to the norm of "respect for culture." Witnessing the points in which the Yemenites were different from the image of a good victim, many activists chose to interpret it by saying, "They say that it is how the Arab culture is supposed to be like." The speech, "That's how they act in their own culture. We must respect it" appeared in any incomprehensible and conflicting situations, being repeated endlessly. It was a norm of decontextualized tolerance and coexistence used with the contexts of the Yemeni culture and the Korean culture ignored altogether. The fragmentary understanding of "multiculturalism=awareness of human rights" caused conflicts among those who helped the refugees together. They could not interpret it with their experiences with the Yemenites and thus raised a doubt about the old norm, but the repeating "multiculturalism=awareness of human rights" diagram put some of the activists in worries. These suffering, worries, and self-examination contained possibilities before finding a new path rather than the old norm.

3) Norm of Safety and Security

The norm of safety and security was the essential norm of the discourse that opposed the Yemeni refugees. The cultural characteristics of Yemen were decontextualized with the cultural and historical contexts eliminated and used as proof to emphasize their violence. The right-wing viewpoint of "fake news" nullified many questions raised and new practices on-site and dehistoricized and decontextualized them as fixed beings (Jeon Ui-ryeong, 2020: 386). Some of Jeju women that actually saw the aspects of the Yemenites complained about their similar anxiety. Some of the activists felt fear to see the Yemeni group. They were, however, able to separate their fear from the fact that their fear was caused by a "group of men" rather than a "group of Yemenis" thank to their experiences with getting in contact with them. Ha Neu-reun (2019: 53-54) points out that fear about the acceptance of Yemeni refugees and sexual violence should be recognized politically and that the fear is deceptive. The fear is an old social feeling produced and circulated by sold patriarchy instead of being caused by refugees. Some meetings raised questions about sexual harassment by some of the Yemeni refugees. The activist that organized the meetings understood their sexual harassment cases as the interest and desire for sex of men in their twenties as an "older brother." This culture happens frequently in the culture of Korean men, as well, having a common denominator called patriarchy between Korea and Yemen. There was a need for a process to address the structures and problems of sexual violence in the South Korean society masked by an emphasis on the sexual suppression of Yemeni men before emphasizing it. The man later reflected on his action and contemplated the idea of putting the issue under the spotlight. Making women a sexual object in the group of Korean men is "expected and natural," but it happened in relations with "Yemeni men," which made him objectify how he was. His case shows that looking at familiar things as "something new and strange" is possible in an encounter and relation with others.

3. Cracks in Norms, Possibilities of Changes

1) *Changes of Relations, Efforts, and Responsibilities*

As relations between the Yemenites and the Jeju people continued, cracks started to happen in the norms. The dynamics of a living world made them realize that it was impossible to look at them as a single group and define them with a certain single feature. Forming continuous relations with the Yemenites, the Jeju people inevitably had various thoughts through their encounter with them and kept changing their minds and values about refugees in the process. The activists commonly said that their thoughts of the Yemeni refugees gradually changed. Their relations with the Yemeni refugees started with "feeling pitiful" and "having a viewpoint of dispensations." As their relations continued, they realized that there was more to them. Many of them began their activities to help refugees out of goodwill. Some kind of goodwill may work as a discrimination for some people, but can the goodwill be criticized blindly? Won't it block the possibility of the goodwill, which worked as a discrimination, moving in a different direction? One activist said, "Honestly, I had the most difficult time with the citizens that approached with goodwill rather than the hate groups." It should be interpreted as the absence of contemplation and effort that must accompany the continuance of meetings and relations.

2) *Imagination about Diverse Relations*

Some activists made a real attempt to set their relations with the Yemeni refugees anew at that time. They recollected that they dealt with their relations with the refugees in a too heavy and careful manner and that it made the situation more difficult. One activist called a couple of years in his life when he worked hard on his relations with the refugees and his activities to help them a sort of project. It was his realization about the variability of his relations with the refugees rather than his assumption that his relations with them would last forever throughout his life. Just as he chose the word project to describe his relations with the Yemenites and a period of his life, there is a need to think about the attitude not to take refugee issues as something fixed and put the same weight on them as a lifelong homework or responsibility. A volunteer service program for coast purification was planned and implemented to put the Yemeni refugees that were talked about just as victims in the position of an active doer and create a chance for them to contribute to the society. The program was followed by an education session on April 3 Uprising for the Yemenites and an activity to have them clean the April 3 Uprising relics and pay them wages. These were also attempts to form a new relation with the refugees.

3) *Need for a Public Sphere*

Although the media broadcasted issues related to the Yemeni refugees continuously, there were no public spheres for those who were closely connected to them and formed a relation with them. Some individuals were observed to have their norms shaken and cracked through an encounter with the refugees in the living world, but the interpretation of the experiences was left to the individuals, many of whom had internal conflicts accordingly. Activists raise a need to have time to share and arrange the days of their activities together. It is noteworthy that a panel discussion was held to focus on the social structure of Yemen that drove the refugees to Jeju rather than their individual issue and view the relations between South Korea and Yemen and between the Jeju people and the Yemenites from a new perspective of arms export. One cannot help wondering what would have happened if the diverse confusion and self-examination at the site, on the Jeju Island, and in the cracks of norms were shared within the community more actively.

4. Conclusion

An encounter with others called the Yemeni refugees has left huge traces in the South Korean society. A direct encounter with them offered the involved citizens a chance to reconsider and reflect on the norms of South Korean society. The "principle of dispensations," "multiculturalism" and the "logic of safety and security" worked on their relations with the Yemeni refugees as norms and fixed the relations within a framework and thought of some sort. Heterogeneity derived from an encounter with others, however, started to cause cracks in the old norms. The citizens of Jeju were able to reconsider and reflect on their perceptions through big and small bumps and conflicts in their relations with the Yemeni refugees. It is not easy to take off the norms that have permeated in the body and become familiar, and they got to rethink their existence as all the things that they had thought and acted were shaking. People can pretend not to recognize an experience that they cannot interpret and their connivance of it, but it will surface= and bother "them" eventually. The bothering, however, signifies the possibilities of new perceptions and relations that cannot be talked about with the current norms. A new way of forming a relation from an encounter with new and heterogeneous others will contribute to changes to the society.