Kyopo (Korean-German) Daughters in Germany: The 'Self' as an Analytical Tool

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Abstract:
Germany until recently did not consider itself an immigration country, holding national identity as a privileged identity based upon the notion of descent. This approach excluded Korean migrant workers, while at the same time policies were working towards cultural inclusion. The notion of sanguinity in defining Koreanness corresponds to the notion of Germanness, turning these two groups perceivably mutually exclusive. This paper focusses on applying anthropological approaches to an exploration of identity and integration of 2nd generation female Korean migrants in Germany into larger society, addressing issues of gender and fragmented identities on the part of the researcher and the researched. As in this case the researcher being of mixed ethnicity does not posit her within either of two starkly differentiated groups, it aims to explain the interplay of self-perception and reflection of identities as an analytical tool in order to understand perceived identities, using the person and the body of the researcher as a lens.

Keywords: Germany, Korea, National Identity, Immigration, Halfies, Embodiment, Women

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Germany until recently did not consider itself an immigration country, holding national identity as a privileged identity based upon the notion of descent, as consolidated in immigration and naturalization laws. This approach excluded Korean migrant workers, while at the same time policies were working towards cultural inclusion. The notion of sanguinity in defining Koreanness corresponds to the notion of Germanness, turning these two groups perceivably mutually exclusive. Applying anthropological approaches to an exploration of identity and integration of 2nd generation female Korean migrants –the *kyopo* daughters of the title- in Germany into larger society, one must address issues of gender and fragmented identities on the part of the researcher and the researched. (*Kyopo* incidentally, meaning 'Korean living in a foreign country' is the chosen name the 2nd generation has given itself.)

As in this case the researcher being of mixed ethnicity does not posit her within either of two starkly differentiated groups, it aims to explain the interplay of self-perception and reflection of identities as an analytical tool in order to understand perceived identities, using the person of the researcher as a lens.

Germany boasts the largest Korean minority in Europe. Numbering roughly 32.000 people it's not a very substantial minority and much less heard of, unlike the Turkish minority, which frequently is a focal point of public concern and debate. The Federal Republic of Germany stopped the immigration of foreign workers in 1974, by which time there was already a considerable Turkish minority. Naturalization laws until recently were quite strict, based on the notion of descent. The belief that as 'guests' foreign labour migrants would eventually return 'home' effectively created a two-tiered society as through legal regulations the 'imported' force was separated from the host-society, which moreover implied that they were supposed to maintain a distinct cultural and ethnic identity (McNeill, 1986). The FRG's policy on migration has been dominated by two principles: 1) migration policy as pure labour market policy and thus dependent upon the economic situation of the Federal Republic; and 2) the Federal Republic is *not* an immigration country (Oepen, 1984).

According to Ang (2003) identity is the basis for social order. National identity -as opposed to other identities- has received its superior status from the political connotations it bears; it is intrinsically linked to the nation-state and as such much more politicised, yet at the same time it has high emotional properties. Today's political world system is based upon nations- the nation amongst nations as a spatially finite category, each defined in the first place

by a set of clear-cut and internationally recognised borders (Smith, 1998:95). However though common perceptions may regard nations as 'natural' the construction of the nation as a theoretical concept now used widely in the description of a certain type of organisation must be regarded within specific historical contexts to understand the implications of the word 'nation' when used in every-day discourse.

The idea of defining national identity through opposing it with 'the other' is consolidated in the introduction of ID cards and passports. This separates the national from the alien (Soysal, 1994), stressing not only the rights and obligations of the individual national and therefore creating a boundary between them and those that do not share those rights and obligations, but also stressing the ethnic unity of the nation and a shared belief in 'blood-relatedness' (Jager, 2003), which outlines the difficulty in the negotiation of identity for the children of Korean immigrants in Germany.

Thus the concept of ethnic unity, important as it is for the understanding of national identity, is one that directly influences discourses on women and the nation. For Sluga the changing conception of gendered bodies (1989, p103) is at the core of the initial exclusion of women from national citizenship.

Sluga argues that not only the family but also the body is intrinsically linked to the way national communities and national selves are imagined (1989, p103). The gender difference, grounded in sexual difference, justifies the exclusion from women from universal rights and furthers the common acceptance of the masculine body as the social and anatomical norm. Men's bodies equip them naturally to be both defenders of the national realm and invaders of other nations, whereas women have no "natural" affinity with the nation because of the representation of their bodies as unbounded defenceless territories.

In Germany, while I was growing up for many years the debate on §218 of the '*Strafgesetzbuch*' (StGB) detailing the punishment and effectively prohibiting abortion was raging. A recent change is now allowing abortion on the condition of providing an attestation of prior professional advice, stating that a continuation of the pregnancy would not be within reason (*zumutbar*) for the woman. Thus it is not a woman's choice, but her choice must be checked by others before allowing an abortion, effectively devaluing a woman's free will and right to choose.

At the same time, while the state insists on controlling the fertility of women, Germany still officially demands national service of men. Until very recently women were excluded from military service, allowed only in medical professions and as musicians. Women are central in their symbolic value to the understanding of the nation as a family of sanguines. The importance of 'blood-relatedness' is one that directly influences discourses on women and the nation, which usually entail a portrayal of women as second-class citizens, being devalued for their passivity and at the same time extraordinarily valued as motherly symbols of the nation and as 'bearers of the nation' (Yuval-Davies, 1996).

Understandings of identity, particularly national identity, in both Germany and Korea place a very strong emphasis on culture and language, creating a difficulty in negotiating the hybridity of different identities that appear mutually exclusive when linked through blood to one nation and through culture and language to another. The Korean nation is constituted in a narrative centring upon blood and soil (Kim, 1998), evoking very strong emotional responses. Korean women are symbolic of the nation, embodying the 'good wife, wise mother' (Kendall, 1996) ideal, which already implies the bearer of the nation and thus the purity of blood, which will guarantee that Koreans are indeed of one blood. This concept personifies the ideals of self-sacrifice, decorum and passiveness, meaning that a woman will give up her own aspirations for her family and in return will be blessed with a husband that will provide for her.

Thus a good Confucian woman is always subservient and self-sacrificing, leaving men to take the active role, while women suffer in silence (Kim, 1998). The construction of masculinity is very much dependent on the construction of femininity, being nearly the exact opposite. Financial power is the main masculine trait that is viable as a man possessed of this will be attractive for a woman and will gain status within society (Kim, 1998). This construction of women reflects the construction of Korean women within the context of national identity, stressing the symbolic importance of women as 'mothers' while valuing women only in relation to men.

In light of this, the construction of national identity and gender both in Korea and Germany can shed light upon the difficulties migrants encounter in their host societies. When looking at Korean and German discourses on national identity the startling similarity and therefore mutual exclusivity of the two concepts becomes clearer.

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It's the notion of purity of blood that made my Mother commit treason in the autumn of 1977. The outcome of that treason is I. My past and self-perception are relevant insofar as it will explain an initial interest, but it is also necessary to comprehend the manner in which I, as the fieldworker, was received and re-contextualised. All ethnographers are after all positioned subjects, their position being defined by certain factors, such as age, gender, outsider status, lived experience and so on. Fieldwork is intersubjective, making it pivotal to gain an understanding of the 'unnamed fieldworker', who to the 'unnamed informants' after all is as real a person as one to the other.

Contextualising this kind of research one must also look at the construction of national identity, gender and 'otherness' both in Germany and Korea. The striking similarities between both countries in the construction of national identity, gender and 'otherness' must be contextualised within a certain theoretical framework that will help understand the practical implications of every-day discourse upon migration and identity within Germany, which in turn is crucial for my analysis.

Equally important are the historical context of migration to Germany and the history of migrants within Germany, regardless of nationality to understand the different workings of the current discourse, contextualising the specifics of Korean migration. Some of these debates have far-reaching consequences for the second generation not only in terms of social integration, but also in legal terms differentiating between children of migrants and the migrants themselves quite sharply.

My Mother-like most other Korean women in present-day Germany- was one of the many nurses that came to the Federal Republic of Germany [FRG henceforth] in the late sixties and early seventies. The comparatively small number of Koreans migrating to Germany began their influx in 1970 after a bilateral agreement between South Korea ['Korea' henceforth] and the FRG (Booth, 1992, p110). The agreement intended to recruit both men and women for work in the mining area and as hospital staff respectively.

My Mother's 'treason' began when she met a German man and ended with her marrying him, having two children and moving to a tiny, strictly Catholic village close to the French border in Germany, where for the longest time my older brother, my Mother and I were the 'local ethnic minority'.

I am "Hon-Hyol-Ah"- the three syllables mean 'mix', 'blood' and 'child' in Korean. It means that I am the daughter of two ethnically different parents, and therefore of 'mixed blood' as the Koreans put it. My passport says that I am German, I have grown up in Germany, I went to German schools, all my friends were German and I lived there until I went to university in the UK aged 19. My contact with Korean culture has always been rather limited to food and two childhood visits, which due to a lack of language facilities did nothing to bring me closer to Korean culture.

The living circumstances in a small village in the German countryside rendered contact with Korean culture and even family marginal. Relatives that came to visit expressed their shock to my mother at her daughter's lack of respect for elders and general lack of demureness, so my mother would try to explain to me 'how things are done in Korea' and 'do try at least while they're here', but save a deeply ingrained aversion against getting tanned ('it's a sign of being lower class, do wear a hat, dear!') I have been resistant, finding Korean manners of very little use in my every-day environment and socialisation.

It was my Mother who decided that neither my older brother nor I should be bilingual, she never taught us Korean, wanting both of us to speak German fluently and to the highest grammatical standard so that we would excel in school. Korea always remained something in the periphery of my thinking, when I always considered myself merely German. I had no community to 'return' to, so the choice for a fieldsite fell on Frankfurt am Main. It currently hosts the largest part of the Korean migrants, numbering approximately 5000 people.

Hastrup (1992) points out that the field is not "the unmediated world of the 'others', but the world between ourselves and the others", s the encounters within the field as part of a wider discourse depend very intimately upon the person of the fieldworker. 'Othering' is part of the anthropological practice; however, the identity of others is relational (Hastrup, 1992, p121), depending very much on the fieldworker herself, her mode of access and her positionality in the field as well as the way she is perceived.

It appears that when the anthropologist goes home to do fieldwork, it becomes difficult to separate the difference of the world out there, the field, from the normality of home (Okely, 1996). The assumption therefore could be made that an 'inside ethnographer' will never be able to conform to the principles of the rite of passage that fieldwork is, as the insider can never be expected to be 'objective and scientific', and the process of studying an alien culture is missing.

Influenced by the relationship with one's own group, the anthropologist apparently cannot distance herself from her group and yet has already done so by choosing to study it (Hovland, 2003, p1).

It was one of the first things however I was confronted with by my informants- being told that my Mother had committed treason in marrying an outsider, a German. One of my main initial troubles was the notion that some informants had, assuming that I was looking 'for my roots' or indulging in a bit of personal navel-gazing. Several of my informants asked me outright if I was looking for my identity in this research, and regarded me with suspicion.

The notions of purity of blood with its cultural implications and the fact that I am not fully Korean within that framework positioned me as an 'outsider' to begin with. I constituted a minority- whose very existence due to ideologies on purity of blood was not always welcomed- making my 'insider' status highly questionable due to my only having a Korean mother.

One of my informants said that 'halfies' are different from *kyopos* who have two Korean parents insofar as they are 'more German'. While most of this discourse was framed in terms of blood and belonging, her further comments are telling about the initial troubles I encountered. 'Halfies,' Chrystal said, 'are raised more liberal than *kyopos* and experience a greater distance to Korean culture, so while there are shared experiences and common understandings, the fact that you never know how far they'll understand you, distances halfies from *kyopos*!' She continued to tell me that in her experience 'halfies' however sooner or later are drawn to Korean culture, even if they haven't had much contact with it- like me.

Chrystal was not the only one sharing this sentiment, initially 'othering' me as the outsider. The notion that I was looking for my own identity in the guise of scientific research, influenced the way in which I conducted interviews, trying to convince my interview partners that I was indeed conducting scientific research to circumvent the prejudice that I was 'looking for my roots'. The latter is regarded with derision as a juvenile activity of identity crisis.

'Halfies' are considered as having had it easier both at home as in larger German society. Most of my informants pointed out to me that having Korean parents meant a much stricter upbringing with a stress on filial obedience. A recurring theme amongst *kyopo* women was the objections on part of parents towards German boyfriends. 'What will I do if you bring a yellow-

hair home?' one of my informants quoted her parents, explaining why she would rather keep a non-Korean boyfriend secret to save herself trouble and remain within keeping of filial obedience.

Generally it was assumed that 'halfies' had it easier in integrating into the larger German society, leading to a perceived lack of understanding for *kyopos* on the halfie's side. Thus the way my informants constructed me, initially made me abandon such plans as attending Korean lessons to evade the notion of searching for my roots and quite often positioning myself as 'purely German'.

At the same time being a 'halfie' provided me with a privileged position in gaining access since it was expected of me to be 'drawn to Korean culture', giving me the opportunity to oscillate between the 'insider' and 'outsider' position. Shared experiences allowed me an understanding of the 'inside', while on the other hand providing me with an opportunity to ask questions about the seemingly self-evident.

One of the focal points of identification being Korean food, my knowledge of various dishes such as *Kim-Bab*, and the ability to reminisce about it, is a small example on how a certain cultural proficiency facilitated bridging the distance between *kyopos* and halfies that Chrystal was talking about. At the same time repeatedly it helped professing ignorance, which was expected due to the already mentioned distance to Korean culture, in asking questions about the self-evident, such as 'yes, but what would be so bad about bringing a yellow-hair home?'

What I am trying to say is that my mere presence highlighted an ongoing discourse. It is a truism that you know about yourself via the way others see you. However in the same vein you learn about others via the way they see you. My Korean connection provided me with a source of access, while at the same time my 'halfie status' kept me in liminality to a certain degree, allowing me to examine notions of Koreanness and Germanness. In a manner of speaking, harking back to the notion that my Mother betrayed her nation by marrying a German, I am the embodied conflict of identity negotiation.

The perception of my being a 'halfie' in conversations brought out issues of what it means to be German or Korean, problematizing integration. One of my informants, Tim said that as a 'halfie' "you are exotic enough to attract attention, but not too outlandish", implying

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once more that 'halfies' have it easier integrating. Turning this around it might roughly read as: You can integrate easily so therefore you are a 'more German', I can't so therefore I am Korean.

In this sense the categorization that I was subjected to served as a means of reflection of what it means to be Korean in Germany. Germany -until a recent epiphany- did not consider itself an immigration country, holding national identity as a privileged identity based upon the notion of descent, which was consolidated in immigration and naturalization laws. The belief that as 'guests' foreign labour migrants would eventually return 'home' effectively created a two-tiered society as through legal regulations the 'imported' force was separated from the host-society, which moreover implied that they were supposed to maintain a distinct cultural and ethnic identity (McNeill, 1986).

This approach excluded Korean migrant workers, while at the same time policies were working towards cultural inclusion. The notion of sanguinity in defining Koreanness corresponds to the notion of Germanness, turning these two groups perceivably mutually exclusive. This creates difficulty in negotiating the hybridity of different identities that appear mutually exclusive when linked through blood to one nation and through culture and language to another.

I (and others like me- I'm certainly not the only halfie) are situated in the gap between these apparently exclusive identities. If the body can be treated as a memory, then my appearance alone and general demeanour not only served as a reminder to those around of my difference, but also to myself. In my fieldwork my being perceived as a 'halfie', with all the attached stereotypes about what it is to be a 'halfie' served as a focal point for discussion in constructing *kyopo* identity. There simply would have been no discussion on the construction of 'halfies' if there were no difficulties with integration within a wider German society.

I never considered myself a 'halfie' until the notion became an important category within my research, situating me within particular circumstances between exclusive identities. My own identity in this sense became a tool of analysis, allowing me to examine on-going debates on identity.

The interplay between my changing self-perception and the perception my informants had of me, reflecting back on me, can be seen as a metaphor for the way in which 'outsiders' are constructed and construct themselves in Germany. The construction of identity is an ongoing interplay, making identities are situational, depending on self-perception as well as outside

reflection or as my 'traitorous' Mother put it: 'There are no foreigners in Germany, they are made here!'

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