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## **Reconstructing Ideas of a Nation: From Ethnic Nationalism to Anti-Multiculturalism Through Migrations in South Korea**

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FINAL THESIS

**“Reconstructing Ideas of a Nation:  
From Ethnic Nationalism to Anti-Multiculturalism Through Migrations in  
South Korea”**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis' aim is to identify the relationship between migrations to South Korea and the ideological shift from ethnonationalism to anti-multiculturalism. Through the use of thematic analysis, conducted on a specific set on newspaper articles, this research examines the roles of migrants in causing a fundamental demographic change in the country and the consequences that this has generated as expressed by the public opinion and the government's attitude. South Korea has for a long time been regarded as a mono-ethnic country and this idea has been consolidated in its nationalistic ideology, together with the doctrine of self-reliance and the aspirations to attain economic development. The findings of the analysis show that, although the stabilization of the presence of migrants in Korean society has helped to partially set aside the ethnic component of Korean nationalism, the lack of laws to regulate their entry and permanence has hindered their integration. This, combined with the deep-rooted ideas of white supremacy and GDP discrimination, has generated antipathy towards most migrants, which materializes in the ideal of anti-multiculturalism, understood as a rejection of the integration and expression of foreign cultures.

## **KEY WORDS**

Nationalism, Immigration, Multiculturalism, South Korea

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## INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century, South Korea has gone through a painful history of struggles for independence, efforts towards economic development, demographic changes and democratization. Therefore, it offers a very useful context for the subjects of this thesis: nationalism, migration and multiculturalism, and the respective sub-themes of ethnic nationalism, the role of migrants in society and anti-multiculturalism.

Nationalism served the newly divided nation in its struggle to recover from the rubbles of the Korean War and build itself up. The celebrated image of Korean people as resilient and willing to sacrifice a lot for the future of their country is very much tied to that period of history and this nationwide unity and joint commitment is often used to explain the so-called Miracle of the Han River, that is the incredibly rapid economic development of the country<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, ethnic nationalism<sup>2</sup> is related to the need for self-determination<sup>3</sup>. In fact, the ethnic connotation of the concept of national unity used to drive these development efforts can be connected to the fact that, for most of its history, Korea has been a largely mono-ethnic country<sup>4</sup>. However, an economically succeeding state, with an exponential growth such as the one South Korea had in the last five decades, would not be able to maintain its good performance without help from the outside. In fact, the monolithic aspect of the South Korean population's demographic composition started to inevitably and irrevocably change with the advent of the migration waves caused by many push-and-pull economic and political factors. They transformed South Korea into a migrant-receiving country<sup>5</sup> and inspired its path towards globalization and multiculturalism. However, the opening of the country in this direction has not brought about the internal changes necessary to allow the integration and free cultural expression of residing foreigners. This causes them to be subject to various types of discrimination even today, as also declared by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (국가인권위원회)<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, in order to understand what the ideological significance of these social changes has been, it is useful to analyze the most recent result of the relationship between ethnic nationalism and migrations, namely the transition to anti-multiculturalism. While the practical differences between ethnic

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<sup>1</sup> Gil-Soo Han, *Calculated Nationalism in Contemporary South Korea Movements for Political and Economic Democratization in the 21st Century* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 132.

<sup>2</sup> Even though Connor's work was the first theorization of the concept and first coin of the word, according to Ma (1990) the most satisfactory model has been given by Smith, that referred to it as 'ethnic nationalism'. Therefore, this thesis refers to it with the latter term.

<sup>3</sup> Walker Connor, "The Politics of Ethnonationalism," *Journal of International Affairs* 27, no. 1 (1973).

<sup>4</sup> Yoon-Kyung Lee, "Migration, Migrants, and Contested Ethno-Nationalism in Korea," *Critical Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (August 2009), 363-4.

<sup>5</sup> Dong-Sung Kong, Ki-Woong Yoon, and So-Yung Yu, "The Social Dimensions of Immigration in Korea," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 40, no. 2 (May 2010), 255.

<sup>6</sup> "Accepting Racial Hierarchy without Question Is Racial Discrimination," National Human Rights Commission of Korea, April 24, 2020.

nationalism and anti-multiculturalism might not be easy to detect, the ideological significance of this shift is relevant to understand today's South Korean society and its relationship with the foreigners who are part of it.

For this reason, this thesis presents the results of a thematic analysis conducted on a set of newspaper articles, published between 1960 and today and collected in the online databases Naver News Library and Big Kinds. In order to demonstrate that the aforementioned shift from ethnic nationalism to anti-multiculturalism has taken place in South Korea as a result of the arrival and settlement of migrants in the country, this research focuses on analyzing the use of three key terms within this literary corpus: nationalism, foreign workers and multiculturalism. As it will be explained, the choice of focusing on migrant workers as an exemplifying category of migrants is justified by the fundamental role they have played in shaping the relationship between them and the Korean society.

After presenting the relevant literature on the three main topics of this research in Section I, Section II will explain in detail how the analysis has been conducted, giving reasoning for the selected data and method. After that, the findings of the analysis will be displayed in Section III and discussed in Section IV, with references to the contents of the literature review. Finally, all the contents of this research will be summarized in the Conclusion.

## **SECTION I – LITERATURE REVIEW**

Starting from the theme of this research, the three main topics to analyze in the literature review are nationalism, migration and multiculturalism. To situate them within the South Korean context, a review on the respective sub-themes of ethnic nationalism, immigrants and their role in the host society and anti-multiculturalism will follow. Considering that these themes have been and still are subject of the study of many scholars, the focus will be on the emerging discussions around them. They will be taken into consideration as a thematic framework for the research that this thesis sets out to present.

In order to obviate the improbability of finding a univocal definition of nationalism, also due to space constraints it will be sufficient to present some of the ideas proposed in the literature pertinent to the Korean context. For example, Han<sup>7</sup> regards nationalism as a social movement and an ideology in that it is both represented by the nationalistic practices and discourses and the reasoning behind them. Nationalistic ideas and acts follow the pursuit of the nation's independence, self-reliance, integration and glory<sup>8</sup> or, more generally, the nation's best interests. While scholars have identified

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<sup>7</sup> Han, *Calculated Nationalism in Contemporary South Korea Movements for Political and Economic Democratization in the 21st Century*, 19-26.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

different strands of nationalism in the different phases of the modern history of South Korea, some are more relevant to understanding the correlation of the discourses on migration and multiculturalism. Firstly, Han<sup>9</sup> makes a fundamental distinction between elite, top-down nationalism and everyday, bottom-up nationalism. The two sides are described as dialectically intertwined<sup>10</sup>, in the sense that it is as relevant that the ruling classes act and direct the masses in favor of the national interest as it is that the masses continuously redefine what that interest is, what is the nation that the ruling classes must serve and how they should do it. To this regard, state nationalism and grassroots nationalism are also relevant strands to take into consideration, as done by Han<sup>11</sup>. In fact, these two concepts more clearly embody the complementary dynamics between societal structure and civil agency and explain this aforementioned top-down and bottom-up contrasting relationship. This dynamic is to be understood in terms of the communion between imposed political and institutional framework and the exercise of freedom to determine and change it that belongs to the citizens that live within it. In this sense, this is crucial to understand the role of immigrants in the South Korean society, which will be addressed below. The theme of ethnic nationalism, among the evolving discussions about nationalism, offers a particularly interesting perspective for this thesis' purpose. The correct term to refer to this concept has been object of debates and, as one can imagine, also its definition. Smith identifies ethnic nationalism as "nationalism with nations" that he characterized through specific features (e.g., cultural differentiae, territorial contiguity, group sentiment, etc.)<sup>12</sup>. Other scholars' definitions revolve around the idea of it being nationalism with ethnic characteristics and focus more on determining the distinctive features of ethnicities and nations<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, Brown<sup>14</sup> defines it as 'a sense of community that focuses on belief in myths of common ancestry, and on the perception that these myths are validated by contemporary similarities of physiognomy, language or religion'. This is a particularly interesting take to consider when discussing South Korea, a country where ethnic homogeneity has been taught and considered as a de facto<sup>15</sup>, so much that it has largely shaped the country's ideas of nation and nationalism. The myth of the 'one ethnicity in one country' was used to create a common spirit of resolution to re-build the country after the Japanese occupation; it was a major argument in favor of reunification with the North during the protests of the 1960s and 70s and,

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<sup>9</sup> Han, *Calculated Nationalism in Contemporary South Korea Movements for Political and Economic Democratization in the 21st Century*, 28-38.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-43.

<sup>12</sup> Shu-Yun Ma, "Ethnonationalism, Ethnic Nationalism, and Mini-nationalism: A Comparison of Connor, Smith and Snyder," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13, no. 4 (October 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Walker Connor, "The Politics of Ethnonationalism," *Journal of International Affairs* 27, no. 1 (1973).

<sup>14</sup> Emma Campbell, "The End of Ethnic Nationalism? Changing Conceptions of National Identity and Belonging among Young South Koreans," *Nations and Nationalism* 21, no. 3 (June 22, 2015), 486.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 483; Jin-Hee Kim and Hae-Eun Jeon, "Anti-Multiculturalism and the Future Direction of Multicultural Education in South Korea," *Curriculum Perspectives* 37, no. 2 (September 25, 2017), 182.

as such, it has been going through a great deal of change<sup>16</sup>. These practices entail exclusion, in that they presuppose the existence of those who belong to the ethnos and those who do not. In identifying the strands and working of nationalism in South Korea, Han parallels ethnic nationalism in opposition to calculated nationalism and globalized cultural nationalism<sup>17</sup>. This more recently affirmed type of nationalism can be regarded as more inclusive because, while still solely serving the best interest of the nation, it widens the limits of who can belong to it. Globalized cultural nationalism questions the validity of ethnicity as the sole determinant of belonging to the nation and bases its ideas on “the concepts of modernity, cosmopolitanism and status”<sup>18</sup>. Within the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to notice that this kind of open nationalism was called for by South Koreans themselves once they recognized that ethnic nationalism as an ideology was “outdated and irrelevant”<sup>19</sup> in the context of their non-monoethnic-anymore country. Therefore, this widespread decision to distance themselves from the ethnic connotation of nationalism marked a crucial conclusion that many South Koreans reached. It shows the realization that it is preferable for the state to adopt a more open approach to the pursuit of national interest (also embracing a broader definition of who is part of the nation) to be able “to overcome the problems resulting from divided Korea, millions of Korean diaspora overseas, and newly settled Koreans”<sup>20</sup>. The debunking of the myth of South Korea's mono-ethnicity has been accepted as a matter of fact thanks to two particular long-range historical dynamics. The first is the stabilized separation from North Korea. After more than 70 years since the wound inflicted on the peninsula along the 38th parallel, following multiple crises, the economic boom and the transformations brought about by modernization, despite the long ancient history that unites them, many South Koreans do not feel a strong identification with their co-ethnics in the North anymore and do not wish the government to push for a reunification or an annexation<sup>21</sup>. This can be seen as a first sign that ethnicity has been starting to mean less than other factors in nationalistic discourses, not least the economic one, as can be seen from the extensively adopted cost-benefit approach to reunification<sup>22</sup>. One way the separation from North Korea is relevant to national identification of

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<sup>16</sup> Lee, “Migration, Migrants, and Contested Ethno-Nationalism in Korea,” 377-8; Campbell, “The End of Ethnic Nationalism? Changing Conceptions of National Identity and Belonging among Young South Koreans,” 486.

<sup>17</sup> Han, *Calculated Nationalism in Contemporary South Korea Movements for Political and Economic Democratization in the 21st Century*, 45-6.

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, “The End of Ethnic Nationalism? Changing Conceptions of National Identity and Belonging among Young South Koreans,” 484.

<sup>19</sup> Han, *Calculated Nationalism in Contemporary South Korea Movements for Political and Economic Democratization in the 21st Century*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 157; Campbell, “The End of Ethnic Nationalism? Changing Conceptions of National Identity and Belonging among Young South Koreans,” 487; Timothy C. Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2021), 201.

<sup>22</sup> Han, *Calculated Nationalism in Contemporary South Korea Movements for Political and Economic Democratization in the 21st Century*, 157.



citizenship is that a nation is continuously re-built by its members based on shared traits but even more by shared experiences<sup>23</sup>, and that has definitely been lacking between the two parts of the Korean peninsula due to the long-lasting tensions.

While this separation was being consolidated, a different category of people began living side by side with South Koreans consistently starting around the 1980s, and that is migrants. Therefore, the second, more relevant influence on this decline of ethnic nationalism came from migration. The topic of migration to and from South Korea has been addressed extensively in the literature, especially since the country has transformed into a “country of immigrants”<sup>24</sup>, especially changing from being a labor-exporting to a labor-importing country<sup>25</sup>. While continuing walking down the line that connects the theme of migrations to the ones of ethno-nationalism and multiculturalism, which will be discussed below, it is useful to focus on who the protagonists of these immigration waves are. There are macro categories of migrants that are most usually identified in the literature, and they play different but relevant roles in their integration and legislation in South Korea. The three largest categories of immigrants are marriage migrants, foreign workers, and foreign ethnic Koreans<sup>26</sup>. Despite the strict anti-immigration rules imposed by South Korea in the name of those nationalist ideals which tended towards national independence and self-reliance, these people in particular managed to settle in the country being accepted by it to some degree, above all, however, for reasons of convenience. What Samers refers to as a “neoliberal or neo-Schumpeterian” preference well explains this dynamic of convenience: to pursue the best interests of the state, the government slightly modified its exclusivist and anti-immigration views to make up for specific national shortcomings by allowing these categories in particular (under very unjust conditions) to reside in the South Korean territory<sup>27</sup>. The problems they were called upon to “solve” were mainly the inability of Korean men residing in rural areas to find wives, the lack of manpower<sup>28</sup>, especially unskilled, and the demographic collapse<sup>29</sup>. Related literature delves in detail into the stories of these people and the push-and-pull factors that led to their migration; here, however, it is more useful to focus on the active and passive role that they had and still have in their hosting country, as it is fundamental for understanding the transition from ethnonationalist to multicultural policies. On one hand, foreign

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<sup>23</sup> Campbell, “The End of Ethnic Nationalism? Changing Conceptions of National Identity and Belonging among Young South Koreans,” 486.

<sup>24</sup> Steven Denney and Christopher Green. “Who Should Be Admitted? Conjoint Analysis of South Korean Attitudes toward Immigrants.” *Ethnicities* 21, no. 1 (April 19, 2020): 121.

<sup>25</sup> Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea*, 61.

<sup>26</sup> Dong-Sung Kong, Ki-Woong Yoon, and So-Yung Yu, “The Social Dimensions of Immigration in Korea,” 254-64.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Samers and Jens Rydgren, “The Regulation of Migration, Integration, and of Multiculturalism in Twenty-First-Century France,” *Citizenship and Belonging in France and North America*, 2020, 59.

<sup>28</sup> Seo-Hyun Park, “Between Globalization and Nationalism: The Politics of Immigration in South Korea,” *Asian Perspective* 41, no. 3 (September 2017): 380.

<sup>29</sup> Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea*, 128-9.

workers have actively participated in pushing for improvements of legislation and migrants' rights with peaceful protests and in collaboration with civic organizations and NGOs<sup>30</sup>. Although the legislation that protects and regulates them and their entry, stay and departure still has large space for advancement even now, there have been vast improvements. Some of this helped guaranteeing migrant workers their rights and the possibility to reside and work in the country for a longer period, which allows them to actually benefit from it<sup>31</sup>. These mark the need for improvements to guarantee them full liberties as is expected from a democratic country with a liberal economy like South Korea's. On the other hand, marriage migrants, who were mostly women from China or South-East Asia at the beginning of the migration waves, have also brought significant changes to their lives as immigrants in the country, challenging patriarchal canons and redefining their presence and their role within society<sup>32</sup>. Over the last few decades, most immigrants in South Korea have had to work against the above mentioned neo-Schumpeterian attitudes and determinants that, behind a facade of liberalism, openness and acceptance, hide a series of dangerous discriminations that do not regard solely the decision on who can enter the country or not, but also on who is guaranteed fundamental rights and possibly permanent settlement once inside<sup>33</sup>. According to Kim and Jeon, the matter of policy discrimination in these terms develops along two currents: white supremacy and GDP discrimination<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, marriage migrants and foreign workers have actively (with protests and formal requests) and passively (with their welcomed or not de facto presence in the country) managed to bring about change for themselves and other immigrants, especially by leveraging South Korea's goals toward reaching global standards on the matter of human rights<sup>35</sup>. In fact, South Korea has already been internationally called upon several times to make it urgent for the country to achieve equal opportunities and rights for immigrants, as well as elimination of the ethno-nationalist and discriminatory tendencies of its policies<sup>36</sup>. This argument is particularly relevant since South Korea is a nation that takes particular interest in making a good impression on the international level and which has been and still is working hard to reach the (neoliberal) globalization standards of the major world powers<sup>37</sup>. Leveraging the backwardness of the right-protecting policies and system is a very

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<sup>30</sup> Julia Jiwon Shin, "The Transnationality of Culture: Policy Implications for the Integration of Migrants in South Korea," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 21, no. 2 (June 2012), 186.

<sup>31</sup> Park, "Between Globalization and Nationalism: The Politics of Immigration in South Korea," 389-90.

<sup>32</sup> Hyun-Joo Jung, "Constructing Scales and Renegotiating Identities: Women Marriage Migrants in South Korea," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 21, no. 2 (June 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Dong-Hoon Seol, "The Citizenship of Foreign Workers in South Korea," *Citizenship Studies* 16, no. 1 (February 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Jin-Hee Kim and Hae-Eun Jeon, "Anti-Multiculturalism and the Future Direction of Multicultural Education in South Korea," *Curriculum Perspectives* 37, no. 2 (September 25, 2017), 182-3.

<sup>35</sup> Park, "Between Globalization and Nationalism: The Politics of Immigration in South Korea," 383.

<sup>36</sup> Kim and Jeon, "Anti-Multiculturalism and the Future Direction of Multicultural Education in South Korea," 182.

<sup>37</sup> Park, "Between Globalization and Nationalism: The Politics of Immigration in South Korea," 384.

effective way of using the national globalization aspirations. It has been utilized by immigrants themselves but also especially by younger generations of Koreans, who get to come more and more in contact with everything outside of Korea and who, consequently, have interiorized different conceptions of citizenship<sup>38</sup>, universality of rights and transnationalism<sup>39</sup>. Thus, the literature presents an ideological opposition that can be delineated in this way: state developmentalism, which exploits migrants and tends, in the name of the country's progress, towards the sacrifice of their interests and rights, and ethnic nationalism, which would like to exclude individuals on an ethnic-racial basis, directly oppose the democratic and globalized ideas and intents of some Korean citizens and the efforts of migrants for the recognition of their own rights. The position adopted by the Korean government in response to this conflict of interest is of questionable effectiveness. What many scholars<sup>40</sup> agree on is the inadequacy of the assimilatory policies and the expectations of assimilation and performance placed on migrants that represented the government's attempt to please both sides. This intent is interpreted as a desire to vaguely broaden the concept of *uri nara* (our country), i.e. who the country belongs to and who belongs to it. However, people who belong to the (well-selected) categories of foreigners that would be included have the duty to maximize their contribution to the host society<sup>41</sup> and at the same time to internalize and present Korean cultural traits<sup>42</sup>. While the departure from the ethnocentric ideals is in itself a big step towards the elimination of racial discrimination in South Korea, these policies show a clear failure that not even the de facto demographic change brought about by the presence of foreigners in the territory has been able to counteract. What is visible as a result is a new openness towards the multiethnicity of the state but against its multiculturalism.

As presented by Lim, multiculturalism as a discourse is a criticism of the infringement of rights; as a state policy it is the recognition of minorities and the effort to guarantee their well-being; and in itself represents the need and the attempt to create new models of citizenship<sup>43</sup>. Moreover, multiculturalism is to be understood as the recognized presence of ethnic groups distinguished by specific cultural characteristics in the same national territory<sup>44</sup>. For this presence to be official and

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<sup>38</sup> Campbell, "The End of Ethnic Nationalism? Changing Conceptions of National Identity and Belonging among Young South Koreans," 492.

<sup>39</sup> Han, *Calculated Nationalism in Contemporary South Korea Movements for Political and Economic Democratization in the 21st Century*, 46.

<sup>40</sup> See for example Campbell (2015), Kim and Jeon (2017), Lee (2016) and Lim (2009).

<sup>41</sup> Campbell, "The End of Ethnic Nationalism? Changing Conceptions of National Identity and Belonging among Young South Koreans," 494.

<sup>42</sup> Yong-Seung Lee, "Multiculturalism and Anti-Multiculturalism Phenomena in South Korea," *The Gakushuin Journal of International Studies* 3 (March 1, 2016), 24; Kim and Jeon, "Anti-Multiculturalism and the Future Direction of Multicultural Education in South Korea," 182.

<sup>43</sup> Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea*, 4-5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

recognized it is necessary for people originally outside of the ethnos to be recognized as citizens. In fact, citizenship allows to gain both the agency that is fundamental for the exercise of one's rights and the possibility of acquiring the ones that are not already guaranteed by the state; that is, it is crucial in order to have the chance of claims-making on one's treatment by the state<sup>45</sup>. This relates to Han's previously mentioned idea of the relationship between agency and structure. This is the way nationalism can become a non-exclusive ideology by eliminating its ethnocentric matrix. However, the disappearance of everyday antagonism and aversion toward migrants is still a goal to be met in the now unarguably multi-ethnic South Korean society. While multiethnicity in the country can now be considered as a fact, due to the migration waves and the effects of globalization, multicultural laws are slow to become effective for the less advantaged strata of the foreign population<sup>46</sup>. This is mainly due to an aversion that has developed relatively recently in Korea, but which has also been developing in other parts of the world where migratory flows have been particularly intense; and that is anti-multiculturalism. The literature that explores the theme of multiculturalism in South Korea specifically recognizes four categories of factors that cause this antagonism to it and to governmental actions that could promote it: the failure of multicultural policies, racism, insufficient multicultural education and negative media representations. Firstly, multicultural policies have brought antipathy towards migrants for various reasons. Kim and Jeon and Lee agree that the first two problems arising from these policies are the excessive focus on marriage migrants, which obscures the importance of other categories, and the lack of philosophical reflection on multiculturalism that shines through these regulations when, more often than not, they end up dis-serving the true interests of migrants (as shown for example by the absence even now of a law against racial discrimination)<sup>47</sup>. Lee also identifies two other problems in the lack of social agreement prior to the issuance of these policies, often due to the lack of participation of the migrants themselves in their formulation, and in policy fatigue<sup>48</sup>. Secondly, fueling the hatred against migrants and their integration into the country are a series of ideas and beliefs rooted in racist thinking that often leads to the desire for homogeneity<sup>49</sup>. This is a trait that refers to the forementioned "one ethnicity in one country" myth, and that is expressed in the social sphere in various ways, particularly in the conception of foreigners as a threat to national identity, as a cause of social insecurity, as aggravators of the situation of competition in the job market and as

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<sup>45</sup> Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea*, 4-5.

<sup>46</sup> Lee, "Multiculturalism and Anti-Multiculturalism Phenomena in South Korea," 18.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 24; Kim and Jeon, "Anti-Multiculturalism and the Future Direction of Multicultural Education in South Korea," 183-5.

<sup>48</sup> Lee, "Multiculturalism and Anti-Multiculturalism Phenomena in South Korea," 25-31.

<sup>49</sup> Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea*, 4-5.

abusers of the generosity of the state at the expense of the natives<sup>50</sup>. Kim and Jeon's suggestion to implement civilian contact with migrants to undermine and invalidate these beliefs<sup>51</sup> is certainly positive but retroactive. Perhaps it could be interesting to consider improving multicultural education on multiple levels as a better way to prevent these biases from forming. In fact, thirdly, if the field of education is the first in which assimilation practices are required and ideals of homogeneity are taught, one can only expect a rejection of ethno-cultural diversity in the large majority of the population. Finally, various examples reported by both Kim and Jeon and Lee but more specifically the analysis by Ko clarify how the representation that the media propose of migrants can influence, often negatively, the vision that native Koreans have of them, such as the victimization of marriage migrants or the negative characterization of ethnic returnees<sup>52</sup>. In conclusion, anti-multiculturalism develops on many levels and often directly influences the lives of immigrants, slowing down and opposing policies aimed at them. The starting point to come out of this stalemate according to the analyzed literature is the implementation of discourse on multiculturalism: the discursive political framing of immigration as a social issue allowed the introduction of the first policies in favor of migrants<sup>53</sup>; the reinforcement of the idea that non-ethnic Koreans could be considered an integral part of the nation was case-based and discourse-driven<sup>54</sup>; the discourse on multiculturalism is what allows to have more space for action in implementing legislations to transform a multi-ethnic country in a multicultural one<sup>55</sup>.

The following diagram shows some of the key concepts presented in this literature review and how they are connected to each other. Since the main aim of this thesis is to prove through media content analysis the consequential relationship between the three themes of ethnic nationalism, role of migrants in the host society and anti-multiculturalism, this scheme will be useful to better understand the findings of such analysis. In fact, the final paragraph of the 'Findings' section will be dedicated to compare them with the key concepts highlighted in this literature review.

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<sup>50</sup> Samers and Rydgren, "The Regulation of Migration, Integration, and of Multiculturalism in Twenty-First-Century France," 19.

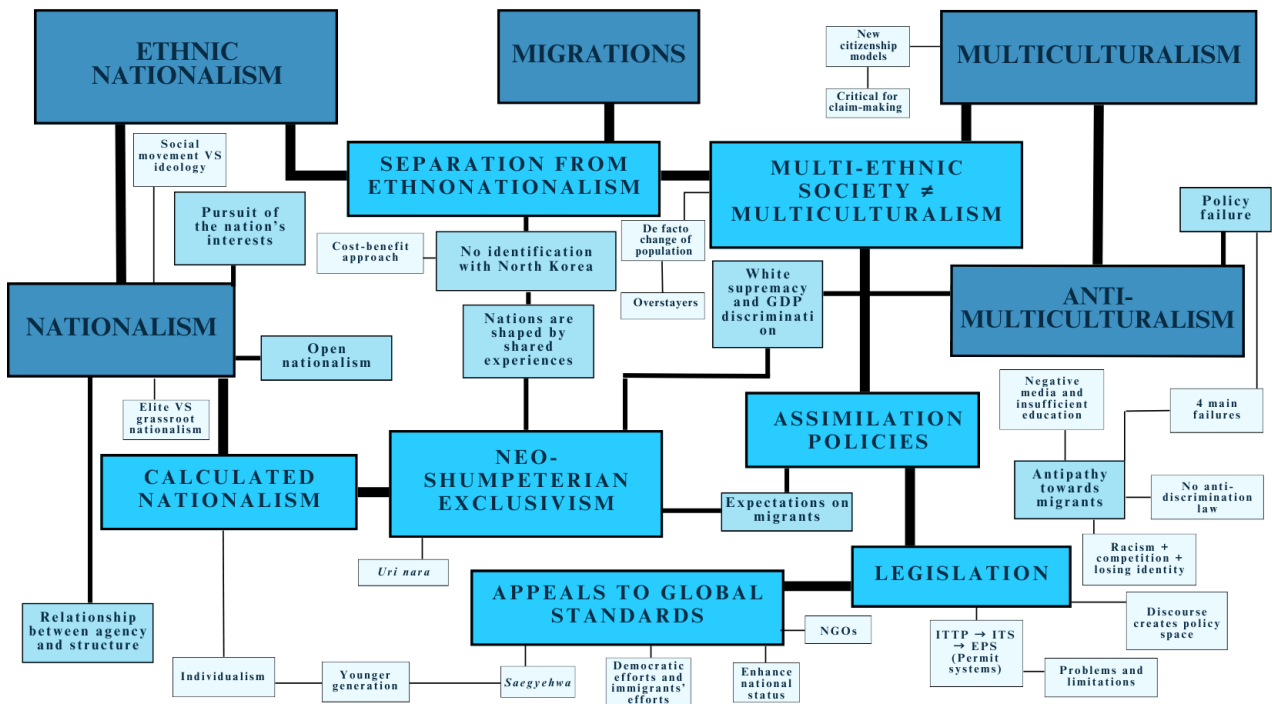
<sup>51</sup> Kim and Jeon, "Anti-Multiculturalism and the Future Direction of Multicultural Education in South Korea," 187-8.

<sup>52</sup> Sangtu Ko, "Image of Immigrants in South Korean News Coverage," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 21, no. 3 (June 8, 2019), 921.

<sup>53</sup> Park, "Between Globalization and Nationalism: The Politics of Immigration in South Korea," 378.

<sup>54</sup> Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea*, 191.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-2.



## SECTION II – METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the relation between the three themes of ethnic nationalism, immigrants' role in society and anti-multiculturalism in the South Korean context, this research focuses on how they have been dealt with by popular means of information within a specific time frame. The temporal limitations allow the analysis to be concise while retracing the ignition as well as the development of debates around such themes. To the aim of this research, the selected method of analysis is a thematic analysis of selected newspaper articles with the purpose of highlighting recurring themes and critical nodes of the discourses surrounding the topics taken into consideration with an inductive approach. The data considered for the analysis have been collected through a keyword search into two digital news databases, News Library<sup>56</sup> and Big Kinds<sup>57</sup>. The research is limited to two newspapers, the Chosŏnilbo<sup>58</sup> and the Han'gyŏrae, and to three terms, *minjokchuŭi* (민족주의, nationalism), *oegugin nodongja* (외국인 노동자, foreign worker) and *tamunhwa* (다문화, multiculturalism), covering the periods from 1960 to 1999 for News Library and from 2000 to 2024 for Big Kinds. The two

<sup>56</sup> “Naver Newslibrary [네이버 뉴스라이브러리].” NAVER Newslibrary. Accessed June 2, 2024.

<sup>57</sup> “Big Kinds [빅카인즈].” Big Kinds. Accessed June 2, 2024.

<sup>58</sup> In conformity with academic standards, this thesis uses the McCune-Reischauer system of transliteration from Korean.

newspapers were chosen for the number of published articles relevant for research and also for their continuity in history. The timeframe was instead determined by thinking about the timeline of the advent of migratory waves, which are at the center of the consequential relationship between ethnic nationalism and anti-multiculturalism. In fact, the period of the 1960s and 1970s is the one that precedes the problematic circumstances caused by these arrivals and that prepare the nationalistic ideological and social terrain in which migrations and multiculturalism were incorporated (in practice and in journalistic narrative) in the years between 1980 and 1999. Moreover, to avoid exceeding the space constraints of this research, migrant workers have been chosen here as an exemplifying and representative category as one of the largest groups of immigrants in South Korea and arguably the one that has had the most significant impact on the host society. During the data analysis itself it was possible to verify this influence both at the level of social problems and social development caused by their increase in presence. Furthermore, while the ethnic-based character of Korean nationalism clearly emerged from the use of the term *minjokchuui*, the more specific theme of anti-multiculturalism required a secondary research into the use of *pandamunhwa* (반다문화, anti-multiculturalism) in the Big Kinds database. The resulting more specific findings were incorporated into the paragraph regarding multiculturalism.

The analysis begins by reading all the news articles that answered the selected criteria and that presented pertinent information to the research<sup>59</sup>, taking notes of the main presented contents and concepts and categorizing them. The categories were determined by subjects, actions and ideas discussed in the articles, whether they dealt with news items or whether they were opinion pieces or columns with a specific theme. A quantitative or specifically semantic analysis of the determined terms is outside the scope of these research, which instead aims at using the different inferred macro-themes to uncover the connection between each of them and consequently also between ethnic nationalism, the role of workers migrants and anti-multiculturalism. Newspaper articles were designated as the type of source to analyze because these social themes are widely discussed outside the academic environment and media outlets usually voice opinions closer to the ideas of the people. Given the selected type of data and the aim of identifying widespread ideological developments, the thematic analysis method was found to be the most suitable for this research. The next chapter will illustrate these themes starting from the historical context in which they are embedded and from some examples of articles that particularly or explicitly mentions them. Then, referring to the theories

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<sup>59</sup> Pertinence here is not to be understood as a precise criterion but rather as a logical assessment of relevance. Since the databases cannot distinguish different uses of the same words in different contexts, some of the articles appearing as results of the research were systematically discarded as not pertinent (e.g., articles in which the terms “foreign” and “worker” were used in different sentences or where *tamunhwa* was intended as “tea culture”).

presented in the literature review, the findings will be pieced together to draw conclusions on the ways in which the three themes are connected and how that influences present and future circumstances.

Future research could overcome the limitations of this methodology that mainly regard the number of newspapers and the variety of terms taken into analysis. At the same time, accuracy and completeness of the inductive approach to such a large amount of data could be put into question despite thoroughness of analysis. Nonetheless, the results presented in the next paragraph line up with the logic followed in the related literature, thus the margin of error resulting from personal analysis bias should be regarded as negligible.

### SECTION III – FINDINGS

This section will firstly present the results of the outlined analysis pointing out the main themes that emerge from the articles taken into consideration. Then, to provide a comparison between this research’s findings and established theories, the last paragraph will illustrate whether they align with or challenge the theories presented in Section II. This analysis has first of all demonstrated that newspapers are a very interesting type of media to study in order to get an idea of the discourse development on social issues. In them it is possible not only to detect ideological changes through time, both at a public opinion level and at a governmental level, but also to have concrete evidence of these changes and of the presence or absence of ideological streams that go against the dominant one.

As anticipated, some recurring themes clearly emerge from the articles taken into consideration and direct the discursive streams relating to the examined keywords. From a thematic analysis viewpoint, it emerges that each of the three corpuses of articles, which respectively include the key terms *minjokchuŭi*, *oegugin nodongja* and *tamunhwa*, present five macro-themes within them. The following table summarizes them in statements or topics which will be contextualized and elaborated in more detail throughout this section.

<i>Minjokchuŭi</i> (nationalism)	<i>Oegugin nodongja</i> (foreign worker)	<i>Tamunhwa</i> (multiculturalism)
Ideological positioning of the public and its relationship with the government	Problematic substructures that affect Koreans	References to the international context
Encounter and confrontation with globalization and internationalization	State regulations and their (lack of) implementation	People’s appeals to the government



Ideal of <i>minjok</i> as reason for exclusion	Human and labor rights violations and legislative loopholes	Public opinions and government actions that go against the development of multiculturalism
Cohesion and homogeneity to pursue economic development	Actions and condemnations in favor of migrants	Initiatives and movements in favor of helping and integrating foreigners
Division from North Korea and prospects for reunification	Expressions of negative public opinion	Importance of multicultural education

**i. Minjokchuŭi (nationalism)**

The term ‘minjokchuŭi’ is consistently found in articles published in the Chosŏnilbo throughout the 60s and 70s but references to it increase considerably in number starting from the mid-80s. When the Han'gyŏrae was founded in 1988, nationalism was already the subject of much discussion and mentions to it continue to be numerous even in more recent years despite a certain decline after the 1990s.

The theme that is most discussed throughout these texts, despite being quite broad, is useful to follow the red thread of the macro developments that nationalism in Korea has had in the last 60 years. It is the issue of the public opinion concerning nationalism and it has to do with the ideological position of the government on the matter and the role it plays in national dogmatic changes. Importantly, many articles identify the March 1<sup>st</sup> movement for liberation from Japanese occupation and the May 16<sup>th</sup> coup led by Park Chung-Hee as the first pivotal moments for Korean nationalism. Both are important to mention as they represent the onset of a united nationalistic effort of the population: in the first case, the entire Korean peninsula marched and protested for its national independence; while in the second, South Koreans witnessed the consolidation of the regime that will exploit the ideals of homogeneity and unity of the nation to pursue the national objective of economic advancement. The people thus dedicated themselves to this goal in the spirit of anti-communist, internationalist nationalism that supported the establishment of liberal democracy<sup>60</sup>. However, problems did not take long to emerge: both in the case of Park Chunghee's regime and in that of following governments, the risks deriving from embracing such ideology materialized in unpleasant socio-political issues. This is a topic widely discussed in the analyzed journalistic narratives which clearly called attention to those risks, especially between the 1960s and the 1980s. First, in 1964 an

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<sup>60</sup> Myŏnggho O, “O Yuk’yŏngmyŏnggwa Minjokchuŭi Minjokch’oŭi Undongŭi Yŏksarŭl Tŏdŭmŏ (Wan) [五(오)·六革命(육혁명)과民族主義(민족주의) 民族(민족)초義運動(의운동)의 歷史(역사)를더듬어 (完(완))],” Chosŏnilbo, June 6, 1962.

article identified the problem of the possible transition from nationalism to authoritarianism in the name of having a strong guide that strives to lead the state towards progress, but that, at the same time and for this same reason, ends up suffocating all the voices that do not align to his own<sup>61</sup>. Similarly, an article from 1982 discusses the spread of patriotism, seen as a negative version of nationalism that tends to have a closed attitude towards the world, and draws attention to the need to adopt a globalist or universalist nationalist ideology instead<sup>62</sup>. This aspiration derives from acknowledging that South Korea is still a weak entity on the world scale and that it cannot afford not to rely on others especially in the era of globalization. However, the 1990s mark the beginning of the end of this type of nationalism based on the primacy of importance of the nation's economic development. This decline begins roughly in correspondence with the emergence of the appeals of the people and the human rights movements and advocates, who asked the government to concentrate its efforts on solving the problems of Korean society that had developed in the race for development and to move from an approach that values growth over everything and everyone to one that values the lives of people. From then on, nationalism as a state ideology weakened in assertiveness and became mostly focused on issues of the country's historical feuds, particularly with Japan. In fact, with the beginning of studies on the 'national shame' period, issues between the two countries that were left unresolved at the end of the occupation, such as the question of fisheries and sovereignty over Dokdo, started to become thorny<sup>63</sup>. This type of dispute continues to this day and has expanded beyond territorial problems to nationalist clashes over national apologies and the tendency to change historical facts in schoolbooks. Still in recent years there are calls on the governments of the two states to disarm their nationalism so that historic reconciliation can be achieved.

The theme of the relations between Korea and other states, however, in the considered texts goes much beyond the dispute with Japan and, as it is evident in the analysis of this second macro theme, the encounter with the world and globalization have sparked a plethora of discourses regarding the attitudes and strategies that the Korean people and government should adopt in this context. A suggestion in this regard comes from a 1982 article which argues that Korea's role in the era of internationalization is to go out, open up to the world, and at the same time keep in mind its status

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<sup>61</sup> Pyŏnguk An, “Kongdongjipp’il, Hollanüissinün Ödisö Ppuryöjyöonna Han’gungminjokchuüüi Kibok [共同執筆(공동집필), 混亂(혼란)의씨는 어디서 뿌려졌나 ③ 韓國民族主義(한국민족주의)의起伏(기복),” Chosŏnilbo, May 29, 1964.

<sup>62</sup> Chongsöng I, “Chogukkwa Tongjokkwa Na [祖國(조국)과 同族(동족)과 나],” Chosŏnilbo, October 15, 1982.

<sup>63</sup> “Toktogwallyön Oegugöllon ‘Han’guk Chujang Tö Söltüngnyök [’독도관련 외국언론 ‘한국 주장 더 설득력’,]” Han’györae, February 14, 1996.

within the larger theatre politician<sup>64</sup>. This is because, although the technological and economic development of the country has made Western superpowers its competition, Korea itself, as explained previously, still had an undeniable need to rely on others. The encounter with globalization and its consequences has brought division to the narrative: on the one hand it has generated criticism of the Korean government and society for its closure; on the other hand, by contrast, it has strengthened in some people the attachment to the idea of homogeneity of the nation and the opposition to everything that is foreign to it. Good examples of this are a 1999 critique of Korean exclusivism<sup>65</sup> and the formation in the 2000s of civil rights movements inspired by global standards<sup>66</sup>. To this are opposed ideas such as that of the need to maintain the primacy of local culture even in the century of internationalization<sup>67</sup> and that of the opposition to multiculturalism by Koreans in their twenties<sup>68</sup>. Although the matter of acceptance of multiculturalism will be dealt with in more detail in the dedicated paragraph, it is important to focus on this issue here too. The younger generations are those with the greatest anti-multicultural tendencies despite being the ones who come most into contact with diversity in various ways (travel, foreign students, media, etc.). The fact that they see inclusion and diversity as an inconvenience for them clearly shows the failure of multicultural education and the attachment to the idea of Korea as an ideally homogeneous and monolithic country.

The idea of ethnic homogeneity of the nation is undoubtedly reiterated very often in this textual corpus, both directly and as a sub-text. For this reason, the first recurring theme taken into consideration is that of the ideal of the Korean *minjok*<sup>69</sup>. It is described as unchanging and unique and thus as a cause of exclusion; as a fixed canon of uniformity that determines the right to be considered as part of the nation. Texts that make a reference to the characteristics which determine this canon mention the language, customs and lifestyle, but also and above all the blood relationship. Many articles testify that the state is commonly characterized by the nationalistic ideal of a single language and ethnicity. Some other articles report that the belief of belonging to a single *minjok* spread among

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<sup>64</sup> Sangu I, “Kukchehwashidaeüi Sae Chip’yöng [國際化時代(국제화시대)의 새 地 平(지평)],” Chosönilbo, October 8, 1982.

<sup>65</sup> Chöngmin Pak, “‘Uriwa Nam’p’yön’garügi Kangbakchüng’ [우리와 남’편가르기 강박증],” Han’györae, August 25, 1999.

<sup>66</sup> Pokün Kim, “‘Minjokchuüi ‘Sarajyöya Hana, Pakkwioya Hana’ [민족주의 ‘사라져야 하나, 바뀌어야 하나’],” Han’györae, February 24, 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Inu I, “In’gwön, Pop’yön’gach’i Chonjung’tawönhasahoe’ro [인권, 보편가치 존중·다문화사회’로],” Han’györae, January 1, 1996.

<sup>68</sup> Söngyun Kim, “[Kim Söngyunüi Ap’oria] Tamunhwajuüüi Kkütcharak [김성윤의 아포리아] 다문화주의의 끝자락,” Han’györae, November 11, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> While in *minjok-chuüi* (national-ism), it is meant to signify ‘nation’ in general, the word *minjok* is in itself used to indicate the ethnic group and the race. Thus, the ethnic matrix of Korean nationalism proves to be an essential aspect for understanding nationalism itself.

Koreans during the Japanese occupation, because of the clear dichotomy established between "us" and "the others", between victims and perpetrators<sup>70</sup>. This forced internalization of a sense of differentiated community left a visible residue in the Korean national and nationalist consciousness even many years later and in different forms. To give an example, the widespread preference and consideration for migrants of Korean ethnicity indicates a greater sensitivity towards the well-being of people who, despite having left their homeland, are related by blood to its inhabitants. Particularly when it became useful to start hiring foreign workers (as will be explained better in the next paragraph), Korean nationals from China were seen as an optimal solution to prevent this openness to the "others" from causing social conflicts and racial problems<sup>71</sup>. At the same time, however, authors in this corpus of articles also voice various criticisms of this exclusivist ideal. Some are recent, the result of many years of openness towards the world and all the changes that it has brought, including the questioning of the criteria for defining the nation. However, there is no shortage of objections even from further in the past, such as the one that in 1980 presented the idea that the national character is not innate in a race but composed of characteristics shared by a culturally characterized group. It also declared that it was necessary for Koreans to go beyond the stereotypes and fabricated nationalities of the past that stemmed from the Japanese occupation. Nonetheless, this opposition to the ideal of a homogenous minjok has not managed to fully eliminate it from the Korean mentality in which nationalism continues to have an exclusivist spirit<sup>72</sup> as can be seen from modern attitudes towards foreign people in Korea.

Another form in which the homogeneity of the minjok is expressed as a value is that of accenting the cohesion of the people as a fundamental component for national development. Some articles explain this concept by declaring that South Korea should contribute to international society as a cohesive ethnic unit. This means that the call for attaining modernization is directed to the minjok and the collective effort for the development of the state must come from a cohesive and united nation because Korea's problems must be solved by those who have lived their whole lives there to avoid further damage caused by external powers and influences. The push for economic growth is related to the sense of duty felt by Koreans to face their past of occupation and humiliation and work hard to build a better future for the nation, one that would put it on par with global powers so as to stop being at their mercy. Such anti-foreign nationalism that creates the exaltation of the "Made in Korea" then

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<sup>70</sup> Söngsik Kim, "Pigük Pijönaen Minjokpunyöl [悲劇(비극)벗어낸民族分裂(민족분열)]," Chosönilbo, March 5, 1964.

<sup>71</sup> Kim Myöngsik, "Chungguktongp'o Usön Suyong Paramjik [중국동포 우선 수용 바람직]," Han'györae, December 21, 1993.

<sup>72</sup> Kipong Kim, "Ch'aek - Kojön Tashiikki/Erünesüt'ü Rünang t'rminjogiran Muöshin'gat' [책 - 고전 다시읽기/에르네스트 르낭 '민족이란 무엇인가?]," Han'györae, November 10, 2006.

developed into a market-worshipping and competition-oriented nationalism<sup>73</sup>. The resulting actual improvement in the economic and living conditions of the country has involved the establishment of another type of prejudice in South Korea, namely that of GDP discrimination<sup>74</sup>. It is the tendency to have a bias against those who come from countries in poor economic conditions, and vice versa to respect more and admire people from wealthy countries. In this sense, it seems like South Korea's economic development, based on the efforts of the homogenous minjok, led the country to a victory on a social level that elevates its status to be higher than most other nations while still lower than Western superpowers. This belief, in addition to a racial inferiority complex towards the latter, encourages the idea of both an economic and racial hierarchy<sup>75</sup>.

Even though the widespread conception of minjok had a mostly exclusion-based nature opposed to the participation of those outside the ethnos, it necessarily also contained within itself an exception of inclusion that concerns the population of North Korea. Throughout the corpus of articles mentioning the topic of nationalism, North Koreans are referred to as compatriots and fellow countrymen. As is known, what initially appeared to be a purely temporary ideological division ended up consolidating into the now long-established existence of two vastly different states. For a long time, the concept of a single and separate ethnicity supported the idea that North Koreans were still part of the minjok that had been forcefully and unnaturally divided by external forces<sup>76</sup>. According to a 1972 article, Korea's ethnic, linguistic and traditional homogeneity should have made reunification possible despite the two countries' ideological differences, simply by emphasizing loyalty to the minjok as a common principle of the two fronts<sup>77</sup>. So much so that the threat of increased heterogeneity of the minjok was the first thing to jeopardize the idea of imminent unification in people's mind, since such change would have made the two parts of the peninsula too different to be reintegrated into one<sup>78</sup>. And so it was, due to the demographic changes in the South, and from the 1990s onwards the journalistic narrative focuses on a different characterization of North Koreans, still mentioned as compatriots who however live in a very different and disadvantaged condition, due

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<sup>73</sup> Hyöngsöök No, "Kwön Hyökpöm Kyosu 'minjokchuüwa Palchönüi Hwansang' / 'Minjok'ün Manbyöngt'ongch'iyagin'ga [권혁범 교수 '민족주의와 발전의 환상' / '민족'은 만병통치약인가]," Han'györae, September 18, 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Sangchin Yun, "Changkkae, Hük'yöng, Kaesüllam... Uri Anüi Injongch'abyörül Torabora [짱깨·흑형·개슬람... 우리 안의 인종차별을 돌아보라]," Chosönilbo, October 8, 2022.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Söngsik Kim, "Pigük Pijönaen Minjokpunyöl [悲劇(비극)벗어낸民族分裂(민족분열)]," Chosönilbo, March 5, 1964.

<sup>77</sup> "Han'guginüi tanilminjok üshik [韓國人(한국인)의 單一民族(단일민족)의식]," Chosönilbo, October 4, 1972.

<sup>78</sup> Kibyöng Ch'a et al., "Nam-Puk'an Ijirhwa Kalsurok Shimhwa [南(남)·北韓(북한) 異質化(이질화) 갈수록 深化(심화)]," Chosönilbo, October 18, 1977.

to the economic crisis and the famine. The set of historical experiences not shared by the two nations and the fluctuating relationship between their governments has caused unification as a theme to become less and less urgent in the discourse on nationalism, to the point that nowadays there is talk of the irreversible disintegration of and departure from the concept of unity of the peninsula, especially due to the North's withdrawal from unification promotion activities<sup>79</sup>.

## ii. Oegugin nodongja (foreign worker)

Research on the use of the term 'oegugin nodongja' produces a relevant number of findings only from the early 1990s on, while the earlier narrative focuses much more on Korean workers abroad. However, the number and variety of themes mentioned throughout the 1990s still makes it worthy of detailed thematic analysis. Clearly these numerical data are not indicators of a lack of journalistic interest on the topic but rather a reflection of the historical reality of this social theme; the first substantial waves of workers arriving in Korea from abroad began in the 1980s, concomitantly with the country's economic growth and the increase in the need for cheap labor, which will be discussed in this paragraph. Since then, the consolidation of their presence has made them the objects of various discussions which are categorized and exposed here.

The first theme may seem marginal with respect to the subjects of our research, i.e. foreign workers, but it is actually very relevant to understand the national context in which they are inserted. It is the theme of the problematic substructures of South Korea's society and work environment, which concern and involve mainly Koreans but also have negative repercussions on the life of migrants. Some articles from 1990 highlights first of all the problem of the aging population and the ever-increasing number of Korean workers moving abroad<sup>80</sup>. They were chasing the promises of greater well-being and fortune offered by other countries such as the United States and Australia, leaving the country in a state of labor shortage. The situation was exacerbated by a demand-supply imbalance in certain industries, particularly for what are called 3D (dirty, dangerous, difficult) jobs that Korean workers refused to do due to terrible working conditions<sup>81</sup>. The push for the country's rapid economic growth required a massive workforce that was highly productive at low cost, thus to the detriment of workers' rights. By avoiding these jobs and leaving these industries to make up for the shortcomings with the non-regularized importation of labor from nearby foreign countries, thus allowing those labor

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<sup>79</sup> Chaeyun Song, "[Jyutdüt'k'allöm] Uriüi Sowönün Chayu, Minju, in'gwön, Pöpch'ida [[朝鮮칼럼] 우리의 소원은 자유·민주·인권·법치다]," Chosönilbo, February 20, 2024.

<sup>80</sup> Kich'ön Kim, "Oegugin Nomujaga Millyöonda [外国人(외국인) 노무자가 밀려온다]," Chosönilbo, June 4, 1990.

<sup>81</sup> Yöngch'öl Ko, "Kinüngin Yangsöng Ank'o Ilson Öpta Hant'anman [기능인 양성 않고 일손 없다 한탄만]," Chosönilbo, January 14, 1991.

rights violations to fall on migrant workers, Korean workers have, however, postponed the improvement of their working conditions<sup>82</sup>. The irregularity of the foreign workers who filled those staffing gaps led the government to start a process of mass expulsion of overstayers. This, together with the exodus of foreigners who voluntarily left the country to avoid illegal stay fines, ended up putting the 3D industry in even greater crisis, since it found itself in a situation of even worse workforce shortage<sup>83</sup>. Even various articles from the 2000s complained about the government's slowness in implementing solutions to the problems of coexistence with foreigners and to the impossibility of forcing employers to guarantee the rights of their employees even when the poor working conditions were reported. Finally, according to the newspapers, today there are mainly two problems that persist for workers in Korea. The first is that in the context of the manufacturing sector, while they have long been replaced by foreign workers in small and medium enterprises, recently they are also starting to be increasingly replaced by the automation of work in large corporations<sup>84</sup>. Secondly, rather than improving the laws and structures that regulate work, more and more sectors are allowing themselves to fill "the bottom" with migrant, underpaid and unprotected workers. Both of these problems can unfortunately be traced back to an attempt by the government and the employers to evade the need for improvement of working conditions in the sector by instead replacing the workforce with something or someone who is in every sense less expensive.

The second recurring theme in the textual corpus concerns this lack of regulations and their implementation. A 1991 article reports that the South Korean government's unpreparedness for the reception and regulation of migrant workers was almost total: there was a lack of laws for the protection of human rights, of initiatives aimed at social integration and of regulations to discourage discrimination<sup>85</sup>. Therefore, it soon became clear that the trainee system, put in place to allow a limited stay for unskilled foreign workers, exploited them by making them work without any type of legal or insurance protection and without any guarantee of receiving payment or having access to the most basic of services<sup>86</sup>. Much of the discussion on this topic focuses on overstayers, meaning those who remain illegally in the country to work beyond the limit set by these regulations. Due to the problematic nature of the trainee system, the risk of deportation, the impossibility of registering

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<sup>82</sup> “Haeoeillyök’suip’kwa Nodonggyeüi Panbal [해외인력·수입·과 노동계의 반발],” Han’györae, March 1, 1991.

<sup>83</sup> Hyöntae Kim, “Pulböpch’wiöp Oegugin Yönmalkkaji Tan’gyech’ulguk 3Döpchong Chungsoöpch’e’nan’gam’ [불법취업 외국인 연말까지 단계출국 3D 업종 중소기업체·난감],” Han’györae, July 26, 1993.

<sup>84</sup> Hyönün Chang, “Irhäl Naegugin Öpsödo Kongjangün Kullyöyajit’ssijunodongja 12manmyöng [일할 내국인 없어도 공장은 굴러야지... 이주노동자 12 만명],” Han’györae, December 11, 2023.

<sup>85</sup> Kūmsu Kim, “Nodongshijangdo Kaebangüro Kanün’ga [노동시장도 개방으로 가는가],” Han’györae, October 30, 1991.

<sup>86</sup> Ch’ölu O, “Kin’güpchindan Oeguginnodongja [긴급진단 외국인노동자],” Han’györae, December 1, 1995.

marriage or the birth of children<sup>87</sup> and the almost impossibility of acquire citizenship<sup>88</sup> were added to the already grave problem of poor working conditions. The lack of direct government action on these issues first and foremost makes the various local authorities and employers feel entitled to violate the rights of migrants, in a climate of widespread indifference towards them<sup>89</sup>. Secondly, because of this, any action in favor of migrant workers and the regulation of their presence in the country appears as a meagre compensation for the damage suffered by them rather than deriving from a genuine interest in protecting them. This concept is well exemplified by events such as that of 2021, in which it was the death of a foreign worker, caused by the inadequacy of the housing made available to him by the employer, to push the Ministry of Employment and Labor to issue guidelines for the improvement of the living conditions of workers<sup>90</sup>. And still, despite this, the change regarding this problem is slow to materialize.

Many articles focus on the consequences of these legal gaps and loopholes which particularly affect migrant workers. As one of those reported in 1990, they were forced to endure starvation wages that barely covered their living expenses and inhumane treatment by employers who also used them as a weapon to threaten Korean employees and create a wage-lowering competition<sup>91</sup>. The perpetration of these injustices very often occurred by taking advantage of the workers' status as illegal overstayers, which prevented them in many cases from resorting to involving the authorities to avoid incarceration and deportation. Newspapers report cases of violations of migrant workers' rights many times every year, and it is important to note that they go beyond disrespecting their rights as workers. For example, a 1997 case reports that, unable to be repatriated due to lack of pertinent laws, the bodies of the deceased often remained for other compatriot workers to manage or had to be taken into custody by churches<sup>92</sup>. Furthermore, of all the cases reported, the violences which target female workers are particularly problematic due to the intersectional nature of such abuses. In the late 2000s some cases came to light of Southeast Asian women who had been brought to Korea with the promise of an artistic career and had instead been forced into prostitution in clubs for foreigners. The

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<sup>87</sup> “Oegugin Nodongja 17man Shidae (1) 2semunje [외국인 노동자 17 만 시대 (1) 2 세문제],” Han’györae, July 24, 1996.

<sup>88</sup> Kisöng Kim, “‘Han’guk Ch’ongp’aöbe Konggamhajiyo’ [“한국 총파업에 공감하지요”],” Han’györae, September 1, 1997.

<sup>89</sup> “[Sasöl] Ijunodongja in’gwönyurin Chojanghal Semin’ga [[사설] 이주노동자 인권유린 조장할 셈인가],” Han’györae, December 15, 2004.

<sup>90</sup> Suji Pak, “Sok’eng Moksum Asagan Pindirhausüt’ssyöjönhi Ijunodongjadüri Sanda [속행 목숨 앓아간 비닐하우스... 여전히 이주노동자들이 산다],” Han’györae, December 10, 2021.

<sup>91</sup> “Oegugin Ch’wiöbe Tanhohan Taech’aekül [외국인 취업에 단호한 대책을],” Han’györae, December 1, 1990.

<sup>92</sup> Kisöng Kim, “Pulböpch’eryu Oegungnodongja Chugösödo Tödörishinse [불법체류 외국인노동자 죽어서도 떠돌이신세],” Han’györae, November 5, 1997.



lack of laws to prevent human trafficking in Korea has caused many serious cases like this, but language barriers, lack of legal information and, once again, illegal immigrant status make even regularly employed foreign women defenseless in the face of ordinary episodes of sexual violence. The rest of the population, however, has not remained in the dark about these various and continuous violations of the rights of migrant workers; in fact, they sparked both many discourses and denunciation actions.

These condemnations came from both migrants and organized members of Korean society, particularly affiliated with Catholic churches and NGOs. Newspapers report the names and stories of the pastors that have continued to expose themselves for a long time by fighting on the side of migrant workers and establishing support groups and centers such as the Seongnam Foreign Workers House or the Ansan Foreign Workers Centre. Religious congregations also played a role in organizing and mobilizing peaceful protests that led migrants to demand better working conditions and treatment from the government and the local authorities for the first time in the mid-1990s. Several articles have been written about the sit-ins at Myeongdong Cathedral in 1995, remembered particularly for slogans such as "We are people, not slaves" and "Don't hit me", in reference to the exploitation and violence suffered by foreign workers<sup>93</sup>. These condemnations appeal and are linked to international human rights standards, as shown by the call for abolition of the trainee system made by the National Human Rights Commission, echoed later also by civil society groups<sup>94</sup>. This is a reference to South Korea's aforementioned intent to emulate international powers, but in this case, it concerns not economic growth but rather standards of democratization. There has also been no lack of practical actions by civil society to improve the living conditions of migrant workers, as exemplified by the foundation of groups for linguistic and cultural education or even by various publication of texts that help them deal with criminal procedures and violations of their rights.

Public opinion, the last macro topic identified in this part of the analysis, is complex to discuss exhaustively and has undergone many variations over time. Firstly, the idea of legalizing the importation of labor was not well received by Korean workers, according to whom the implementation of such measure would allow immigrants to steal their jobs. In fact, they thought that for the good of local workers, the employment of foreigners should not have been tolerated as it imposes a threat to the rights of Korean workers and worsens the problem of unemployment<sup>95</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> Ch'ölu O, "Kin'güpchindan Oeguginnodongja [긴급진단 외국인노동자]," Han'györae, December 1, 1995.

<sup>94</sup> Sangch'öl Hwang, "Shimindanch'e, Sanöbyönsuje p'yeji Ch'okkU [시민단체, 산업연수제 폐지 촉구]," Han'györae, December 14, 2004.

<sup>95</sup> "Chung-so-Öp-Ch'e Oe-Kuk-in Ko-Yong Iman-Myöng-Sön&nbsp; [중소업체 외국인 고용 1 만명선]," Han'györae, August 29, 1991.

Foreigners are therefore perceived as a threat, but not only with regards to the working environment. The population's calls for the expulsion of illegal immigrants are also justified by the idea that they are fundamentally criminals and is combined with a general contemptuous attitude towards the poor and the foreigners, especially those racially characterized in a negative way<sup>96</sup>. This "we" consciousness of Koreans, as mentioned previously, becomes a source of social exclusion, generating a status hierarchy on an ethnic basis in which foreign workers occupy the bottom part. Despite them working for years for the economic development of the county, this social construction makes them in some way eternal newcomers. This means that in the mentality of many Koreans the possibility of a real process of social inclusion for them is not taken into consideration. One factor that tends to gradually change public opinion, even on subjects like migrant workers, is the representation in the media. If nothing else, it often acts as a means for the population to learn about the problems that afflict them, in the hope of raising awareness. These representations are sometimes informative, while other times they are full of negative biases that incite the public against them. An example of this is given by a news story in which a foreign worker had problems with Korean customs for trying to send his family an amount of money that exceeded the allowed limit<sup>97</sup>. The narrative with which this story was presented by the media was solely focused on the fact that migrants like him earn too much and that what they send to their families is inherently Korean money that they steal from the local population through their illegal jobs. This type of representation reinforces negative and mostly unfounded stereotypes which make coexistence in the country even more difficult. Finally, although their presence is now consolidated, foreigners in general still encounter opposition from the public.

### iii. Tamunhwa (multiculturalism)

The search for the word 'tamunhwa' is the one that generated the least number of results in both databases, despite a noticeable increase in articles relating to this topic in the late 2000s. However, it is also worth taking into consideration the sporadic previous mentions, because they illustrate the peculiar incipit of the diffusion of the idea of multiculturalism. The first identifiable macro theme therefore concerns South Korea as an observer of the international context which was changing towards the intranational coexistence of different peoples and cultures. The first stories of multiculturalism that are mentioned in newspapers are those of Koreans abroad, who find themselves living in nations made up of proper cultural mosaics. In countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States they experience the possibility of living with locals while preserving their own cultural

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<sup>96</sup> Yöngjin I, "Oegungnodongja Myölshi Maraya [외국노동자 멀리 말아야]," Chosönilbo, December 21, 1994.

<sup>97</sup> Myöngok Kang, "Oeguginnodongja Songgüm Pömjoejach'wigübe Yugam [외국인노동자 송금 범죄자취급에 유감]," Han'györae, January 1, 1998.

identity and its expressions, often thanks to the creation of community help groups<sup>98</sup>. Although there is no mention of Korea as a multicultural society until the mid-1990s, even in the decades before one can find articles that positively mention multiculturalism as a functional solution to certain economic needs<sup>99</sup>.

The second theme is structured around two fundamental issues: raising awareness and appealing to the government. The first of the two concerns the changes that the waves of migrations brought about to Korean society and that, at the turn of the century, made it impossible to deny the evidence. It becomes known that different ethnic groups and cultures coexist in South Korea and this means that the country was already multiethnic and on the way to becoming multicultural. Although at the time the stable presence of foreigners had not yet been normalized as it is today, it was already foreseen that this would have been a fundamental change in the new century and that, to prepare for it, the government would have had to make changes to its policies, especially regarding foreign affairs. First, some requested the abandonment of isolationism, which risked leaving Korea behind in comparison with the globalized world powers. Secondly, some others began to appeal to the government to collaborate with international organizations and NGOs to try and solve the increasingly numerous global problems that cannot be addressed by one country alone (it is sufficient to keep in mind as an example the discussion on the management of illegal immigrants in the previous paragraph)<sup>100</sup>. The observation of the international context enabled the civilian population to make these bottom-up calls for action but, as detailed below, the government's actions on this matter followed a side of the public opinion that was more critical of the issue of multiculturalism than hoped for in these pages.

This is precisely the focus of the third theme identified in the corpus of articles, namely the way negative public opinion has provided an excuse for the government to not implement effective multicultural policies. In this part of the journalistic narrative, the modernization of the means of communication plays a fundamental role. Indeed, the way the general consensus is often influenced and measured is through online communities that gather like-minded people and amplify and spread their voices like wildfire. Regarding this topic in particular, there are articles that report the active presence of online community cafés which aim to share anti-multicultural ideas and hatred for

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<sup>98</sup> “Tongsöyang Kongjont’ tshidüni Kyomin 3manmyöng [東西洋(동서양) 공존...시드니僑民(교민) 3 만명],” Chosönilbo, May 14, 1991.

<sup>99</sup> “K’aenadaüi t’aep’yöngnyang Shidae Imin Chöngch’aek [캐나다의 태평양(태평양)시대 ③ 移民(이민) 정책],” Chosönilbo, August 10, 1986.

<sup>100</sup> Kwangp’yo I, “P’osüt’ümodönsidae Chakünjöngbu p’iryo’ [“포스트모던시대 작은정부 필요”],” June 3, 1996.

migrant workers and Muslims<sup>101</sup>. There is also plenty of other forms of communication clearly in opposition to the social ideal of multiculturalism, but this one in particular, due to its mostly unregulated nature, suggests how it is possible to anonymously strengthen harmful ideas that can transform groundless prejudices (e.g. foreign workers come to steal Korean people's jobs and to commit crimes) in more serious social conflicts. In fact, this type of community tends to establish itself in cyber spaces creating a wave of anti-multicultural sentiment which is easy to ride for the public in case they want to express opposition to certain policies or decisions. In this way the authorities, under the pretext of following the public opinion, cowardly accept the widespread anti-multicultural attitude and avoid implementing policies in favor of social integration and the expansion of immigrants' rights<sup>102</sup>.

Although from the analyzed articles this appears to be the trend with the most social and political influence in Korea at the moment, one cannot disregard the initiatives designed by members of the civil society which are instead aimed at making multiculturalism flourish in their society. Many articles from 2000 to today have shed a light on the commitment of some corporations and ministries to facilitate social integration, particularly of multicultural families (i.e., made up of one Korean and one foreign parent and their mixed children). The cases are many and, although quite disconnected from each other, still incredibly significant; but perhaps there are two in particular that are worth drawing as examples from the list. The first is the founding in 2003 of a civic group to promote the elimination of discrimination against mixed-race children<sup>103</sup>. This one especially could represent a good counteraction to the widespread anti-multicultural tendencies, insisting on the urgency of rejecting discourses on blood distinctions in the era of globalization. The second example, which introduces the last macro theme of this analysis, is that of educational initiatives for migrants. In 2014, the Daegu University of Oriental Medicine opened a "Multicultural welfare and Korean Language" department which would allow foreign women and their children to become social workers or language instructors<sup>104</sup>. Today many other massive initiatives like this, that aim at the integration of foreigners are implemented with the aim of making Korean language education accessible to all

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<sup>101</sup> Kwōnil Pak, "[Pakkwōnil, Tainaemik Tonōt] t'rneorait'ūt'ūi Kwihwan [[박권일, 다이내믹 도넛] '네오라이트'의 귀환]," Han'gyōrae, July 5, 2018.

<sup>102</sup> Sōngman Kang, "'20nyōn Kongikpyōnhosaro Salmyō t'rin'gwōnūn Kkūch'i Ōmnūn Kilt' Chōlgamt'e' ['20년 공익변호사로 살며 "인권은 끝이 없는 길" 절감]," Han'gyōrae, March 24, 2024.

<sup>103</sup> Pyōngch'an Kwak, "T'ehonhyōrin Ch'abyōl Ch'ōlp'yet'e /Kakkye Yōndae Shiminundong p'yōgiro ['혼혈인 차별 철폐' /각계 연대 시민운동 퍼기로]," Han'gyōrae, December 4, 2003.

<sup>104</sup> Taesōn Ku, "Taeguhanūidae, Tamunhwabokchihan'gugōhakkwa Kaesō [대구한의대, 다문화복지한국어학과 개설]," Han'gyōrae, December 23, 2014.

members of multicultural families. Projects like these stress the importance of education and training as fundamental elements for inclusion, especially in a society that values language and traditions as criteria of recognition of its citizens (after the criterion of ethnicity that is).

To conclude, it is necessary to discuss the last recurring theme taken into analysis, which concerns another type of education, namely the multicultural education of South Korean people. As it appears to be evident from the previous paragraph on public opinion, anti-multiculturalism in Korea is mostly fueled by stereotypes and negative perceptions that lacks empathy and open-mindedness. In order to bring benefits to everyone, including foreigners, multicultural education must not be just a push towards the outside in order to be successful in the global market or to raise a generation that might bring more economic benefit to the country. As explained by a 1997 opinion piece, multiculturalism must be distinguished from liberalism in that, differently from the latter, it does not erase the cultural identities of minorities while accepting them into society<sup>105</sup>. The problem of Korean multiculturalism is identified precisely in the fact that it advocates for diversity but fails to incorporate diversity into society<sup>106</sup> treating it as an exotic factor, external to the Korean society which remains detached from it even when it comes into contact with it. Therefore, in conclusion, to counter the widespread anti-multicultural tendencies, it is necessary, according to this reading of the journalistic narrative, to promote projects and initiatives that introduce and educate the Korean population to the true spirit of multiculturalism, which is equal participation in the society in which foreigners and local citizens enjoy the same right to preserve and express their culture. This has been and continues to be done in the hope of influencing, with a more educated and informed public opinion, the government authorities to promote multiculturalism which, without the active inclusion of foreigners, is only forced coexistence with diversity.

#### **SECTION IV – DISCUSSION**

To start drawing the conclusions of this thesis it is firstly necessary to briefly summarize the findings of the analysis. The research on the term ‘minjokchuŭi’ has presented many theoretical results regarding the ideology of the state as well as the stance of the South Korean people on matters of ethnicity, national unity and globalization. The period taken into consideration saw major societal changes in the country and this inevitably led this research to disclose and identify them in the set of relevant articles. The most notable is the shift in interest on the issue of division from North Korea,

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<sup>105</sup> Chaepom Ham, “Kaeinŭi Munhwajök Chŏngch’esŏng-Sosuminjok p’yŏngdŭnggwŏn Chomyŏng [개인의 문화적 正體性(정체성)-소수민족 평등권 조명],” Chosŏnilbo, January 26, 1997.

<sup>106</sup> Jongmin I, “[Kigo]t’rtamunhwat’nŭn Purŭjinnŭn Ke Anida [[기고]·다문화’는 부르짖는 게 아니다],” Han’gyŏrae, October 31, 2007.

but there was also no lack of ever-increasing opposition to the strategic ideal of the country's economic growth and to what the population was willing to sacrifice for it. The theme that throughout this period has been detected most consistently, although not free from various criticisms and oppositions, has been the attachment to the exclusivist connotation of nationalism due to its association to ethnic hierarchies. The difficult legacy of Korean history still calls the population to deal with problems such as white supremacy and GDP discrimination. However, what this thesis argues is that, despite this, and due to the specific social change brought about by the migratory waves and the ever-increasing number of foreigners permanently residing in the country, an ideological change has occurred which no longer allows us to refer to this as ethnic nationalism and instead asks us to reflect on the theme of anti-multiculturalism. In order to understand the way in which these themes are connected it is necessary to look at the history of the arrival of migrants to Korea, the push-and-pull factors that generated this demographic movement and the controversial nature of the resulting consequences. The findings of the analysis show that the way foreigners were introduced in the Korean context and started to be perceived by the population was problematic in various ways. First of all, the very own occurrence of this events was against the idea of national self-reliance that had previously been celebrated so decidedly. This is because the presence of foreigners in the country was not only imposed by their own needs, but rather necessary for Korea to solve problems such as labor shortages. Secondly, the illegitimacy of these migrations, caused by the lack of regulations from the government, has antagonized the foreigners to the population and allowed their mostly unpunished exploitation. These circumstances have created a paradoxical contrast between the desire and need to open the country to globalization and its inability to incorporate into its own society those elements of diversity that would have made it actually advantageous. This thesis identifies this as the shift from ethnic nationalism to anti-multiculturalism, also supported by the theories highlighted in the literature review: the imposition of the stable presence of foreigners in the country that has forced the population to negotiate their own conceptions of a unique and unchangeable minjok, and what remains of it in today's society is not so much an ethnical exclusivity that would be anachronistic in the context of the era of globalization and internationalization but rather an unwillingness to let multiethnicism transform into multiculturalism. That is, for what regards the public's opinion, racial distinctions are no longer as central to the matter of discrimination as issues of identity and cultural expression are, since the latter could, in the Korean imagination, undermine the existence or in any case the prevalence of local culture.

When considering the limitations of these results, the type of data taken into analysis may be subject to criticism. In fact, newspaper articles might not be considered an exhaustive source of information about the general public's perceptions of an issue. However, reports of actual events and

critical shifts in political ideology can certainly help to have an idea of how specific themes are depicted and talked about through time (hence the methodology used for this research).

## **CONCLUSION**

This thesis' aim was to prove the consequential relationship between the increasing presence of migrants and the shift from ethnic nationalism to anti-multiculturalism in South Korea. This objective was achieved through a thematic analysis conducted on a set of newspaper articles in which the use of specific key terms relating to this theme was examined. By focusing the research on the timeframe in which the social changes analyzed were generated and established, it was possible to disclose not only the historical causes behind this ideological shift but also the practical issues that concern the lives of Korean citizens and migrants. In fact, the findings demonstrate that the ethnic connotation of Korean nationalism has long been rooted in the popular conscience, which has been educated to use it as a motivation to unite efforts as one nation and achieve economic development goals. It was then demonstrated that the spirit of self-reliance internalized by the population in that period fomented the government's unresponsive attitude towards irregular entry and consequent exploitation of migrants, necessary to maintain the pace of that same economic development. Although over time there have been increasingly more protests from the migrants themselves and some civil society groups and NGOs, the government justifies the lack of laws to protect migrants by using the side of negative public opinion, which considers them as inferiors and criminals by valuing ideals of racial hierarchy and GDP discrimination. The consequence of this widespread antipathy for migrants was that, even when the demographic composition of the country became objectively multi-ethnic, due to the consolidated presence of migrants, Korean society did not become multicultural. The essence of anti-multiculturalism, as demonstrated by the analyzed newspaper articles, is expressed both in discursive form, especially on online platforms dedicated to gathering consensus on these issues, and in actual actions of rejection of the expression of foreign cultures.

This research and its results are useful to stress how important it is for the Korean government to implement multicultural policies that might avoid further social clashes on these issues. The degree of multicultural acceptance is low even in the younger generations, who come in contact the most with the diversity that is derived from openness to the world. This is because they have not been educated to accept this diversity nor to consider it as a possibility of enrichment for the nation. For this reason, today as then, at the beginning of these changes that have in some way shaped Korean society, it is important to give voice to the testimonies and the needs of migrants and to invest in the initiatives of those who have long supported their battles.

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