Korean Peace: Framing the Nexus of Movements, Identity and Peace

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Abstract:

The Korean War never officially ended, resulting in continued hostilities on the Korean Peninsula for over 70 years. International state-led diplomatic talks have achieved little success in reducing tensions. In these failures, there has been a grassroots social movement voicing demands for peace in the region. However, perspectives from this movement have not been given much consideration, thus, this thesis explores perspectives of Korean-identified activists involved in the Korean peace movement. Semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis were used to identity three overarching frames – *han*, *jeong*, and rights talk – which inform the activists' views on conditions in the Korean Peninsula and their approaches to peace activism. Drawing on framing theory, as understood in social movement studies, these frames were analyzed in their three core framing tasks – diagnosis, motivation, and prognosis. Findings show a cultural context for peace activism, based in historical injustices, and centered around Korean identity. Peace is interpreted not as an end goal, but as a means to a right for greater self-determination.

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Peace, peacebuilding, social movements, framing theory, human rights, Korea

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1. Introduction

When South Korea hosted the 2018 Winter Olympics, also regarded as the "Peace Games" (McCurry, 2018), peace and hope became the central themes of the sporting event. This was most evident in the opening ceremony as South and North Korea walked together under a unified Korea banner for the first time since 2006. The two countries would go on to compete together under this flag in the women's ice hockey competition for the Olympic games. Global news coverage anticipated a new era of peace and diplomacy for the region with belief that the Olympics signified progress in talks for reunification of the two countries (English and Murray, 2024). However, in his speech to the Supreme People's Assembly in December 2023, Kim Jung Un, the ruling leader of North Korea declared for the first time ever that North Korea would no longer support reunification moving forward with South Korea (Shin and Smith, 2024). This departure from a position of unification has not been seen before in the past 70 years after the partition of the peninsula. An anti-reunification stance is then considered a threat to peace and escalation in hostilities. However, this announcement perhaps is not a shock to many that are observing already hostile conditions in the region with the US increasing military arms in South Korea and greater deployment of troops (Yim, 2024).

With the latest address from the North Korean leader, peace processes for the Peninsula are at a standstill, halting state-level diplomatic talks once again. As news coverage and political conversations continue to focus on these international state dynamics, little consideration has been given to the people at a local level and the collection actions taken throughout this peace process. Current forms of activism have proven to shape politics on the Korean Peninsula and impact relations between North and South Korea, and international dynamics between the Koreas with larger state powers like the US (Chung, 2011). However, research on peace has not meaningfully examined the role that social movements can play in building towards peace. Understanding how grassroots-level actors navigate these complexities is necessary to formulating more nuanced approaches to peace moving forward, considering the limits that state-led approaches have faced so far. I intend to lay the groundwork to bridge that gap through this exploratory study.

Therefore, this thesis will investigate perspectives from activists involved in the social movement for Korean peace. I will highlight key themes that arise for these participants and explore how these themes are framed in the peace movement. Following a brief historical and political contextualization of the Korean Peninsula in this first chapter, I present the development of studies on peace and conflict in Chapter 2 and explain the call for a new shift towards a more localized analysis of peacebuilding in relation to people affected by conflict. I argue that, despite this call, there have not been meaningful methodological suggestions to facilitate this shift. Considering this gap, I follow up in Chapter 3 with an introduction to social movement studies and framing theory as models to analyze perspectives of social movement participants. Then, in Chapter 4, I explain the relevance of thematic analysis for my methodology and describe the methods of the study itself. I present my findings in Chapter 5 and analyze the data to answer my research questions in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 is where I conclude my study and highlight relevance to human rights and further research considerations.

1.1. Contextualizing the Korean Peninsula

With the fall of Japanese colonial rule in the Manchuria region at the end of World War II in 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union rushed in to claim their stake on this territory. The peninsula once more became occupied and split along the 38th line of latitude with the US occupying the south and the Soviets in the north (Cockburn, 2012, p. 181). Soon after, the US military controlled government brought in Syngman Rhee – an anti-communist Korean living in Washington DC – to establish the Republic of Korea (RoK) (Chang, 2020), while the Soviets pushed for the election of Kim Il-Sung – formerly a guerilla fighter against the Japanese that became pro-Soviet – in the development of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) (Cumings, 2015, p. 73).

Ideological and political differences obstructed reunification and the peninsula served as a site for one of many proxy conflicts in the Cold War era between superpowers. The Korean War of 1950-53 cemented the division of the peninsula, separating thousands of families and splitting the ethnic Korean people across two states. The end of the Korean War in 1953 resulted in an armistice calling for a temporary ceasefire, signed by China, North Korea, and the United States without South Korea as a signatory (Kim, 2023, p. 141). The Syngman Rhee

administration opposed the ceasefire because they aspired to continue with the military campaign into North Korea (Lee, 2013, p. 184). The armistice had a significant impact in pausing immediate violence and formalized the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) as the border between North and South Korea. A peace treaty was expected to replace the armistice but failed numerous times, meaning that the Korean peninsula technically is still in a state of war (Choi, 2007; Kim, 2023). Both North Korean and American signatories have violated the armistice numerous times over the years, with these violations named by both parties as reasons for delaying unification or pausing conversations on peace talks (Lee, 2013).

With these states still at war, Korean people have suffered immensely and still suffer from numerous human rights violations by both states in the name of greater security from the other Korean state. It is well known that North Koreans have endured strict authoritarian rule. Their government has come under scrutiny often from many human rights groups about its treatment towards its own people. However, below the DMZ, South Koreans endured similar hardships well into the 1980s under military dictatorships where social movements were repeatedly suppressed. Even today, the South Korean government enforces harsh censorship rules that stifle political activity and freedom of speech and thought. Additionally, with the construction of the DMZ as a border, restrictions on the right to movement for the Korean people became inevitable and painful considering the fact that thousands of families were forcibly divided because of the War. Families that were split by the Korean War have remained divided for seventy years now and are denied the right to see each other, except for special and rare exceptions by both governments. Diplomatic efforts to assuage tensions and reconcile political differences have been key in addressing these harmful violations and improving conditions for all Koreans.

Since the 1960s, waves of conversations between the two governments to reconcile differences have led various peaks such as the 1972 joint communique on the three principles to peaceful unification (McCormack, 1982, p. 28), the 1998 Sunshine Policy of South Korea (citation), Joint Declaration of 15 June 2000 (Cockburn, 2012, p. 187), the 2003-2007 six party talks (Cockburn, 2012, p. 186), and the 2018 Panmunjeom Declaration and Pyongyang Joint Declaration. However, the North and South governments have held clashing approaches towards reunification which have consistently led to interruptions in these hopeful peaks. The North prioritizes a “revolutionary unification” (McCormack, 1982, p. 15) while the South values an

incremental stage approach (Kwak, 1990, p. 175). Commentary on these failures are informed by a bias that usually focuses blame on North Korea without consideration for greater geopolitical factors or South Korea's actions as well (Murray, 2020; Seo, 2009). Ultimately, historical strategies towards reunion have envisioned collapse and full absorption of one side into the other's political regime, with a particular inaccurate expectation of North Korea's demise (Cumings, 2015; Grzelczyk, 2019, p. 32). And yet still, both Article 3 of the South Korean constitution and Article 1 of the North Korean constitution extend their application across the entire peninsula. Rather than a sign of domination, these articles perhaps allude to a broader identity of the collective people and maintain a connection across the peninsula.

Peace for the Korean people is historically and culturally bound with conversations around reunification that both escalate and de-escalate conflict in the peninsula (Shin, 2017). Reunification remains a central demand for many in North Korea, South Korea, and the diaspora, despite disagreements on how to achieve that goal (Lee, 2020; McCormack, 1982). Lee and Lee (2019) point out that reunification contains a multitude of meanings, i.e. the "geographical integration on the Korean Peninsula, the construction of one political and economic systems of Korea, or social and cultural integration of North and South Koreans" (p. 295) and that these nuances are difficult to capture in general polling. And as previously mentioned, the methods to unification are varied and can call for hostile approaches such as absorption which only escalate further conflict. Despite that challenge, polls on attitudes of South Koreans towards reunification are frequently collected and continue to demonstrate a popular desire for this process (Jiyoon et al., 2018). For example, 78% of South Koreans in a 2018 survey supported reunification "to eliminate the threat of war" (Lee and Lee, 2019, p. 302). Another survey conducted in 2019 showed that only 13.7% of participants explicitly opposed unification of the peninsula (Lee, 2020, p. 21). Ultimately, most polls show that most Koreans in the South continue to support a unified Korea, although reasons may differ across generations and political leanings (Jiyoon et al., 2018; Lee, 2020).

As the Korean War was in fact, an international war, foreign players are central to the conflict in this region – particularly the United States. With the peninsula still in a state of war, the United States has been allowed to heavily militarize the southern zone under the premise of security and defense (Lee, 2013). In fact, the US began to ship nuclear arms to South Korea starting in 1958, a violation of the armistice agreement signed just five years previously (Lee,

2013, p. 194). One of North Korea's main stipulations for peace is the withdrawal of the US military from South Korea for any peace talks to make meaningful strides (McCormack, 1982, p. 30). Because South Korea was not a signatory to the ceasefire armistice agreement, any peace agreement for the peninsula would require negotiations between North Korea and the United States to end formal hostilities (Congressional Research Service, 2018). However, since the 50s, the United States has not supported any peace agreement or peaceful strategies towards reunification, believing that peaceful advancements between the two Koreas would mean that the "U.S. military forces would have to leave" (Hong, 2002, p. 1250) and diminish US influence in the region. This unresolved conflict remains entrenched in larger geopolitical dynamics because of the global interests of larger foreign states in the region (Lee, 2023).

2. Literature Review

The Korean Peninsula still "remains politically and geographically divided" after 70 years and is considered one of the last vestiges leftover "after the end of the East-West Cold War" (Choung, 2021, p. 18). The decades of hostile tensions in the region, enveloped within larger geopolitical dynamics, has led to an extensive array of literature across various academic fields. Scholars have explored impacts of the Korean War (Cumings, 1989; Grinker, 1998), historical analysis of unification efforts (McCormack, 1982; Choi 2007), the DMZ (Kim, 2016), the role of foreign states and international bodies (Lee, 2013; Ban, 2021), security paradigms and nuclear diplomacy (Wit et al., 2004), and nationalist political identity (Shin and Chang, 2004). While literature has been abundant, policymakers and scholars alike often operated with an assumption that the North Korean government would inevitably fall, resulting in biased analyses and incorrect speculations (Harrison, 2002; Byman and Lind, 2010). Consensus around its staying power now requires "a change in scholarship" because "it is no longer appropriate to speak of an imminent North Korean collapse" (Grzelczyk, 2019, p. 32). Continued hostilities between the Koreas also means a continuation of hostile conditions that harm the Korean people. Research on peace and reconciliation in the region then warrants even greater significance and relevance today.

International law scholars have productively interrogated the legal conditions that peace has to be built upon in the Korean Peninsula. According to Kim (2023), “contemporary scholars agree that an armistice”, like the Armistice Agreement of 1953, “ceases hostilities but does not entirely terminate the war” (p. 134). With the official status of a war unended, this means that “new justification to use force is not required” (p. 130) and establishes an environment of tension even if there is no active armed conflict. Various domestic declarations have been agreed upon by the two Korean governments numerous times, however, legal interpretations of armistice agreements signify the necessity of a formal peace treaty to shift the legal landscape that enables hostilities to this day. While legal interpretations have established a potential goal for realizing peace in the region, processes towards peace are not only legal matters but also complicated political ones as well. For example, historians have shown that state signatories to the Armistice Agreement have violated the agreement numerous times over the decades, setting a precedent of distrust and lack of confidence (Lee, 2013; McCormack, 1982). Another important consideration for a Korean peace treaty is that in accordance with the Armistice Agreement, the “US will be a signatory as a representative of the unified command” (p. 150). By legally necessitating the involvement of international foreign states, a political understanding of international relations beyond the scope of legal studies must be considered as well.

2.1. International Relations

International political factors, such as the US-China rivalry, play a prominent role for peace negotiations between the Koreas and have been an obstacle at times as well (Park, 2020). The understanding of this complexity has resulted in examinations of peace and conflict in the Korean Peninsula predominantly through the field of international relations. International relations are often approached theoretically through a realist lens or a liberal lens. The realist school of thought operates with the “assumption that the world is a large anarchic space” (Park, 2022, p. 11) meaning that states must be self interested in order to survive. Military power because the innate aspiration for states and national security becomes the primary focus of relations between states. Peace can only be “characterized as the absence of war” (Kim et al., 2007, p. 296) or a “negative peace achieved through balance of [military] power” (Kim, 2019, p. 45). This theory interprets conflict in the Korean Peninsula as part of intrinsic violent traits of

states and attributes blame solely then to matters of military actions without interrogating possible legitimate motivations (Hwang, 2011). Scholars like Maxwell (2015) then conclude that because states like North Korea cannot be shifted away from military power, forced regime change is the only response to addressing conflict. Less egregious conclusions are also made that still center peace negotiations solely around military power balancing (Shin, 2020). Kang (2003) and numerous other international relations scholars heavily criticize this theory, claiming that the realist theory does not accurately describe the conflict in the Korean Peninsula, and that this will "only lead to a regressive path of deterioration of the security dilemma, further away from instating peace on the Korean peninsula" (Koo, 2011, p. 113).

These scholars alternatively argue for a liberalist perspective in international relations, which assumes that "peace is the natural state of human affairs" (Kim et al., 2007, p. 296) and that states are willing to cooperate with each other outside of national security motivations. It rests upon "the spirit of international organisation (internationalism, democracy and trade)" (Richmond, 2008, p. 22). International relations scholars have also noted that more liberal states with more open economies and democratic institutions tend to experience less conflict (Oneal and Russett, 2001). From this observation, liberalists then suggest that "interstate political systems, economic interdependence, and the institutionalization of cooperation offer the possibility of achieving democratic peace" (Park, 2022, p. 13). This is why industries such as tourism to the DMZ are framed positively as contributing to peace processes in Korea (Bigley et al., 2010). These types of activities in liberal international relations have developed into a theory known as liberal peace theory, which encompasses "democratisation, the rule of law, human rights, free and globalised markets, and neo-liberal development" as means for addressing conflict between states. South Korea adopted a liberal approach for a time starting in 1998 with its "Sunshine Policy", pursuing economic cooperation with North Korea through railway construction plans, investment agreements, and a South Korean corporate center north of the DMZ (Kwak, 2002). Kwak goes on to argue that "as its [North Korean] economic structure begins to change under the impact of market-oriented economic policies and increased contacts with the outside world, its political and social structure is bound to change" (p. 9), affirming a liberal approach in reconciliation with North Korea.

2.2. Peace and Conflict Studies

But because the "liberal peace framework… implicitly emerged in mainstream IR theory" (Richmond, 2008, p. 97), scholars called for deeper theoretical considerations focused on peace and peace issues. This theorization burgeoned into a subfield of liberal international relations called peace and conflict studies which offered new concepts and methodologies for peace processes. "Peacebuilding" was introduced by Galtung (1976) in response to realist international practices, peacekeeping and peacemaking operations, which he argued only focused on immediate conflict resolution. While peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts were effective in halting immediate military violences, as seen with the Korean Armistice Agreement, peacebuilding is a process that addresses root causes of violence in conflict ridden societies. This initial conception of peacebuilding was grounded in Galtung's earlier works which defined violence as more than just physical, but also as "structural" which leads to various "social injustices" (1969, p. 171). According to Galtung, peacekeeping and peacemaking values a "negative peace" (1969, p. 183), whereas peacebuilding aspires towards "positive peace" (p. 183) that targets root structural violences. The concept of peace is then viewed as a systemic condition that addresses social justice. The UN adopted peacebuilding into its peace operations in its 1992 report, "An Agenda for Peace", as presented by the UN Secretary-General at the time, Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In this report, he stated that peacebuilding was an essential aspect of achieving peace, as a post-conflict process to sustain peace and prevent any further violences.

However, this new turn in peace practices and studies did not address some core limitations of international relations. Despite being situated as a subfield, more critical peace and conflict scholars have advanced further criticisms of both realist and liberalist approaches. Scholars like Cox (1981) argued that peace processes in international relations detrimentally center around the state where the "general pattern of institutions and relationships is not called into question" at all (p. 129). Korean scholars like Kwak (2002) have proven that state-centered approaches for peace in the Peninsula are hampered by international diplomacy politics, noting that the US's position on North Korea "has negative effects on both US-North Korean relations and inter-Korean relations" (p. 21). Alternatively, Lederach (1997) called for new "approaches that go beyond traditional stasist diplomacy" (p. xvi). To address the root structural violences that Galtung first conceptualized, local actors have to play a crucial role in peace processes, not just state governments. Cultural contexts and "local everyday dynamics of peace" must be

considered for peacebuilding to truly be sustainable (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013, p. 768). Kang and Heo (2023) follow this vein in examining how ordinary Korean citizens perceive and respond to formal rhetoric around concepts like peacebuilding. They reveal how the identity and language of everyday people is instrumental and should be considered in peacebuilding efforts on the Peninsula. Kim (2019) has also gone on to affirm the importance of non-government actors, such as civil society, in breaking through the obstacles that government-led peace processes often face in Korean peace processes.

Mac Ginty and Richmond's perspective on the role of the local, however, differs from Lederach's more widely accepted positioning. Lederach recommends that peacebuilding efforts should center on "middle-range actors" because they are considered to have the "greatest potential to serve as sources of practical, immediate action" (1997, p. 61). In this regard, the turn to the local for peacebuilding processes often meant that high level civil society actors took on greater roles. Unfortunately, empirical observations have proven these "local actors" still require and lean on international interventions and operate based on conventional liberal practices, maintaining a top-down and state-centric approach for peacebuilding (Paffenholz, 2015; Leonardsson and Rudd, 2015). These scholars claim that the elitist development of these middle-range actors does not effectively or successfully target the root causes of structural violence. While they do not reject this emphasis on the local, they argue for a more "emancipatory peace" that "reopens the debate on power, peace, social justice" (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013, p. 78).

2.3. A Decisive Gap

The irony in peace and conflict studies advocating for the "need to listen to voices from below" (Leonardsson and Rudd, 2015) is that this field returns to concepts of peace as its main focus rather than the local actors themselves. Paffenholz (2015) states that further peace research must "move away from the binary understanding of the research subject" (p. 868), but in reality, the local actors were never truly the research subjects in the first place. Local agency and resistance to state-centric processes are understood as both "small-scale" and "large-scale mobilisation" (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013, p. 770), but never given proper consideration on how local agents mobilize, other than recognizing that local actors "have to become activists" (p.

776). Paffenholz (2015) rightfully critiques Mac Ginty and Richmond on failing to elaborate their conception of "resistance" but does not offer any alternative theoretical model either (p. 865). Even in Kang and Heo's (2023) study on "ordinary activists" mentioned previously, the "forms and functions of individual and collective action" (pp. 763-764) are explicitly ignored. Richmond (2006) does briefly acknowledge that social movements are a method for local communities to take ownership in the peace process but does not address this point any further (p. 301). It becomes clear that research moving forward has to hone in on these activists and better understand the social movements that they participate in to advance the peace research agenda.

Previously, peace movements have been narrowly defined with a mission "military power in particular" (Galtung, 1998, p. 402) or "national security strategies" (Hermann, 1992, p. 872). This situates them antagonistically against realist perspectives in international relations. However, their relationship to more liberal models of peacebuilding have not been explored deeply. There is minimal literature that examines the role of social movements on peace in peacebuilding processes. Nagle (2016) speculates that perhaps that this is because social movements "construct conflictual relations with clearly defined opponents" which can lie "uneasy with the goals of peacebuilding" (p. 19). However, Nagle supports my argument that peace movements can play an important role in criticizing and reforming peacebuilding practices to create positive change and positive peace.

Chung (2011) and Cockburn (2011) provide a Korean context in this gap by identifying the collective efforts of Korean grassroots activists towards peacebuilding as part of a Korean social movement for peace. By understanding local actor efforts on peacebuilding as a peace movement, resistance can be better conceptualized and centers grassroots actors as the research subject rather than peace. Both Chung's and Cockburn's case study accounts on Korean peace movements highlight that Korean peace activists are engaged not only in issues of peace but have also been engaged in issues of democratization and human rights actually. This contribution importantly contests a common divide between peacebuilding and human rights (Hvidsten and Skarstad, 2017). With the development of peace and conflict studies, an epistemological and ontological divide also developed between perceived contradictions of peacebuilding practices and human rights ideals. Case studies on conflict resolution in Bosnia and Colombia are attributed as examples of the clash between "the normative nature of human rights demands" and

the "practical requirements of making and building peace" (Parlevliet, 2017, pp. 335–336). In the context of Korea peace activists, this tension arises often regarding peace for the region and contending with human rights violations committed by the North Korean government (Cockburn, 2011, p. 201). A deeper dive into the perspectives of Korean peace activists would not only offer insight into how these activists navigate this tension, but also more broadly how the peace movement defines peacebuilding practices for themselves in a localized manner. I argue that the field of social movement studies offers important theoretical and methodological frameworks to center these activists and explore possible tensions in the cultural context through their voices and perspectives.

3. Theory

3.1. Social movement studies

Historical and modern social movements have complexities and nuances across different economic, political, and social landscapes. The academic field of social movements cemented following the American Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s in attempts to understand how movements begin and are sustained. Scholars such as Tilly (1973; 1978), McAdam (1982), and Tarrow (1991) introduced theories that presented these phenomena not as "spontaneous, unorganized, and unstructured" (Morris, 2000, p. 455), but rather, products of succinct political processes and structures embedded in societal changes. The political landscapes that activists had to navigate became compelling grounds for academic insight which was coined as political opportunity structures. Kitschelt (1986) demonstrated this in his comparative study of anti-nuclear social movements mobilizing in different manners across different countries.

McCarthy and Zald (1977) expanded upon this perspective by introducing resource mobilization theory which shifted research further away from a social psychology lens of analysis towards one focused on economic and political structural factors. Resource mobilization theory identified formal organizational processes and resource availability as fundamental and strategic determinants for actors in mobilizing social movements within the political opportunity structures referenced before. This sociological perspective grounded movements within a realist and structuralist epistemology that categorized actor motivations as rational responses to

economic factors to "gain entry into the polity" (Hannigan, 1985, p. 438). However, valid criticisms to this perspective highlighted a need for a more constructivist lens which accounts for cultural contexts and identity politics of participants in their movements (Buechler, 1995). Other scholars also argued that social movement studies needed to account for discourse on grievances that activists and movements claimed in their actions and campaigns (Snow et al., 1986; Zald, 1996). These criticisms grew into an alternative school of though known as new social movement theory. Frame alignment or "framing" was developed as a new theory in this social movement studies which allowed a more constructivist analysis on how participants in social movements make meaning of their actions (Benford and Snow, 2000). As a response, scholars expanded upon social movement theories to incorporate these constructivist tools and synthesized the building blocks of social movements as processes of mobilizing resources, identified political opportunities, and framing issues (McAdams et al., 1996). This model of social movement theory has been coined as "political process theory" (Morris, 2000).

While new social movement theorists attempt to shift away from the realist interpretations of activists in political process theory, various critics have suggested that even still this paradigm "has not been able to fully escape the bonds of structural determinism" (Hannigan, 1985, p. 448). New social movement theory still implicitly maintains a positivist lens in its analysis set within a postindustrial society as the realm of social movements (Vahabzadeh, 2001). The attempts of new social movement theory to distinctly situate itself within a cultural sphere away from the modern state paradoxically maintains a structuralist form of society. This alternative paradigm also traps itself within an arbitrary dichotomization between a supposed cultural and political reality (Buechler, 1995, p. 451; Vahabzadeh, 2001, p. 627). Notably though, these critiques do not call for a dismissal of new social movement theory or a revitalization of political process theory but recognize how both schools of thought reflect different aspects of social movements particularly in why movements are started and how they operate. Understanding the trajectory of social movement theories effectively highlights the necessity of researching social movements within the context of regions outside of Western countries. Criticisms of resource mobilization theories have acknowledged that political process theories were developed within the context of the United States (McCarthy and Zald, 1997, p. 1213) and new social movement theories in European contexts (Buechler, 1995, p. 460). New scholarship must recognize the unique natures of movements outside of the Western frame to

refine and navigate the limitations of their theories (Vahabzadeh, 2001, p. 624; McAdam et al., 2001, p. 305). Ultimately, the incorporation of framing concepts in political process theory, the development of the alternative new social movement theory, and critiques of both demonstrate a continued push towards a more constructivist understanding of social movements and the actors within them as societies continue to change from impactful social movements.

3.2. Framing theory

With an understanding that a constructivist approach can offer more insight into social movements seen today, I return to the "framing" activities identified by Snow et al (1986), expanding on Goffman's (1986) research on "frame analysis" – a theoretical insight into the experiences of how individuals perceive and create meaning relationally. Inspired by media and theater, Goffman explored the performances of interactions that inform our perceptions of the realities we navigate. He introduces and defines frames as "schemata of interpretation" that allow individuals to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" events through their personal lenses. Snow and other scholars like Benford (2000) apply this interpersonal social theory to the political realm in the context of movement work and these processes are developed and shared between individuals and broader organizations. Frames questions the assumptions of static interpretations of grievances and gives meaning to the processes of identifying and responding to these framed concerns. Inherently, framings in social movements build off of a fundamental understanding of an injustice occurring in society (Snow et al., 1986, p. 474; Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 616; Zald, 1996, p. 266). These injustices open windows to construct discourse that "not only differ from existing ones but may also challenge them" (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 614). Importantly, framing is "an active, creative, constitutive process' (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 16) that is dynamic and relational between grassroots activists and the political regimes they are engaging with. Actors in social movements construct these meaningful shared experiences as constitutive people within "collective action frames" (Gamson, 1992) that are rationalized as the underpinnings of mobilization and strategies for activating campaigns. Collective action frames are also not accidental processes but meaningful negotiations between "individual and SMO interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values, and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary" (Snow et al. 1986, p. 464).

Snow et al. (1986) categorized these processes as frame bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation.

Once collective action frames are constructed through these alignment processes, they then are tasked with various functions within that strategic social movement work. Benford and Snow (2000) have categorized these tasks into three processes: diagnostic frames, motivational frames, and prognostic frames (p. 615). As previously mentioned, diagnostic frames define the problem or injustice that must be changed within a society. A key characteristic of diagnostic frames is the attributional nature of these shared claims in identifying within the injustice where the blame and responsibility should be attributed. Within social movements at transnational levels, the attribution is often shifted from "self-blaming to structural-blaming, from victim-blaming to system-blaming" (Snow et al., 1986, p. 474). Effective diagnostic frames that have staying power begin to broaden into larger understandings of worldviews or ideologies presented as "master frames" (Snow and Benford, 1992). Another core task for frames is the motivational framing which gives reasoning to why people should engage with and enter social movements then. Finally, the prognostic frame serves to portray possible solutions that can address the shared injustices identified within these diagnostic frames. Prognostic frames then offer meaningful tactics and responses to identified opponents in order to address the diagnosed injustice.

It is important to remember that the production and refinement of frames "grow out of existing cultural definitions" (Zald, 1996, p. 273). As argued by new social movement theorists, social movements are built upon cultural and historical landscapes that inform the discourses and interpretations which activists claim. This cultural contextualization serves to better understand the "collective" aspect of collective action frames. The construction of an identity in relation to broader organization as a "collective identity" (Hunt and Benford, 2004, p. 437) denotes this process of aligning individual perspectives to find commonality in experiences and injustices. Understanding the unique cultural settings of the specific place better informs how certain collective action frames come about and why they are successful. Efforts to better understand these nuances outside of a "new general model" (McAdams et al., 2001, p. 305) has led to an explicit focus on the contentious nature of framing that activists require to protest the unique injustices that they face in their society.

Returning to peace and conflict studies, Richmond (2008) claims that "the peace being constructed in the various contemporary conflict zones around the world looks very different from the perspectives of local communities, polities, economies, and officials" (p. 309). Lederach (1997) then argues that any peacebuilding that works towards that constructed goal of peace must be rooted in the "experiential and subjective realities shaping people's perspectives and needs" (1997, p. 28). Social movements for peace in Korea have been present for decades (Chung, 2011), and are already voicing their perspectives on peace and peacebuilding approaches. Framing theory is instrumental in capturing those perspectives.

3.3. Research Question

Given current academic focus on state-centered policy approaches to peace and the call for a local turn in peacebuilding, there is a need to pay greater attention to, and explore peace processes from the perspectives of grassroots activists and their social movements. Additionally, framing theory – as understood within social movement scholarship – has not been commonly applied to explore the nuances of peace movements. This research aims to contribute to peace and human rights scholarship by illuminating how social movement activists frame fundamental ideas around issues for peace and justice. Korea offers a compelling site of study because of the unique nature of its cultural and historical setting that calls for an intersection of peacebuilding with the ongoing Korean War and historical relevance of the division of the Peninsula. My research questions are then:

1) How do Korean peace activists interpret the cultural and political landscape of hostile tensions on the Korean Peninsula?
    a. How do these interpretations inform the social movement for peace between the two Koreas?
2) What relevance do these frames hold for peacebuilding and human rights in the Korean Peninsula?

4. Methodology

With these research questions in mind, the following methodology has been chosen. Framing theory has proven to be effective and insightful in revealing nuances in the landscape of grassroots politics outside of the limitations of realist and positivist approaches. Fuller and McCauley (2016) believe that "the political process of framing and the construction of justice claims" (p. 1) are important to examine in relationship to one another to better understand social activists and social movement organizations. Framing analyses can better "place the agents of such claims at the forefront of social movement research" (McCauley, 2017, p. 4). This is important in giving "voice to the perspectives of oppressed groups and analyzing their forms of resistance and the ways they understand their situation" (Cappialli, 2023, p. 213). In particular, social movements around human rights have actively relied on rights framing as a means to navigate transnational spaces (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p. ix). Scholars such as Miller (2010) have applied framing tools to the narratives within human rights movements, proving the relevance of this constructivist approach to not only frameworks of injustices, but also to the rights that activists desire. In this study, I offer an exploratory interrogation into how Korea peace activists frame this movement for peace, and in particular, how the cultural context of Korean identity and the division of the Peninsula impacts their work.

4.1. Methods

Wide ranging qualitative approaches have proven to be of great use in studying social movements and the actors in those spaces (della Porta, 2014). With an understanding of the inherent constructivist nature of framing theory and analysis of qualitative materials, qualitative methods are an appropriate means to study this research question. I use semi-structured interviews which opens "access to a broader and more diverse group of social movement actors" (Blee and Taylor, 2000, p. 93). Interviewing methods are productive for framing theory and because they allow for a deeper "scrutiny of meaning, both how activists regard their participation and how they understand their social world" (p. 95).

I conducted semi-structured interviews with ten different Korean activists who shared their opinions with me on the history and demands of the social movement for peace in Korea. The 10 activists I interviewed are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Participants

Aiyoung	NGO Chair, activist
Cathi	NGO worker, activist
Echo	NGO worker, activist
HK	Activist
Youngjoo	Activist
Pauline	Activist
Soobok	Activist
Yehjung	Humanitarian aid worker
Young Sun	Artist
Youngah	Activist

These activists are involved in various movement organizations based in South Korea and the United States ranging from humanitarian organizations like Korean Sharing Movement, to feminist organizations such as Women Cross DMZ, with all being grassroots focused. They spoke to me from their own individual perspective and not as official representatives on behalf of their affiliated organizations. However, in these interviews they still offered some insight into stances and positions of their organizations at times. Other than being identified as ethnically Korean, I did not collect demographic data on these activists as the aim of the research was to offer an initial assessment of the possible ranging themes that arise in their organizing work. That being said, the backgrounds of these activists ranged immensely in terms of age, gender, sexuality, and geographies. For example, some activists were born in the northern region of the Korean Peninsula at the end of World War II, while others are millennial, American-born Koreans. One activist lived in Germany at the fall of the Berlin Wall and experienced a state reunification. The vast differences in identity give even more depth and rich data in analysis. One limitation in the sample size is that I was unable to speak to any North Koreans involved in peace movement work on the Peninsula. However, I was able to interview several activists that

have North Korean family members, and one of my participants even lived in North Korea for two years starting in 2018.

These interviews were conducted virtually mainly in English, however, Korean was used at times in the introductions and endings of the interviews to build a more comfortable rapport. Participants were initially recruited through personal connections that I developed through my past organizing and advocacy work. And then, through snowball sampling techniques, initial participants introduced to me other activists that were willing to be interviewed for this research project. One other limitation in recruiting efforts is that my Korean is only at a conversational competency level, so it is not proficient enough for me to conduct interviews on topics like this completely in the Korean language. I did not have the resources to facilitate a translator for interviews either, so potential participants had to have a certain level of English which I recognize also limited my sample size. Additionally, I did not have confidence in my Korean language skills to fully communicate ethical research considerations to the participants and needed them to be able to express consent willingly in English to me.

4.2. Data Analysis

I turn to thematic analysis, in its most recent conceptualization as first articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006), for my tool to analyze these interviews. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method that researchers utilize to interrogate "participants' lived experience, views and perspectives, and behavior and practices" through "identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning" which culminate into themes. (Clarke and Baun, 2017, p. 297). A reminder that framing theory is "rooted in the symbolic interactionist and constructionist principle that meanings… arise through interpretive processes" (Snow et al., 2018, p. 393) and those processes, also known as framing, result in cohesive frames, or shared sets of beliefs around those meanings. Therefore, thematic analysis serves as a useful mechanism to identify relevant themes in my interview data which can then be further understood and constituted as frames.

With the understanding of the relevance of thematic analysis for my research question, I relied on the process offered and outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021). First, I sought to familiarize myself with the data by reviewing all computer-generated transcriptions of the

interviews. Because in the interviews, the participants and I would jump back and forth between Korean and English, I knew that the transcriptions would not be completely accurate. So, I then listened back to all recordings for the interviews and manually transcribed them. Translating Korean phrases that the participants used was also a helpful activity in fully engaging myself with this data. The next step was systematically coding the entire dataset by identifying key vocabulary and phrases that were pertinent to my research questions with color coded highlighting. From this stage I identified meaningful connections across codes that developed into initial themes. The following step involved reviewing these themes and testing if they coherently connected to my codes and to the research topic. It was in this stage that I interpreted several themes that had to be split apart. Refinement and naming of the themes came after, where I critically engaged with my themes and realigned several themes as subthemes under broader onse. It was in this stage that I perceived unique connections between these themes and Korean cultural concepts, which then informed my naming of two of them to Korean cultural terminology. The final step was writing the analysis of my findings.

4.3. Ethical Considerations and Positionality

Within social science research, numerous ethical issues must be given proper consideration for participants such as "minimizing harm, respecting people's autonomy, avoiding exploitation, and preserving their privacy" (Traianou, 2020, p. 86). Especially in fields of study like human rights and social movements, there can be risk to participants if they are expressing politically dissenting views in research that have to be mitigated with ethical practices. The need to negotiate with the inherent ethical issues in research such as potential risks for participants highlights the "unbalanced relationship that research establishes between the investigator and the research object" (Milan, 2014, p. 448). Thus, our own positionalities and privileges in the status of researcher become another central ethical issue that must be considered. Within this research project, questions of anonymity for participants and my own ethnic identity and past political activities became largely relevant in ethical considerations.

Anonymization is usually considered a standard practice of protecting participants in research and to maintain their confidentiality, however, this is "questioned on the basis that participants sometimes want to be named in research reports" (Traianou, 2020, p. 91). Scholars

have also "begun to question what they see as the default assumption of anonymisation of participants as a straightforward ethical good" (Pickering and Kara, 2017, p. 301). Feminist scholars such as Moore (2012) challenge this practice by claiming that it can be potentially a means of silencing the voices of participants. Gordon (2019) recognizes that "not fully crediting or attributing participants' voice can play a role in replicating experiences of marginalisation" (p. 544) and that when participants do reject "notions of anonymity… they are challenging unequal power dynamics between them and the researcher" (p. 549). Obviously there are situations that participants must be anonymized, and data collection itself should uphold these practices of anonymity and confidentiality. However, there are scenarios where it could be reasonable to allow them "a right to decide whether they are anonymized" based on the "specific cases concerned" (Hammersley, 2015, p. 441). If we respect a participant's agency to give free and informed consent to be researched in the first place, we can also respect this agency in their decision around ethical practices regarding them such as anonymity.

Regarding my own research participants, these are activists that are publicly open about their political dissent against government actions and about their involvement with social movement organizations. I also recognize if I were to interview activists in North Korea, ethical considerations would have to be much more nuanced as there are much greater risks for expressing dissent, particularly to a researcher coming from a Western institution like me. However, all the activists that I interviewed resided in South Korea or the United States which they fully understood as meaning fewer risks in openly expressing their opinions. With that in mind, I wanted to center their autonomy and allow them the choice of being anonymized or not in the writing. I tried to clearly express the nature of the research and the scope of where my dissertation would go so that they could make a fully informed decision. All of them chose not to be anonymized. I align with their decisions because I view naming them as a way to give credit to their voices and perspectives. Unequal dynamics of power in research are reinforced when "human participants are understood as sources of data" only, where participant perspectives are then seen simply as data which "becomes the property of the researcher, and the research relationship ends there" (Pickering and Kara, 2017, p. 300). This is not just my data, but also knowledge that is produced and constructed by other humans.

Contending with issues of ethics, such as anonymization standards, demonstrates the necessity for critical reflection on the researcher's positionality throughout the research process

in general when interrogating ethical considerations. Milan (2014) notes that “reflexivity… is a central axis of the research process, and a mechanism central to the ethical engagement with the realm of activism” (p. 448). Therefore, ethical considerations must be given thought regarding my own positionality as a Korean American with previous participation and involvement in the social movement that is the focus of my study. Often, academia assumes a degree of separation between the researcher and participants and the field of study, in this case the field of social movements, is “the only scientifically sound research, on the grounds that the observer is sufficiently detached from the object of study” (Milan, 2014, p. 460). However, a direct connection to social movements can provide “important incentives to produce more accurate information, regardless of whether the researcher is studying a favored movement or its opponents” (Bevington and Dixon, 2005, p. 190). Engaging with activists that are part of the same movement which I have been involved in fosters greater commitment to better research and accountability to the participants in avoiding exploitation. Particularly in data collection methods such as interviewing, sharing commonalities with my participants in identity, language, or political experiences “can facilitate access to a movement and promote trust and rapport necessary for collecting sound data” (Blee and Taylor, 2002, p. 97). Bevington and Dixon (2005) continue to argue that “the engaged researcher has more of a stake in producing accurate findings than one with no stake in the movement” (p. 192). My subjectivities and background can be “understood as a resource… rather than a potential threat to knowledge production” (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 592) when maintaining a critical practice of reflexivity. This is not a call for “blurring the boundaries between activists and researchers” (Milan, 2014, p. 452), but rather, affirming that transparently articulating my own positionality in a reflexive manner ensures more ethical proceedings and strengthened knowledge production.

5. Findings

As a reminder, 10 semi-structured interviews were carried out with Korean activists, who provided over 13 hours of rich and significant raw data and evidence. This evidence has been analyzed using thematic analysis. Through a step-by-step thematic analysis process, numerous codes were identified and developed as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Themes

Han	
Legacies of Injustice	Significance of past historical traumas
Resistance against American Influence	Current sentiment/resentment against the US
Jeong	
Thawing Relations with North Koreans	Affirmation of a shared ethnic identity across state borders
DMZ	Contesting the border dividing the Peninsula
Rights Talk	
Right to Self-Determination	Desire for Koreans to have more agency in inter-Korean relations
Censorship	South Korean National Security Law
North Korean Human Rights	Problematizes human rights discourse on North Korea

I identified seven themes which coalesced into three overarching themes. These themes can be analyzed or understood as *frames* that seek collective action within social movement contexts. Themes are not just patterns found within content but have a purpose which is why they may be further understood as collective action frames. As my research question probes at frames that are constructed within the Korean cultural landscape of this social movement, it is fitting to identify them with cultural terminology bound in Korean language and identity. The two of the three frames I identified connected to key Korean concepts which are *han* and *jeong*. These require brief contextualization and then I will move into demonstrating how the themes are situated within these cultural frames. The third frame culminates into their interpretations of how human rights apply and are relevant to peace movement efforts in Korea. As stated previously, according to framing theory, frames are tasked with three core functions: diagnosis, prognosis, and motivational framing. I explore and identify how the broader frames I have identified operate within these given tasks.

5.1. Han

The Korean concept of *han* does not translate easily to a single word in English, however, it can be understood generally as a "collective feeling of unresolved resentment, pain, grief, and anger" (Kim, 2017, p. 254). It is considered an innate quality that binds all Koreans together in their collective ethnic identity and manifests in all aspects of society. Importantly, *han* is not just an abstract cultural idea, but a politically and historically situated sentiment that Koreans attribute to "centuries of suffering from wars, invasions, colonization, injustice and exploitation" (Jeong, 2018, p. 154). Koreans conceive of *han* as part of our heritage that is passed down through the bloodlines of all Koreans, transcending geographic boundaries and enveloping even diasporic communities (Kim, 2010). *Han* has been examined in numerous fields of scholarship pertaining to Korean society such as in psychiatry (Ka, 2010), literary analysis (Hyunsuk, 2019), and theological studies (Moon, 2014). The shared Korean feeling of *han* is not solely based in grief or "denotes not only the accumulation of wounds and traumas but also a hope to overcome them" (Yoo, 2022, p. 251). The modern interpretation of *han* can be seen particularly under Japanese colonization in the early 1900s (Kim, 2017, p. 258) and following the Korean War as a means to "reflect the oppression experienced during the colonial period due to political governmental authoritarianism, as well as Western imperialism" (Moon, 2014, p. 420). So, the frame of *han* goes beyond a general perception of injustice as it assigns this injustice to interventions by foreign powers which serves to strengthen a unified commonality of Korean identity. I found in my interviews that the frame of *han* encompasses two key sub themes: legacies of injustice and resistance against American influence.

5.1.1. Legacies of Injustice

While none of the Koreans I interviewed claimed *han* explicitly in their experiences in the peace movement, many evoked this sentiment of pain from historical traumas as a foundation for peace movement work in Korea. Firstly, many participants made clear this tie between current Korean social movements and the historical Korean resistances against colonial power – most evidently against Japanese occupational rule. This topic aligns within the sub theme of "legacies of injustice" under the *han* framing. Young Sun, an artist and descendant of North Korean refugees, reminded me that the current landscape of Korean society is premised on a

"culture…completely separated due to war and intervention by foreign nations, and after many years of colonization or occupation by Japan, Russia, the US". One of the interviewees, Youngjoo, had a grandfather that was an independence fighter in the Manchuria region during the Japanese occupation which has informed her presence in this movement. Another activist, Aiyoung, is the chair of the Women Cross DMZ organization, and was actually born in what is now North Korea, during Japanese occupation. She told me that her family had to leave Korea because her father "was unable to withstand that type of life" working for a "Japanese owned company. They owned everything as colonizer". This legacy of injustice around Japanese occupation is important to note in the history of colonization for the Korean people because this colonial rule solidified the call for a single state. Cathi, another organizer with Women Cross DMZ told me that so much complexity and conflict in the region "emerged out of Japanese colonial resistance and in that fight for nationhood or independence", soon strode in the superpowers post World War II – the Soviets and the Americans. Despite that brief era of liberation against the Japanese, according to Echo, another activist associated with both Korea Peace Now and Women Cross DMZ, "in September 1945, US came in, they lowered the Japanese flag and raised the American flag". Immediately after Koreans assembled a vision of a nation-state free from Japan, the Soviets and the Americans entered the peninsula leading to a division that was cemented by three years of war. Therefore, the violence of Japanese colonialism could never be addressed in Korea, which confirms an important characteristic of *han* which is that the suffering is unresolved. The unaddressed hardships the Koreans suffered under colonial rule are fundamental aspects of this framing.

Next, the interpretations by these Korean peace activists around the Korean War and the partition of Korea, I argue, are a continuation of *han* framing. Familiar themes of injustice and grief were expressed by these activists when describing the nature of the Korean War and division of the peninsula. Noticeably, all attributed the conflict to foreign powers that ignored the will of the Korean people. Yehjung, a South Korean humanitarian aid worker to North Korea, concluded my interview with her by stating, "the division of Korea, it was decided by superpowers, right? So there's the start of the misery in the two countries" The emotional pain embodies *han* in that it is a collective sentiment for Koreans and spurred on by foreign states. Aiyoung noted how her organization makes an explicit effort to honor this.

> One of our focuses at Women Cross DMZ now is to acknowledge and recognize the silence, the buried fears and, and suffering that, our parents and the generation before us were not able to articulate, but which have, which have affected us invisibly through the generations. And it is a form of trauma and it is a form of insecurity and a form of worry, which we are carrying forward.

Again, highlighting that this sentiment of *han* – this unjust suffering – is carried on in Koreans which collectivizes us into a shared identity. Aiyoung continued to connect this pain to "being deprived of our sovereignty", that is, Korean sovereignty, and awareness that many Korean political struggles are tied to actions by foreign states. In this vein, Echo shared with me a prominent saying in Korean society, "the shrimp who got torn apart by two whales fighting", as indicative of Koreans' viewing their nation being torn apart by larger foreign interests. These activists expressed the pain and unfairness perceived from the division of the Peninsula and injustice that they felt within it. The historical violences that Koreans endured are framed as still presently relevant and centered in their peace activism today.

Cathi's frustrations regarding the partition of the Korean Peninsula were salient in describing how simply:

> two mid-tier US officials in a room in DC drew a line using a map of Korea from National Geographic. Once I learned that it was these two guys who weren't even the Secretary of State or a comparably high-ranking position, – not that it makes it better — but I just feel like that really paints this picture. These two colonels drew a line and did this geopolitical parceling without consulting a single Korean… And this just short changes so much of the complex and layered legacies of Korean culture, history, political ideology that existed across the Korean Peninsula up to that point… but that division is not reflective of that.

These two officers are cited to be Colonel Dean Rusk and Charles Bonesteel, who allegedly used a National Geographic map in 1945 to delineate the territory the US would control and the portion that would be under Soviet authority (Jeong, 2018, p. 156). Around the event of the parceling of the Korean Peninsula into North and South, all participants expressed this feeling of

unfairness and lack of control in this partition which they voiced as a political endeavor forced upon Koreans by both the Americans and the Soviets.

For *han* framing, Koreans identified Japan historically, and more recently the Soviets and Americans as sources of this suffering. In particular, the US now plays a significant role in political relations with South Korean and the Peninsula as a whole. This leads to the second subtheme within the *han* frame.

5.1.2. Resistance Against American Influence

In the eyes of Yehjung, "the US influence on the Korean Peninsula is absolute. If the US really wants peace or reunification, I think that they can make an environment". While there was agreement among these peace activists that the US plays a critical role in addressing the conflict in the region, there was also consensus that the US has demonstrated very little incentive to alleviate hostilities and actually acts as an impediment sometimes. Cathi described how in the early 2000s, "US policymakers interfered and it was the US that wanted to slow down or to hedge on that peace process" between the two Koreas. Other activists like Young Sun concurred, pointing out how the US did not uphold its own end of the bargain for reducing sanctions against North Korea as assurances for denuclearization talks. Youngah raised another interesting example regarding denuclearization talks where some activists "think that North Korea's nuclear and ICBM development is result of US and South Korea policies. Because US nuclear policy, they didn't declare no first use policy". This "No First Use" policy that Youngah is referring to is the US foreign policy strategy on nuclear weapons promoting deterrence and non-proliferation (Sagan, 2009). Ultimately, with this approach, the US provides assurance that most countries in good standing will never be struck first by the US with nuclear weapons. Several countries have been excluded from this assurance though, namely China, Russia, and North Korea. Scholars like Sagan (2009) have argued that these types of stances from the US heighten risk and could actually promote proliferation as a perceived threat (p. 175). Even aside from the seemingly insurmountable question of nuclear weapons, Aiyoung viewed the US as an insincere diplomatic facilitator in the region when she said, "You can't hold out an olive branch and say, let's talk, we're ready to talk and then continue with the other hand, impose sanctions, travel bans, settle

our troops there". These instances exemplify that Korean activists view the US as a key actor and target in their social movement for peace in the Peninsula.

HK, also an organizer with Korean Peace Now, claimed that the US is not for peace or reunification because "the US wants in a way a status quo because they're fine just enough tension for rationale to keep the troops there to keep the funding there". Most of the activists named the US "military industrial complex" as a negative phenomenon that incentivized the US to increase militarization in the Peninsula for profit, leading to a perception of escalating hostilities and tensions. Youngjoo named this industry as a source of US unwillingness to support a Korean peace process. Quite blatantly, she said:

> They want to sell weapons. I don't think the US government wants Korea to be united… because a lot of it's a weapon industry or gun industry. They're the ones making money… everywhere there's a war there are people who are making lots of money so I think they [Americans] play the same kind of thing to the Korea issue too.

This framing extends their critiques of US influence not just to political interference, but also to a lens of anti-militarism, which is a central theme in peace movement work (Galtung, 1998). So, resistance to the presence of the US can be understood as an extension to the general practice of peace activism against militarization and military power. This coupling became more cognizant when several of the interviewees brought up American influence on domestic Korean military matters. An example of this that came up often for the interviewees was around the impression that the US had great influence over the South Korean military. According to HK:

> South Korea does not have control of its military, it is US… if you want real peace you want the separation to occur so that South Korean military can maintain the peace on its own vis a vis North Korea without interference or involvement of foreign troops.

The "intertwined nature of the militaries", as Cathi described it, acts as a source of injustice perpetrated by Americans that has to be resisted. Connecting this to the previously named "military industrial complex", it becomes clear that these activists do not trust the motivations

for the US having a military presence in the Peninsula and that this presence is against the will of the Korean people. Soobok, described to me these negative feelings of resentment and *han* towards the US when he once visited the DMZ:

> US GIs are standing there. You know it's our country. That's not Korean territory, that's so called UN territory equals American territory. Humiliation. Unhappy, sad, humiliation, and any minute, not our will, via USA will, another war rekindled. We can't control.

In the case of the Korean peace movement, the monopoly control of the military is not by the South Korean government, but rather, by US power. Thus, *han* as an overarching frame in a social movement for peace identifies the injustices faced by the Korean people as connected to overwhelming presence and control by the US.

5.2. Jeong

Jeong is considered another unique concept within the cultural and historical identity for Koreans. Again, while it does not translate to another direct term in English, *jeong* can be described as an "affectional feeling tone underpinning relational ties… characterized by a strong sense of mutual altruism, attentiveness, empathy and helpfulness" (Yang and Horak, 2019, p. 399). However, "*jeong* exists even when you do not have a positive feeling… you still have *jeong* regardless of liking or disliking" (Yang, 2006, p. 286) meaning that it describes a deeper bond or unity to that person. Joh (2006) discusses how in Korea, these "relationships full of discontent" (p. 123) are sometimes labeled *mi-eon jeong*, and that "Koreans have a saying: 'It's better to have *mi-eun jeong* than no *jeong*' (p. 123). The deep communal relations in *jeong* – even through thick and thin – demonstrates a key trait Korean culture. Koreans give this sentiment great importance as they consider it to be the fundamental basis for relations between Koreans (Ka, 2010, p. 229). So, in a similar vein to *han*, this concept is another unifying mentality that connects all Koreans. Kwon (2001) recognizes that while *jeong* is very much a universal emotion shared in many other cultures, it is not easily understood by the Americans or Westerners that are entrenched in more individualized societies (p. 44). This concept has been studied, just like *han*, in numerous fields

such as educational curriculum development (Ryu and and Cervero, 2011), social work (Lee et al., 2018), and fashion marketing (Ko et al., 2011).

While this term is often in reference to the day-to-day types of relations, I hone in on the fact that "it is through *jeong* relation that Koreans find 'the Korean-ness' among the Korean race" (Kwon, 2001, p. 45), and extend this cultural concept to this political arena of social movements. With this understanding, *jeong* is seen as a very salient frame that the interviewees ascribed to in making meaning of their motivations to enter this movement work. I found that the *jeong* frame also contained subthemes: relations to North Koreans and questioning the DMZ as a border.

5.2.1. Thawing Relations with North Koreans

The unity and affection that *jeong* evokes became most apparent in the way that the participants expressed their connection to people living in North Korea. Pauline, another activist involved in Korea Peace Now and various LGBTQ Korean advocacy spaces, affirmed this framing with a reminder that "despite the 80 years of division of the Korean Peninsula, you know, the 40 years of Japanese colonial rule before that, there is still a consciousness of one Korean nation". By naming "one Korean nation", she is expressing the mentality of connection I referred to earlier that all Koreans feel towards one another, even if they have been divided into two different states. This consciousness that she spoke of is a driving factor in the call by many activists to support and center families that were divided by the Korean War and partitioning of the Peninsula. Youngjoo, who comes from one of these divided families, expressed how this was a large motivation for her involvement in the Korean peace movement:

> So as a… divided family, I really wish that we have a reunification… we can go visit North Korea. And then North people… can come to South Korea. And then at least see people… before they die, right? Like meet their parents or children.

For Youngjoo and many like her family, Koreans that live in the US or South Korea have not been able to see family members in North Korea due to continued hostilities for many years. And for those traveling with a South Korean passport – and now a US passport – that opportunity has

effectively been shut down. When advocating for families divided across borders, these peace activists are inherently interrogating the contentious relations between states that trickles down into harms against the Korean people. Young Sun connected this issue of divided families to a greater Korean identity when discussing this desire of "wanting to be able to see their family members [in North Korea], of wanting to be able to heal the division… which is not even just about seeing family, but it's something spiritual, cultural, sort of this inevitable thing". This desire of reconnecting with family members in North Korea as part of a greater Korean identity grounds the *jeong* frame within this subframe of relations with North Korea.

Relations with North Korea are considered important to these activists because they perceive many negative stereotypes of North Korea that have to be dispelled as part of any effort towards peace. Aiyoung criticizes how:

> They [Americans] have demonized North Koreans, as have South Koreans demonized North Koreans for decades through two generations… They were raised with a demonic picture of the North and the people in the North. Not just the leader, but that North Koreans are all bad.

Renegotiating the image of not just the state, but also the people of North Korea becomes a key topic for activists that addresses not the foreigners – in the way that *han* does – but amongst the Korean people themselves. *Jeong* serves as an overarching frame for this because of its utility in driving a narrative that despite being separated for decades, Koreans are still inherently connected through identity.

The negative imagery of North Koreans is also often situated within political ideology through the dichotomization of capitalist societies versus communist societies. Even Yehjung's humanitarian NGO, Korean Sharing Movement, suffered from this negative discourse because "even humanitarian assistance to North Korea is kind of helping communists in North Korea, in their eyes". Pauline noted to me that even aside from Westerners, many Koreans are "right-wing anti-communists who think that any negotiation with the DPRK is going to lead to complete capitulation" and will label "anyone who calls for engagement with North Korea, communist sympathizer". This discourse around North Korea that activists have to rebut would be classified in framing theory as a "counterframe" (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 626) which is perpetrated by

"countermovement actors, bystanders, and state officials who oppose the movement" (Zald, 1996, p. 261) This anti-communist or communist sympathizer counterframe has marred many aspects of the peace movement, but Echo resists this counterframing when she said, "I don't think capitalism engulfing North is right or North Korea is engulfing the South with their system they is right either". This counterframe enlivens the *jeong* frame which attempts to resituate the movement away of the political binary. For HK, he sees the Korean peace movement culminating to a point:

> where both sides respect each other and to try to find common ground, common vision for the future of Korea for future generations. How they would live side by side or together on the system that can be beneficial to everybody, not just one side.

Jeong offers a path for the peace movement to center around Korean identity as the motivating factor for advocacy rather than entrenching discourse in battles of political or economic ideologies.

5.2.2. DMZ

"Even *jeong* takes its shape from our relations with non-human beings, such as objects and nature." (Hyunsuk, 2019, p. 161). While Hyunsuk (2019) is referring to analysis of Korean literature around community conflict and building, this demonstrates the breadth and depth of *jeong* as a concept for Korean identity across various forms, such as with the relation to the territory of the DMZ. Discussions for the peace movement around connecting families or improving relations with North Korea inherently involve an understanding of the relationship to the border that is the dividing force. As a frame, *jeong* then interrogates the maintenance and role of the border in relation to the peace movement and these themes. For Cathi, she even contests the terminology of a border dividing the peninsula. She points out that rather than a border, "this is a zone that… has severed a people that were one people for centuries". In her eyes, the notion of a border cannot legitimately sever the *jeong* that connects Koreans as a unified collective.

In 2015, Aiyoung was part of a delegation of thirty women that organized a crossing from South Korea to North Korea and spent five days there engaging with North Korean women peace

activists. When reflecting on that experience, she described it as" we were women to women, people to people". She went on to realize, "oh my God, they're just like me. I'm just like them… I had never had that feeling before". The emotional connection Aiyoung formed with these other Korean women, in seeing each other as part of a shared identity across the DMZ can also be understood as developing *jeong* between Koreans. This transformative journey is actually what led to the creation of the NGO, Women Cross DMZ. While Echo was not part of this delegation that crossed, she is now part of the NGO and relayed to me the symbolic significance of this event. "They wanted to show to the world that DMZ is permeable. That DMZ is not a line that people cannot cross. But it is a line that we *can* cross". Sharing a similar sentiment, both Pauline and HK characterized the DMZ as "artificial" and Young Sun viewed it as a "spectacle". By contesting the legitimacy of the border between North and South Korea, these activists construct a reality where Koreans are actually unified and subvert the militant border making practice along the DMZ. Koreans reject the basis of the DMZ not only because of *han*, in the sense that it is an injustice inflicted by a foreign power, but also, because of *jeong*, that they are one people.

Returning to the quote by Hyunsuk, *jeong* framing depicts a relation among Koreans that can also be tied to the land and nature itself. One phenomenon that was highlighted by interviewees was the thriving ecosystems that had sprung out from DMZ territory. For Cathi, there is an "irony of the DMZ being such a place of nature flourishing and actually has so much life there, but is frozen geopolitically in time, but is not frozen in mother nature and the earth's timeline". The irony is pointed out by Pauline particularly that "the term, 'demilitarized zone' is hilariously ironic because it's actually the most highly militarized zone in the world". Young Sun's description of the DMZ as "spectacle" that is sold through "images of tanks and barbed wire" are contradicted when envisioning the true " lush ecosystem with a lot of fragile fauna that are thriving there at this time". This type of imagery of the DMZ seems to resonate with the peace activists because in doing so, it subverts the militant nature of this borderland and replaces it with an ecological nature to delegitimize the division. According to Joh (2006), "symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity" (p. 62) and can be "appropriated, translated, rehistoricised, and read anew". Rather than a military border partitioning the Korean people, there is simply a lavish ecosystem thriving in the middle of the peninsula.

5.3. Rights Talk

Through the process of thematic analysis, a review of the major themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 91) revealed a necessity to explore one theme adjacent to the two overarching frames of *han* and *jeong*. This theme regarded how the participants interpreted the relevance of different rights to aspects of the peace movement. This crystallized around three subthemes: the right to self determination, censorship in South Korea, and human rights in North Korea.

5.3.1. Right to Self-Determination

This subtheme of the right to self-determination was important to distinguish from *han* because the participants expressed clear sentiment around a desire for reclaiming ownership of their land that extended beyond the cultural concept of *han* which centered on the injustices. Soobok evoked this sentiment of self determination when saying that Koreans are "entitled to decide our fate… we have to make up our fate, our future, our happiness by ourselves". When discussing political goals in the Korean Peninsula, Cathi reminded me of her positionality as an American-born Korean activist and her hesitancy to make bold policy recommendations:

> I'm not sure that the answer would be best served coming from me as a U.S. citizen… We certainly have a role to play in shaping and democratizing U.S. policies that affect other countries but we've run into so many problems in global history because U.S. citizens purport to decide best policy for other countries without centering the voices of those most impacted in those countries themselves".

Even as a Korean involved in the movement for peace on the Korean Peninsula, Cathi was centering self-determination of the Korean people living there.

This subtheme is also where reunification came to the forefront of the interviews. Young Sun connected Soobok's feelings of regaining control to reunification by reflecting that "when you reunify, you're giving more of that independence and control back to the Korean people to sort of have a say in their own destiny". Reunification in itself was not the aspirational goal for Young Sun, but rather, the goal is for Koreans to have an independent voice in the destiny of the Peninsula. Even for those that did not necessarily desire reunification, they recognized its role in

conversations for self determination of the Korean people. Yehjung was one of the participants and stated "whether we reunify or not reunify, that's up to us. That's what I believe, and that's the way to eliminate further misery in the Peninsula". For her, the misery that she referenced earlier under the *han* frame could be rectified not necessarily by reunifying the countries, but by gaining the agency and right to decide on that without the obstacle of foreign powers intervening. Reunification was the vocabulary used by these participants because it also allowed a consideration for extending this right to North Korea as well. Self determination did not mean reifying South Korea as a sovereign state, but rather, was an expression of a desire for Koreans in both states to have this control.

5.3.2. Censorship

However, this right to self determination was also not reflective of the participants' faiths in the government of South Korea. Not only do they perceive foreign powers as an obstacle to claiming this right, but they also commented on how the South Korean government itself was an impediment to this claim, most concretely through the South Korean National Security Law. Yehjung contextualized this law for me stating that in South Korea:

> the enemy is North Korea in the law. And according to their law, to read or see North Korean contents is kind of illegal… and also if there is some situation in South Korean politics, they use this law to threaten people.

Youngah commented how this law is a violation of the right to "freedom of expression and freedom of thought. We cannot access North Korean information… The government suppressed civil society and peace activists". Historically, South Korea designed this law in 1949 right after the division of the Peninsula in the lead up to the Korean War as a supposed response to escalating hostilities and to protect the South Korean state. (Kraft, 2012). It has been maintained ever since under the premise that North Korea is still a threat to South Korea with the Peninsula still in a state of war. This law has been actively used to suppress political dissent in South Korea since its inception. In 1949 alone, over 100,000 Koreans were arrested under this law that were allegedly sympathetic to the North Korean state (Lim, 2006, p. 86). The National Security Law

historically has also used the death penalty as punishment for individuals that were considered leaders in organizing political dissent against the South Korean government (Kraft, 2012, p. 631). While capital punishment under this law has not been enacted for many years, the censorship practices continue and frustrate Korean activists.

Frustrations aired by the participants about the South Korean government's censorship laws were frequently connected to the first subtheme of a right to self-determination. According to Soobok, he believes that "we have to study DPRK. We have to understand, we have to get ready one day we reunite. So we have to understand DPRK. But current law prohibits it. It's ridiculous". Again tying back to the message around reuniting both countries, Soobok interprets reunification as an act of self-determination of the people. The obstacle here is the South Korean government impeding on that self-determination through violations of political rights.

5.3.3. North Korean Human Rights

The participants commonly voiced frustrations around the utilization and application of human rights as a tool and discourse in the region regarding North Korea. Specifically, several of them believe that intentions for addressing human rights violations committed by the North Korean state are influenced by this counter frame and wary of these messages. According to Echo:

> many of the times what you hear from the North Korean defectors or the human rights watch, I don't think you can trust them 100% on what they say… HRW groups don't provide context, geopolitical or historical, which is important to understand the root causes of conditions that North Koreans face.

Youngah agreed with this sentiment when she said, the "international community deal with North Korea human rights to criticize North Korea regime. Not a way to improve human rights in North Korea". To be clear, none of the participants denied that human rights violations were being committed and acknowledged the brutality of the regime, however, they perceived an association of human rights rhetoric with punitive actions that obstructed peace between the two Koreas. Em (2021), describes how discourse on North Korea is often entrenched in a Western "securitization paradigm" (p. 120) that is dependent on old "Cold War epistemology" (p. 124).

Hong (2014) claims that this discourse leverages a “human rights imaging of North Korea” that is “directed toward regime change” (p. 565). These analyses aligned with the participants’ interpretations of human rights in North Korea. For example, HK believed that “they're always narrow focusing on the human rights issue. And then they say… Destroy the government. Destroy North Korea government. The downfall of North Korea”. They perceive that human rights are currently used as a continued escalation of hostilities in the region.

That being said, the participants did not outright reject human rights as a concept in the way that scholars such as Em and Hong have. Echo followed up her earlier comment on human rights in North Korea by saying, “by ending the war and bringing North Korea out of the seclusion, isolation, we would actually have better knowledge on their human rights conditions”. These activists call for a reinterpretation in how human rights are used when engaging with North Korea that can promote dialogue around peace. Youngah also continued to say that “we have to change our approach dealing with human rights…we should deal peace on the Korean peninsula and we should think about ending the Korean War”. Because both North and South Korea “limit individual rights in the name of national security” according to her, peace would be a productive avenue to promote rights across the Peninsula.

This subtheme then ties to the two previous subthemes in considering how human rights are recognized as relevant to the conversation of peace, whether it be in claiming self-determination or addressing censorship laws in South Korea. Ultimately though, these participants did not view human rights as the approach to address these subthemes and encouraged a lens of peace to discuss these matters. Aiyoung also described how she organized several meetings between members of Korean Peace Now and Tomas Quintana, who was at the time, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK (North Korea). Their conversations, she told me, ultimately ended with a message that “peace is a requisite to human rights”. This peace that she is referring to in practical terms is articulated as formally ending the Korean War and ending hostilities between the United States, South Korea, and North Korea.

6. Discussion

As a reminder, this dissertation set out to explore the following questions:

1) How do Korean peace activists interpret the cultural and political landscape of hostile tensions on the Korean Peninsula?
    a. How do these interpretations inform the social movement for peace between the two Koreas?
2) What relevance do these frames hold for peacebuilding and human rights in the Korean Peninsula?

Thematic analysis has revealed three overarching themes -- with various subthemes – about how Korean activists perceive the injustices that Koreans have faced historically and currently, and how to remedy them. Rather than interpreting themes simply as individual perspectives on "everyday dynamics of peace" (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013, p. 768), I situate these themes as frames that inform how activists then go about achieving peace. Framing theory allows me to interpret these themes within the context of a social movement for peace and what their purposes are.

6.1. Framing tasks

These peace activists operated through a frame of *han* which ties Koreans together in a shared injustice committed by foreign states which is yet to be resolved. The cultural identity point of this frame extends their movement beyond state boundaries and envelopes both South Koreans, North Koreans, and diasporic Korean communities. It is clear that *han* framing serves as a diagnostic tool to highlight the injustices that Koreans uniquely face and have suffered historically. Diagnostic frames, once again, are frames that organizations and individuals task with identifying the problem or injustice that has to be remedied for the collective group. These frames then attribute blame to an actor that is responsible for causing the problem. The unresolved aspect of *han* means that Koreans are victims of this societal issue which needs to be addressed and attributes blame to foreign powers as the cause of Korean suffering. Current responsibility is also then assigned to certain key foreign powers, in particular, the United States.

At first glance, the explicit criticisms of the US as an obstacle to Korean peace might be considered simply in line with traditional anti-American movements that have been seen before,

both globally and in Korean history (Kim and Lee, 2011). However, to attribute these comments simply as antagonistic against the US would be insufficient. While Kim and Lee (2011) acknowledge that these types of resistances are "often not solely about the United States" (p. 231), they fail to address the cultural and historical contexts that inform this sentiment in Korean activism. With a framing of *han*, a connection between the critiques of the US begin to align also with sentiments against the Japanese for their colonial violence on the peninsula. For example, Echo's quote, "the shrimp who got torn apart by two whales fighting", demonstrates historical frustrations with the influence of the Soviet Union as well in the political developments of the Korean Peninsula. This is also why it was necessary to split the *han* frame into subthemes of legacies of injustice and current resistance against American influence because of the temporal quality of the concept of *han*. The historical traumas of occupation that Koreans have suffered informs why Korean activists today perceive the current relations between the US and South Korea as an injustice in itself.

The next task for frames is the motivational frame that is the "call to arms" which offers the rationale for why people should engage with social movement organizations and movement work. This frame functions through this task which gives meaning to why Koreans feel compelled to address these issues of injustice as perceived by the diagnostic task of *han*. *Jeong* then becomes one of the "vocabularies of motive" (Benford and Snow, 2000, p. 617) for activists in the peace movement. Snow et al. (2018) also identify how "although the link between framing and emotions has not received the attention it warrants…the appeal to or use of emotion appears to be a central feature of motivational framing" (p. 397) which is most apparent in the ethno-nationalist sentiment of *jeong*. More than emotions though as suggested by Snow and other scholars, "collective identity" seems to be the compelling reason that these Koreans desired to engage in peace movements. Framing theory on collective identity however designates the social movement as constructing the shared identity for participants in movements (Hunt and Benford, 2004). However, for the activists I interviewed, the cultural background had already shaped and informed their identity. If anything, the social movement for peace arises from this collective identity rather than the other way around.

Within psychiatric and pastoral scholarship on Korean cultural identity, Ka (2010) prescribes an interesting relationship between *jeong* and *han*, believing that *jeong* can be a helpful concept in addressing and alleviating psycho-somatic suffering that arises from *han*. This

same association can be seen in the frame of *jeong* by these Korean activists. More than a prescription though, these activists seem to claim *jeong* as a mechanism that energizes them to enter this space. The ethos of *jeong* motivates them to enter this space of peace activism which affirms their connection to other Koreans, particularly to North Koreans. So, their reasons for contesting negative imagery of North Korea is not bound in political alignment with communist or socialist ideology, nor is it quite explicitly in an anti-capitalist lens, but a cultural one. *Jeong* framing also informs why they contest the DMZ and state border between North and South Korea. The injustice that is the division of the Peninsula cannot legitimately sever the bond that is the Korean identity. Rhetoric on rejecting the border seems to parallel discourse around themes found in border abolition (Bradley and De Noronha, 2022). However, understanding *jeong* as a motivational frame shows that Korean peace activists use discourse on borders through a lens of cultural collective identity for participation in movement work rather than on motivations around migrant justice. The connection to other Koreans, across state boundaries, contests the historical construction of a border. Further research could examine how this perception could contribute to border abolition theories, but that is beyond the scope of this study.

Prognostic tasks are the third core task of collective frames which offer solutions that comply with the diagnostic and motivational frames developed within a social movement and its organizations. The motivational *jeong* frame naturally leads into the "rights talk" frame, which more concretely identifies solutions and actions that the activists believe will address the perceived injustices identified in the *han* frame. The subthemes in the "rights talk" frame naturally evolve into that solutions and demands. So on the subtheme of censorship in this frame, activists were calling for policies that would dissolve the South Korean National Security Law which was violating their rights to freedom of thought, speech, and political activities. Discussions on North Korean human rights led into calls for greater normalization efforts by both South Korea and the US for engagement with North Korea. On the subtheme of self-determination, several activists believed that the end goal of reunifying the two Koreas would be a solution for reclaiming control over their land. But ultimately, formally ending the Korean War was presented as the most demanding and immediate solution moving forward which would address all three subthemes. Ending the Korean War would reduce hostile conditions that could contribute to normalizing relations between North and South Korea, embarking on a path for

realizing the essence of *jeong*. Without any formal peace treaty to replace the Armistice Agreement, the prolonged Korean War legitimizes violations of human rights in both North and South Korea. Ending the war would dampen discourse on national security and open opportunities to address the South Korean National Security Law. Youngah told me that a coalition of peace organizations have already collected 200,000 signatures calling for an end to the Korean War. They delivered this petition last year to the UN, US government and South Korean government.

6.2. Perspectives from the bottom-up

Diagnosing the basis for this social movement as a cultural bound phenomenon also implies that perceptions of peace are not based in universal ideals like that of human rights, but rather, from a point based in specific cultural identity. According to Hyunsook (2019), "Korean people attach more importance to the emotion and the mind than to the institutions and norms" (p. 173). Framing theory allows an analysis of peace processes for the Korean Peninsula through a lens that begins to ask what the injustices are perceived to be, rather than assuming what justice will look like for these people. According to McCauley (2017), "we should not assume the origins of injustice" (McCauley, 2017, p. 3), which are then dependent on preconceived theoretical notions of justice. Norms of human rights approaches and current peacebuilding practices are not assumed to be the answer or solution necessarily from the start. The call to focus on the local level in peacebuilding by peace and conflict scholars like Mac Ginty and Richmond reflects this value. However, even when peace studies, like Kang and Heo's (2023), attempt to redirect focus onto the perspectives of grassroots actors, they still claim that "peace is an architecture" (p. 769) that activists must still somehow fit into. So I would slightly disagree with Hvidsten and Skarstad (2017) when they argue that "peace research needs to (re-)ask the question 'what is peace?' for its own sake" (p. 113). Rather, the question should be moreso, "how do people define peace". Maintaining a theorized concept of peace at the center of the study falls into the limitation of ascribing a model of justice onto a people rather than building off of how these people theorize peace themselves. "Movement experience informs theory" (McCauley, 2017, p. 2) and shouldn't be the other way around. Bevington and Dixon (2005) also agree that "movement participants can and do produce such theory" (p. 189). The frames that I

identified from these Korean peace activists offer this needed insight into how Korean activists make meaning of peace in relation to the injustices of the Peninsula and how to respond to those claims.

Within the *han* frame, the activists I interviewed frequently associated these injustices with rhetoric around sovereignty and reclaiming control of their territory. Where human rights approaches infer obligations of the state to its people, these activists are fundamentally contesting what that state actually means in their frame of injustice. If anything, human rights rhetoric is perceived to actually obstruct and add to the escalation of conflict. This is why they believe current human rights instruments and tools do not address the actual root problems of Korean society. I return to Hyunsook's (2019) conclusion:

> Although the political, economic, and social system in Korea has been very hostile to its people, the Koreans themselves wisely have not succumbed to these stark regimes but have succeeded in cherishing their own dignity and value as human beings (p. 173)

While this quote infers similar normative values claimed in human rights discourse, my data analysis shows that Korean peace movement frames are built upon more cultural identity work such as *jeong*. Even though human rights are a priority for the activists and their organizations, however, they believe that the maintenance of hostilities driven by the unending Korean War are the source of these human rights violations.

Nevertheless, as the "rights talk" frame demonstrated, human rights are still of value to these activists and they express the desire for rights to be applied both fairly and genuinely. The call for the local turn in peacebuilding has reflected a sharp criticism by peace and conflict scholars that identify "the possible incompatibility of post-conflict justice with the stabilisation of society and human rights" (Richmond, 2013, p. 292). However, by approaching peace from the perspective of the local actors, this theoretical division becomes blurred in practice. According to Hvidsten and Skarstad (2017), the relevance of human rights to a movement is not necessarily whether activists explicitly "justify what they are doing by appealing to human rights – which is a purely empirical question – but also whether they are actually championing human rights" (p. 106). Therefore, while this social movement is described by activists as a peace movement, there is an intimate connection to human rights, whether it be framed culturally

through notions of *jeong*, or more explicitly in targeting oppressive laws in South and North Korea. The *han* frame function of identifying injustices on the Korean Peninsula as committed by foreign powers also explains the significance of the right to self-determination, as addressed in the first subtheme in the "rights talk" frame. Even though the activists never used this specific vocabulary, there were clear calls to it in expressing a desire for more control over the trajectories of inter-Korean relations away from foreign powers.

By exploring the interpretations of how Korean activists view their social movement, a conceptualization of peace begins to form. Historical accounts of Korean activism remind us that the "struggle to by people to build just peace in the Korean peninsula goes back to the independence movement under Japanese colonial rule" (Kim, 2019, p. 149). Peace for Koreans is not simply a matter of ending war, but part of a legacy in resistance against the colonial and imperial structures that oppressed them. That is why rights such as the right to self-determination became so salient in this study – peace is not an end in itself, but rather, a historically defined means to achieving an ideal of independence. Peacebuilding for Korean activists then becomes not only a domestic matter between the two Koreas, but also a mechanism to critique currently perceived hegemonies of new globalizing forces that present as neocolonial continuations of this history. Current liberal mechanisms of both peacebuilding and human rights structures have not encompasses this ethos and must account for that in order to genuinely and productively respond to demands by this social movement. International peace processes for the Korean Peninsula such as the "six-party talks" (Kwak, 2010), which require involvement from states like Japan and Russia, do not consider this sentiment and perpetuate a perception of both former and current colonial powers maintaining an undesirable influence over the trajectories of the Korean people.

7. Conclusion

In this study, I set out to explore the perspectives of Korean-identified activists in relation to their social movement work towards building peace in the Korean Peninsula. Through in-depth interviews, I identified key themes that inform their views on issues ranging from historical events to notions of cultural belonging which culminated into three categories: *han*, *jeong*, and "rights talk". These three themes contained nuances that led to various subthemes

within each one. With the understanding that my interviewees participate in peace efforts through a social movement, I approached these themes as "frames" conceptually, which then identifies these themes as messages and values of the peace movement. In particular, I examined the tasks of these frames through their diagnostic function, motivational function, and prognostic function. However, these frames do not operate in siloes away from each other and interplay to present broader meaning and significance to understandings of the peace movement, nor are they exclusive to advocacy organizations that these activists are affiliated with. I found that there is a deep cultural element for these activists, not around an abstract conception of peace, but around a cultural connection to being Korean as seen with the *jeong* framing. This was seen across Korean participants that lived both on the Peninsula and in the US. Central to this cultural identity was identifying with the injustices enveloped in *han*. While universal principles may be relevant to their activism, a cultural bound value drives the peace movement forward. While there is not a singular message that the movement operates through, these frames are shared concepts which align activists both in their values and then in their goals.

The *han* and the *jeong* frames begin to answer the question of *how do Korean peace activists interpret the cultural and political landscape of hostile tensions on the Korean Peninsula*, by mapping out key aspects of the cultural landscape. Both *han* and *jeong* are grounded in core Korean concepts that do not translate well into the English language or into Western societies – as argued by Korean scholars like Moon (2014) and Kwon (2001). These cultural markers for identity-making are not bound by place and connect Koreans across geographies and diasporas (Lee et al., 2018; Kim, 2010). *Han* is a concept of resentment or anger that derives meaning from historical traumas which have caused unaddressed and unresolved suffering. Not only does it articulate a sense of injustice tied to Korean identity but does so by explicitly identifying the role of foreign superpowers. *Jeong* on the other hand, is a more uplifting concept which defines an unspoken love or comradery among Koreans and to the land. It complements *han* by centering the collective nature of identity, presenting an obligation of Koreans to support one another in the name of community and heritage. These elements of the Korean cultural landscape lay the groundwork and inform the political landscape that activists traverse in their organizing efforts.

The political landscape is sculpted by this cultural landscape. It constitutes not only interpretations of major events or crises on the Peninsula, but also the political discourse of the social movement. Political analysis of events like the Korean War, the partitioning of the Peninsula, and intern-Korean diplomatic affairs are intimately informed by cultural concepts like *han* and *jeong*. *Han* gives meaning to resistance against perceived liberalizing forces, interpreted as hegemonic productions by foreign actors like the US. They are considered antagonistic blockades which perpetuate the Korean War and maintain the DMZ, reinforcing a North and South dichotomy. Rejecting US led military alliances with the South Korean government affirms *han* and Korean identity. *Jeong* also then gives meaning to the calls for reshaping discourse on North Korean relations and resisting the maintenance of the border. These cultural concepts also give rise to political discourse in the shape of various human rights, whether they be rights violations or aspirational goals. Ultimately, a right to self-determination seems to be a driving theme that ties these rights together. Human rights violations on the southern and northern sides of the DMZ serve to impede aspirations towards a Korea that has a more democratic function.

The subquestion *how do these interpretations inform the social movement for peace between the two Koreas* serves to explore how these activists navigate the cultural and political landscape. I answer this question in Chapter 6.1. by analyzing the framing tasks of the two cultural concepts and political discourse on rights. Understanding how activists make use of these interpretations for their call to collective action clarifies the details of these landscapes. For example, by interrogating the *han* frame, I find that resistance to US interventions and the American military are not just ideologically driven political efforts, but part of a greater cultural task in broadly resisting foreign state actions.

Identifying major themes in the peace movement offers compelling answers to the last question, *what relevance do these frames hold for peacebuilding and human rights in the Korean Peninsula?* Exploring these frames serves to better understand the how Korean people want to build towards peace in the region. My findings show that the Korean peace movement is a resistance movement at the junction of peace, human rights, and sovereignty. The human right to self-determination appears to be the most compelling message thematically across the frames. While peace is a goal for their movement work, peace is not the end goal – self-determination is, whether that be reunification or another transformation of the two Korean states. In Chapter 6.2.,

I argued that pre-conceived notions of justice limit scholarship on peace and limit peacebuilding efforts. Ultimately, I found that peace serves as a mechanism to remedy injustice and is not justice in itself. Peace and justice are not at odds with each other, which has been previously considered a contradictory relationship in previous scholarship (Parlevliet, 2017). Peace serves as a strategic concept and goal for this social movement in order to achieve justice which presents as greater self-determination. Peace is also considered an important vehicle to addressing human rights violations in North Korea. International institutions that facilitate peacebuilding efforts were criticized by Korean activists for frequently using human rights disingenuously to perpetuate anti-North Korea rhetoric. Instead, the right to self-determination can be seen as a more compelling norm to work towards for peace processes to productively advance.

7.1. Further Research

My thesis affirms the calls found in new social movement literature (Buechler, 1995) and peacebuilding studies (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013) that a culturally contextualized lens must be central to any meaningful processes for building towards peace. Peacebuilding based on universal ideals of justice such as human rights cannot be generic step-by-step guides for procedures to peace, which have already proven to be faulty in practice as seen by the Kim Jung-Un's address to the Supreme People's Assembly last year (McCurry, 2018). However, I hesitate to offer my recommendations and return to Cathi's previous quote in Chapter 5.3.1 : "that should not be answered by me as a U.S. citizen… we've run into so many problems in global history because U.S. citizens purport to find policy for other countries". The actors in the Korean peace movement have already offered a succinct set of demands which can be seen on their online platform: https://en.endthekoreanwar.net/.

However, my findings have shown there is a need to for continued research to better understand the connection between certain human rights and peace studies. Greater theoretical consideration must be given to the right to self-determination as a normative value to peacebuilding. This human right holds significant relevance to various topics in the Korean peace movement regarding issues such as reunification of the Peninsula and contesting of the border between North and South Korea. Further research into grassroots perspectives of this

human right would contribute greatly to the field of human rights in the potential applications for peacebuilding and border abolition.

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