



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

Master's Degree

in

Languages, Economics and Institutions of Asia and North  
Africa

Final Thesis

## **Politicising the victims of a tragedy**

Analysing the discourse on the North Korean abduction issue

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**Academic Year**

2019 / 2020

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## **Acknowledgements**

This journey would not have been possible without the support of many people. First of all, I would like to thank my family and my longtime friends. Special thanks go to my parents, Flavia and Daniele, and my grandmother Lia for encouraging me in all my pursuits and supporting me every step of the way. Many thanks also to the friends I have made in Venice and Kyoto, with whom I shared part of my journey.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Zappa for providing guidance and feedback throughout this research. I remain very grateful to all Japanese language assistants at Ca'Foscari for their commitment and assistance. Lastly, I want to thank Professor Cho who introduced me to the topic of this thesis and made me view issues from multiple perspectives.

Thank you all for your unwavering support.

## 要旨

論文題目 拉致被害者とその政治化: 拉致問題の言説分析

1970年代から80年代にかけて北朝鮮による日本人拉致問題は国民の関心を引くこととなった。それに、「北朝鮮に対する関心事項」のうち「拉致問題」が「核開発問題」や「ミサイル問題」を抜いて1位となった。しかし、なぜこのような問題は非常に強い感情的な反応を引き起こしたのだろうか。また、拉致被害者とその家族はどのような役割を果たしてきたのであろうか。

本論文は、「拉致問題」が日本において、家族会（北朝鮮による拉致被害者家族連絡会）、救う会（北朝鮮に拉致された日本人を救出するための全国協議会）、拉致議連（北朝鮮に拉致された日本人を早期に救出するために行動する議員連盟）等の主催者によって政治化されていった経緯や様相、その背景を分析し意欲的に取り組んだ論考である。

本論文は全六章から構成されている。

第一章は、序章であり、問題の地政学的状況や歴史的背景が述べられている。したがって、1970年代後半から2000年代まで日本の政治分野で起きた主な出来事が分析される。すなわち、拉致事件の経緯から2002年の日朝首脳会談に至るまでの出来事を検討する。その後、先行研究と本論文の構成が紹介されている。理論的枠組みには、英文の査読付き学術雑誌を基礎とした。特に、ジャパントイムズ編集局報道部次長エリック・ジョンストンや国際政治学・国際関係論・地域研究の研究者リヌス・ハグストロムが書いた論文に注目する。

第二章は、拉致問題研究を分析するにあたり枠組みと方法について述べられている。ここでは、本研究計画の中心をなす「政治化」「言説」「犯罪被害者」という用語の定義について解説する。本論文では、ポスト構造主義的なアプローチが使用されており、フォーコー派の言説分析の手法が用いられている。それをもとにして、被害者

家族へのインタビュー、各府省等のWebサイトや拉致利益団体のホームページなどの内容が分析される。このような質的研究法では、「拉致問題」の言説はどのように構造されているのかを明らかにする。心理学者のウィリグのアプローチに基づき「誰が語るか」、「どのような立場から語るか」、「どのような制度がそうした言説を成り立たせているのか」という疑問を解き明かしていく。また、本稿の考察は被害者学の概念と感情に関する知識に支えられている。

第三章は、「拉致問題」をめぐる日本のドミナント・ディスコースが構成されていく中で、発言者のポジショナリティについて究明を深めている。すなわち、「支援者」、「加害者」と「被害者」として位置付けられる人々との関係性を、ウィリグのアプローチを用いて、分析している。その結果、拉致問題は「国民的な悲劇」や「主権侵犯と人権蹂躪の問題」として位置付けられ、最重要課題となったと主張する。このような言説の構成は二つのことを可能にしたと思われる。一方では、北朝鮮は「加害者」の立場に立ってしまい、頻繁に「日本の国家安全保障上の脅威」「犯罪軍事国家」「非常識の鬼」などと言った否定的・感情的イメージで語られるようになった。他方では、拉致被害者とその家族は被害者になり、国民の共感を呼び起こすことや国の政策の方向性を変えることなどができるようになった。

第四章は、詳しい調査と資料の言説分析が行われている。まず、家族会が「拉致問題」をどのように語っているのかを具体的事例をあげながら検討する。特に、「理想的な被害者」の役割から、13歳の少女横田めぐみの拉致事件の大切さを強調していく。そうすると、拉致被害者とその家族がいかにして政策形成過程に重要な役割を果たすかということを明確に示す。そして、2002年以降の歴史再審論者や拉致利益団体などによる拉致問題の言説の成立と政治化の過程を詳しく見ていく。そのため、語りにおける主な概念や類似点が指摘されている。

第五章は、ドミナント・ディスコースに対する非難された政府やメディアの反応について熟考する。まず、1990年代後半から2000年までの拉致問題に関する日本政府の政策について調査する。そして、小泉政権から第2次安倍内閣までの拉致問題に関する

取組や対北朝鮮政策の方針が検討されている。特に、対北朝鮮強硬派として知られる安倍晋三の役割が指摘されている。そのために、外務省と首相官邸、国会ホームページ等で公開されている法律や主な言発を参考とする。ここで特筆すべきことは、家族会と拉致利益団体が政府と外務省に強い影響を与えたということである。

第六章は、本論文における目的に即した結論を導く。全体を振り返りながら、拉致問題の言説を決める過程やその言説を利用する過程の政治的・社会的力について改めて考察し、国民的な関心事となった主な理由をまとめる。そして、日朝間における安全保障の課題について今後考察していくための準備を整え、本論文は帰結する。



## Abstract

The abduction of Japanese nationals (*rachi mondai* 拉致問題) by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 1980s has captured the interest of the Japanese public and it now represents a major source of security concern regarding North Korea, surpassing the missile and nuclear issues. But why the matter has sparked such strong emotional responses? What role did the victims and their families play in its representation?

It is interesting to note that the problem started to get serious attention by the Japanese government and the media only in the beginning of the 1990s. On the one hand, the initial lack of interest contributed to highlight national weakness and the fecklessness of Japanese political leaders. On the other hand, it allowed right-wing elements to manipulate the issue and the victims' families in order to mobilize public sympathy and reorient national policies.

The case of Yokota Megumi is emblematic in this sense. Her victimhood has influenced Japanese people's perception of themselves as well as of the 'other,' identified with North Korea and portrayed as criminal or irrational, a threat to national security. Thus, this case study further demonstrates how victims of politicized tragedies can play an important role in shaping policy change.

In the present study I will argue that organisations such as *Kazokukai* (Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea), *Sukūkai* (National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea) and *Rachi Giren* (Parliamentary League for Early Repatriation of Japanese Citizens Kidnapped by North Korea) have been instrumental in politicising the abduction issue.

In order to answer to the research questions, this paper investigates the construction and the politicisation process of the abduction issue discourse by revisionists and nationalist interest groups in Japan after 2002, while taking into account the political and social context.

The study applies Foucauldian concepts and discourse analysis on the interviews with the victims' families and on the content of the official websites run by support organisations and the government. This qualitative method of analysis aims to explore

in which way the abduction issue is put into discourse. That means discovering who is speaking and from which position, what viewpoints they hold and which institutions prompt them to speak about it and how the things that are said are put to work and distributed.

In order to analyze public opinion and the role played by the media, empirical observation is conducted by using online article databases such as Kikuzo II Visual (*Asahi Shimbun* database). As for theoretical analysis the study relies mainly on English academic journals. Of particular relevance are the papers written by influential scholars in international relations and political science such as Linus Hagström and Eric Johnston. Relevant literature about the topic was identified through database searches with pre-established keywords like ‘Japanese abduction issue,’ ‘politicisation of the abduction issue,’ ‘victim politics,’ ‘political empathy.’

### **Keywords**

Japanese abduction issue, politicisation of the abduction issue, victim politics, political empathy, Foucault

## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research background

This section aims at providing historical context and geopolitical background to the politicisation of the abduction issue by analysing key events in Japan's domestic and foreign policy between 1977 and 2002.

#### 1.1.1 Chronology of the abductions

As of now, the Japanese government has identified seventeen persons whose disappearances are linked to North Korean abductions, while suspecting other eight hundred eight-three possible cases.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFA), the first case of abduction goes back to September 1977, when Yutaka Kume disappeared off the coast of Ushitsu, Ishikawa prefecture. At the time the local police arrested an ethnic-Korean who confessed to helping a North Korean agent in the plot.<sup>2</sup> The case, however, was soon dismissed as an isolated incident.

Just two months later arguably the most famous case took place. It involved a thirteen-year-old junior high school student, named Yokota Megumi, who disappeared on her way home in Niigata Prefecture.<sup>3</sup>

But it was not until January 7, 1980, that other similar cases were reported by the *Sankei Shimbun* newspaper. The article clearly questioned the involvement of foreign intelligence agents behind the disappearance of three couples in Fukui, Niigata and Kagoshima prefectures and a kidnapping attempt of another young couple in Toyama prefecture. Further evidence supporting the speculation was that kidnappers possessed handcuffs and other things not available in Japan at the time. For years, fishermen had

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Abduction Victims Identified by the Government of Japan*, 28 December 2018, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/na/kp/page1we\\_000068.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kp/page1we_000068.html), 07-09-2020.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Nippon.com, *North Korean Abductions of Japanese Citizens: A Timeline*, 18 October 2018, <https://www.nippon.com/en/features/h00310/north-korean-abductions-of-japanese-citizens-a-timeline.html>, 07-09-2020.

been reporting strange vessels and radio transmissions in those areas. While the words ‘abduction’ and ‘North Korea’ were nowhere to be found, the police clearly suspected a connection among the incidents.<sup>4</sup> Once again the story did not get much attention by the other media, nor by the Foreign Ministry or the Diet.

In the 1980s more evidence connecting the disappearance of Japanese nationals to North Korea’s involvement started to surface and the authorities began to investigate the issue. In 1985 a North Korean agent carrying a fake passport with the name Hara Tadaaki was arrested while entering South Korea. Police discovered that the real Hara was reported missing five years earlier in Miyazaki prefecture.<sup>5</sup>

The case of Taguchi Yaeko, abducted in June 1978 and brought to North Korea under the name of Lee Un-hae, shed some light on the purposes of the kidnappings.

As many other abductees she was forced to give Japanese language and culture lessons to spies, including Kim Hyon-hui, the terrorist responsible for the Korean Air Flight 858 bombing in 1987.<sup>6</sup>

From North Korean defectors’ testimonies, it can be deduced that Pyongyang’s main objectives in abducting foreign nationals were to use them in espionage training operations as well as to steal their identities in order to infiltrate other countries and gather information. Furthermore, the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea contends that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (hereafter DPRK)’s policy of kidnapping foreigners dates back to the beginning of Kim Il Sung’s regime and it was not limited to Japan or to Japanese citizens.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> ABE Masami, *Abekku san kumi nazo no jōhatsu* [The Mysterious disappearance of three couples], Sankei Shimbun, 7 January 1980, <https://nippon.zaidan.info/seikabutsu/2001/00997/contents/00228.htm>, 26-09-2020.

<sup>5</sup> NARKN, *How were abductions committed?*, “The abduction of Japanese nationals by North Korea,” <http://www.sukuukai.jp/English/how.html#TadaakiHara>, 27-09-2020.

<sup>6</sup> National Police Agency, *Suspected Abduction Cases by North Korea "Lee Un Hae" Case*, [http://www.npa.go.jp/keibi/gaiji1/abd\\_e/ri\\_une\\_e.html](http://www.npa.go.jp/keibi/gaiji1/abd_e/ri_une_e.html), 26-09-2020.

<sup>7</sup> NKNET, *Taken! North Korea's Criminal Abduction of Citizens of Other Countries*, 2011, pp.63-64. DOI: 10.1163/2210-7975\_HRD-0147-0010

Many studies have been conducted in order to explore the reasons behind the abduction and detention of foreign citizens, but no definitive answer has been found.

Nonetheless, the news that Kim Hyon-hui's teacher had been Japanese made the suspicions of the local police that North Korea was somehow involved in the kidnappings more plausible.

It was on March 26, 1988, that the issue was first raised in the Diet by Kajiyama Seiroku, then Chairman of the Public Safety Commission and member of the Liberal Democratic Party (hereafter LDP). He clearly stated that there was strong evidence linking the disappearances happened in 1978 to North Korea's policy of abduction.<sup>8</sup>

Eric Johnston (2004, 3) notes that no action was actually undertaken afterwards, neither by the authorities nor by the media due to the lack of evidence. Richard J. Samuels (2010, 368) suggests that the mainstream media did not touch the issue in fear of protests by associations of Korean residents or by left-wing parties, which had deeper connections to North Korea at the time.

In September 1988 the family of Ishioka Jun, disappeared in Madrid in 1980, received a letter from him, where he revealed he was living with other Japanese nationals in North Korea. At the suggestion of the Foreign Ministry, the letter was never made public out of safety concerns for the abductees.<sup>9</sup>

The families started then asking questions and demanding answers from the government. The vague response given by the authorities and their lack of action can be better understood by taking into consideration international and political factors.

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<sup>8</sup> Eric JOHNSTON, "The North Korea Abduction Issue and Its Effect on Japanese Domestic Politics," *JPRI Working Paper*, No. 101, June 2004, p.3.

<sup>9</sup> The Sankei Shimbun, "Kayoko Arimoto Dies Without Seeing Daughter Abducted by North Korea 40 Years Ago," in *japan-forward.com*, 13 February 2020, <http://japan-forward.com/kayoko-arimoto-dies-without-seeing-daughter-abducted-by-north-korea-40-years-ago/>, 07-09-2020.

### *1.1.2 The international and domestic political context, 1970-1990*

In the 1970s and in the 1980s the Japanese government held high hopes of normalizing relations with North Korea. Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei's statement that, «Japan cannot help but recognize that there exists [sic] two Koreas on the Korean Peninsula and the co-existence of the two is the diplomatic goal we desire» sums up the country's policy on the Korean peninsula until the late 1980s.<sup>10</sup>

The desire to strengthen cultural and economic ties was well shared by Kim Il Sung, North Korea's leader at the time. As a result, in 1971 a Dietmen's League for the Promotion of Japanese-North Korean Friendship was created.<sup>11</sup> The association included members of the LDP and of the Japanese Socialist Party (hereafter JSP), bank presidents and members of the Korean community in Japan.<sup>12</sup>

In 1972 the Japanese government approved a five-year trade agreement with Pyongyang. During these years the informal ties between the two countries grew, mainly due to the support of members from the JSP and *Kōmeitō* (Clean Government Party).<sup>13</sup>

According to Hagström (2006, 440), Tokyo's objective was not limited to establishing peace and stability in the region, but it included also expanding business opportunities for Japanese companies and releasing the *Fujisan Maru's* crew, fisherman that were held by North Korea since 1983.

While the efforts to improve bilateral relations were driven by a more favourable international environment, Tokyo's policy vis-à-vis Pyongyang became a source of friction with South Korea. In the 1980s Japan was forced to side with Seoul against the DPRK's terrorist activity, in particular following the bombing of KAL Flight 858 in

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<sup>10</sup> David FOUSE, "Japan's Post-Cold War North Korea Policy: Hedging toward Autonomy?," *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 31, 2, 2004, pp.1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Linus HAGSTRÖM, Marie SÖDERBERG, "The Other Binary: Why Japan-North Korea Relations Matter," *Special Issue of Pacific Affairs*, 79, 3, 2006, p.438.

<sup>12</sup> HAHN Bae-ho, "Korea-Japan Relations in the 1970s," *Far Eastern Survey*, 20, 11, November 1980, pp.1087-1097. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2643911>

<sup>13</sup> SEUNG K. Ko, "North Korea's Relations with Japan Since Detente," *Pacific Affairs*, 50, 1, 1977, p.32.

November 1987. However, according to a statement issued by the MOFA in January 1989, Japan still intended to hold talks with North Korea without preconditions.<sup>14</sup>

In September 1990 a delegation of Japanese politicians from the LDP and JSP led by Kanemaru Shin (Deputy Prime Minister in 1986 and 1987) and Tanabe Makoto (Former Japanese Socialist Party Chair) visited Pyongyang and signed a Three-Party Declaration in a move toward diplomatic relations. The agreement included a substantial financial aid as wartime reparation by Japan.<sup>15</sup>

There is a strong probability that the abduction issue was mentioned, but not discussed during the negotiations. An interview conducted by the *Yomiuri Shimbun* in 2002 to Kanemaru Shingo, secretary to his father during the trip to the DPRK, sustains that Kanemaru Shin did not know about the abduction issue at the time. Notwithstanding that the matter had been raised before in at least three instances by members of opposition parties to government representatives.<sup>16</sup>

Johnston (2004) reports rumours that a year after this meeting some members of the delegation received five billion yen in payoffs from Korean credit associations.

In 1992 a raid in Kanemaru Shin's home uncovered 600 million yen in gold bars and large amount of money. At the time the media speculated that the unmarked gold bars were actually from North Korea.<sup>17</sup> After the bribery scandal Kanemaru was forced to resign from his party posts amid public criticisms.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> David FOUSE, "Japan's Post-Cold War North Korea Policy-Hedging toward Autonomy ?," *Asian Affairs An American Review*, 2004, p.2.

<sup>15</sup> SATO Yoichiro, LIMAYE Satu, *Japan in a Dynamic Asia: Coping with the New Security Challenges*, Lexington Books, 2006, pp.138-139.

<sup>16</sup> Amy CATALINAC, *Electoral Reform and National Security in Japan: From Pork to Foreign Policy*, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p.201.

<sup>17</sup> Marcus NOLAND, *Avoiding the Apocalypse: The Future of the Two Koreas*, Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 2000, p.105.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew M. CARLSON, Steven R. REED, *Political Corruption and Scandals in Japan*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018, pp. 54-55.

According to Christopher Hughes (1999, 86), Kanemaru as well as other Japanese politicians were encouraged to visit North Korea with the prospect of financial rewards in return for improved bilateral and international relations. The political power was then transferred from politicians to the MOFA.

In conclusion, from 1977 to 1991 politicians in Japan did not pay much attention to the evidence that Japanese citizens were being abducted by North Korea out of international as well as domestic considerations.

On the one hand, the Japanese government and the MOFA were focused on improving bilateral relations with the DPRK following the general climate of détente in the region and wanted to preserve the fragile peace achieved after the Cold War.

On the other hand, in the process of securing Japan's economic and political influence some politicians were left ample room for manoeuvre. Diet Members such as Kanemaru pursued a 'private', 'individual' diplomacy (*kojin gaikō*) with Pyongyang, showing far more interest into the commercial, industrial and financial benefits they could gain from the normalization of relations.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, it can be said that the Japanese political actors saw the abduction issue as a destabilising factor, which could bring back historical grievances and distrust and hamper the normalization process.

### *1.1.3 The international and domestic political context, 1990-2000*

In the 1990s the situation was reversed: the Japanese government started to recognize the abduction issue, even granting it voice and legitimacy at the expense of its own foreign policy.<sup>20</sup>

In the early 1990s the global and regional environments grew tense and Japan began to pay more attention to the security aspect of its relationship with North Korea.

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<sup>19</sup> Christopher W. HUGHES, *Japan's economic power and security: Japan and North Korea*, London: Routledge, 1999, p.76. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203022405>

<sup>20</sup> Celeste L. ARRINGTON, *Accidental Activists: How Victim Groups Hold the Government Accountable in Japan and South Korea*, UC Berkley, 2010, p.158.



Tokyo came under pressure by its allies, concerned by the rapid pace of the negotiations with the DPRK, and the MOFA was eager to regain their trust. Following the demands from Washington, Tokyo formulated new principles for the normalization policy, refusing any colonial or wartime compensation to Pyongyang and demanding inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).<sup>21</sup>

At the same time Tokyo was receiving increasingly domestic pressures, especially from the abductees' families and their supporters in the Diet that could not be ignored any longer.

In 1991, during the eight rounds of Normalization Talks with Pyongyang, Japan formally raised the abduction issue for the first time.<sup>22</sup> In this occasion, the Japanese side asked more information regarding Kim Hyong-hui's Japanese teacher and requested an investigation. North Korea's response was to strongly deny its alleged part in the suspected abductions, claiming that it was an act to destroy the bilateral talks. The normalization talks came to a standstill, troubled by other emerging issues.<sup>23</sup>

In May 1993 North Korea conducted a successful missile test into the Sea of Japan. DPRK's ballistic missile programme further escalated military tensions in the region. Furthermore, Pyongyang kept on developing nuclear weapons, in clear contrast to the IAEA's demands. That resulted in the first nuclear crisis and in the intervention of US President Jimmy Carter.<sup>24</sup>

In July 1994 North Korea's leader, Kim Il Sung, died and was replaced by his son Kim Jong Il. Taking into consideration the delicate political situation the MOFA decided not to confront North Korea on the abduction issue.

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<sup>21</sup> David FOUSE, "Japan's Post-Cold War North Korea Policy-Hedging toward Autonomy ?," *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 31, 2, Summer 2004, pp. 102-120.

<sup>22</sup> MOFA, Abductions of Japanese citizens by North Korea, 18 December 2018, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/na/kp/page1we\\_000067.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kp/page1we_000067.html), 26-09-2020.

<sup>23</sup> Eric JOHNSTON, "The North Korea Abduction Issue and Its Effect on Japanese Domestic Politics," *JPRI Working Paper* No. 101, June 2004, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher W. HUGHES, *Japan's economic power and security: Japan and North Korea*, London: Routledge, 1999, pp.58-68. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203022405>

Bilateral talks restarted in 1995, when a delegation of LDP and Social Democratic Party (SDPJ)'s members led by LDP leader Watanabe Michio was sent to Pyongyang. However, the main topic of discussion was rice aid to North Korea in order to normalize relations.<sup>25</sup>

In the mid-1990s Japan's policy orientation towards the DPRK underwent a drastic change. Academic commentators note that Tokyo started to give more importance to its own bilateral agenda and domestic political conditions than to international issues in dealing with North Korea.<sup>26</sup>

In August 1997 the leaders of the two countries met in Beijing in order to discuss once again the fate of 'missing' Japanese citizens. Pyongyang agreed to search for any Japanese that might have gone missing with the support of a Red Cross team. The only response from the North Korean organization was that: «It has been proven that the persons identified by Japanese sources do not exist within our territories, and have never entered nor resided in the country in the past.»<sup>27</sup>

In the same year the families of kidnapped victims made public the names of their loved ones and formed the Association of Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea (hereafter AFVKN or *Kazokukai*). The issue became then a significant political matter for Japan and saw the emergence of conservative policy-making agents and associated rightist organizations supportive of a hard-line policy toward the DPRK.

Members of the Diet also started to work closely with these organizations and together they created a petition that was signed by over one million people.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Eric JOHNSTON, "The North Korea Abduction Issue and Its Effect on Japanese Domestic Politics," *JPRI Working Paper* No. 101, June 2004, p.4.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher W. HUGHES, "The political economy of Japanese sanctions towards North Korea: domestic coalitions and international systemic pressures," *Pacific Affairs*, 79, 3, 2006, p.455.

<sup>27</sup> Ivi, p.90.

<sup>28</sup> NKNET, *Taken! North Korea's Criminal Abduction of Citizens of Other Countries*, 2011, p.91. DOI: 10.1163/2210-7975\_HRD-0147-0010

As a result, in March 1999 Prime Minister Obuchi Keizō met with the abductees' families, sending a strong message to North Korea. The issue was now a top priority for national politics.<sup>29</sup>

Within a short period of time another incident inflamed public opinion in Japan, encouraging a harsher stance vis-à-vis Pyongyang. Two suspected spy ships from North Korea entered the Sea of Japan and were chased by the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF). The episode provided further evidence of how Japanese nationals were abducted and brought to the DPRK.<sup>30</sup> Obuchi promised to work with the United Nations (UN), the Republic of Korea (ROK) and other countries to promote the return of the abductees.<sup>31</sup>

Nonetheless, Eric Johnston notes that some politicians in the *Komeitō* Party and in the LDP, such as Chief Cabinet Secretary Nonaka Hiromu, were still cautious of the issue and prioritised the normalisation process with North Korea. This attitude was shared by some members of the MOFA.

In 1999 Murayama Tomiichi and its bipartisan delegation managed to agree on resuming talks with Pyongyang with the promise of rice aid. The agreement originated a debate and it was strongly criticised by the public opinion. The families of the abductees and their support organizations staged sit-ins in front of the MOFA and LDP headquarters. Moreover, they organised a series of symposiums and seminars, as well as a rally in Tokyo with the support of local rescue associations in order to raise awareness.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Eric JOHNSTON, "The North Korea Abduction Issue and Its Effect on Japanese Domestic Politics," *JPRI Working Paper* No. 101, June 2004, p.8.

<sup>30</sup> Efron SONNI, "Japan Gives Up Chase of Suspected N. Korean Spy Ships," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 March 1999, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1999-mar-25-mn-20861-story.html>, 07-09-2020.

<sup>31</sup> Celeste L. ARRINGTON, *Accidental activists: Victim movements and government accountability in Japan and South Korea*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016, p.160.

<sup>32</sup> Eric JOHNSTON, "The North Korea Abduction Issue and Its Effect on Japanese Domestic Politics," *JPRI Working Paper* No. 101, June 2004, p.8.

Following Obuchi's death, Mori Yoshirō took his place as Prime Minister. Mori was more sympathetic to abductees' families and in contrast to Nonaka he supported a tougher stance towards North Korea. In September 2000, he spontaneously met with the families and declared no normalization would take place with the DPRK without resolving the abduction issue first. However, three days later the Japanese government approved 500,000 tons of rice aid in response to an international call by the UN.

That, coupled with gaffes and a series of scandals, affected Mori's public approval ratings and he was later forced to resign. His place was taken by Koizumi Jun'ichirō, a far more popular candidate.<sup>33</sup>

To sum up, in the late 1990s the abductee families and the supporting organizations managed to obtain recognition by the Japanese government. This has been testified by their meetings with prime ministers Obuchi and Mori, which show the influence possessed by the associations and political actors close to the families on the movement itself. They also benefited from lawmaker's disagreements over dialogue versus pressure towards the DPRK, which contributed to weaken the government's stance on the issue.<sup>34</sup>

#### *1.1.4 The Pyongyang Summit: public outcry and political backlash*

A major change in Japan-North Korea relations came at the September 2002 Summit Meeting. After years of denial, Chairman Kim Jong Il admitted for the first time that agents from the DPRK had kidnapped some Japanese nationals and formally apologized. In addition, North Korea revealed that of fifteen Japanese, eight were dead, two they had no record of, and five were still living in Pyongyang and they were now free to return to their homeland.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Eric JOHNSTON, "The North Korea Abduction Issue and Its Effect on Japanese Domestic Politics," *JPRI Working Paper* No. 101, June 2004, p.9.

<sup>34</sup> Celeste L. ARRINGTON, *Accidental activists: Victim movements and government accountability in Japan and South Korea*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016, p.160.

<sup>35</sup> Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, Government of Japan, "Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea: For Their Immediate Return." Available online at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000305207.pdf>.

Calling the abduction issue «a vital matter directly linked to the lives and safety of the Japanese people,» Prime Minister Koizumi issued the following statement after their meeting:

Chairman Kim Jong Il honestly acknowledged that these were the work of persons affiliated with North Korea in the past and offered his apologies, expressing his regret. He stated that he would ensure that no such incidents occur again in the future. I intend to arrange for meetings with family members of those surviving and to do my utmost to realize their return to Japan based on their will.<sup>36</sup>

One month later the five surviving abductees returned to Japan and were reunited with their families.

The summit was a political success for Koizumi, but also for the abductee families and their supporters who managed to exploit the opportunity to dominate Japan's foreign policy.<sup>37</sup>

Kim's announcement generated firm opposition to diplomatic normalization with North Korea and anger against the regime among the Japanese public. According to a survey conducted in 2003, 90 percent of the Japanese citizens considered the abduction issue of primary concern towards the DPRK, followed by the nuclear program with just 66 percent.<sup>38</sup>

Media coverage of the issue as well is quite indicative of societal relevance and perception. By using the keywords *rachi* 拉致 and *kitachōsen* 北朝鮮 Isa Ducke notes that the number of articles mentioning the issue went from 129 in 1998 to 2423 in 2002. Furthermore, she observes that journal articles on the abduction issue increased from 26

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<sup>36</sup> MOFA, "Opening Statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at the Press Conference on the Outcome of His Visit to North Korea," 17 September, 2002. Available online at: [http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n\\_korea/pmv0209/press.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/press.html).

<sup>37</sup> Celeste L. ARRINGTON, *Accidental activists: Victim movements and government accountability in Japan and South Korea*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016, pp.161-163.

<sup>38</sup> "Gaikō nikansuru yoron chōsa" [Public opinion survey about diplomacy], Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, October 2003, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h15/h15-gaikou/2-1.html>, 26-09-2020.

to 554 and the matter started to appear in a broader range of general magazines, with the exception of academic writings.<sup>39</sup>

It can be concluded that the interaction between the victims' families, their supporters and Japan's media contributed to magnify the public's political dissatisfaction and to deepen their distrust vis-à-vis North Korea. Japanese politicians and parties had become less responsive to a broad cross-section of citizens and were perceived as incapable of offering solutions to this discontent (Arrington 2010, 162).

The power vacuum was exploited by certain right-wing elements, who managed to exert considerable pressure on the government. In early 2000s they successfully shifted the center of the political spectrum in Japan to the right.

LDP's victory in the parliamentary election in November 2003 constitutes a tangible proof of that. Abe Shinzō's election to Prime Minister, known for his hawkish attitude toward the DPRK, effectively marginalized North Korea engagers and encouraged more conservative views.<sup>40</sup>

## 1.2 Literature Review

The abduction issue has sparked strong emotional responses among the Japanese public, surpassing other concerning safety issues with North Korea and eventually dominating policymakers' decisions. Scholars have advanced several explanations as to why the issue and related activism have gained such prominence in Japan.

Arrington (2013), for instance, suggests that Japanese abductee families' moral authority as victims mixed with the Japanese government's negligence have created the right conditions for public outrage.<sup>41</sup> She emphasises how structural conditions, such as «a relatively homogeneous media content and consumption patterns» and the presence

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<sup>39</sup> Isa DUCKE, *Citizens' groups in Japan and the Internet*, Deutsches Institut für Japanstudien, 2003, p.16. Available online at: [https://www.dijtokyo.org/doc/wp\\_03-02-ducke.pdf](https://www.dijtokyo.org/doc/wp_03-02-ducke.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> CHO, Il Hyun, *Global Rogues and Regional Orders: The Multidimensional Challenge of North Korea and Iran*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p.73.

<sup>41</sup> Celeste ARRINGTON, "The Abductions Issue in Japan and South Korea: Ten Years after Pyongyang's Admission," *International Journal of Korean Studies*, XVII, 1, Spring 2013, p.109.

of «local networks of activist groups focused on narrow issues», have offered opportunities for such challengers «to develop and sustain public interest in their causes».42

Johnston (2004, 13) has a different perspective on the abductees' families and does not regard them as active agents, but more as passive victims acted on by outsiders. He highlights politicians' inadequacy and focuses his attention on how right-wing elements have managed to narrow the public's views on North Korea through an incessant and uncritical media coverage of the abductions after Kim Jong Il's admission in 2002.

While Samuels (2010, 389) argues that the issue was elevated in the national discourse by capable conservative politicians who created a 'captivity narrative' exploiting 'institutions, ideology and partisanship' to their advantage.43

Other scholars, such as Williams and Mobernd (2010), study the issue from an ideological perspective and contend that the abduction issue arose in connection with discourses on national identity.44 Also Hagström and Hanssen (2015) explain the dominance of the abduction issue as a vehicle of identity shift in Japan, whereby Japan becomes the 'victim' and North Korea the 'aggressor'.

While Williams and Mobernd (2010) point out that «an already completed identity shift caused increased interest in the abduction issue,» Hagström and Hanssen (2015) argue that «the two phenomena are mutually constitutive.»45

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42 Celeste L. ARRINGTON, *Accidental Activists: How Victim Groups Hold the Government Accountable in Japan and South Korea*, UC Berkley, 2010, p.44.

43 Richard J. SAMUELS, "Kidnapping Politics in East Asia," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 10, 3, December 2010, p.389.

44 Brad WILLIAMS, Erik MOBRAND, "Explaining Divergent Responses to the North Korean Abductions Issue in Japan and South Korea," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 69, 2, May 2010, p.519.

45 Linus HAGSTRÖM, Ulv HANSSEN, "The North Korean abduction issue: emotions, securitisation and the reconstruction of Japanese identity from 'aggressor' to 'victim' and from 'pacifist' to 'normal'," *The Pacific Review*, 28, 1, 2015, pp.72-73.

Though differing on many points, all studies seem to agree that the abductee families have been instrumental to civil society actors, political lobbies and individual politicians in order to raise the issue and promote self-interested objectives.

Finally, and most importantly, it should be noted that scholarly analysis so far has focused mainly on Japan's security and foreign policy changes enabled by the abduction issue discourse. As stated by Arrington (2013, 111), the above-mentioned analysts have «paid little attention to the ways in which the media and activists filtered communication» to spark emotional responses. As a result, the role played by the abductee families in putting the abduction issue into discourse still remains a peripheral topic in the broader debates. Therefore, I intend to address this lacuna by exploring the social aspects of communication and the ways people involved used language to achieve specific effects.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

This paper is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 presents the background of this study, the literature review and the outline of the paper.

The background gives a brief overview of the abductee issue by focusing mainly on key incidents during the 1970-2002 period. It serves to introduce the social and geopolitical contexts that paved the way to the discourse by right-wing actors. While the literature review underscores the necessity to conduct this study to examine how the issue is construed through the voices of the families and their supporters.

Within a Foucauldian framework, Chapter 2 clarifies some concepts and terms, namely *politicisation*, *discourse* and *victims of tragedy*, related to my research questions. It also sets up an analytical framework based on Foucault's notions on discourse and on Willig's six-stage approach in order to analyse the selected material.

Chapter 3 applies the above-mentioned notions to the abduction issue in order to reveal who has gained by the identified discursive constructions and who has been excluded by them. At the same time, it further explores the subject positions made available to the abductees, their families and North Korea, as well as the process of taking them up.



Chapter 4 presents empirical data and the related findings with the purpose of exploring the construction of discourse through the words of state and non-state actors. The main focus is on the role played by three associations: *Kazokukai*, *Sukūkai* and *Rachi Giren*. The chapter also investigates Yokota Megumi's case in greater detail with the purpose of highlighting the process that has turned her into the ideal poster child for the cause. In this context, the notion of victimhood is explored in relation to its political significance.

Chapter 5 investigates the Japanese government's policies in regard to the abduction issue, first in the late 1990s and then from 2002 onwards. Therefore, a brief political contextualisation is followed by the analysis of relevant laws and institutions in favour of the victims and their supporters.

In the final chapter general conclusions are drawn from the findings of the study as well as some considerations on its contributions and limitations, followed by suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2. Research design and method

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

Before proceeding further, it may be useful to clarify a few key concepts and terms integral to this dissertation, proposing relations between them and formulating a framework.

#### 2.1.1 Politicisation

The term *politicisation* is extremely difficult to define because of its complex, variant, dynamic and socially constructed nature. It often takes on a negative connotation and especially when it involves certain issues it can be regarded as morally problematic.

In the most general terms, *politicisation* refers to «the demand for, or the act of, transporting an issue or an institution into the sphere of politics — making previously unpolitical matters political,» thus «making collectively binding decisions a matter or an object of public discussion» (Zürn 2014, 50).

For the purposes of this study, *politicisation* is seen as a bottom-up process, where a private grievance — an unpolitical matter — was turned into a public issue — political — by challengers such as grassroots organisations, social movements and conservative elements. Through the abductee families civic groups in Japan have successfully worked to mobilize public support, framing the abduction issue for the media and exerting pressure on those higher up in order to attain policy change.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Lauren DEMPSTER, *Transitional Justice and the 'Disappeared' of Northern Ireland Silence, Memory, and the Construction of the Past*, London: Routledge, 2019.

### 2.1.2 Discourse

Drawing from ideas of post-structuralism, *politicisation* can be viewed as a manifestation of discourse. Thus, some assumptions characteristic of post-structural thought as forwarded by Foucault may be helpful.<sup>47</sup>

For Foucault discourse is «a group of statements which provides a language for talking about — a way of representing the knowledge about — a particular topic at a particular historical moment [...] Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But [...] since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do — our conduct — all practices have a discursive aspect» (Hall 1992, 291). It results that, «there is no one ‘world’ that can be described and studied; rather, there are numerous versions of the world, each of which is constructed through discourses and practices» (Willig 2008, 408).

By the use of constructs in discourse we actually construct the event itself, allowing and limiting the possibilities of understanding the object.

According to Foucault it is not just we accept discourses and the ideas that go with them, but we locate ourselves on that conceptual map by taking on the roles defined by the concepts and we think of ourselves in those terms.

For instance, the abductee families regard themselves as victims and as such entitled to require action from the government. Hence, the dominant discourse on the abduction issue has been derived from both verbal and textual statements made by those individuals and their supporters.

Discourses create a subjective experience and certain forms of knowledge, which in turn regulate people’s conduct. Discourse is «characterized by a will to truth and a will to power. What passes as truth and how truth is validated are dependent upon the discourse.»<sup>48</sup> To build on our case, the abduction issue has been presented as an act

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<sup>47</sup> See Michael FOUCAULT, *Archeology of knowledge*, 1972.

<sup>48</sup> Allan KENNETH, *Contemporary Social and Sociological Theory: Visualizing Social Worlds*, Pine Forge Press, 2006, pp.295-296.

perpetrated by an ‘evil’ regime in North Korea, responsible of kidnapping ‘innocent’ Japanese citizens from their homes.

Notion of power also produces reality, it restricts our behaviour and at the same time enables it, producing domains of objects and rituals of truth.

Of note here is that some discourses are so entrenched that it is difficult to see how they could be challenged, they become common sense. Hence, who can contest the sufferance of the abductees and their families and their right to a resolution?

### *2.1.3 Victims of a tragedy*

The abductees and their families represent the subjects of ‘our discourse,’ inasmuch as they are victims.

As for tragedy, it generally refers to an extremely sad event, related to death or suffering, which usually «involves some element of moral failure, some flaw in character, or some extraordinary combination of elements that produce a tragic consequence.»<sup>49</sup>

However, not every loss can be considered ‘tragic’ and the label ‘tragedy’ depends on various factors, including media attention or public outcry.<sup>50</sup>

The North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens is regarded as a tragic event in Japan as much as 9/11 in the United States. They both generated very similar strong responses in the public, even though the death toll and circumstances are different.<sup>51</sup>

Tragic events are often susceptible to politicisation and the role played by the victims is instrumental in its construction. As in the case at hand, abduction became a conflict motif used to frame victimhood.

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<sup>49</sup> J. James KILPATRICK, “Court Agrees: ‘Tragedy’ Is Overused,” *Universal Press Syndicate*, 5 April 1992, <https://archive.seattletimes.com/archive/?date=19920405&slug=1484688>, 26-09-2020.

<sup>50</sup> Marcia LATTANZI-LICHT, Doka KENNETH, *Living with Grief: Coping with Public Tragedy*, New York: Routledge, 2003, p.1. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203505182-12>

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

In this regard, several studies on social movements and victimology provide useful insight into the construction of ‘victim status’ and the importance of ‘political empathy’ in altering public’s perceptions.<sup>52</sup>

Lynch and Argomaniz (2015) see the ‘victim status’ as strongly related to questions of legitimacy, morality, power and appeal.<sup>53</sup> As a result not all victims enjoy the same status, since it «is based on the perceived level of innocence and the extent to which the ‘victim’ label is applicable» (Lauren Dempster, 2019).

Abductees in Japan have emerged as a distinct category of victim thanks to the work of their families and ultimately of interest groups, who adopted their cause for political ambitions. However, like Yokota Megumi’s case exemplifies, there are victim stories that are more prominent than others.

Moreover, in political contexts it is common to speak about a ‘victim’ and a ‘criminal’ who perpetrated violence. According to this logic, «victims can be used as evidence-providers, contributing to the building of a case to prosecute perpetrators» (Lauren Dempster 2019). And that is what we refer to as ‘politicising the victims of a tragedy’.

## 2.2 Analytical Framework

In order to describe, interpret and explain the ways in which discourse is put into work Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) is adopted as a qualitative analytical approach.

However, as Hook (2007, 521) notes, «there exists no strictly Foucauldian methods of analysing discourse,» even though many methods derive from Foucault’s

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<sup>52</sup> Related literature: L. Jennifer DUNN, “The Politics Of Empathy: Social Movements And Victim Repertoires”, 37, 3, *Social Movements In The New Century*, August 2004, pp. 235-250; Orla LYNCH, Javier ARGOMANIZ, *Victims of Terrorism: A Comparative and Interdisciplinary Study*, London: Routledge, 2015, p.16; Lauren DEMPSTER, *Transitional Justice and the 'Disappeared' of Northern Ireland Silence, Memory, and the Construction of the Past*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2019.

<sup>53</sup> Orla LYNCH, Javier ARGOMANIZ, *Victims of Terrorism: A Comparative and Interdisciplinary Study*, London: Routledge, 2015, p.16.

poststructuralist discourse theories. In this sense, the theoretical framework presented in the previous section lays the foundation of the analytical framework used in this study.

As a guideline to perform FDA, I decided to adopt the six-stage approach proposed by Willig, which does not explore the genealogy of the discourse.<sup>54</sup>

The stages are as follows:

1. Discursive Constructions;
2. Discourses;
3. Action Orientation;
4. Positioning;
5. Practice;
6. Subjectivity.

In the first phase, I engaged in the process of free association where I read through the selected sources while noting my initial impressions and associations with the text and transcripts. To this end almost anything, from public speeches to books and programs, has been considered discourse.

The first stage involved looking at how the discursive object in question was constructed, its themes and topics. Since discourses are historically and culturally situated it is important to establish how the discourse arose and who or which institution was involved.

In the second stage I focused on the differences between constructions, because the object or event may be constructed in contradictory ways.

Next, I analysed what was the function of constructing the issue in that particular way, at that particular moment. Especially what or who gained from that particular subject position. To evaluate gain or losses explicit focus was on power and politics behind those discourses.

In the fourth stage, I examined what kind of subject positions did the discourse offer and the relations between the people located in it.

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<sup>54</sup> Carla WILLIG, *Introducing Qualitative Research In Psychology*, Open University Press, 2007, p.384-390.

In the fifth stage, based on what kind of categories or types of people are on offer and that people can adopt for themselves or assign to others I dealt with the actions that discourse made possible or prohibited.

In the last stage of analysis, I looked at what people thought, felt and experienced given their positions within the discourse.

Contrary to academic conventions this study presents the analysis together with the discussion on the findings. This is because «a meaningful presentation of the analysis of data can only really take place within the context of a discussion of the insights generated by the analysis» (Willig 2008, 122). However, any wider theoretical or conceptual implications arising out of the research will be addressed in a separate conclusion section.<sup>55</sup>

I also aware that there might exist some limitations in the Foucault-informed discourse analysis being deployed in my dissertation. The reasons are mainly two.

Firstly, FDA could be considered a ‘plural term’ and Foucault’s work «does not represent a linear, homogenous body of work» (Cheek 2008, 4). Secondly, when conducting discourse analysis, there is a risk for researchers to ‘impose meanings on another’s text’ (Cheek 2008, 3). Thus, the researcher becomes both the product and the producer of discourse, impacting the premises and the outcomes of the study.

Ultimately, we must accept that, «discourse analysis can never tell the truth about a phenomenon because, according to a discursive perspective, such a thing as the truth is itself not recovered from but rather constructed through language» (Willig 2013, 126).

### **2.3 Methodology**

In order to gain a better insight into the discourse around the abduction issue I searched for interviews, letters, books, images and pamphlets recorded or written by the families of the abductees, the abductees themselves and by their supporters.

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<sup>55</sup> Carla WILLIG, *Introducing Qualitative Research In Psychology*, Open University Press, 2007.

The majority of the material comes from official websites run by the Japanese government and by NARKN. It was selected by taking into account several factors related to the written or oral text itself, such as content, relevance and authenticity.

Thus, a thematic analysis was conducted looking for recurrent patterns and at the ways individuals constructed the abduction issue. In order to gain a more comprehensive view, the aforementioned qualitative method was integrated with a quantitative study of the data that took into account word frequencies. The process involved coding all the material before identifying and reviewing key themes and arguments, which were then examined in order to understand what kind of ideas and representations underlie them.

At this stage it was important to look at the sources of the material, checking the producers' institutional and personal backgrounds. This means the search focused on their political opinions, their affiliation with other organizations and on the medium used to reach the audience.

At the same time, I explored how these social actors, agents and groups were characterized and positioned within the text. The focus shifted on how the abductees' families and its supporters portrayed themselves in relation to the 'other,' represented by North Korea. Particular attention has been paid to the notion of 'victimhood,' tracing the consequences of taking up certain subject positions in terms of emotions, thoughts and actions.

The identification of discursive constructions was followed by the analysis of what they allowed in terms of action and how they benefited their producers in turn.

The attention, however, was not placed solely on the elements emphasised by the discourse, but also on silences and gaps that could suggest alternative perspectives.

The study focused then on themes and categories that were either barely mentioned or strongly countered by the dominant discourse within the materials. To this purpose, professional media practices were particular useful.

Table 2.1 illustrates the steps taken in the analysis of the data collected and the process of operationalisation of Willig's six stages of FDA.



**Table 2.1 Data analysis framework**

	<b>Stage of analysis</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Willig's FDA</b>
1	Selection of the discourse	The abduction issue	
2	Localisation & preparation of data sources	Interview transcripts, articles, posts, books, pamphlets	
3	Codification & identification of themes	Thematic analysis, open coding, axial coding	Discursive constructions
4	Exploration of the background	Socio-historical context, production process, intended audience, speaker's personal/ institutional characteristics	Discourses
5	Analysis of external relations	Intended purpose of the text, dominant social practices and ideologies	Action orientation
6	Analysis of internal relations	Silences and gaps within the text vs dominant discourse	Practice
7	Interpretation of external & internal relations	Representations of events & actors, speakers' positionality	Positioning & Subjectivity

As the table above shows, 'positioning' and 'subjectivity' have not been separated into two different stages as Willig proposes, but they have been incorporated into one stage of analysis since they represent concepts closely related to each other.

## **Chapter 3. The ‘abduction discourse’**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The current chapter investigates the purposes and the effects of the ‘abduction discourse’ in terms of power and knowledge. It starts by focusing on the action orientation of the text and talk analysed, exploring what is being done or achieved by *Kazokukai*, its support organisations and the political elites. Then, the attention shifts to the ‘North Korea issue’ and the related taboos in the Japanese society and politics. Finally, the chapter concludes with the analysis of the positioning process within the discourse, arguing that the labels of ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator,’ respectively attached to the abductees, their families, and North Korea, were not readily available but had to be negotiated and legitimised.

### **3.2 The power that lies behind discourse**

The thematic analysis conducted reveals that the dominant discourse about the abduction issue has been constructed along the lines of a ‘personal tragedy,’ a ‘violation of Japanese sovereignty’ and an ‘abuse of human rights by North Korea.’

Through these discursive constructions the abduction issue has brought about a shift in public moods and imaginaries, influencing even political preferences in Japan. Thus, it played a fundamental role in wider social processes of legitimation and power.

When the abductees’ families describe the abductions as a personal tragedy and a painful experience they are able to stir sympathy from their audience. For a relatively powerless group, emotional appeals represent quite potent tools in order to gather as much support as possible and get eventually heard by the authorities. It could be generally argued that, «emotions are very important in the ascending phase of a movement and in the recruitment phase of new activists» (De Nardis 2020, 361).

Through campaigns *Kazokukai* was able to mobilise support for its cause, promote recovery and identification measures, and ensure that the abductees remain part of the public consciousness. In the end, by holding the Japanese government accountable the association has managed to obtain partial redress as well as political support.

The goals of AFVKN can however be considered apolitical in nature, since their main objectives consist in gaining information about their missing relatives and pressing for their immediate return.

Nonetheless, feelings such as anxiety, anger, but also hope can motivate political action when politicized. Anger and fear towards a perceived injustice or threat can lead to moral indignation, which in turn drives populist support (De Nardis 2020, 361).

These particular negative emotions have been stirred by the representation of the abductions as a ‘violation of Japan’s sovereignty’ and an ‘abuse of human rights’ by North Korea. As a matter of fact, 80 percent of the Japanese people affirms to dislike North Korea and the public’s hostile sentiments have been constantly increasing after 2002.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, the notion that the abduction issue has not yet been resolved has instilled uncertainty in regard of the likelihood and nature of the ‘danger’ faced by Japan, exciting public fears.

Studies on emotional intelligence contend that anger differs from fear, inasmuch it arises when the event has already happened as «a consequence of deliberate or negligent behaviour by an external agent in control and thus worthy of blame.»<sup>57</sup>

This emotion is also related to questions of morality and rule violation. Hence, the act perpetrated by North Korea is portrayed and perceived as morally outrageous.

The literature on emotions further suggests that in the case of anger the individual believes to have the capability to influence and address the situation to a certain degree.<sup>58</sup> In fact, the anger of the Japanese public has been directed not only at the DPRK, but at politicians who have either exploited the issue or sought better relations with North Korea; at the government for failing to protect its citizens and not taking a

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<sup>56</sup> MUROTANI Katsumi, “(Yoron chōsa bunseki) Nihonjin no sukina kuni, kiraina kuni” [Opinion polls analysis: Japanese favorite country and least favorite country], Central Research Services, 2011, <https://www.crs.or.jp/backno/old/No575/5751.htm>, 26-09-2020.

<sup>57</sup> Guillem RICO, Marc GUINJOAN, Eva ANDUIZA, “The Emotional Underpinnings of Populism: How Anger and Fear Affect Populist Attitudes,” *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23, 4, 2017, p. 446.

<sup>58</sup> Ivi, pp. 446-447.

tougher stance and at the mainstream media that have ignored the abductions for a long time. In other words, this anger prompted the public to act against the responsible agents with the belief to be able to change the current situation. And this shows the influence that emotions exerted on political judgment and behaviour.

A public survey conducted in 2004 revealed that 73,4 percent of the Japanese people felt that national policies poorly reflected the opinions and thoughts of the citizens, asking to politicians to hear them out.<sup>59</sup>

By attributing responsibility to the government, the dominant discourse has reinforced the belief that politics is characterized by corruption and inattentiveness, promoting distrust and dissatisfaction with the democracy.

Organisations such as the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea (hereafter NARKN or *Sukūkai*), *Rachi Giren* and the Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea (hereafter ICMJPRNK) have revealed how a peaceful state built on the principles of the Japanese Constitution is not capable of guaranteeing security, affecting Japanese public opinion on Japan as a whole.

Through the abduction discourse they have offered alternative solutions. And the majority of the Japanese people started to support more punitive and aggressive policies toward North Korea, calling for economic sanctions.<sup>60</sup>

By focusing on securitisation the discourse has enabled the call for a constitutional reform or reinterpretation of it in order to allow military intervention, restricted under the current Constitution as per Article 9.

LDP member Nakayama Tarō, for instance, has stated at a conference held by *Nippon Kaigi*:

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<sup>59</sup> “Kuni nitaisuru ishiki” [Country opinion survey], Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, January 2004, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h15/h15-shakai/2-2.html>, 26-09-2020.

<sup>60</sup> “Shushō no Yasukunijinja sanpai, sanpi ni fun honsha yoron chōsa” [Prime Minister’s visit to Yasukuni shrine, 50% for and 50% against (Asahi’s opinion polls)], *asahi.com*, The Asahi Shimbun Company, 30 November 2004, <http://www.asahi.com/special/shijiritsu/TKY200411290310.html>, 26-09-2020.

Have the Japanese people really come to think about the country? **Suspicious ships have threatened our surrounding waters, many young men and women have been kidnapped.** The families of the abductees were told to entrust the issue to the government. For the first time since the end of the war, the relationship between the people and the nation was made clear.

To protect the country, to protect lives and to carry out compulsory education. All these things are done by the state. The power of the people that constitute the country is entrusted to the members of the Diet. **When two-thirds of the members decide, the first step towards the revision of the constitution will be accomplished.**<sup>61</sup>

These proposals have made the revision of Article 9 and remilitarisation look as politically possible. But the abduction issue has been used in arguments for re-writing history textbooks as well, underlining the necessity for a radical educational reform.

For instance, the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform has proposed to include the North Korean kidnappings as a ‘sovereignty’ and ‘human rights’ issue in its high school textbooks in place of references to alleged Japanese war crimes.<sup>62</sup>

Thus laying the grounds to a change in public perceptions of Japan’s identity, where the DPRK takes the role of ‘aggressor’ that previously belonged to Japan since World War II. In this regard, many scholars have argued that the abductions have been instrumentalized in order to build a national narrative of Japanese victimhood.<sup>63</sup>

The discourse and its constructions have stirred not only fear and anger, but also love for and pride in Japan. The abductions have been represented as a ‘national disgrace,’ encouraging a collective sense of nationhood based on the notion of ‘wounded pride.’ The issue has been especially used to further promote nationalist tendencies among the young generation.

In a public survey conducted in 2004, 50 percent of the Japanese people described themselves as being very proud of their country, percentage that increased for two years

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<sup>61</sup> “Setsuritsu go shūnen taikai” [Nippon Kaigi’s fifth anniversary assembly], *Nippon Kaigi*, Japan Conference, 18 November 2002, <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/about/5years>, 26-06-2020.

<sup>62</sup> “‘Atarashii rekishi kyōkasho wo tsukurukai’ to wa dono yōna soshiki ka?” [What kind of organisation is the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform?], Korean Student League in Japan, 2006, <http://www.ryuhaktong.org/material/others/03.html>, 17-07-2020.

<sup>63</sup> See Linus HAGSTRÖM, Karl GUSTAFSSON, “Japan and identity change: why it matters in International Relations,” *The Pacific Review*, 28, 1, 2015, p.10. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2014.969298>

in a row. And they were most proud of their ‘history and tradition’ and ‘great culture and art,’ whose percentages increased in comparison to the ones of the previous year.

80 percent of the respondents even felt there is the need to nurture more love for Japan.<sup>64</sup>

In conclusion, it could be said that the discourse constructions mentioned so far have legitimised the political requests of right-wing to far-right political elements who call themselves ‘supporters’. The result is that these actors have made possible a shift in Japan’s national security and foreign policy aligned with their political vision and ideological imaginary.

On a more practical level, the abduction issue discourse has allowed the ascendance of political actors such as Abe Shinzō, and has given the ruling coalition, the LDP, incentives to pass legislation to address challengers’ grievances in order to retain power. Through his support of the dominant discourse and his hard-line posture towards the DPRK Abe has promoted the image of a defender of the national interest. It not only raised his popularity among the public, but it ultimately helped him win the elections in September 2006.

As a matter of fact, the abduction issue has become deeply connected to Abe’s revisionist rhetoric, aimed to underline the necessity of a ‘strong Japan’.

In 2012 Abe and the LDP campaigned using the slogan ‘*Nippon o torimodosu*’ — ‘Take back Japan’ —<sup>65</sup> which was curiously transplanted to the abduction issue with a national poster campaign declaring that the Abe government will ‘definitely bring back the abductees’ — ‘*Rachi. Kanarazu torimodosu*’ (see Figure 3.1).<sup>6667</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “Kuni nitaisuru ishiki” [Country opinion survey], Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, January 2004, <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/h15/h15-shakai/2-2.html>, 26-09-2020.

<sup>65</sup> “(Jimintō shin CM) ‘Nippon o torimodosu’” [(LDP’s new CM) Take back Japan!], LDP, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S5rhUHmPbZc>, 22-08-2020.

<sup>66</sup> “Kurashi ni yakudatsu jōhō” [Useful information for daily life], Cabinet Office Government of Japan, <https://www.gov-online.go.jp/useful/article/201311/3.html>, 22-08-2020.

<sup>67</sup> Sebastian MASLOW, “An End to the ‘Lost Decade’ in Japan-North Korea Relations?”, *The Diplomat*, 7 May 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/05/an-end-to-the-lost-decade-in-japan-north-korea-relations/>, 22-08-2020.



**Figure 3.1** The Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, *Abduction issue awareness poster (a)*, <https://www.vons.co.jp/works/detail.php?id=147>

While in the *anime Megumi*, promoted by the Japanese government, there is a scene where Yokota Shigeru states: ‘If Megumi will come back, I would like to show her the new Japan’. These words clearly recall Abe’s book ‘Towards a new country: towards a beautiful country’ — ‘*Atarashii kuni e, utsukushii kuni e,*’ where he envisions a new country identity starting from the revision of the Constitution.<sup>68</sup> In this regard, Abe believes that «knowing one own country’s culture is connected to being a real citizen of the world. Someone that cannot talk proudly about their identity, their national culture and tradition, once in the world will be looked at with contempt. [...] And for this reason, there is the necessity to learn what traditions and what culture are part of your own country.»<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> See SHINZŌ Abe, *Atarashii kuni e, utsukushii kuni e* [Towards a new country: towards a beautiful country], Bungeishunju, 2013.

<sup>69</sup> ŌSHITA Eiji, *Abe Shinzō to Kishi Nobusuke* (Shinzō Abe and Nobusuke Kishi), Kadokawa, 2013, p.34.

Therefore, it could be noted that the frames made available by the abduction issue discourse have espoused Abe's political ideas, benefitting his career. This ultimately shows how discourse is where power relations are enacted and exercised.

### 3.3 Systems of exclusion

Poststructuralist discourse theory sees discourse as a structure fixed by temporary meanings that assigns identities and orients practices, while what falls outside of it simply represents other discourses.

«While discursive frameworks order reality in a particular way, rendering it visible and understandable, they may also constrain or even exclude the production of understandings and knowledge that could offer alternative views of that reality» (Cheek 2008, 356).<sup>70</sup> This means that in order for one discourse to arise and become hegemonic all the other interpretations of it must be erased, since they could potentially challenge and resist it. This is usually achieved by discrediting any alternative understanding of the object in question. And the abduction issue discourse is no exception.

For instance, the dominant discourse bases itself on the belief that the abductees are still alive and living under harsh conditions in North Korea. While Pyongyang keeps affirming that the abductees are all dead and conclusive evidence has been provided.

It results that North Korea's position is considered problematic inasmuch it constitutes an opposing view of the issue. Therefore, it has to be contested and undermined in order for the dominant discourse to exist and produce its effects.

This was achieved by showing that Pyongyang is not trustworthy, the regime tells lies and deceives people. For instance, at a seminar on the North Korean abductions issue Nishioka Tsutomu, chairman of NARKN, commented:

I thought that the issue of dealing with the kidnapping is an issue that requires us to **fight against lies**. [...] But **the lies** that North Korea tells — there are two different stages of them. The **first** is they say that they don't kidnap anyone — that even

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<sup>70</sup> Julianne CHEEK, Foucauldian discourse analysis. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2008, p.356.



though they are kidnapping someone, they say — they **lie** and say they aren't. But we in Japan have won in the **battle against their lies**. They have said that they never kidnapped Japanese people. Well, we forced them to admit that they did.<sup>71</sup>

The word 'lies' expressly appears four times and twice in relation to terms such as 'battle' and 'fight,' marking the use of military metaphors.

According to this statement, Kim Jong Il's admission of having kidnapped Japanese citizens in 2002 represents a determinant factor in exposing the 'true nature' of the regime.

The other key factors were Yokota Megumi's fake remains handed over by Pyongyang and the alleged fabrication of her death certificate. In this regard, an article published in the scientific journal *Nature* suggesting that DNA samples were possibly compromised and inconclusive, faced strong denial by the government.<sup>72</sup>

Chief cabinet secretary Hosoda Hiroyuki referred to this article as 'inadequate' and 'a misrepresentation of the scientist's statements.'<sup>73</sup> To which *Nature* responded:

Japan is right to doubt North Korea's every statement. But its interpretation of the DNA tests has crossed the boundary of science's freedom from **political interference**. *Nature's* interview with the scientist who carried out the tests raised the possibility that the remains were merely contaminated, making the DNA tests inconclusive. **This suggestion is uncomfortable for a Japanese government that wants to have North Korea seen as unambiguously fraudulent.** [...]

It is also entirely possible that North Korea is lying. But the DNA tests that Japan is counting on won't resolve the issue. The problem is not in the science but in the fact that **the government is meddling in scientific matters** at all. Science runs on the premise that experiments, and all the uncertainty involved in them, should be open for scrutiny. Arguments made by other Japanese scientists that the tests should have been carried out by a larger team are convincing. Why did Japan entrust them to one scientist working alone — one **who no longer seems to be free to talk about them?**<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> "Seminar on the North Korean Abductions Issue (Transcript)," *Hudson Institute*, Washington D.C., 3 May 2019, <https://www.hudson.org/research/15010-transcript-seminar-on-the-north-korean-abductions-issue>, 20-07-2020.

<sup>72</sup> David CYRANOSKI, "DNA is burning issue as Japan and Korea clash over kidnaps," *Nature*, 433, 3 February 2005, p. 445. Available online at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/433445a.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> "Seiji to genjitsu" [Politics versus reality], *Nature* (Japanese version), 434, 17 March 2005, p.257. Available online at: <https://storage.googleapis.com/natureasia-assets/ja-jp/ndigest/pdf/v2/n4/ndigest.2005.050402.pdf>

<sup>74</sup> "Politics versus reality," *Nature*, 434, 17 March 2005, p. 257, <https://www.nature.com/articles/434257a>, 26-09-2020.

It is interesting to note that the news was not covered by the Japanese mass media and thus it was never made public, preventing people from receiving information.<sup>75</sup>

While the stories told by abductees' relatives in North Korea and the testimonies given by former DPRK agents have been considered full of contradictions and somewhat ambiguous. The Headquarters for the abduction issue has even inserted a complete list of the inconsistencies found in its official website.<sup>76</sup>

According to a special report by the committee for human rights in North Korea the regime has not only provided 'false and unsubstantiated assertions', but it denies thorough bilateral investigations in order to hide unpleasant facts.<sup>77</sup>

In addition, North Korea is often portrayed as 'evil and strange' by the Japanese mainstream media, which have played a big role in destroying its public image leaving out any comment that could benefit it.

In other words, Pyongyang's arguments were discredited by either attacking the country's character or by casting doubt on its motives and behaviour following a rhetorical strategy called 'ad hominem'.<sup>78</sup>

At the same time, the relatively uniform content across outlets connected with the wide distribution and status news media in Japan enjoy, has allowed the abduction discourse to receive the spotlight.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), "Japan and North Korea: Bones of Contention," *Asia Report*, No. 100, 27 June 2005, p.12. Available online at: [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/10759/100\\_japan\\_and\\_north\\_korea.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/10759/100_japan_and_north_korea.pdf)

<sup>76</sup> "Kitachōsengawa shuchō no mondaiten"[The problems with North Korea's claims], Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea, <https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/mondaiten/index.html>, 27-06-2020.

<sup>77</sup> NKNET (Network for North Korean Democracy and Human Rights), *Taken! North Korea's Criminal Abduction of Citizens of Other Countries*, 2011. DOI: 10.1163/2210-7975\_HRD-0147-0010

<sup>78</sup> Gabrijela KIŠIČEK, *Ad hominem arguments in political discourse (An analysis of Croatian Parliamentary debate)*, 2017. Available online at: [https://www.uni-saarland.de/fileadmin/upload/institut/eir/Proceedings/Paper\\_Kisicek\\_Gabrijela.pdf](https://www.uni-saarland.de/fileadmin/upload/institut/eir/Proceedings/Paper_Kisicek_Gabrijela.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> LYNN Hyung Gu., "Vicarious traumas: television and public opinion in Japan's North Korea policy," *Pacific Affairs*, 79, 3, 2006, p.487.

In an interview with Community Cable Japan (CCJ) — a tv broadcast company based in Mie prefecture — former *Kazokukai* Secretary General Hasuike Tōru reveals that «there are too many taboos regarding the abduction issue, even in the mass media.»<sup>80</sup>

Ultimately the communications industry holds the power to amplify some voices and silence others by determining what is discussed and which views are heard.

In Japan the elevation of the abduction discourse into the national debate was followed by the search for people who had previously denied or doubted the DPRK's involvement into the kidnappings. Few cases literally made the news.

For instance, the *Sankei Shimbun* has heavily criticised the other Japanese newspapers.

On June 2, 2018 it published an article entitled '*The Japanese media, who kept ignoring the existence of the abductions*' advertising the new book written by one of its journalists, Abe Masami, the first to raise the issue to public attention in the 1980s.<sup>81</sup>

While in 2009, when journalist Tahara Sōichirō stated during a live show run by *TV Asahi* that abductees Yokota Megumi and Arimoto Keiko were 'not alive,' Arimoto's parents reportedly filed a complaint asking for 10 million yen in compensatory damages, declaring:

Not only was the statement per se extremely offensive, but to report false information on TV to the all country is highly illegal.<sup>82</sup>

Both Tahara and *TV Asahi* were forced to issue a public apology a month later, in a clear act of self-censorship.

Politicians and intellectuals even started to be called 'traitors' (*baikokudo* 売国奴) and to be accused of being 'pro-North Korea'. As a result, those who became targets of

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<sup>80</sup> See HASUIKE Tōru and MASAKUNI Ota, *Rachi Tairon* [Abduction debates], Tokyo: Ohta Shuppan, 2009, pp. 33, 82.

<sup>81</sup> "Rachi no sonzai, mokusatsushitsudzuketa Nihon no media" [The Japanese media, who kept ignoring the existence of the abductions], *The Sankei News*, The Sankei Shimbun, 2 June 2018, <https://www.sankei.com/world/news/180602/wor1806020001-n1.html>, 20-07-2020.

<sup>82</sup> "Tabūka suru rachi mondai ~ Tahara Sōichirō-shi e no teiso" [The abduction issue that creates taboos: Tahara Sōichirō's lawsuit], *Egawa Shoko Journal*, Shoko Egawa, 16 July 2009, <http://www.egawashoko.com/c006/000296.html>, 25-07-2020.

criticism either avoided to talk about the abductions or publicly recanted their statements and apologized for past actions.

As Williams and Moberand have noted, while the public debate became dominated by conservative and right-wing parties, the Japanese Left fell into silence and it was even restricted from talking about the issue.<sup>83</sup>

In October 2002, SDPJ leader Doi Takako apologized to the abductees' families for not having sufficiently pursued the issue. The article, published by the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, went on remarking that the SDPJ for a long time 'tagged along' with North Korea, adopting a 'dishonourable behaviour' and that Doi's apology 'is not enough,' suggesting that the Communist Party as well should humbly reflect on the matter. The relatives of abductee Masumoto Rumiko subsequently asked at a press conference:

To the members of the Diet, the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party that have kept ignoring the issue, if you have something to say to us please contact us.<sup>84</sup>

Also the head of the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asia-Pacific Bureau, Tanaka Hitoshi, came under attack for his conciliatory stance towards North Korea and for his role in the negotiations that led to the Pyongyang Declaration. In September 2003 a bomb was planted in his garage, to which former Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintarō commented:

The incident does not surprise me. He said he negotiated with a certain Mr. X, who we don't know if exists or not, doing exactly what he was told by North Korea.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Brad WILLIAMS, Erik MOBRAND, "Explaining Divergent Responses to the North Korean Abductions Issue in Japan and South Korea," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 69, 2 May 2010, p.530.

<sup>84</sup> "Rachi mondai: Doi shakaiminshutō ga chinsha, 'tsuikyū fujūbun'" [The abduction issue: SDPJ leader Doi apologises, '(we) did not pursue (the abduction issue) sufficiently'], *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 8 October 2002, <https://database.yomiuri.co.jp/rekishikan/>.

<sup>85</sup> "Ishihara chiji 'bakudan shikakerare atarimae' to hatsugen. Fushimbutsu jiken" [Governor Ishihara's remark: It's natural a bomb was planted there. Bomb threat incident], *asahi.com*, The Asahi Shimbun Company, 10 September 2003, <http://www.asahi.com/special/abductees/TKY200309100265.html>, 27-07-2020.

According to Ishihara, Tanaka wanted to strike from the document any mention of pressuring the DPRK and thus the bomb was deserved.

But despite the general belief that economic sanctions were the right solution, some abductees' families as well have come to question their efficacy and the implications for their relatives still in the DPRK.

For instance, former abductee Hasuike Kaoru's elder brother Tōru received pressure from AFVKN at the time he expressed his wish to pursue a softer approach to North Korea, based on dialogue and diplomacy instead of economic sanctions. He was eventually told by *Kazokukai* something like:

You can say that [you want dialogue and diplomacy] just because your brother is back. You are even the speaker. Since you are not persuasive anymore, you should step down as head of the secretariat.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Hasuike resigned and consequently decided to withdraw from the association all together. Still he felt like he was pushed into making that decision.<sup>86</sup>

In the end, the information conveyed by the mass media and the government was crucial for public opinion perceptions. The power of the discourse produced the so called 'bandwagon effect,' where people are inclined 'to join in their preferences or behaviours what they perceive to be existing or emerging majorities or dominant positions in society.'<sup>87</sup> Eventually, the number of individuals that obey to the discourse determine its strength, which is in turn enforced by 'social punishment'. Punishment becomes instrumental in deterring individuals from thinking about deviating from the discourse.

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<sup>86</sup> CCJ, (*Hasuike Tōru-shi dokusen intabyū*) *Chaputā 3 rachi nitsuite ~ rachi mondai Kazokukai moto jimukyokuchō toshite* ~ [Special interview with Tōru Hasuike. Chapter 3: The abduction issue seen by *Kazokukai*'s former secretary-general], 26 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9dkN7OfJio>, 26-09-2020.

<sup>87</sup> Schmitt-Beck RÜDIGER, "Bandwagon Effect," *Oxford Bibliographies*, 28 June 2016, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756841/obo-9780199756841-0113.xml>, 26-09-2020.

In this case, the sanction entails the attitudes and reactions of the other members of society in the form of public shame and humiliation.<sup>88</sup>

Conformity to the dominant discourse was especially expected of the government.

Starting from Obuchi all prime ministers arranged meetings with the families and began wearing the blue ribbons pins as a sign of solidarity with the Japanese citizens abducted. And when the government did not respond to their expectations, *Kazokukai* and *Sukūkai* organized sit-ins in front of the Diet.<sup>89</sup>

Japanese policy makers were put into a position from where it is impossible to dismiss the abduction issue and have bent to the will of the families and its support organisations by passing favourable bills. As a result, the resolution of the issue has become a precondition to normalize diplomatic relations with North Korea, giving it top priority on the political agenda. Nonetheless, any normalization talk is still regarded with suspicion, as an attempt to compromise by the government and therefore a potential source of criticism. That has led to a vague set of terms in reference to ‘the complete resolution’ of the issue, impeding any concrete progress in the negotiations.

### 3.4 Victims and perpetrators

As noted in the previous section, power is exercised by controlling others’ use of language. Any form of opposition is delegitimised and negatively presented by using speech acts such as blaming, accusing, and insulting.<sup>90</sup>

Blame attribution has been the first step in the emergence of anger towards the DPRK, an external actor that prevents the abductees’ families and their supporters from

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<sup>88</sup> Chaim FERSHTMAN, Uri GNEEZY, Moshe HOFFMAN, “Taboos and Identity: Considering the Unthinkable,” *American Economic Journal: Microeconomics*, 3 May 2011, pp. 139–164. Available online at: <https://rady.ucsd.edu/faculty/directory/gneezy/pub/docs/taboo.pdf>

<sup>89</sup> “Okada daihyōra ga rachi higaisha kazoku no minasan no kokkai zen suwarikomi o gekirei” [Okada representatives have encouraged the abductees’ families’ national sit-in in front of the Diet], The Democratic Party of Japan, 24 June 2005, <http://210.135.97.116/news/?num=6920>, 26-07-2020.

<sup>90</sup> Paul Anthony CHILTON, *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge, 2004, p.46. Available online at: <https://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Analysing-political-discourse-Theory-and-Practice-by-Paul-Chilton.pdf>

attaining their goals. North Korea has therefore taken the role of ‘Other,’ a foreign virtual enemy who has committed an evil deed.

At the other end of the spectrum, there is the legitimisation of the families and the abductees, who have gained moral authority as victims of both North Korean aggression and the Japanese government’s negligence.<sup>91</sup>

Legitimation «is usually oriented to the ‘Self,’ includes positive self-presentation, manifesting itself in acts of self-praise, self-apology, self-explanation, self-justification, self-identification as a source of authority, reason, vision and sanity, the self is either an individual or the group with which an individual identifies» (Chilton 2004, 47).

This self-other dichotomy can be understood as a consequence of the discourse, which constructs subjects by making available certain positions to people that can either be assumed or attached to others. These subject positions in turn allow the individual to feel, think and experience in a certain way.

Thus, the aim of this section is to investigate the positions that the abduction discourse has offered and the subsequent dynamics and dilemmas of taking them up.

As previously mentioned, the abductees’ families have declared themselves ‘victims of a tragedy’ and ‘advocates of change’ in desperate need of support. The association they formed, *Kazokukai*, represents non other than a collective identity based on the fact of sharing the same status and an emotional connection brought by tragic circumstances. Through the recognition of AFVKN the families have gained recognition for their loved ones who went missing. At the same time, by acknowledging the abductions as morally unacceptable they have positioned those responsible, namely North Korea, as the ‘perpetrator’. However, self-identification is not sufficient in constructing victimhood.

Victim positioning presents dilemmas, it is often contested and needs to be narratively negotiated. Therefore, the abductees and their families must have met certain legal, social and moral criteria in order to be positioned as ‘legitimate victims’.

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<sup>91</sup> Celeste ARRINGTON, “The Abductions Issue in Japan and South Korea: Ten Years after Pyongyang’s Admission,” *International Journal of Korean Studies*, XVII, 1, Spring 2013, p.109.

Sarah Thunberg (2020, 46) proposes three contributing factors to the construction of victimhood: First, a person must be subjected to a victimising event, perceived as hurtful and recognised as a violation of national law; second, a person must act as a victim and according to the discursive constraints of victimhood; third, a person must be called a victim either by one self, by others or by both. In other words, it requires positioning in the form of self-identification and social recognition. And this in turn establishes what types of support the so-called victims are offered.<sup>92</sup>

In our case, the abductees and their families meet all the above mentioned criteria.

First of all, the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korean agents constitutes a crime, whereby people have been unlawfully taken and carried away either by force or fraud and detained in the DPRK against their will. Japan denounces it as a violation of its sovereignty and territorial waters.

Moreover, according to international law ‘enforced disappearance’ represents a crime against humanity falling under the jurisdiction of each State Party.<sup>93</sup> As a matter of fact, in 2006 Japan promulgated the Law Concerning Measures to Address the Abductions Issue and Other North Korean Human Rights Violations. While 2014 UN General Assembly Resolution 69/188 internationally recognised the abductions as human rights violation perpetrated by North Korea.<sup>94</sup>

The abductions can also be categorized as an hurtful event, that affected not only the lives of the abductees but of their families as well.

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<sup>92</sup> Sara THUNBERG, *Victimization, Positioning, and Support Young Victims' Experiences of Crime*, Örebro University, 2020, p.46. Available online at: <http://oru.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1412894/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

<sup>93</sup> The convention has been signed and ratified by Japan. Committee on enforced disappearances, “International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance,” United Nations Human Rights, 6 February 2007, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/ced/pages/conventionced.aspx>, 04-08-2020.

<sup>94</sup> United Nations General Assembly, “UN General Assembly Resolution 69/188 - Situation of human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” 18 December 2014. Available online at: [https://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/UNGA\\_Resolution\\_69-188.pdf](https://www.ncnk.org/resources/publications/UNGA_Resolution_69-188.pdf)



This pain is underlined in a video released by the Cabinet Office in 2014, where the narrator asks:<sup>95</sup>

There are people whose lives and families have been suddenly taken away. What if it was you? What if it was your family?

As the next chapter will show in further detail, the abductions have separated many families for over forty years and shattered bonds that are considered sacred even. This has led to an array of emotional responses that range from anger to fear, frustration, self-blame and grief. The suffering of the families, however, is ongoing and exacerbated by the fact that their loved ones cannot be relocated as dead.

Second, the abductees' families act in accordance with the discursive expectations of a victim. For instance, they talk about their relatives as being innocent, not bearing any responsibility for what has happened to them, and being harmless, not able to fight off their perpetrators. After all, the majority of the people was abducted at a young age while going about their daily business, like Matsumoto Kyoko (29) who was kidnapped on her way to a knitting class nearby her home.<sup>96</sup> Ordinary citizens whose only crime was being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The chances of overpowering their offenders was minimal, considering that the abductions were carried out by trained agents and operatives on the field.

However, since most of the victims cannot act on their own behalf, their families are morally and legally entitled to exercise their rights. As a matter of fact, *Kazokukai* has mobilised and made claims seeking a remedy to its members' suffering and to the harm received. This entailed asking for thorough investigations into the fate and whereabouts of their relatives, as well as official apologies, financial retribution and policy reforms.

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<sup>95</sup> “Kanarazu torimodosu! ‘Kitachōsen niyoru nihonjin rachi mondai’ no kaiketsu e” [We will surely bring them back! Towards a resolution to the ‘Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea issue’], Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 11 November 2014, <https://nettv.gov-online.go.jp/prg/prg10798.html>, 20-08-2020.

<sup>96</sup> “Rachi mondai keihatsu eizō sakuhin ‘~ messeeji ~ kazokutachi no omoi’” [Educational video production on the abduction issue. Messages: the thoughts of the families], Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea, [https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/message/message\\_full.html](https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/message/message_full.html), 02-07-2020.

The campaigns initiated by AFVKN clearly show the moral and political power of victimhood as well as its ability to do transitional justice.

Third, the abductees and their families identify themselves as victims, but they are recognised as such also by others. Particularly interesting is the term used to refer to the ‘abductees’ in Japanese: *rachi higaiisha* (拉致被害者), which literally means ‘victims of abduction’. The term further validates that a crime has been committed and that the people affected are victims.

The first ones to recognize the families and their loved ones as victims of a tragedy have been local citizens, neighbours and friends who founded the first rescue associations. At the time, *Kazokukai*'s members started to tell their stories and to pose with the images of their missing relatives, gaining the sympathy and support of their communities. Their image was then promoted and made public nationwide with the help of right-wing activists as well as politicians that engaged in advocacy advertising.

However, it was only after 2002 that a more consistent public awareness was raised, mainly due to the media and the government. In this regard, it could be argued that Japanese news outlets' saturation coverage of the issue caused an ‘additional victimisation’. They created «tragic and accessible narratives [...] in the form of a ‘reality’ tragedy and vicarious traumas that could be experienced from the comfort of the living room» (Lynn 2006, 502).

Even so, the families of the abductees have placed great importance on sharing their stories in front of a live audience, by taking part in conferences, rallies and public events. For instance, the Yokotas were invited to a school festival with the purpose of holding a lecture on the abductions. For the occasion the students prepared a photography exhibition with the pictures of the victims. Their comments are particularly revealing of their perceptions on the issue, clearly influenced by the families' narrative:

Student 1: I am too 14 years old now. So if I were to think I cannot see my parents for twice as much as my life I get really sad.

Student 2: I think I gained a deeper understanding after being able to directly hear [from the Yokotas] the real story.

Student 3: After hearing your story I fully realised how I was living with little information. I would like to help in the promotion of the abduction issue. Thank you.<sup>97</sup>

The government has even produced a DVD with the purpose of raising awareness on the abduction issue among Japanese students, further legitimating the ‘victim position’ of the abductees and their families. The impressions of the students have also been recorded. A high-schooler writes:

I managed to learn a lot of things that I didn’t know before about the abduction issue. First, I was surprised that there were so many people abducted to North Korea. **The fact that a lot of people were abducted made me think that there are a lot of people who felt sad.** Then, **after hearing about Yokota Megumi and her mom, I felt sad.** I thought: Why can North Korea do such things? I think that the people who committed the abductions have a family as well. **If my family or I were kidnapped, how would I feel?** I believe that if they were able to think about other people’s feelings, a sad thing like the abductions would have not happened. Watching today’s DVD, I thought that it would be nice if the number of people who think about the others raises, I would like to become one of them.

While other students clearly point out the victims’ powerless position:

I think that the people who were abducted, in the moment they were kidnapped, **could not understand what was going on, could not do anything but cry and think about their family and friends.**

**Even though they did not commit any crime,** they took Japanese citizens to North Korea and among them, a **very young girl** still in her first year of middle-school.<sup>98</sup>

As remarked by these comments, the Japanese public has widely accepted this ‘truth,’ positively conceptualising the abductees and their families as a distinct category of victims who are morally entitled to sympathy due to their blamelessness. At the same time, assigning the blame to North Korea has created the perception that everyone else

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<sup>97</sup> “Kanarazu torimodosu! ‘Kitachōsen niyoru nihonjin rachi mondai’ no kaiketsu e” [We will surely bring them back! Towards a resolution to the ‘Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea issue’], Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 11 November 2014, <https://nettv.gov-online.go.jp/prg/prg10798.html>, 20-08-2020.

<sup>98</sup> “Rachi mondai keihatsu DVD o shichōshita kōkōsei no kansō bun” [Reports of high-school students who watched the educational DVD on the abduction issue], Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/rati/dvd/highschool/kansou.html>, 06-08-2020.

is inherently good and innocent. However, as scholars have demonstrated, the conventional dichotomy of victim versus perpetrator can be excluding and limited when it comes to capture the diversity of victimhood.<sup>99</sup>

Indeed, *Kazokukai* has presented itself to the audience as a collective identity far more homogenous than it really is, sometimes obscuring the heterogeneity of the abductees themselves. Based on the perceived degree of responsibility to their victimisation the abductees have been differentiated and categorised according to a ‘hierarchy’ not only by the government, but also by the families themselves.

And then there are the ‘disappeared,’ who were excluded from any categorisation and are yet to be entitled the label of ‘victim’. The ICMJPRNK maintains that they are at least four hundred and forty, reporting:

It is unclear how many among them were kidnapped, but it seems there is a considerable number of cases of abducted people without relatives. Moreover, there are cases of suspected abduction but the families have not come forward. In those cases, with few exceptions, they are neither inserted in the list of the ICMJPRNK nor in the one of the police.

The association further comments:

It goes without saying, that the Japanese government’s responsibility to rescue and protect [its citizens] should be towards all these people. However, **at present, except for the abductees recognised by the government no information has even been asked to North Korea.** Nevertheless, after the additional recognition of Soga Hitomi and Miyoshi, daughter and mother, Ishioka Tōru and Matsuki Kaoru as abductees during Prime Minister Koizumi’s visit in North Korea in September 2002, two years and a half have passed before Tanaka Minoru was finally recognised as the sixteenth victim. If this situation continues, the greater part of the abductees will end their lives in North Korea.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> See Margarida HOURMAT, “Victim-Perpetrator Dichotomy in Transitional Justice: The Case of Post-Genocide Rwanda,” *Narrative and Conflict: Explorations in Theory and Practice*, 4,1, 2016, pp. 43- 67. Retrieved from <http://journals.gmu.edu/NandC/issue/view/197>, 30-09-2020.

<sup>100</sup> Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea, “*Sangūin rachi toku de no Araki daihyō ga sankōjin shōgen*” [The testimony of Araki, representative of the House of Councillor regarding the abductions], 17 June 2010.

As a matter of fact, the Japanese government so far has recognised only seventeen abductees, thereby restricting the number of cases for which it admits liability.

For instance, the Act concerning Support for Victims Kidnapped by North Korean Authorities and Other Persons passed by the Diet in 2002 excludes the families of abductees who have either died or still remain in the DPRK from obtaining such support.

However, as previously introduced, even among the identified abductees there is a difference in their victim status as some are seen less innocent than others in their victimisation. Different circumstances as well as the relationship to the perpetrator, age and gender are among the contributing factors that should be considered.

In this regard, it is worth to note that not all abductees were kidnapped in Japan, but some were taken away abroad, during their stay in Europe.

In 2002 the ex-wife of the *Yodo-gō* hijacker, after the name of the plane hijacked in March 1970 by members of the Red Army Faction, admitted to having approached and deceived Arimoto Keiko in London with a job offer at a North Korean company. Once the girl was persuaded, she was brought to Kim Yu-Chol of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP).<sup>101</sup> Together with Arimoto Keiko the Japanese government lists two other people, Matsuki Kaoru and Ishioka Tōru, as *Yodo-gō* group's victims.

They are clearly set apart from the other abductees, not only due to the location of the abduction but also for the circumstances leading up to it and that end up compromising their victimhood. According to the official reports none of them was subjected to physical assault, but they were rather given the 'choice,' 'invited' even to follow their kidnappers. This emerges in Hasuike Tōru's remark, when he underlines that his brother was taken to North Korea in a different way:

My younger brother was **violently kidnapped** from the coast, while the people who are said to have been taken away by the Red Army Faction, the *Yodo-gō* group **were tricked with alluring words, told 'there's a good job for you,' invited and**

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<sup>101</sup> National Police Agency, "Movements of the *Yodo-gō* group," *Focus*, 271, <https://www.npa.go.jp/archive/keibi/syouten/syouten271/english/0302.html>, 09-08-2020.

**then taken to North Korea, not by force but by deceit.** Even so, now they have become all the same. Well, to be exact, **there's a big difference between saying 'abduction' and saying 'violent abduction'**.<sup>102</sup>

Nonetheless, the less 'ideal victim' might be Hara Tadaaki, a Japan-born North Korean kidnapped at the age of 43. According to the explanation given by the DPRK, Hara made a deal with a North Korean agent in exchange for medical treatment and money, therefore giving him access to his citizen registry and enabling an identity theft.<sup>103</sup>

In this case as well, Hara has been deceived and taken to North Korea, thus he could partially be accounted responsible for his own kidnapping since he 'could and should' have protected himself by not being there. In addition, his motives for going abroad could be seen as morally questionable given that money is involved. And it does not help that being a middle-aged man with no close relatives and friends elicits less sympathy in the audience. It could also be argued that Mr. Hara possessed the same strength of the offender and was aware of him to a certain degree, even if under false pretences. As a result, his victimhood presents complexity and could easily be put into question if he was not part of an already well-established category of victims, that is, 'the abductees'.

### 3.5 Conclusions

Chapter 3 has highlighted the relationship between language and power, showing how the discourse is a producer of power that forms and shapes reality, transmitting it to its objects and its subjects. Its various constructions are not casual however, but action-oriented.

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<sup>102</sup> CCJ, (*Hasuike Tōru-shi dokusen intabyū*) *Chaputā 3 rachi nitsuite ~ rachi mondai Kazokukai moto jimukyokuchō toshite* ~ [Special interview with Tōru Hasuike. Chapter 3: The abduction issue seen by *Kazokukai*'s former secretary-general], 26 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9dkN7OfJio>, 26-09-2020.

<sup>103</sup> "Hara Tadaaki-san nikansuru 'chōsa hōkoku' no gimonten, mujunten" [Doubts and inconsistencies of the investigation report about Tadaaki Hara], *Sukūkai*, 25 November 2004, [http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item\\_173.html](http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item_173.html), 09-08-2020.

The abductee families' subjective and emotional suffering is reproduced through their statements and it has enabled them to receive attention and sympathy, stirring also anger and indignation. These emotions have played a big role in attracting support to their cause and have infused them with power to politically negotiate their requests.

As for the support organizations, they have amplified and maintained these feelings through an 'apocalyptic narrative' aimed at strengthening the public's distrust towards the government and at motivating military action against North Korea. The ultimate goal behind their arguments appears to be the 're-construction' of Japan's identity as a strong, military independent country, once again 'unique' for its culture.

In turn, these nationalist and revisionist objectives propelled by the dominant discourse have politically benefited those who came to support them, mainly Abe Shinzō and his LDP. This stresses the notion that, «political power is gained by those in power being more knowledgeable and therefore more legitimate in exercising their control over others in both blatant and invisible ways» (Kendall 1999, 42).

Moreover, the present chapter showed how the constructions of the abduction discourse as a 'personal tragedy,' a 'violation of Japanese sovereignty' and an 'abuse of human rights by North Korea' have offered two opposing subject positions: the victim and the perpetrator.

On the one hand, the families of the abductees have self-identified themselves as victims of a tragedy but also as advocates of their relatives' rights, creating a powerful collective identity. As a group they have received remarkable attention by the Japanese public, constituting a distinguished and untouchable category of victims.

On the other hand, North Korea's stance was delegitimised by attributing it blame as the 'perpetrator' of the abductions. The media have repeatedly represented North Korea as feeding lies to Japan and being immoral and wicked. Certain taboos surrounding the issue were imposed in the domestic debate through the use of physical and verbal coercion, which have eventually led the political arena and the Japanese society to conform to the knowledge provided by the discourse. Thus, an apparent homogeneity was obtained through consensus, silence and profuse apologies for 'past wrong-doings'.

In this context, *Kazokukai* and the Japanese government have played the role of ‘labellers’, deciding even who can be defined as worthy of the victim status and who is not. As a result, the abduction issue discourse constructed by AFVKN and its support organisations came to predominate over alternative plausible interpretations of the object in question. However, as noted in section 3.3, there exist factors that could possibly impact upon this cohesion and homogeneity.

Filmmaker and author Mori Tatsuya remarks that the media have made *Kazokukai* and *Sukūkai* sanctuaries (*seeiki*), a matter that is not up for discussion. He reveals that the news outlets either do not report these inconsistencies or they want to but their incapacitated to do so: the abduction discourse has become so pervasive that it is virtually impossible to put it into question.

In conclusion, as a result of restricting any alternative understanding or critical approach to the issue, the hatred and the sense of danger have increased and North Korea’s position as a virtual enemy has been further established.<sup>104</sup>

While the current chapter focused on the theoretical implications of the abduction discourse, the next chapter will deal with the analysis of the material produced by the abductees’ families and the support organisations with the purpose of revealing the discursive constructions put in place.

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<sup>104</sup> “Hasuike Tōru-san to Mori Tatsuya-san: ‘Rachi’ kaiketsu e no michi wo saguru” [Hasuike Tōru and Mori Tatsuya: Trying to find a way to the resolution of the abductions], Magazine-9jo, 2010, <http://www.magazine9.jp/taidan/006/index3.php>, 26-07-2020.



## **Chapter 4. FDA: *Kazokukai* and the support organisations**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter FDA is applied on extracts from interview transcripts, letters, posts and books in order to understand the influence exerted by the abductees, their families and supporters on the Japanese public. Willig's stepwise approach is adopted with the purpose of exploring the processes of representation behind the circulating narratives on the abduction issue, since «representations can be seen as key to how emotions acquire a collective dimension and become shared by entire communities» (Bleiker and Hutchison 2008, 130).

The first section briefly introduces the main subjects of the discourse, the victims' families and the related associations, as well as their process of involvement in the abduction issue. While the second section starts by clarifying the premises behind the existent discursive constructions before exploring in greater detail *Kazokukai*'s emotional narrative and the political rhetoric used by the members of *Sukūkai*, *Rachi Giren* and ICMJPRNK when it comes to the abductions. A particular paragraph is dedicated to Yokota Megumi's story, considered the symbol of the abductees and a central figure in the politicisation of the issue.

### **4.2 The voice of the families**

In the 1990s the abductee families were the first to break the silence imposed by the Japanese government and to exercise their agency in speaking out about the fate of their loved ones. Already in the late 1980s the single families began to become aware that others shared similar experiences to them. This awareness in turn prompted them to act together, creating a new collective identity. In conclusion, their collective status enabled them not only to find their voice, but to amplify it.

It was only in 1997, twenty years after the first abductions, that they decided to establish AFVKN (or *Kazokukai*). According to Hasuike Tōru, brother of abductee Hasuike Kaoru and former secretary-general of AFVKN, not every family took part in the first assembly that was somehow orchestrated by the secretary of a member of parliament

representing the Japanese Communist Party and a producer of the *Asahi* broadcasting company.<sup>105</sup>

Mr. Hasuike further reveals that the association was initially called ‘Liaison Association’ (*Renrakukai*), where the members exchanged their telephone numbers and their contacts with the objective to share any information they might get. At the time, he sustains, the fact that Yokota Megumi was actually in North Korea was still a speculation.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, the term ‘abduction’ (*rachi* 拉致) had not yet been used and the talks focused on ‘suspected abductions’ (*rachi giwaku* 拉致疑惑).

In the same interview, Mr. Hasuike talks about the first petition launched by the association, meant to raise awareness of the issue and to call upon government and officials to take action. He clearly states that one of the major obstacles, besides the lack of proofs and information, was the lack of experience, infrastructure and means in order to achieve their goals.

Mr. Hasuike describes the first assembly as a gathering of old people (*Kōreisha no atsumari*), a relatively powerless group that was struggling to get policymakers’ attention. While Yokota Megumi’s mother represents herself and the families of the other abductees as «mere ordinary people, whose children have been kidnapped, transferred from one country to another and forced to live there [North Korea] a completely different life.»<sup>107</sup>

However, in the following years, an ever-growing number of local ‘Rescue Associations’, starting from the one built in Niigata and devoted to rescuing Yokota Megumi, made their appearance. These supporters were mainly neighbours who felt

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<sup>105</sup> CCJ, (*Hasuike Tōru-shi dokusen intabyū*) *Chaputā 3 rachi nitsuite ~ rachi mondai Kazokukai moto jimukyokuchō toshite* ~ [Special interview with Tōru Hasuike. Chapter 3: The abduction issue seen by *Kazokukai*’s former secretary-general], 26 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9dkN7OfJio>, 26-09-2020.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> “Setsuritsu go shūnen taikai” [Nippon Kaigi’s fifth anniversary assembly], *Nippon Kaigi*, Japan Conference, 18 November 2002, <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/about/5years>, 26-06-2020.

sorry for the abductee families, activists with some interest in North Korea and parents who empathised with the loss of a child.<sup>108</sup>

Their story attracted the sympathy of civil society activists with nationalist and revisionist ideas as well. These elements created in turn support associations such as *Sukūkai* and *Rachi Giren*, powerful enough to control and to spread the discourse on the abductions.

The abductees' families are well aware that without the support of political elite allies and grassroots sympathy they would have not been able to sway policy changes.<sup>109</sup>

At the *Nippon Kaigi*'s fifth anniversary celebration in 2002, Megumi's parents, Yokota Sakie and Shigeru, openly thanked various members of *Rachi Giren* including Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Abe Shinzō, Councillor Saiki Akitaka and Counsellor Nakayama Kyoko for their diplomatic efforts. Megumi's mother went as far as describing these men as «people possessing the warm heart of the old Japan they so much wished for. Strong men that have come forward and got directly involved.»<sup>110</sup>

Mr. Hasuike confirms that central figures of *Sukūkai* (NARKN), established in 1997, were mainly members of the *Nippon Kaigi*.

*Nippon Kaigi* describes itself as a national movement that embraces the imperial system, celebrates Japan's past wars in Asia and supports the JSDF's activities refusing constitutional pacifism. As reported in section 3.2, the association further advocates for a new constitution inspired by Japan's 'traditional values' and calls for a 'normalised education' based on the revision of current history textbooks.<sup>111</sup> These supporters are also linked with nationalist groups such as the Japanese Society for History Textbook

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<sup>108</sup> Celeste L ARRINGTON, *Accidental Activists: How Victim Groups Hold the Government Accountable in Japan and South Korea*, UC Berkley, 2010, p.144.

<sup>109</sup> Celeste L. ARRINGTON, *Accidental activists: Victim movements and government accountability in Japan and South Korea*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016, pp. 157-159.

<sup>110</sup> "Setsuritsu go shūnen taikai" [Nippon Kaigi's fifth anniversary assembly], *Nippon Kaigi*, Japan Conference, 18 November 2002, <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/about/5years>, 26-06-2020.

<sup>111</sup> "Nippon Kaigi to wa" [About Nippon Kaigi], *Nippon Kaigi*, Japan Conference, 30 May 1997, <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/about>, 15-07-2020.

Reform (*Atarashii Rekishi Kyōkasho o Tsukuru Kai*) and the Modern Korean Research Institute (*Gendai Korea Kenkyūsho*).

Therefore, associations such as *Sukūkai*, *Rachi Giren* and *Nippon Kaigi* can be categorised as supporters of the families and not part of *Kazokukai* since they have no direct blood relation to the abductees.

In 2002 Koizumi's visit to North Korea and Kim Jong-Il's admission over the abduction cases marked a key turning point for the issue. It was no longer sheer speculation: Japanese citizens had indeed been kidnapped by North Korea's agents.

It is in this moment that the voices of the families actually started to get heard by the Japanese people and the government, sparking various reactions from all corners of the country.

Mr. Hasuike tells that «at the time the mass media did a 180-degree turn, since they started to provide lots of information when up until now they completely ignored [the issue].»<sup>112</sup>

However, the voices of the families also began to get framed in unintended ways. The lack of power inevitably led *Kazokukai* to seek financial and logistical support from the above-mentioned organisations. The speeches and the words of the families and the abductees who got to return to Japan, whether in the official websites, in the letters or in the interviews, are always fragments inserted in a bigger picture and in different contexts. As a result, we could say that the abduction discourse has been constructed in more than one way.

These different constructions will be revealed in the following section through a thematic analysis of the material.

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<sup>112</sup> CCJ, (*Hasuike Tōru-shi dokusen intabyū*) chaputā 3 rachi nitsuite ~ rachi mondai Kazokukai moto jimukyokuchō toshite ~ [Special interview with Tōru Hasuike. Chapter 3: The abduction issue seen by *Kazokukai*'s former secretary-general], 26 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9dkN7OfJio>, 26-09-2020.

### 4.3 The discourse and its constructions

As remarked in the Theoretical Framework, words and phrases represent not only linguistic signs, but instruments of communication that mediate experiences and construct realities. As a result, the same object can be ‘talked into being’ by using different discursive frames, which can either include or exclude different meanings and serve different interests.

In the case at hand, the media, the abductees’ support associations and the Japanese government have all used — to various degrees — the words and the images of the abductees and their families, emphasising in turn what they considered more prominent. The analysis of topics, themes and concepts coming from the collected data reveal that different perspectives and purposes have indeed led to three different discursive constructions of the object.

First, we have the families of the victims that see the abductions as an issue falling under the government’s responsibility and focus on their own personal experiences whenever they are interviewed or required to release a statement.

Then, there are support organisations such as *Sukūkai*, *Rachi Giren* and the ICMJPRNK<sup>113</sup>, who regard the abduction issue as further evidence of North Korea constituting a threat for Japan and its people.

Lastly, there is the official version of the Government of Japan (GOJ), which considers the abductions a violation of human rights and sovereignty by the DPRK.

It should be noted, however, that different constructions do not necessarily exclude each other, but in some instances they support each other in creating one dominant discourse. As a matter of fact, all these constructions are based on the same firm belief, that is, the abductees are still alive and living somewhere in North Korea against their will.

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<sup>113</sup> See *Tokutei Shissōsha Mondai Chōsa-kai* (特定失踪者問題調査会), <https://www.chosa-kai.jp/cyosakai/tokutei>, 29-06-2020.

This is exemplified by the book *‘Megumi and the others are still alive! The North Korean abduction and the ten-years battle of Kazokukai and Sukūkai’* published by the two organisations in 2007.<sup>114</sup>

Also Yokota Megumi’s parents have more than once expressed the belief that their daughter is still alive and on that same presumption the support organisations and the Japanese government are promoting campaigns and demanding answers to North Korea. Hence, the issue is still considered unresolved by Japan.

While Pyongyang, as reported by the official website of the Japanese government, affirms that among the twelve abductees whose fate is unknown, eight are dead and the other four have never entered North Korea. Furthermore, Pyongyang states that the five abductees still alive have been returned to Japan, as well as the remains of two of the eight dead abductees whose whereabouts are unknown and under investigation. Therefore, North Korea believes the request by the Japanese side to return alive people that are dead preposterous. To which the Japanese government comments:

We cannot certainly accept North Korea’s claims. And since there is not even one proof that supports the victims’ ‘deaths’, on the assumption that the victims are still alive, we request their immediate return and a convincing explanation of the facts. The Japanese government is by no means making an ‘unreasonable demand.’<sup>115</sup>

The official website of the GOJ lists three major ‘pieces of evidence’ to support its position.

First, Tokyo argues that:

In addition to the large number of unnatural deaths among the ‘causes of death’ of eight abductees, no objective evidence to support these allegations has been presented.

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<sup>114</sup> KAZOKUKAI, SUKŪKAI, *Megumi-san tachi wa ikiteiru! ‘Kitachōsen rachi’ Kazokukai, Sukūkai 10 nen no tatakai* [Megumi and the others are still alive!: The North Korean abduction and the ten-years battle of *Kazokukai* and *Sukūkai*], Sankei Shimbun Publications, 2007.

<sup>115</sup> “Kitachōsengawa shuchō no mondaiten” [The problems with North Korea’s claims], Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea, <https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/mondaiten/index.html>, 27-06-2020.

Tokyo declares that the DNA test results revealed that the remains of the two abductees handed over by North Korea do not match the ones of Yokota Megumi and Matsuki Kaoru as stated.<sup>116</sup>

The morning after the official announcement the news was covered by the major newspaper companies, among them the *Sankei Shimbun*. It is interesting to note that the article contained an impressive number of details regarding the DNA analysis, represented as quite meticulous.<sup>117</sup> Whether it was to prove Japan's high technology skills and the certainty of the results or not is up to debate. What can be said for sure is that the incident received a lot of attention in the news reports.

It is not surprising then that Megumi's allegedly fake remains provided by North Korea have become a point of strong national interest and controversy. And this can be considered a fundamental element to the construction of the discourse, able to unleash powerful emotional responses.

As shown in the *anime Megumi*, produced by the Minister for the Abduction Issue, the Yokota family refused to believe in the veracity of the remains from the start. There is one precise scene where Yokota Shigeru, Megumi's father, says:

I don't believe it! That's just what North Korea is saying! It isn't the truth! I cannot believe it! Megumi is... our Megumi is alive!<sup>118</sup>

According to Mrs. Yokota, Megumi's hospital record was almost completely covered in black, except for the words 'deceased' written above 'entered and left hospital'.

Mr. Yokota pronounced the same words at the *Nippon Kaigi's* conference in 2002, where he restated as representative of the abductees' families:

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<sup>116</sup> "Kitachōsengawa shuchō no mondaiten" [The problems with North Korea's claims], Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea, <https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/mondaiten/index.html>, 27-06-2020.

<sup>117</sup> "Megumi-san 'ikotsu' nisemono: Nippon no kagaku sōsa o amaku mita? Teikyōdai kantei de hanmei" [Megumi's fake remains: Has the Japanese forensic investigation been underestimated? Confirmed by Teikyo University's appraisal], *Sankei Shimbun*, 9 December 2004.

<sup>118</sup> *Anime 'Megumi' e konte (daijyesutoban)* [Anime 'Megumi' storyboard (digest version)], Headquarters for the abduction issue. Available online at: <https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/megumi/megumidigest.pdf>, 16:58'

We don't believe in North Korea's statement and we will continue to fight on the premise they are alive.

Even current chairman of NARKN and executive secretary of *Nippon Kaigi*, Nishioka Tsutomu, writes about the remains of the abductees in his book '*Let's bring back Yokota Megumi and the others: it's now or never,*' reinforcing the Japanese government's position on the matter.<sup>119</sup>

In the official website of NARKN there is even a section devoted to 'fundamental knowledge' entitled 'Megumi and the others are alive! The lie about the eight deaths!'.<sup>120</sup> According to NARKN and AFVKN, North Korea has told two big lies, that are, 'Eight abductees, including Megumi Yokota, are dead' and 'The people abducted are only thirteen.'

The Japanese government also contends that: «no genuine document proving the deaths of the abductees exists.»<sup>121</sup> It claims that 'proof of death certificates' — handed over by North Korea — were prepared in a hurry at the time of the visit by the Japanese inquiry commission.

Second, Tokyo maintains that there are many strained and ambiguous points in North Korea's explanation. There are a lot of contradictions between the facts confirmed by the investigation and the testimonies of the abductees who came back home, and thus the credibility of the entire explanation is suspicious.

Third, Japan refuses to recognize that the people responsible for the abductions have actually been punished as stated by North Korea. The reason adduced is once again the existence of inconsistencies in the explanation given by Pyongyang.

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<sup>119</sup> NISHIOKA Tsutomu, *Yokota Megumi-santachi o torimodosu no wa ima shika nai* [Let's bring back Yokota Megumi and the others: it's now or never], PHP Institute, 2015.

<sup>120</sup> "Kiso chishiki - Megumi-santachi wa ikiteiru! '8 nin shibō' toiu uso -" [Megumi and the others are alive! The lie about 'the eight deaths'!], Sukūkai, <http://www.sukuukai.jp/index.php?itemid=1068>, 01-07-2020.

<sup>121</sup> "Kitachōsengawa shuchō no mondaiten" [The problems with North Korea's claims], Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea, <https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/mondaiten/index.html>, 27-06-2020.



As shown above, not only the Japanese government, but also NARKN, AFVKN and the media consider the lack of ‘concrete’ evidence sufficient to believe the abductees are still alive and to seek their return.

This was particularly important to establish since the discourse is based on these premises, in clear contrast with North Korea’s position.

#### 4.3.1 *The abductions told by the victims’ families*

The belief that the abductees are still alive is tightly connected to the need for information and establishing the truth raised by the abductees’ families, whose main objective is to be reunited with their loved ones.

Hasuike Tōru, in an interview held by CCJ, reveals that for a long time he and the other families either «did not receive information or it was rough. It was like their relatives were spirited away, vanished, disappeared.» At one point Mr. Hasuike took matters into his own hands and started to look for his brother in pachinko parlours across Nagoya, where he was last spotted. He reveals that the families did not have any information, the state was not giving any and certainly they did not receive any information from the police. And it felt like the MOFA was untouchable, beyond the reach of criticism or attack.<sup>122</sup>

Megumi’s mother, Yokota Sakie, recounts her surprise when she found out about the abductions and how her image of Japan as a ‘safe place’ was put into question. Her statement reconnects with the theme of ‘security’ that the support organisations frequently mention in their speeches:

I didn’t even think about the possibility of abduction... In this **peaceful Japanese country**, a ‘thing like that’ really happened.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> CCJ, (*Hasuike Tōru-shi dokusen intabyū*) chaputā 3 rachi nitsuite ~ rachi mondai Kazokukai moto jimukyokuchō toshite ~ [Special interview with Tōru Hasuike. Chapter 3: The abduction issue seen by *Kazokukai*’s former secretary-general], 26 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9dkN7OfJio>, 26-09-2020.

<sup>123</sup> “Kanarazu torimodosu! ‘Kitachōsen niyoru nihonjin rachi mondai’ no kaiketsu e” [We will surely bring them back! Towards a resolution to the ‘Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea issue’], Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 11 November 2014, <https://nettv.gov-online.go.jp/prg/prg10798.html>, 20-08-2020.

Her husband, Yokota Shigeru, tells that even inside the government there were people asking whether it was the right choice not to build better relations with North Korea ‘because of some dozens missing people’. It meant that the families’ desperate activity was also in vain and that the government would not take any steps in their favour.<sup>124</sup>

According to Mr. Hasuike, the current political power lacks the willingness to resolve the abduction issue: «If the government was really determined it would have acted faster», he comments.<sup>125</sup>

While the current representative of AFVKN, Iizuka Shigeo, states in the NARKN website:

It seems that the interest of the **administration** and the **government** is moving away from the abduction issue, but this is a fundamental issue that the **Government of Japan** and the **Parliament** must take responsibility for and resolve. This is an important problem, we are strongly determined to further deepen the awareness about it and to fight North Korea together.<sup>126</sup>

In a video message from the families of the abducted, posted in the official website of the government, Mr. Iizuka says:

I believe it is quite rare that a case like this in Japan cannot be resolved after such a long time. However, this is an important incident as a **nation** and I think **the state, the Japanese government** must respond strongly to the national crime committed by North Korea. [...] Moreover, despite the **Prime Minister in Japan** has changed several times, this abduction issue has made no progress at all. Yes, five people have returned, but I refer to the many, many abductees still in North Korea. I think one of the reasons why it is taking longer it is because [the issue] was not carried on. Naturally, **as a nation, as a government**, this issue should be tackled with the highest priority. Even though there are the right conditions [for it], we are still in a situation where we cannot read that intention [from **the government**].

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<sup>124</sup> *Anime ‘Megumi’ e konte (daijyesutoban)* [Anime ‘Megumi’ storyboard (digest version)], Headquarters for the abduction issue, <https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/megumi/megumidigest.pdf>, 26-09-2020, 15:59’.

<sup>125</sup> CCJ, (*Hasuike Tōru-shi dokusen intabyū*) *chaputā 3 rachi nitsuite ~ rachi mondai Kazokukai moto jimukyokuchō toshite* ~ [Special interview with Tōru Hasuike. Chapter 3: The abduction issue seen by *Kazokukai*’s former secretary-general], 26 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9dkN7OfJio>, 26-09-2020.

<sup>126</sup> “Iizuka Shigeo, Kazokukai daihyō” [Iizuka Shigeo, *Kazokukai*’s representative], Sukūkai, 2010, [http://www.sukuukai.jp/report/item\\_2168.html](http://www.sukuukai.jp/report/item_2168.html), 28-06-2020.

Of course, it is often said that the minimum **duty of a country** is to protect the lives and the safety of its people. We also feel that way.<sup>127</sup>

As it can be visually noted, Iizuka Shigeo mentions twelve times the national state authorities in relation to the abduction issue, demanding political action against North Korea. Governmental accountability emerges as a recurrent theme also in the speeches of the other victims' relatives, like the Yokotas and Hasuike Tōru.

More than once they communicate the feeling of being left alone in fighting for this cause and in desperate need of support. Some even state to have been either failed or deceived as citizens by the police and the government.

This perspective reflects the liberal ideology in which politics should be devoted to the protection of individual rights and the government assumes the role of a protector from any form of violence. So, the government must guarantee the safety of law and order as well as protect its citizens from each other and from foreign threats. Ultimately, the state is considered the one entity holding the power to meet, treat and fight the other governments.

These statements clearly put into question the ability of the Japanese government to take action and to fulfil its duties. The image sent to the Japanese public is of an ineffective and inefficient state and the public is naturally inclined to sympathise with the families' position as fellow citizens.

The unfulfilled expectations linked to the government incapacity to resolve the issue are exposed by the passing of time. The families argue that not enough has been done in the past two decades since the release of five abductees.

Hasuike Tōru's brother has come home seventeen years ago, but in Yokota Megumi's case forty-two years have passed.<sup>128</sup> As Mr. Iizuka highlights:

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<sup>127</sup> “Rachi mondai keihatsu eizō sakuhin ‘~ messeiji ~ kazokutachi no omoi’” [Educational video production on the abduction issue. Messages: the thoughts of the families], Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea, [https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/message/message\\_full.html](https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/message/message_full.html), 02-07-2020.

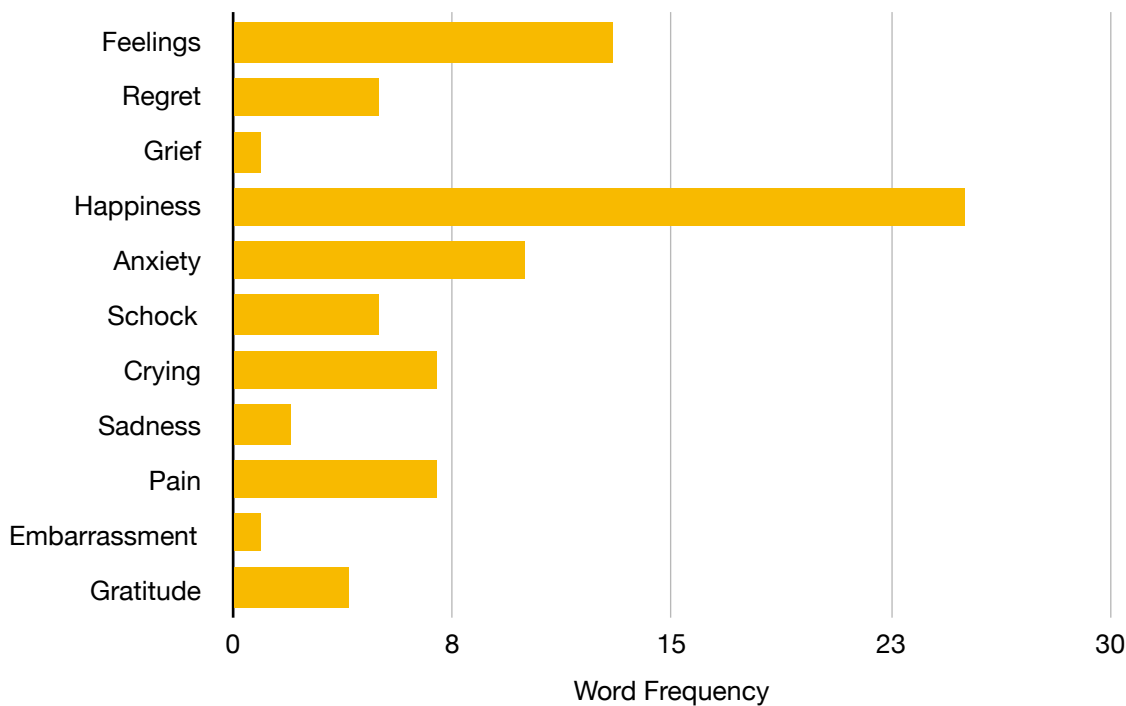
<sup>128</sup> CCJ, (*Hasuike Tōru-shi dokusen intabyū*) *chapatā 3 rachi nitsuite ~ rachi mondai Kazokukai moto jimukyokuchō toshite* ~ [Special interview with Tōru Hasuike. Chapter 3: The abduction issue seen by *Kazokukai*'s former secretary-general], 26 September 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9dkN7OfJio>, 26-09-2020.

AFVKN has kept fighting over the years, setting up activities, but every family, as well as the abductees still in North Korea are growing old. Naturally, the number of relatives waiting is little by little decreasing.<sup>129</sup>

In the interviews as well as in the written statements a certain urgency to repatriate their loved ones surfaces; the situation is often described as a ‘race against time’ and ‘*ichi nichi mo hayaku,*’ literally ‘as soon as possible,’ has become a sort of motto.

To this regard, it is particularly interesting to cite the letter written by Soga Hitomi, one of the few abductees that managed to return to Japan, published in NARKN’s website.<sup>130</sup>

**Figure 4.1 Emotions in Hitomi Soga’s letter**



<sup>129</sup> “Rachi mondai keihatsu eizō sakuhin ‘~ messeji ~ kazokutachi no omoi’” [Educational video production on the abduction issue. Messages: the thoughts of the families], Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea, [https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/message/message\\_full.html](https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/message/message_full.html), 02-07-2020.

<sup>130</sup> “10 nen o furikaette. Soga Hitomi-san no shuki” [Hitomi Soga’s letter: Looking back at the past 10 years], Sukūkai, 21 September 2012, [http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item\\_3180.html](http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item_3180.html), 28-06-2020.

The letter was written in 2012 and it looks back on the past ten years since her release. A quantitative analysis of the letter's content, focused on word frequency, reveals that Soga Hitomi's writing is highly emotional. As the bar graph above (Figure 4.1) shows, 'happiness' is the prevalent emotion, although a wide range of words that connote negative feelings are used.

As the following passage exemplifies, the word 'happiness' appears in connection to her reunion with her long-separated family, underlining her excitement to return to her place of birth, Sado, a little island off Japan's west coast.

If I think about the **feelings** of the families waiting for the people abducted, every day is a very precious time, we are arrived to a point where we cannot wait anymore. [...] Twenty-four years, the long awaited moment finally arrived. My dreams came true. I was so **ecstatic** that I don't know how to express the **happiness** I felt at the time. [...] I still remember that **happiness**.

Then, the letter touches upon her struggle to fit back into the Japanese society, to reintegrate into the local community. In this regard, she recounts the uneasiness to obtain a regular job and to apply for a driver's license. Normal things that contrasted with her life in North Korea that she prefers not to remember.

And this creates a narrative of separation and return that reinforces the sense of 'Japaneseness', encompassing both cultural and national identity questions.<sup>131</sup>

Moreover, her perspective as abductee contributes in creating a compelling imagery, since she identifies with the emotional pain of the people still in North Korea, and that is, of being hopeless and helpless:

Since they have been kidnapped, how many people are spending their days in **tears** and **sorrow**? Once **in North Korea, nothing can be done with one's individual strength**. No matter how much you wait, no one comes rescuing you. There might be people who think that nobody is looking for them and end up **giving up**. When I think about the people that are spending everyday **going crazy, I remember myself at that time**. I wish them to hear my soundless voice. And then, I would like to say to the abductees in North Korea 'Absolutely don't give up! If you wait

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<sup>131</sup> LYNN Hyung Gu., "Vicarious traumas: television and public opinion in Japan's North Korea policy," *Pacific Affairs*, 79, 3, 2006, p.499.

in faith, there will certainly be someone that comes to help you. So, just hang in there a little longer.<sup>132</sup>

Soga Hitomi represents her stay in North Korea as unpleasant and a source of anguish to say the least. And this image is reinforced by other family relatives.

In a letter to his brother Ishikawa Shuichi, abducted in 1978, Ishikawa Kenichi writes:

I heard [**North Korea**] has a **desolate landscape**, even if it is just early November the **cold is harsher than in Japan**, it's a **place** where in midwinter it is **extremely cold**.

While abductee Matsumoto Kyōko's brother recounts:

I went to South Korea in October 2010, at the observatory where you can see **the DPRK**. I saw the **North Korean country** by sea and came back home. I could really see the red clay of the mountain scenery at that time. I looked at **North Korea**, which made me feel somehow **lonely** and I thought, **is she really living in such a place?** I heard about the **cold wind** and that starting from this period **North Korea** gets **very cold**. When I went to South Korea it was **really cold** as well. When I recall that you have been living in such a **cold place** for twenty eight years, I really want to give my best, together with the other families, to rescue you and to bring you back to Japan soon, no matter what.<sup>133</sup>

The term 'cold' associated with North Korea is mentioned six times and for the most part it is reinforced by intensifying adverbs such as 'very,' 'really,' 'extremely'.

Moreover, North Korea is portrayed as a wild and harsh place to live compared to the warm Japanese country, where the abductees' home is and that is considered safe. Although this image has been put into question by the abductions, as Yokota Sakie's statement previously revealed.

This fosters a sense of fear in the audience, of something that is basically unknown and potentially dangerous. By using sensory language the victims' families have created a

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<sup>132</sup> "10 nen o furikaette. Soga Hitomi-san no shuki" [Hitomi Soga's letter: Looking back at the past 10 years], Sukūkai, 21 September 2012, [http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item\\_3180.html](http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item_3180.html), 28-06-2020.

<sup>133</sup> "Rachi mondai keihatsu eizō sakuhin '~ messeiji ~ kazokutachi no omoi'" [Educational video production on the abduction issue. Messages: the thoughts of the families], Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea, [https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/message/message\\_full.html](https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/message/message_full.html), 02-07-2020.

vivid and engaging story, where their quiet and ordinary lives have been disrupted by a foreign and cold country.

During the interviews and in the letters collected, particular emphasis is put on the importance of family ties. The fact that many families are still broken is represented as a tragedy: the abductions have deprived Japanese citizens of a happy life at home and have shuttered human relations.

Emotional appeals, like the one of Soga Hitomi to her fellow countrymen, are quite recurrent throughout the selected material. Other examples are the video messages from the families published by the Cabinet Office and the petition launched to bring back the abductees, which has been signed by over ten million people.<sup>134</sup>

In these occasions the victims' families repeatedly express their gratitude for public support and even ask a direct contribution and participation to AFVKN's activities.

This shows how personal feelings can be effective rhetorical devices, with the power to socialise a conflict and ultimately gain leverage. Still, not all the families and the abductees have received the same attention due to different circumstances and characteristics. As a matter of fact, there is one abductee whose story became the 'rallying point in the abduction issue discourse' (Hagström 2016, 85) : Yokota Megumi, whose victim status has become indisputable and whose case has spurred even stronger emotional responses from the public. As the next section will explain, her case became fundamental in the politicisation process of the abduction issue, in which her parents played a significant role.

#### *4.3.2 Yokota Megumi's story*

Yokota Megumi could be considered the poster child of Japanese abductees by North Korea, as her story came to play an important part in framing the abduction issue discourse and in the mobilisation of domestic supporters.

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<sup>134</sup> NARKN, "The abduction of Japanese nationals by North Korea," <http://www.sukuukai.jp/English/>, 01-07-2020.

Several reasons can be adduced to explain such an uncontested popularity. To this purpose, concepts derived from victimology can provide useful material for discussion.

In 1986, Nils Christie elaborated the figure of the ‘ideal victim’ who possesses specific characteristics able to evoke potent feelings such as sympathy and compassion in their audience. He listed five attributes fundamental to the construction of the ‘perfect’ victimhood: (1) the victim must be weak, (2) the victim must be carrying out a respectable project, (3) she must find herself where she cannot possibly be blamed for, (4) the offender is big and bad, and (5) the offender is unknown and in no personal relationship to her.<sup>135</sup>

Yokota Megumi seems to fit perfectly into this description.

At the time she was kidnapped she was only thirteen years old, by far the youngest among the abductees. Not only she is a girl but she was still a child, thus perceived as innocent, helpless and incapable of defending herself. This reconnects with the general idea that children are spontaneous, pure and they lack knowledge of what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’. According to this notion of ‘innocence’ children are seen as not legally responsible and in need of protection by adults.

Megumi was abducted while fulfilling her duty, that is, she was walking home from badminton practice, sport she excelled in. Her father recalls that she was chosen as ace player of the team, which is a great honour, considering that the girls’ badminton club in Niigata was ranked high nationwide. She was a good student and a dutiful daughter.<sup>136</sup>

As a matter of fact, she cannot be blamed for her location at the time of the abduction, it was the same route she took everyday from school to home. It was her hometown and her neighbourhood, places that one should consider safe. Nonetheless, it was there that she was violently taken away by a mysterious ‘big and bad’ man with malevolent intentions who illegally entered Japan from North Korea. This shows how the status of

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<sup>135</sup> Nils CHRISTIE, “The Ideal Victim” in *From Crime Policy to Victim Policy*, ed. Fattah E. A., London: Macmillan, 1986, 18, pp. 17-30.

<sup>136</sup> “Megumi-san no omoide” [Memories of Megumi], 「救う会」全国協議会・『家族会』・日本ブルーリボンの会, 27 March 2014, <http://nippon-blueribbon.org/Panel-gallery/?p=14>, 14-08-2020.



‘ideal victim’ is connected to and is further legitimised by the existence of an ‘ideal offender’. And the ‘ideal offender’ is non other than North Korea, characterized as being amoral, dangerous, distant and foreign, but most of all non-human. It perfectly fits the public image of an offender, which has to be feared and needs to be defeated.

Christie, however, added another attribute that makes the ‘ideal victim’: «the victim must be either powerful enough to make her case known, successfully claiming the status of an ideal victim or alternatively, she must not be opposed by strong counter-powers that shut her up.»<sup>137</sup>

In this case, Yokota Megumi could not speak for herself, but her family took her place. As suggested in section 3.4, victimhood can extend to a certain degree to the relatives of the victims. And Megumi’s parents, Yokota Shigeru and Sakie, have certainly played a great role in her victimisation. They are the first to have come forward, publicly revealing the name of their daughter as one of the abductees, telling their tragic story and stressing the human suffering.

In 2012 Yokota Sakie published a book entitled ‘*Megumi and me, 35 years*’ that chronicles the last decades since her daughter’s abduction.<sup>138</sup> The narrative is full of personal details, descriptions of their family life before the incident and of Megumi’s personality. Megumi is presented as a bright, curious and energetic girl, who loves flowers and animals, with big dreams for her future. She is characterized as inherently good, incapable of causing harm.<sup>139</sup> And this is the image that has impressed itself on the minds of the Japanese public.

The Yokotas are also the first ones to have obtained local support inasmuch as victims. Hence, the first rescue association was called the Group of Promoters of an Inquiry into Yokota Megumi’s Abduction (*Yokota Megumi-san Rachi Kyūmei Hakkinin Kai*), later

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<sup>137</sup> Nils CHRISTIE, “The Ideal Victim” in *From Crime Policy to Victim Policy*, ed. Fattah E. A., London: Macmillan, 1986, 18, p.21.

<sup>138</sup> YOKOTA Sakie, *Megumi to watashi no 35 nen [Megumi and me, 35 years]*, Shinchosha, 2012.

<sup>139</sup> “Rachi mondai keihatsu eizō sakuhin ‘~ messeji ~ kazokutachi no omoi’” [Educational video production on the abduction issue. Messages: the thoughts of the families], Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea, [https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/message/message\\_full.html](https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/message/message_full.html), 02-07-2020.

known as *Sukūkai*. It was launched by activist Harunori Kojima in Niigata, Megumi's hometown, already in January 1997.<sup>140</sup>

The following month the news of Megumi's suspected abduction was published by the *Sankei Shimbun* and mentioned during a Diet session by SDPJ member Nishimura Shingo. While in March 1997 *Kazokukai* was established by the families of the abductees and Yokota Shigeru became its first chair-man.

The Yokotas heavily contributed in the distribution of pamphlets and in the organization of petitions, collecting signatures from every corner of the country. They reportedly held lectures in more than one thousand and three hundred places all over Japan in order to raise awareness on the issue. Under the category of abductees' families and related support organizations, Yokota Sakie has published several books detailing the history and thoughts behind *Kazokukai*. Thus, it is not surprising that the Yokotas are often referred to as the 'symbol of the abductee rescue movement' (*kyūshutsu undō no shōchōteki sonzai*).<sup>141</sup>

Their movement in turn inspired other abduction-related associations, such as *Asagaonokai*, named after Megumi's favourite flower and established in 2003 by residents living in the same condominium as the Yokotas.<sup>142</sup>

All in all, Megumi's parents have contributed to their daughter's popularity by depicting her as an approximate 'ideal victim' and by effectively conveying that image to a vast audience. However, the interest of the general public was attracted to the case not only by Megumi's character but also by the tragic story that followed her abduction and the mystery it is shrouded in. And through interest one is able to hold attention.

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<sup>140</sup> "Dai ni kai nitchō shunō kaidan 15 nen: zen rachi higaisha no kikoku onegai" [Second Japan–North Korea summit meeting in 2003: request for the return of all abductees], *Niigata Nippon more*, The Niigata Nippo, 22 May 2019, <https://www.niigata-nippo.co.jp/feature/rachi/page04.html>, 15-08-2020.

<sup>141</sup> "Yokota Megumi-san no chichi, Shigeru-san shikyo: shodai Kazokukai daihyō" [Yokota Shigeru, Megumi's father, dies: *Kazokukai*'s founder], *The Sankei News*, The Sankei Shimbun, 5 June 2020, <https://www.sankei.com/world/news/200605/wor2006050028-n1.html>, 15-08-2020.

<sup>142</sup> *Asagaonokai*, Association's homepage at <https://www.asagaonokai.jp/jp/outlinej/outj.html>, 30-09-2020.

It results that Megumi's story was well-suited for news consumption, thus exploitable by the media.

Her abduction first catalyzed attention in October 1996 due to an article published in the magazine *Gendai Korea* (Modern Korea, run by Satō Katsumi), where Ishitaka Kenji, *Asahi* Broadcasting producer, reported having received intel on Yokota Megumi from a former North Korean spy. The secret testimony of a mysterious defector, only later known as Ahn Myong-jin, appealed to the public sense of curiosity. The information was vague, since the spy just revealed seeing a Japanese woman at his spy school who had reportedly been kidnapped when very young in order to teach Japanese language and culture. This person seemed to fit Yokota Megumi's profile.

It was at that time that the Yokotas decided to reveal her name to the press. Two months later the news was covered by the major Japanese journals such as *Sankei Shimbun* and *Aera*, which inserted the comments of the astonished Yokota couple as well as images of their daughter in her school uniform.<sup>143</sup>

Public interest was once again reignited when Ahn decided to reveal his identity to the Japanese media and agreed to be interviewed. He was then invited to speak at symposia held across Japan by support organizations such as *Rachi Giren* and he even testified in the Diet.<sup>144</sup> In 2003 Ahn published a book that gave rise to a consistent number of speculations, by the intriguing name '*Yokota Megumi is alive: the 'abduction issue' conspiracy exposed by a former North Korean spy*'.<sup>145</sup> According to his sources, Yokota Megumi was in reality Kim Jong Il's sons Japanese instructor and was chosen due to her

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<sup>143</sup> “Yokota Megumi-san rachi sōdō' de kimyōna hāmonī” [A strange harmony in the ‘scandalous abduction of Yokota Megumi’], 24 December 1997, <http://nyt.trycomp.com/hokan/houseki9801.htm>, 15-08-2020.

<sup>144</sup> “Megumi-san wa sō shoki no musuko no nihongo kyōshi' moto kōsakuin shōgen” [The testimony of a former agent: Megumi was the Japanese teacher of secretary-general's son], *asahi.com*, The Asahi Shimbun Company, 27 March 2003, <http://www.asahi.com/special/abductees/TKY200303270287.html>, 16-08-2020.

<sup>145</sup> AHN Myong-Jin, *Yokota Megumi wa ikiteiru — Kitachōsen moto kōsakuin An Mei-jin ga abaita 'nihonjin rachi' no imbō* [Yokota Megumi is alive: Yokota Megumi is alive: the ‘abduction issue’ conspiracy exposed by a former North Korean spy], Kōdansha, 2003.

starking resemblance with his deceased mother. Ahn further suggested that Megumi could not be dead due to the vital information she held about the regime.<sup>146</sup>

In the meantime, the major news outlets continued to cover Megumi's story and adopted an unusually informal language, affectionately referring to her as Megumi or even Megumi-chan.

A sensational plot-twist took place in September 2002, when Kim Jong Il publicly revealed that Yokota Megumi had not only been kidnapped by North Korea, but she was among the eight dead abductees, leaving behind a daughter of fifteen years old.

The admission immediately became fodder for the news media and was widely circulated around Japan, instigating strong emotional reactions ranging from indignation against the DPRK and sympathy for the victims and their families.

However, the case was far from resolved and Pyongyang's revelation just raised more questions than it answered.

According to North Korea's explanation, Yokota Megumi committed suicide during her recovery in a psychiatric hospital where she was receiving mental health treatment for her depression. After her death the hospital handed over the medical records to the 'husband', who in a letter expressed the interest in meeting the Yokotas.<sup>147</sup> Pyongyang also claimed that those responsible for Megumi's abduction had been respectively convicted in 1998 and in 1999.<sup>148</sup>

This statement and the documents provided were never accepted either by Megumi's parents or by the government that claimed the suicide and the death certificate were clearly forged by the North Korean authorities.

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<sup>146</sup> "Kisanu riyū wa 'futsugōna himitsu'– kita no saikō songen, Jon'iru-shi no chibu mita 'shiri sugita higaisha'" [The reason for not returning is an 'inconvenient secret': 'the victim who knows too much' and that has seen the shameful secrets of North Korea's majesty Kim Jong-II], *The Sankei Shimbun & SANKEI DIGITAL*, 16 March 2017, <https://www.sankei.com/world/news/170316/wor1703160017-n2.html>, 20-08-2020.

<sup>147</sup> "Yokota Megumi-san: Otto wa 41 sai kaishain, musume wa chūgakusei" [Yokota Megumi: the husband is a 41 year old employee and the daughter is in middle-school], *asahi.com*, The Asahi Shimbun Company, <http://www.asahi.com/special/abductees/data/yokota.html>, 16-08-2020.

<sup>148</sup> "Kitachōsengawa shuchō no mondaiten" [The problems with North Korea's claims], *Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea*, <https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/mondaiten/index.html>, 27-06-2020.

The news of the fake certificate and the suspicious circumstances surrounding Yokota Megumi's death created a scandal in Japan that further intensified Tokyo's distrust towards the DPRK and the victims' families frustration.

At the same time, the story became more and more intriguing: everybody wanted to know the truth. It was as if the Japanese media was giving the public one piece of the puzzle at a time and at the end one was expected to put them all together in order to arrive at the correct solution. All the nation was waiting with bated breath when the 'incontrovertible proof' that North Korea fed lies to the Japanese side came: DNA results showed that Megumi's alleged remains belonged to another person. It then raised the question: whose bones were tested?

As a result, the issue became the subject of much discussion in the media and speculation over Megumi's fate only intensified. From time to time new evidence suggesting that she is still alive came up and immediately made the front page of the main news outlets. Eventually, the lack of concrete information shifted the focus to Megumi's personal life in North Korea, especially on what little was known about her family. Her mysterious husband and alleged daughter made for interesting characters in the ever-evolving narrative.<sup>149</sup>

In October 2002 Kim Hye-kyong, Yokota Megumi's daughter, appeared in an interview hosted by *Fuji Television*, where she expressed the wish to meet her grandparents in North Korea. According to a video research, the interview drew 26,3 percent of the viewers in the Kantō area and 26,8 percent in the Kansai area. *Fuji TV* was flooded by calls. The company's public relations section reported one thousand and five hundred calls to the operators, while the tape automatically responded to fifteen thousand in the span of three days. In addition, two thousand and five hundred comments were posted on the homepage. Most of them were criticisms.

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<sup>149</sup> "Yokota Megumi-san no otto to sareru jinbutsu nikansuru DNA kantei nitsuite" [DNA analysis of Yokota Megumi's alleged husband], Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 7 April 2006, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/18/rls\\_0407c.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/18/rls_0407c.html), 16-08-2020.

NARKN Chairman, Satō Katsumi, fiercely accused *Fuji TV* of being a pawn of North Korea's scheme, while others criticized the decision to ask to a young girl information about the abductions. *Fuji TV* consequently apologized and stated that:

The interview was proposed by Fuji TV and not by North Korea. The proposal followed the consideration that news on Yokota Megumi was the public's biggest concern and we wanted to confirm it.<sup>150</sup>

Megumi's daughter was again the focus of media attention in March 2014, when she first met her grandparents in Mongolia together with her new family.<sup>151</sup> While in June 2020, Yokota Shigeru's death received a mention in every Japanese newspaper and was even reported abroad. Few days later *Fuji TV* broadcasted a special memorial program recollecting his forty-three years long fight to rescue his daughter Megumi.<sup>152</sup> This signals the high popularity the Yokota family still enjoys nowadays. Therefore, it should not surprise that Yokota Megumi's life has become the subject of foreign and Japanese TV shows, movies, *anime*, documentaries and comics, obtaining enormous success.

On May 14, 2003 *Tokyo TV* broadcasted a docudrama related to the abduction issue entitled '*Megumi, your mom will surely rescue you*' that faithfully reproduced Yokota Sakie and Kazuhiro Araki's original work.<sup>153</sup> While in 2006, the 'emotionally charged' film '*ABDUCTION: The Story of Megumi Yokota*' directed by Chris Sheridan and Patty

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<sup>150</sup> "Kitachōsen no bōryaku no tesaki toshite hataraita Fujiterebi ni danko toshite kōgisuru" [Resolute protest against Fuji TV, a pawn of North Korea's scheme], *Rakuten Blog*, Rakuten.Inc, October 2002, <https://plaza.rakuten.co.jp/kaz1910032/84000/>, 16-08-2020.

<sup>151</sup> "Yokota Megumi-san no ryōshin to Kim Hye-kyong-san ga hatsu menkai" [The first meeting between Yokota Megumi's parents and Kim Hye-kyong], *HuffPost News*, HuffPost Japan, 16 March 2014, [https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/2014/03/15/megumi-yokota\\_n\\_4972772.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.jp/2014/03/15/megumi-yokota_n_4972772.html), 17-08-2020.

<sup>152</sup> "Yokota Shigeru-san no 43 nen no tatakai ga dokyumentarīdorama ni Sakie-san 'otōsan ga yatta koto wa machigatteinakatta'" [Yokota Shigeru's 43 years long fight will be a docudrama. Mrs.Yokota: 'There was no mistake in what my husband did'], Fuji Television Network, 12 June 2020, <https://www.fujitv-view.jp/article/post-119194/>, 20-08-2020.

<sup>153</sup> "Sugaya shachō shigatsu teirei kaiken" [Sugaya's president, April scheduled briefing], Tokyo TV, 24 April 2003, <https://www.tv-tokyo.co.jp/kisya/0304gatu.htm>, 17-08-2020.

Kim won the Audience Award for best documentary at the Slamdance Film Festival.<sup>154</sup> Interesting enough the film has been listed under the category mystery and crime.

It should also be noted that the Yokotas have accepted to play themselves and to take part in the direction of the film, turning into testimonials of their suffering.

In 2004 the couple collaborated into the creation of a comic book simply entitled ‘*Megumi*’ that was chosen as the front cover of the issue ‘*Manga Action*’.<sup>155</sup> According to the Japan Times, the series portrays disturbing scenes as well, showing the girl in the hold of her abductor’s boat while screaming for her mom’s help and desperately scratching the wooden walls.<sup>156</sup> The same scene is reproduced in the homonymous animated version always sponsored by the Japanese government and released in 2008 in ten languages. Its download has been further promoted by the Minister for the Abduction Issue by making it freely available.

The theme of victimisation receives particular attention in the final scene of the *anime* where Yokota Sakie says:

[...] Moreover, up to now a long time has passed, please report sincerely about the **neglected young Japanese**. Please, think about how they feel inside, they who have become **victims for Japan** and that are suffering or might as well be dead. We have worked very hard together, fighting, revealing how this is a serious political issue. This is an important matter for Japan and for North Korea. I believe it is for this purpose that **Megumi has become a victim** and she has accomplished her mission. Sooner or later everyone dies. With the idea of leaving a lasting mark, I will continue to do my best and fight with all of you. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have loved Megumi, who have constantly gathered information about the issue and to those who have prayed. I will keep fighting with the belief that she is still alive. Thank you!<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> “Award-winning documentary film on Megumi Yokota debuts in Japan,” *The Japan Times*, 26 November 2006, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2006/11/26/national/award-winning-documentary-film-on-megumi-yokota-debuts-in-japan/#.XzqBRy1aZp8>, 17-08-2020.

<sup>155</sup> YOKOTA Shigeru and Sakie, HON Souichi, *Megumi*, Futabasha Publishers Ltd., 2005.

<sup>156</sup> “Tale of Yokota's abduction by North now recounted in comic-book form,” *The Japan Times*, 24 December 2004, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2004/12/24/national/tale-of-yokotas-abduction-by-north-now-recounted-in-comic-book-form/>, 20-08-2020.

<sup>157</sup> *Anime ‘Megumi’ e konte (daijyesutoban)* [*Anime ‘Megumi’ storyboard (digest version)*], Headquarters for the abduction issue. Available online at: <https://www.rachi.go.jp/jp/megumi/megumidigest.pdf>, 21:06’



**Figure 4.2** The Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, *Abduction issue awareness poster (b)*, <https://www.gov-online.go.jp/useful/article/201311/3.html>

Megumi is once again the main feature in the national poster campaign promoted by the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, where she can be seen wearing her mother’s *yukata* (see Figure 4.2 above).

Few lines handwritten by Yokota Sakie are printed on the left side of the picture:

Megumi, your mom will definitely rescue you. Such a long time has passed since you disappeared. There are many abductees that like you are asking to be saved.

On the occasion of the North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week, the GOJ has also produced a commercial video representing the tragic separation of a daughter from her parents who grow old as her image gets stuck in time, clearly reminding of the Yokota family’s story. Once again it is interesting to note that the theme of broken families ties is being presented.<sup>158</sup>

As a matter of fact, Yokota Megumi has become the face of the public awareness’ campaign initiated by the Japanese government, the ultimate symbol of all abductees. In this regard, it could be argued that her image well suits the political rhetoric on the

<sup>158</sup> “Rachi mondai keihatsu CM” [Abduction issue awareness CM], Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea, <https://www.rachi.go.jp/message/moviecm.html>, 20-08-2020.



abduction issue. As previously noted, young girls like Megumi tend to be considered as in need of protection, especially male one, thus enabling the request of stricter security and defense policies against the ‘ideal offenders’. The perfect propaganda for the nationalists and right-wing elements that push for military action and historical revision in regard to the DPRK.

Therefore, Megumi’s abduction was presented and then perceived in Japan as if the all nation was wronged by North Korea, it was assaulted and robbed of its innocence. Thereby leading the way to a denial of responsibility by Japan for its past actions, or at least, to a lessening of guilt feelings. In other words, Megumi’s victimhood became a nationalised one with the potential of shaping the Japanese public’s self-concept, re-opening a debate on the very essence of Japanese identity.

In this sense, it could be said that Megumi has come to represent a category apart inasmuch she qualifies as an ‘ideal victim,’ proving the existence of a ‘hierarchy of victimisation’ among the abductees which is not only reflected in the media but reinforced by the dominant discourse.<sup>159</sup>

In conclusion, Yokota Megumi’s case has been particularly instrumental to the politicisation of the entire issue, since it has not only made the abductions known for first to an increasingly vast public, but it has spurred the establishment of support associations such as *Kazokukai* and *Sukūkai*, drawing vast support from all over the world. Her case in particular demonstrates how dramatising specific stories of suffering by adding personal details directly narrated from identifiable victims can turn into a rather powerful tool to elicit compassionate responses.

Acknowledgement and legitimisation were made possible through the successful construction of Megumi’s victimhood. Her parents, the media and the rescue associations have all presented her as a sympathetic figure with a highly tragic story, morally worthy of her victim status due to her innocence and blamelessness. She has been absolved of any responsibility, meeting the criteria set by people’s stereotypical

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<sup>159</sup> Ulv HANSSSEN, “Japan’s ideal and less ideal victims,” *AsiaPortal*, 21 April 2015, <https://www.asiaportal.info/japans-ideal-and-less-ideal-victims/>, 26-09-2020.

view when it comes to victims. This is also because, the blame has entirely fallen onto North Korea, an extremely bad distant being, that makes for the ‘perfect offender’. Yokota Megumi and the DPRK have been represented as two distinct, mutually exclusive subjects within the discourse, setting the stage for a conflict story.

Her story has also highlighted the vulnerability of the victim category: «victim images create an objectified, incapable, passive category that justifies intervention by actors with vested interests» (Dunn 2012, 239). ‘Ideal victims’ are considered equally ideal for rhetorical purposes, inasmuch they can shape response policies. Yokota Megumi’s story in particular has been framed in order to appeal to broader audiences and keep the public attention glued to the abduction issue. On the one hand, the media have understood its commercial potential and have tried to exploit it to the fullest. On the other hand, social movement activists have seen the recruitment potential enabled by Megumi’s victim status. The emotional responses of the Japanese public to her case have inspired a collective identification, which entails commitment and solidarity among members who in turn are likely to give assistance. And this assistance has been presented as a political action by the support organisations.

#### **4.4 The discourse of right-wing support groups**

*Kazokukai*’s need for support is what has driven organisations such as NARKN, *Nippon Kaigi*, ICMJPRNK and *Rachi Giren* to the issue.

NARKN in particular has played a big role by helping the abductees’ families to organise themselves and supporting them financially since 1997. This in turn has led to the families becoming entangled in the association’s right-wing agenda propelled by certain academics and social activists.

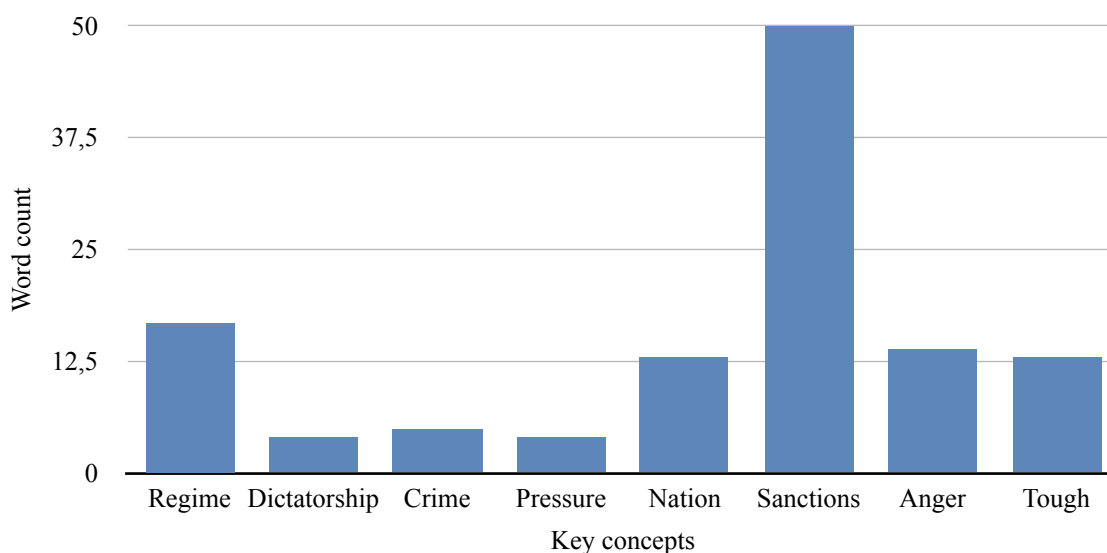
As Yokota Shigeru said about Satō Katsumi, founder of *Sukūkai*: «We know Satō is a right-winger but we need all the help we can get from whoever we get it from» (McNeill and Hippin 2003).

Hasuike Tōru, former secretary-general of AFVKN, comments on NARKN:

Those people with right-wing ideas and the people who wanted harsher measures against North Korea simply used ‘*Kazokukai*’ under the name of ‘*Sukūkai*’. [...] In short, they were people that wanted to crush North Korea. [...] If we crush that country, the abductees will come back home. [...] These people everyday... not everyday actually, but every week or so they would say this to us and naturally you start drifting to the right. [...] So, we were almost inclined to the right, without even realising it.

When referring to the abduction issue, NARKN and its most active members heavily focus on the role played by North Korea in an effort to encompass the public’s initial emotions stirred by the families’ narrative.

**Figure 4.3 Most frequent concepts in NARKN material**



As Figure 4.3 summarises, the material extracted from NARKN’s website reveals a high number of terms that can be associated to far-right political opinions in regard to Japan-North Korea relations.

At the Grand National Assembly on April 27, 2013, NARKN’s representative states:

Unfortunately, with the exception of the five people who returned home and their families, many abductees are still forced to go through hell everyday. Meanwhile **North Korea**, who committed the **crimes**, assumed a defiant attitude saying that the abduction issue does not exist anymore, it has been resolved. The Terakoshi incident and many other identified missing people have been ignored. Furthermore, **North Korea**, based on its experience so far, believes that the international community will sooner or later loosen the sanctions and lend a hand.

Last year, it enforced the missile launches and nuclear tests while letting tens of thousands of people starve to death. I think the maintenance of a **dictatorship** calls for **harsh political measures**. On the other hand, the international community is **increasing pressure**, within the international community, even China, is showing to apply **pressure**.

The **Kim Jong Un administration** should decide to return all the abductees and agree to hold negotiations on the abduction issue, making it face the drawbacks related to the existence of the **regime**. The Japanese people are **angry** and must continue to send the message that their **resentment** cannot be dissipated until all abductees have returned.<sup>160</sup>

The entire statement revolves around North Korea, which is expressly mentioned three times and always in negative terms, as a threat to the entire international community.

NARKN advocates the right to speak on behalf of the abductees' families and of the Japanese people as well, described as 'angry' and 'resentful'.

According to the association the only way to bring back the abductees is to impose immediate economic sanctions against North Korea 'for their inhuman act of abducting numerous Japanese people.' Nishioka Tsutomu speculates that an eventual failure to impose such sanctions would cause a serious setback in resolving the issue and would send a passive message to North Korea, that Japan is not taking these crimes seriously. To this regard he presented a proposal on the official website, appealing directly to Mr. Koizumi to take action.

NARKN supports economic sanctions because it believes they will lead to the following: they will send Japan's clear message to North Korea so that the leadership will be forced to change its policy vis-à-vis Japan; they will inform Kim Jong-II's successor that North Korea will receive no economic aid from Japan unless all abductees safely return to their home country; they will drive South Korea, China, and Russia to work for rescuing the abductees; they will provide a step towards the

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<sup>160</sup> "Subete no rachi higaisha o kyūshutsusuru zo! Kokumin dai shūkai" [Let's save all abductees! Grand National Assembly], Sūkūkai, [http://www.sukuukai.jp/syuukai/item\\_3373.html](http://www.sukuukai.jp/syuukai/item_3373.html), 4-07-2020.

inclusion of the abduction issue in the UN Security Council Resolution and they will strengthen the Japan-US alliance.<sup>161</sup>

These expectations were actually fulfilled by the GOJ, as we will see in the next chapter. As a matter of fact, NARKN claims the sanctions regime one of its ‘biggest successes’ (Arrington 2016, 166) and it has placed a lot of importance on its power to bolster the country’s position vis-à-vis the international community.

This perspective is strictly connected to the nationalist notion of a ‘strong’ Japan.

**The Japanese government has so far assisted North Korea by sending rice, which only benefits privileged class.** We do not need to provide such an assistance but only need to say: ‘If you return Megumi and the other abductees to Japan, we will allow Man Gyong Bong<sup>162</sup> to enter Niigata port once a year.’ **Why Prime Minister Koizumi cannot do that?** If the Japanese government does not do so, **Japan will be regarded as a country which does not resent even if its sovereignty is violated.** Megumi was abducted at age 13 and turned 41-year-old as of October 2005.

On the day Megumi was abducted, she was walking on her way home from school as usual. She was abducted by North Korean spies, stuffed into a bag and taken to a spy ship.

She cried out “Mom, mom, help me!” so loudly that she was confined to a dark hold for forty hours. In the hold, she continued crying out “Mom, mom!” scabbling the concrete wall, so her nails were peeled off and covered in blood when the ship reached North Korea.

We have to hear Megumi’s cry, “Mom,” as a cry for her “homeland, Japan”. Whether the scale is large or small, **a government is to protect its sovereignty and its own citizens.** The most needed reform now is to realize the **responsible government that can act determinedly.**

**The government should show national will** of retrieving all the abductees by **imposing sanctions.** Without that, it cannot save victims. The victims’ families who are aging and exhausted to rush around across the nation trying to retrieve their loved ones cannot have hope until the **government shows an unwavering resolve.**<sup>163</sup>

According to the above-mentioned statement, NARKN presents itself as a group of people far more reliable and determined to push the issue forward compared to the

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<sup>161</sup> “Teigen ichi: seisai de Kitachōsen no tai Nichi seisaku o kaeyou” [Proposal 1: Let’s change North Korea’s policy vis-à-vis Japan through economic sanctions], Sukūkai, [http://www.sukuukai.jp/report/20050214/20050214\\_01.html](http://www.sukuukai.jp/report/20050214/20050214_01.html), 4-07-2020.

<sup>162</sup> North Korea’s primary cargo and passenger vessel.

<sup>163</sup> NISHIOKA Tsutomu, “Nihonjin rachi no shinsō to kyūshutsu no hōhō” [The truth about the abduction of Japanese citizens and the ways to rescue them], Sukūkai, [http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item\\_97.html](http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item_97.html), 05-07-2020.

‘weak and fickle’ Japanese government, responsible of failing its citizens through its softer approach towards the DPRK. The same notion is repeated at least seven times, calling the government to its duty towards its citizens. These requests definitely echo the frustrated demands of the victims’ families for whom they are advocating, as noted in section 4.3.1.

Nonetheless, the tone used by NARKN activists is far more assertive. For instance, great hostility shines through Professor Shimada Yōichi’s (vice chairman of NARKN) statement at the Congressional Hearing on Abduction of Foreign Citizens by North Korea:

Do I have a message for Kim Jong-Il? No, I have none. He is **hopeless. I just want him to fall into the ash heap of history as soon as possible.** But I have a message for the people surrounding him: **Eliminate Kim Jong-Il** and secure the safety and freedom of the abductees, their family members, their friends, their friends’ friends. That is, for all except Kim Jong-il and his **henchmen.** Then North Koreans can expect not only the lifting of sanctions but also tremendous financial aid from all over the world.<sup>164</sup>

He portrays Kim Jong-Il’s regime as a ‘terrorist’ menace and an ‘aggressor’ that needs to be eliminated in order to reestablish order and rescue fellow countrymen.

Strong words resonate also in Nishioka Tsutomu’s book, which starts with the apocalyptic title: ‘*The final battle against terror abductions has begun*’.<sup>165</sup>

Within the discourse of right-wing support groups political terms such as ‘sovereignty,’ ‘human rights’ and ‘dictatorship’ are frequently emphasised.

NARKN not only uses emotional appeals to stir fear and rage, but it makes good use of populist rhetoric as well, saying: «Here was a group of innocent Japanese citizens, kidnapped from their homes by an evil regime in North Korea, a regime that a spineless Foreign Ministry and certain ‘traitors’ in the left-wing media and Diet had coddled for

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<sup>164</sup> United States Congress, United States House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations (HOUSE), *North Korea : human rights update and international abduction issues*, Washington: 2006, p.39.

<sup>165</sup> NISHIOKA Tsutomu, *Yokota Megumi-santachi o torimodosu no wa ima shika nai* [Let’s bring back Yokota Megumi and the others: it’s now or never], PHP Institute, 2015, p.1.

years. The families had sought help, but what did they get? Lies and excuses from a government too weak to do anything and too corrupt to care» (Johnston 2004, 6).

The same perspective is shared by the ICMJPRNK, set up in 2003 by *Sukūkai* member Araki Kazuhiro.

ICMJPRNK's chairman maintains that current diplomatic negotiations alone cannot rescue all abductees, especially the ones yet to be recognised by the government.

Not only it would be necessary to enact economic sanctions, but the Japanese government should put military pressure on the DPRK as well. Araki sounds almost certain that the North Korean regime is on the verge of collapse, putting the abductees' personal security in extreme danger. And when the time comes, the only ones who can act to rescue these fellow countrymen will be the JSDF. Therefore, the Commission demands to the Japanese government to promptly dispatch the JSDF and to take proper measures to rescue the abductees.<sup>166</sup> In this regard Araki recites Article 13 of the Japanese constitution, sustaining there is no constitutional restriction preventing the use of the JSDF in such circumstances.<sup>167</sup>

Araki has also testified in quality of representative of the abduction issue at the House of Councillors, openly criticising the Japanese government's policy of 'dialogue and pressure':

The **government is trying to minimise the abduction issue** as much as possible, by treating it as a separate incident. However, the **abductions are an act of war** rooted in the policy adopted by North Korea since its founding, directed at unifying the South under the red flag. Unless we prepare ourselves, from now on starting with the abductions **there will be other acts infringing state sovereignty**. And the **victims will be the ordinary citizens** now living in this country.

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<sup>166</sup> Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea, "*Seifu mi nintei rachi higaisha kyūshutsu nikansuru yōsei*" [Request for the rescue of the abductees not recognised by the government], 15 October 2003.

<sup>167</sup> Article 13 of the Japanese Constitution: "All of the people shall be respected as individuals. Their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness shall, to the extent that it does not interfere with the public welfare, be the supreme consideration in legislation and in other governmental affairs."

I would like for you to recognize the resolution of the abduction issue as a means to **protect our own safety**.<sup>168</sup>

The abductions are presented as a personalised and proximate threat to the Japanese citizens through the use of military terms. Araki suggests that kidnappings may happen again and therefore the DPRK must be absolutely stopped before the situation escalates. According to Araki, North Korea has a long history of abducting foreign nationals and it considers these acts as ordinary and not a short-lived action with a precise scope.

The ICMJPRNK argues that there may be hundreds of abductees inside North Korea who are not known to be there.<sup>169</sup> As of now, they list as many as four hundred and forty missing people who may have been kidnapped by North Korea. While NARKN maintains that Pyongyang has abducted more than one-hundred Japanese people, plus many others from eleven countries besides Japan.<sup>170</sup>

Both organizations agree that the abductions constitute a global problem. According to their statements, they fight for the protection of *Zainichi* Koreans<sup>171</sup> and South Korean abductees' human rights as well, with the hope to make a difference also for the vast majority of North Koreans who suffer under the dictatorship.<sup>172</sup>

The discourse crosses national borders, demanding action from the entire international community. This process of conflict expansion, however, falls outside the scope of this dissertation since it takes into account a different and much larger target audience.

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<sup>168</sup> Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea, “*Sangūin rachi toku de no Araki daihyō ga sankōjin shōgen*” [The testimony of Araki, representative of the House of Councillor regarding the abductions], 17 June 2010.

<sup>169</sup> Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea, “*Genjiten niokeru rachi mondai no zentai nikansuru kenkai*” [Opinion on the current abduction issue situation as whole], 25 September 2003.

<sup>170</sup> “Shimada Yōichi Sukūkai fuku kaichō no Bei gikai Kain kōchōkai e no teishutsu bunsho (nihongo-yaku)” [Documents submitted to the US Congressional hearing by Yōichi Shimada, Vice Chairman of NARKN (Japanese translation)], Sukūkai, 5 June 2006, [http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item\\_403.html](http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item_403.html), 08-08-2020.

<sup>171</sup> Permanent ethnic Korean residents of Japan (在日韓国・朝鮮人, *Zainichi Kankokujin*), often known simply as *Zainichi* (在日, “Japan resident”).

<sup>172</sup> Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea, “*Genjiten niokeru rachi mondai no zentai nikansuru kenkai*” [Opinion on the current abduction issue situation as whole], 25 September 2003.



Nonetheless, the above-mentioned organisations are conscious to have a strong domestic support when it comes to impose sanctions by basing themselves on national public opinion polls. In 2004, NARKN reported in its website the results of several surveys conducted by the television and newspaper media:

In a national opinion poll released by NHK on December 13, when asked what the government should do in response to *Kazokukai's* appeal for economic sanctions, **74%** responded to be in favour of a **tougher stance**, — including the option of economic sanctions — while just 19% voted for ‘dialogue’. According to a survey published by *Fuji TV* on December 14, **71,8%** supported **economic sanctions**, 22,4% were against and 5,8% did not know. According to the survey conducted by *Yomiuri Shimbun* and released on December 14, if the abduction issue does not progress, **74%** of the respondents believes that **economic sanctions** should be imposed on North Korea, while 19% would be against.<sup>173</sup>

According to NARKN:

Survey results show that the Japanese public understands there is no point in continuing with dialogue and no pressure. Attention is now paid to the decision of the Official Residence (*Kantei*) and the government on how to express people’s will and good sense.

This certainly bolstered the support organisations’ position vis-à-vis the Japanese government, although the results should always be put into context.

In this regard, it is worth to note that «the public’s drastic exposure to media debates and discussions about North Korea that included such organizations and other elites must have played a part in leading the direction of the discourse» (Seung Hyok Lee 2016, 67).<sup>174</sup>

Major activists such as Satō Katsumi, Nishioka Tsutomu and Araki Kazuhiro have published various works, including books on the issue. In addition, they try to appeal to popular sentiments through newspapers, magazines and web banners. Every time events

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<sup>173</sup> “Keizai seisai shiji ga kako sai takane ni – Kaku yoron chōsa” [Every poll: record high support for economic sanctions], Sukūkai, 14 December 2004, [http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item\\_196.html](http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item_196.html), 5-07-2020.

<sup>174</sup> LEE Seung Hyok, *Japanese Society and the Politics of the North Korean Threat (Japan and Global Society)*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016, p.67.

such as regular meetings and lectures are held, the videos get uploaded on YouTube. At the same time, they use email newsletters to send monthly content updates.

They not only distribute pamphlets during the meetings and petitions, but they issue statements and campaign advertisements in daily newspapers under the name *Sukūkai*.

Furthermore, these activists frequently appear in the media, presenting their opinions whenever the ‘North Korean problem’ arises.

NARKN and the ICMJPRNK have been supported by another influential organisation able to grant access to decision makers: the Parliamentarian League for Early Repatriation of Japanese Citizens Kidnapped by North Korea, also known as *Rachi Giren II*, a multi-partisan group of more than two-hundred Diet members formed in 2002 after the previous association called the Parliamentary Members Alliance to Help Japanese Allegedly Abducted by North Korea (*Kitachōsen Rachi Giwaku Nihonjin Kyūen Giin Renmei* or *Rachi Giren I*) was disbanded.

Among the group’s initial members there were Abe Shinzō, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary at the time, Nakagawa Shōichi and Hiranuma Takeo, both former ministers of Trade Economy and Industry.<sup>175</sup> At its launch in 1997 Abe Shinzō stated:

Even in the Diet a Parliamentary League that supports Japanese and their families in relation to the alleged abductions has been launched. A great number of Diet members have joined. Unfortunately, except for the LDP and the New Frontier Party’s members, not many of you have joined. However, I feel like this Diet members’ caucus will play an important role in the future and it will put great pressure on North Korea.<sup>176</sup>

While on December 9, 2004, *Rachi Giren II* held its general meeting and adopted an important resolution concerning economic sanctions as a way to resolve the abduction issue:

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<sup>175</sup> Christopher W. HUGHES, “The political economy of Japanese sanctions towards North Korea: domestic coalitions and international systemic pressures,” *Pacific Affairs*, 79, 3, 2006, pp. 455-481.

<sup>176</sup> ŌSHITA Eiji, *Abe Shinzō to Kishi Nobusuke* (Shinzō Abe and Nobusuke Kishi), Kadokawa, 2013, p.83.

Our **resentment** has reached its limit. The recent return of the human remains, which the North Koreans claimed to belong to Megumi Yokota, has proved to be someone else's after a scientific examination. It turned out that the remains are of two unidentified persons. The guy who is alleged of giving these fabricated "evidence" to the Japanese authority introduced himself as Megumi's husband. Who in the world was that person? This **outrageous act** constitutes **insult** not only to **the Yokotas**, but **to the Japanese people** as a whole and **the nation of Japan** itself. The utmost anxiety, which the family members of Megumi must have gone through during scientific examination, is beyond our imagination. Now, **North Korea (Kim Jong-II) proved it doesn't have even the slightest sympathy towards the families' feeling and the good faith to solve the abduction issue.** We no longer recognize any necessity to treat **this kind of regime** as a normal state. One high-ranking Japanese official who took part in the bilateral negotiations with the DPRK said to the Yokota family "if the remains were to be proven as fraud, our response should not be a mere economic sanctions, but much more." We, the Parliamentarian League, could not agree more to this comment. No need for hesitation, now. The immediate freeze of food supply as well as the implementation of economic sanctions are imperative to deal with such an **egregious regime**. Moreover, we should consider calling off the Japan-DPRK bilateral talks. Furthermore, we cannot help but to insist on **changing or overthrowing the Kim Jong-II regime**. We must also ask our allies and neighbouring countries to impose economic sanctions against North Korea along with us. The international society as a whole should take decisive actions. We call on all **Japanese** to embrace this **anger** of the **Yokota's and other families** as their own pain and stand up to rescue the victims kidnapped by North Korea. Imposing economic sanction is the only way to resolve the issue. Koizumi administration must understand this and respond correctly to the will of the people by acting immediately. Let the above be resolved.<sup>177</sup>

On the one hand, the feelings of the abductees' families and their supporters are expressed twice by the word 'resentment,' which is generally considered an other-condemning emotion. Curiously enough the same term has been previously used by a NARKN's representative.

On the other hand, North Korea is represented as indifferent, deprived of moral values and of emotions like sympathy. In other words, a country that cannot be trusted and not committed to collaborate with Japan.

Once again there is the theme of governmental accountability: the Japanese government is called upon to assume the role of problem solver of the abduction issue by taking a

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<sup>177</sup> "Keizai seisai no sekkyokuteki hatsudō o kentō – Rachi Giren ketsugi" [Considering the activation of economic sanctions – Resolution by the Parliamentarian League], Sukūkai, 9 December 2004, [http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item\\_186.html](http://www.sukuukai.jp/mailnews/item_186.html), 02-07-2020.

tougher stance against it. The economic sanctions are seen as the only viable solution to the problem and a response to the ‘insult’ received by Japan as a nation.

*Rachi Giren* has managed to arrange various meetings between the abductee families and government officials, giving them public view and legitimacy. Already in 1997 Abe Shinzō set up a meeting with *Kazokukai*, *Sukūkai* and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, leveraging his own political connections to overcome the Ministry’s reluctance.<sup>178</sup>

While in 2006, Deputy Cabinet Secretary Suzuki Seiji met with representatives of AFVKN, NARKN and *Rachi Giren*, commenting:

**Chief Cabinet Secretary Shinzō Abe** has mentioned the necessity to ‘**find ways to make it disadvantageous for North Korea to delay the process of solving this abduction issue.**’ We, as a Cabinet, will work accordingly and make it harder for North Korea to tell lies and intentionally prolong the bilateral negotiation process. Regarding the **request received from the AFVKN and NARKN to impose economic sanctions against the North**; we have asked more governmental agencies than before to consider and consolidate the impact of unilateral economic sanctions if they were to be implemented. The Defense Agency, Ministry of Finance, and the Environment Agency joined in this process. We have strongly urged them so the response would be different this time. We will aggregate the report hopefully during January. This will support the Foreign Ministry officials in charge of negotiations with North Korea.<sup>179</sup>

As this quote exemplifies, Abe Shinzō is generally portrayed as an influential supporter of AFVKN and NARKN as well as a hard-liner when it comes to North Korea.

In his e-mail magazine Abe publicly expressed his long-standing interest in the issue as a personal matter more than a political one:

It was roughly 20 years ago that I first encountered the abduction issue, when Ms. Arimoto Keiko's parents visited my father's office where I was working as a secretary. I was not sure at the time if I could believe my ears when I heard that a nation had abducted nationals of another country. With further investigation, however, I had no choice but to believe that it was indeed a heinous act conducted by North Korea, and was equally **shocked that Japan had left this issue untouched.** Since then, there has never been a time, either before I entered politics

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<sup>178</sup> ŌSHITA Eiji, *Abe Shinzō to Kishi Nobusuke* (Shinzō Abe and Nobusuke Kishi), Kadokawa, 2013, p.84.

<sup>179</sup> NARKN, “Excerpts of the meetings with Deputy Cabinet Secretary and the Chief of Security Bureau, National Police Agency,” 18 January 2006, <http://www.sukuukai.jp/narkn/>, 07-07-2020.

or since, when this **issue has not been close to my heart**. I am driven by a **strong determination** to one day find a resolution.<sup>180</sup>

Abe sided with the families, but he took also a critical approach towards the same government he was working for: he distanced himself from the notion of a ‘careless’ state and presented himself as a person with a ‘heart,’ an emotional investment in the issue. Already in 2002, at *Nippon Kaigi*’s fifth anniversary assembly, a young Abe expressed his strong resolve to not back down from the issue and talking about Japan’s North Korea policy he stated:

Neither I nor the government have stopped the flow of people, goods and money to North Korea and we have imposed no sanctions. We haven’t even talked about KEDO’s share of aid. It is an extremely **soft approach** and I think it could be considered **weak** if we were the United States.<sup>181</sup>

As in the case of NARKN, Abe links Japan’s soft approach towards the DPRK to a sign of weakness. Statements like these ones contributed to create the image of a one-issue politician focused on the abduction issue and ready to take action and transform the way policies were decided. As we shall discuss in the next chapter, Abe finally gained the actual political power to prioritise the issue and propel reforms in 2006, when he was elected LDP president and Prime Minister of Japan.

## 4.5 Conclusions

In the present chapter a thematic analysis was conducted on the data previously collected in relation to the abduction issue. To this purpose, the abductee families’ recounts have been analysed first.

*Kazokukai*’s narrative results as highly focused on the personal experience of the victims and it is therefore largely driven by feelings, which range from resentment and

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<sup>180</sup> Cabinet Public Relations Office, “Hello, this is Shinzo Abe. Message from Prime Minister,” Abe Cabinet E-mail Magazine No.2, 19 October 2006, <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/m-magazine/backnumber/2006/1019.html>, 30-09-2020.

<sup>181</sup> “Setsuritsu go shūnen taikai” [Nippon Kaigi’s fifth anniversary assembly], *Nippon Kaigi*, Japan Conference, 18 November 2002, <http://www.nipponkaigi.org/about/5years>, 26-06-2020.

frustration to anguish, despair. The first two emotions are attributed to the accountability of the government and the lack of attention by the media perceived by the families, who lamented an absence of the institutions during their suffering, while pain and distress are linked to their concern for their relatives' well-being in North Korea.

An important theme that has emerged is the one of 'ties', not only family ones but in the wider sense of 'Japan'. This has also been underlined by Yokota Megumi's story as told by her parents, the media and the GOJ, who have contributed into making her the symbol of all abductees. In this context, victimhood has been presented as a functional, strategic and rhetorical process within the discourse. It revealed how the speaker is actually required to construct its needs and to use them in order to attain specific goals.

The focus has then shifted to the discourse of the support organizations, namely NARKN, *Rachi Giren* and ICMJPRNK, that could be considered rather homogenous and strongly politically driven. The main theme detected is the dichotomy between Japan and North Korea, frequently described by using military terms. The idea of North Korea as a 'threat' is recurrent and it is usually followed by the arguments in favour of 'economic sanctions' and even 'military intervention'. Ultimately, the associations have turned the abductions into a national security issue, calling for a 'strong' Japan and criticising the weakness of the government in taking action.

## **Chapter 5. The abduction issue in Japanese politics**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The first part of the chapter explores Japan's policy on North Korea in relation to the abduction issue during the 1990s, setting the basis for a comparison with policies adopted post-2002. While the second part focuses on the analyses of relevant legislations and institutions approved by the Diet after the Pyongyang Summit with the purpose of highlighting the influence exerted by *Kazokukai* and *Sukūkai* on policy making, revealing at the same time how the abduction issue has been 'officially' framed.

### **5.2 Tokyo's policy responses during the 1990s**

As stated in the Introduction chapter, a series of evidence and testimonies had already revealed North Korea's involvement, but in line with a policy of rapprochement adopted by Deputy Prime Minister Kanemaru the issue was not put at the front. Thus, the Japanese government first formally raised the abduction issue only in 1991, during the Normalization Talks with Pyongyang. At the time, North Korea strongly denied any participation in the suspected abductions and accused Japan of destroying the bilateral talks. As a result, the normalization talks completely stopped, while other security-related issues emerged.

It took several years and the establishment of *Kazokukai* and *Sukūkai* for the GOJ to bring up the matter with Pyongyang once again.

In November 1997, under the Hashimoto cabinet, Mori Yoshirō went to the DPRK with the Japanese delegation in order to discuss the resolution of the abduction issue but to no avail. Domestic political pressure was increasing. In August 1998, Tokyo imposed limited sanctions on Pyongyang after the launch of Taepodong-1 ballistic missile, cutting Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO) fundings and other forms of assistance. These measures were however short-lived, since they were lifted in the following year in line with US and South Korea's softer policy.<sup>182</sup> Therefore, it could be

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<sup>182</sup> Christopher W. HUGHES, "The political economy of Japanese sanctions towards North Korea: domestic coalitions and international systemic pressures," *Pacific Affairs*, 79, 3, 2006, pp. 461-462.

said that in those years inner political forces were already at work in order to contain North Korea.

In 1999 it was Murayama Tomiichi's turn to go to the DPRK with the bipartisan delegation of the LDP and the JSP. He and his team managed to reach an agreement to resume talks for diplomatic normalization and to further discuss humanitarian issues.<sup>183</sup> Japan's new initiative was however criticized by the Japanese media and by NARKN, whose main concern was for the abduction issue to be on the agenda of the normalization talks as a sort of precondition of food aid to North Korea.

The following year, Prime Minister Mori sent a request for summit talks to Kim Jong Il. North Korea's first Deputy Foreign Minister agreed on a prospective summit meeting to solve 'the issue of missing Japanese people' and other issues, but the plan soon dissolved due to Mori's resignation. Yet, the Japanese government started to recognize the strength of the domestic movement, as the official meetings in 1999 and 2000 between the prime ministers and the abductee families indicate.<sup>184</sup> The abduction issue, however, did not actually progress until it was elevated in the national discourse as a political agenda item by the politicians in power.

### **5.3 Tokyo's hard-line policy after 2002**

As of now the government officially recognizes the abduction issue as «a grave concern that affects the national sovereignty of Japan and the lives and safety of the Japanese people» and calls for a rapid resolution as a matter falling under its own responsibility. The resolution is seen as dependent on three factors: the safety of all abductees must be secured and they must be returned to Japan immediately; North Korea must give a full account of the truth regarding all abduction cases and must hand

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<sup>183</sup> Ivi, p. 462.

<sup>184</sup> Celeste L ARRINGTON, *Accidental activists: Victim movements and government accountability in Japan and South Korea*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016, pp.160-161.



over to Japan the persons who carried out the abductions.<sup>185</sup> The GOJ threatens North Korea that no normalization of diplomatic relations will occur until the above-mentioned items are achieved.

Moreover, Tokyo promises to keep searching for the truth by investigating the fate of officially and unofficially identified abductees believed to be still in the DPRK.<sup>186</sup>

In this regard, the GOJ officially maintains that North Korea abducted seventeen of its nationals, but authorities are not reluctant to state they may be over eight hundred in alignment with the claims of ICMJPRNK.<sup>187</sup> It should be noted that the list was first presented to the North Korean side in 2002, reporting the names of just thirteen suspected abductees, number that increased to fifteen in January 2003.<sup>188</sup>

As a matter of fact, since 2002 the Japanese government has implemented various measures to show its commitment to the issue and the victims, taking full responsibility to defend the country's 'sovereignty' and the 'human rights' of its citizens against the North Korean 'dictatorship.' In other words, the Cabinet started to take action in order to control the 'abduction narrative' after being on the receiving end of constant critics. The state had to regain the trust of the victims' families, their supporters and the Japanese public after years of 'neglecting the issue.'

In December 2002, the Diet passed a bill in favour of the Japanese citizens abducted to North Korea and their families who return to Japan, entailing the promise of financial help and other support.<sup>189</sup> The law came into force few months after Prime Minister

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<sup>185</sup> Headquarters for the abduction issue, "Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea. For their immediate return!," May 2017. Available online at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000305207.pdf>

<sup>186</sup> "Kokunai niokeru torikumi" [Government's initiatives], Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 13 February 2019, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a\\_o/na/kp/page1w\\_000084.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a_o/na/kp/page1w_000084.html), 26-09-2020.

<sup>187</sup> "Seifu nintei no rachi higaisha" [Abductees recognised by the government], Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a\\_o/na/kp/page1w\\_000081.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a_o/na/kp/page1w_000081.html), 26-09-2020.

<sup>188</sup> Emma CHANLETT-AVERY, *North Korea's Abduction of Japanese Citizens and the Six-Party Talks*, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 19 March 2008, p.3.

<sup>189</sup> "Kitachōsen tōkyoku niyotte rachisareta higaishatō no shien nikansuru hōritsu" [Act concerning Support for Victims Kidnapped by North Korean Authorities and Other Persons], *The House of Representatives, Japan*, Shugiin, 2002, [https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/search/elawsSearch/elaws\\_search/lsg0500/detail?lawId=414AC1000000143](https://elaws.e-gov.go.jp/search/elawsSearch/elaws_search/lsg0500/detail?lawId=414AC1000000143), 26-09-2020.

Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang in September 2002, during which Kim Jong Il officially acknowledged the abductions and offered his apologies.<sup>190</sup> In the following month, Koizumi was able to bring the five surviving abductees home – Soga Hitomi and Hasuike Kaoru included. At the time of the press conference on the outcome of the visit to North Korea, the Prime Minister professed his intention «to arrange for meetings with family members of those surviving and to do his utmost to realize their return to Japan based on their will.» On the same occasion, he promised that the issue would have been dealt with in a 'comprehensive manner,' that is, together with the missiles and nuclear development issues during upcoming normalization talks.<sup>191</sup>

Therefore, the law served not only to resolve the practical problem at hand, but also, as the clause citing a possible revision after three years since the enforcement indicates, to prepare the ground for the return of the abductees' families.

Indeed, Koizumi's second visit to Pyongyang in 2004 succeeded to bring the family members of the five surviving abductees back to Japan, while North Korea agreed to reopen investigations about the other suspected abductees. No sanctions was invoked and Japan even provided humanitarian assistance to the DPRK, plan that attracted heavy criticism towards the MOFA.<sup>192</sup>

According to the Japan Times, «the new legislation amounts to a tacit admission of neglect on the part of Japanese authorities,» but at the same time, «the bill's unanimous passage through the Lower House reflects overwhelming public support for the abductees and their families.»<sup>193</sup> It could be argued, however, that the law was primarily

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<sup>190</sup> MOFA, "Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's Visit to North Korea," 17 September 2002, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n\\_korea/pmv0209/index.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/index.html), 26-09-2020.

<sup>191</sup> MOFA, "Opening Statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi at the Press Conference on the Outcome of his Visit to North Korea," Pyongyang, North Korea, 17 September 2002, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n\\_korea/pmv0209/press.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/press.html), 26-09-2020.

<sup>192</sup> MOFA, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi After the Japan-North Korea Meeting," 22 May 2004, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n\\_korea/pmv0405/press.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0405/press.html), 26-09-2020.

<sup>193</sup> "A new law to help the abductees," *The Japan Times*, 30 November 2002, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2002/11/30/editorials/a-new-law-to-help-the-abductees/>, 08-07-2020.

aimed at pleasing *Kazokukai*'s members who were getting more and more influential thanks to the support of *Nippon Kaigi* and of sympathetic politicians from *Rachi Giren*. Especially Abe Shinzō, who was deputy chief cabinet secretary in Koizumi cabinet from 2000 to 2003, managed to create consensus among lawmakers and pushed for redress policies.<sup>194</sup>

Article 1 of the legislation expressly recognises the abductions as 'unprecedented state-sponsored criminal acts by North Korean authorities,' while Article 2 thoroughly lists the people who are entitled to obtain recognition and support by the Japanese authorities. For instance, both the abductees and the families are required to permanently live in Japan in order to access to benefits. Moreover, the GOJ has full discretion in deciding whether to grant or not assistance.

Nonetheless, Article 3 clearly underlines the obligations of the central and local governments towards the victims and their relatives, calling for more communication between the parties. The authorities should provide the returnees with monthly stipends, exemption of public-pension subscriptions, preferential housing accommodation and free vocational training in order to help them rebuild their lives in Japan.

Another important step in this direction was taken by the Abe administration in 2006. Just three days after being elected, Abe announced the launch of the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue (*Rachi mondai taisaku honbu*) and as a sign of his strong resolution he decided to act as its chairman. During the speech he firmly stated that: «There can be no normalization of relations between Japan and North Korea unless the abduction issue is resolved.»<sup>195</sup> The establishment of this institution signalled an important victory for *Kazokukai* and *Sukūkai*, since it meant they finally had a saying in Japan's policy vis-à-vis North Korea. The headquarters served as an exclusive communication channel between the government and the families, giving to the latter direct access to the chief

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<sup>194</sup> Celeste L. ARRINGTON, *Accidental activists: Victim movements and government accountability in Japan and South Korea*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016, p.164.

<sup>195</sup> Prime Minister and His Cabinet, "Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 165 Diet," Tokyo, 29 September 2006, [http://japan.kantei.go.jp/abespeech/2006/09/29speech\\_e.html](http://japan.kantei.go.jp/abespeech/2006/09/29speech_e.html), 24-09-2020.

cabinet secretary. In 2007 its staff was even increased and the budget was expanded ten-fold.<sup>196</sup> As previously noted, the headquarters is behind the production of documentaries, books and posters on the abductions and has become its main promoter. Arrington reports that one official in the headquarters said, «the state owes the AFVKN a debt (*oime*) for having failed to investigate the abductions more closely and for not forming an institutional structure like the Headquarters.»<sup>197</sup> Therefore, the headquarters could be interpreted as a way to make amend by the government and the closest thing to an official apology to *Kazokukai*.

Support to the abducted and their families has been also shown by the adoption of their ‘symbols’ in the course of international and national events. During Japan-DPRK normalization talks in October 2002 Japanese officials were already wearing blue ribbon pins on their jackets at the request of *Kazokukai* and *Rachi Giren*.<sup>198</sup> The color blue stands for the Sea of Japan, that separates the abductees’ homeland from North Korea, and for the blue sky, the only thing that connects the victims and their families.<sup>199</sup>

Moreover, the Japanese government has accommodated other policy requests advanced by NARKN and AFVKN, de facto adopting a tougher stance against the DPRK as a mean to resolve the abduction issue.

In February 2004 the Diet passed the Revised Foreign Exchange and Trade Law, enabling the government to halt any trade and monetary flow to another country at its discretion. Followed in June by the Ship Entry Prohibition, effectively preventing North Korean ships from entering Japanese ports. While in June 2006 the GOJ approved another bill, whereby it committed itself to imposing economic sanctions on Pyongyang

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<sup>196</sup> Celeste L. ARRINGTON, *Accidental Activists: How Victim Groups Hold the Government Accountable in Japan and South Korea*, UC Berkley, 2010, p.161.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> Ivi, p.148.

<sup>199</sup> MOFA, “Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea,” 2012. Available online at: [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n\\_korea/abduction/pdfs/abductions\\_en.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/abduction/pdfs/abductions_en.pdf)

if no progress in regard to the abduction issue was made. According to the Japan Times, the law was especially welcomed by *Kazokukai* that in February 2005 had presented a petition together with *Sukūkai* demanding to the government to cut any financial or material assistance to the DPRK.<sup>200</sup><sup>201</sup> These measures were then imposed as a response to North Korean ballistic missile launches in July 2006.<sup>202</sup>

Japan took an increasingly harder stance towards the DPRK especially under the Abe administration, started in September 2006. One of Abe's first initiatives as Prime Minister, together with the establishment of the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, was imposing economic sanctions on Pyongyang.

After North Korea's nuclear test in October 2006, Tokyo introduced additional sanctions, banning the entry of all North Korean vessels into Japanese ports and introducing a ban on all imports as well. According to the GOJ, these measures were applied not only to condemn the nuclear test, but also as a protest against Pyongyang's lack of 'good faith' in resolving the abduction issue.<sup>203</sup>

Japan further expanded the restrictions and imposed unilateral sanctions in response to North Korea's nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches in 2016 and 2017. It results that more than once pressure was put on the DPRK by linking the nuclear and missile issues to the abductions.

This follows Abe's hard-line policy as per stated during his speech 'Japan is Back,' given after his reelection as Prime Minister in late 2012:

My government, upon their nuclear test, introduced an added sanction against Pyongyang. Their nuclear ambition should not be tolerated. Unless they give up on

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<sup>200</sup> "Diet passes North sanctions bill," *The Japan Times*, 17 June 2006, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2006/06/17/national/diet-passes-north-sanctions-bill/>, 09-07-2020.

<sup>201</sup> NARKN, "Petition by Shigeo Izuka, president of AFVKN," [sukuukai.jp](http://www.sukuukai.jp/English/Petition.html), <http://www.sukuukai.jp/English/Petition.html>, 26-09-2020.

<sup>202</sup> SEUNG-HO Joo, *Peace Regime Building on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asian Security Cooperation*, 2010, p.153.

<sup>203</sup> MOFA, "Abductions of Japanese Citizens by North Korea," 2012. Available online at: [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n\\_korea/abduction/pdfs/abductions\\_en.pdf](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/abduction/pdfs/abductions_en.pdf)

developing a nuclear arsenal, missile technologies, and release all the Japanese citizens they abducted, my government will give them no reward.

This is not only a regional matter, but a global one. Japan, on my watch, should work tirelessly with the U.S., South Korea, others and the United Nations to stop them from pursuing those ambitions.

Now, if you look at the lapel of my jacket, I am wearing a blue-ribbon pin. It is to remind myself, each and every day, that I must bring back the Japanese people who were abducted by North Korea in the 1970s and 80s. Among them was a girl, Megumi Yokota, who was only thirteen at the time.

That is also the reason why, as a **nation firmly behind human rights**, Japan must stay strong, strong first in its economy, and strong also in its **national defense**.<sup>204</sup>

As the quote underlines, Abe has pushed for an increase awareness of the abduction issue by framing it not only as a security matter, but also as a humanitarian one.

In 2005 lawmaker Nakagawa Masaharu, founder of the International Parliamentarians' Coalition for North Korean Refugees and Human Rights (IPCNKR) and member of the DPJ, proposed to the Diet a bill that outlined the responsibilities of the government in regard not only to the abduction issue, but also to the escapees from North Korea.

The bill was meant to deal with the assistance to North Korea as well, in an effort to improve the human rights situation over there.<sup>205</sup> As a matter of fact, it was far more comprehensive and less focused on pressuring the DPRK than the final bill proposed by the LDP the following year, which passed in 2006 under the title 'Law Concerning Measures to Address the Abduction Issue and Other North Korean Human Rights Violations.'<sup>206</sup> It should be mentioned that the bill was elaborated by the LDP's Abductions Issue Team and the North Korea Sanctions Simulation Team, probably under the influence of *Kazokukai* and *Sukūkai*.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> MOFA, "'Japan is Back', Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at CSIS," 22 February 2013, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/abe/us\\_20130222en.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/pm/abe/us_20130222en.html), 29-09-2020.

<sup>205</sup> Life Funds for North Korean Refugees, "Lawmaker Proposes Human Rights Law in Japan Diet," 15 June 2005, <http://www.northkoreanrefugees.com/lawmaker-proposes-human-rights-law-in-japan-diet/>, 24-09-2020.

<sup>206</sup> "Rachi mondai sonota Kitachōsen tōkyoku niyoru jinken shingai mondai e no taisho nikansuru hōritsu" [Law Concerning Measures to Address the Abduction Issue and Other North Korean Human Rights Violations], *The House of Representatives, Japan*, Shugiin, 2014 [http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb\\_housei.nsf/html/housei/16420060623096.htm](http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_housei.nsf/html/housei/16420060623096.htm), 26-09-2020.

<sup>207</sup> Celeste L. ARRINGTON, *Linking Abductions Activism to North Korean Human Rights Advocacy in Japan and Abroad*, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 99-101.

Article 7 of the legislation clearly refers back to the Revised Foreign Exchange and Trade Law and to the Act concerning Prohibition of Entry of Specified Ships into Ports as sanctions measures were the human rights situation fail to improve. While Article 2 and 3 impose a duty on the national as well as local governments to increase public awareness of the issue and the interest in human rights violations. These articles are connected to Article 4, which follows the recommendation contained in the DPJ's draft and establishes the North Korean Human Rights Abuses Awareness Week from December 10 to 16. During this week the abduction issue is heavily promoted through brochures, posters, film shows, lecturers, symposia and advertisements.<sup>208</sup>

As for Article 6, it calls for greater cooperation with foreign governments, international organizations and domestic NGOs. In this regard, the North Korean defectors' issue receives only a brief mention, whereby the GOJ is charged with the responsibility of taking proper measures.

The law in question is particularly important because, upon the suggestion advanced by the DPJ's draft, it legally constituted the Headquarters for the Abductions Issue. At the same time, it stressed the relevance of the abductions as part of the 'North Korean human rights' discourse. This connection was further reinforced in 2014 with the adoption of a UN resolution that declared:

[The General Assembly] Underscores its very serious concern at the systematic abduction, denial of repatriation and subsequent **enforced disappearance** of persons, including those from other countries, on a large scale and as a matter of State policy, and in this regard strongly calls upon the Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea urgently to resolve these issues of international concern, in a transparent manner, including by ensuring the immediate return of abductees.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> MOFA, "Steps taken in Japan", 19 February 2019, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/a\\_o/na/kp/page1we\\_000071.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/na/kp/page1we_000071.html), 11-07-2020.

<sup>209</sup> United Nations, "2014 UN General Assembly Resolution on North Korean human rights," 21 January 2005. Available online at: [https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/publications/UNGA\\_Resolution\\_69-188.pdf](https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/publications/UNGA_Resolution_69-188.pdf)

It should not surprise since Japan has been sponsoring the North Korea resolutions at the Human Rights Council since 2004, exploiting the opportunity to give international relevance to the abduction issue as a matter that transcends national borders. Furthermore, the resolution presents the ‘enforced disappearances’ as North Korea’s state-policy implying not only a violation of international norms, but a serious crime against humanity as suggested by the term ‘on a large scale’.

These resolutions clearly reinforce the negative image of North Korea, portrayed as a criminal state, and make it accountable for its deeds. But even more than internationally, this image has been promoted by the GOJ at home through institutional channels.

In 2006 the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue released a poster showing the map of a blood-red North Korea that covers the eyes of a Japanese teenager. The picture is quite powerful, since it portrays the DPRK as a threat to the country’s youth, urging the Japanese people to open their eyes (see Figure 5.1).<sup>210</sup>



**Figure 5.1** The Ministry of Justice, *North Korean Human Rights Violation Awareness Week poster*, [http://www.moj.go.jp/JINKEN/jinken04\\_00086.html](http://www.moj.go.jp/JINKEN/jinken04_00086.html)

<sup>210</sup> “Nippon uyoku wa rachi mondai o seiji riyōshiteiru ka?” [Is the Japanese right-wing making a political use of the abduction issue?], *In the Strawberry Field*, 24 December 2006, [http://biglizards.net/strawberryblog/archives/2006/12/post\\_263.html](http://biglizards.net/strawberryblog/archives/2006/12/post_263.html), 11-07-2020.



This negative representation is backed up also by various Japanese media that were previously criticized for their lack of attention to the issue.

An article published on *Asahi Shimbun* in 2002 warned the Japanese public:

As the abduction issue has made clear, North Korea is a **dangerous country for Japanese nationals**. We must end this destabilising and **dangerous relation** as soon as possible.<sup>211</sup>

In just three lines the word ‘dangerous’ is mentioned twice in relation to North Korea, once again presenting the issue as a ‘public safety concern’.

But the media have also cooperated with the GOJ in order to send a message to the abductees in North Korea as well as to the regime.

In 2006 Internal Affairs and Communications Minister Yoshihide Suga issued an order for NHK to air more content on North Korea’s abductions of Japanese nationals in its shortwave radio service, called *Shiokaze* or Radio Sea-Breeze.<sup>212</sup>

As it can be noted, the Cabinet continuously emphasises its public education efforts to establish information about the issue and repatriate the abductees through different means of communication. The result is an exponentially high number of Japanese citizens exposed to the same abduction narrative propelled by the families and their support organisations. Indeed, Prime Minister Abe’s actions reignited hope among the families of the abducted, which was eventually crushed by the freeze of Japan-North Korean relations.

For instance, Mr. Hasuike firmly believes that the abduction issue has not progressed at all because of Abe Shinzō, who has repeatedly betrayed the abductees and their families’ expectations. Mr. Hasuike accuses Abe of having climbed to the position of

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<sup>211</sup> “Kanashii rachi no ketsumatsu, henka unagasu seijōka kōshō o nitchō shunō kaidan” [The sad conclusion of the abductions: Japan-North Korea normalization talks to urge change], *Asahi Shimbun*, 18 September 2002, p.2.

<sup>212</sup> OKUDA Ryouin, “Sōmu daijin ga ‘rachi mondai’ de NHK kokusai hōsō ni ‘meri hōsō’” [Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications orders NHK to broadcast on the ‘abduction issue’], NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation), 1 January 2007, <https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/summary/research/focus/111.html>, 26-09-2020.

Prime Minister with the help of the abduction issue. In December 2015 he even published a book entitled ‘*Shinzō Abe and the cold-blooded people who let the abductees die.*’

At a speech in Kunitachi, Tokyo he said:

The moving story of Abe that he was the one to stop the five returnees from going back to North Korea is an outright lie. It was I who stopped them.

To which Abe responded:

I have not used the issue and I have not told lies. If what I’m saying is not true, I’ll quit. I’ll resign my seat in the Diet.<sup>213</sup>

The quoted interaction certainly shows a growing tension between the government and the families of the abducted. Nonetheless, what can be said for sure is that Abe has concluded his fourth cabinet in September 2020 with few concrete results. His hard-line stance in response to North Korea’s provocations has managed only to interrupt the investigations into the whereabouts of still-missing Japanese abductees, ultimately keeping the issue alive.

## 5.4 Conclusions

The current chapter has shown a shift in Japan’s policy toward North Korea, namely between the late 1990s and early 2000s. Starting from 1991 the abduction issue was raised as a humanitarian concern at official meetings with North Korean authorities, without setting preconditions and in line with a dialogue-based approach. The Japanese government acknowledged the families and their supporters, but it did not come up with concrete plans to resolve the issue.

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<sup>213</sup> “Rachi mondai mi kaiketsu de Abe shushō hinan. Hasuike Tōru-shi ga kazoku gaikō nado o teian” [Prime Minister Abe accused of the unresolved abduction issue. Tōru Hasuike’s proposal of families’ diplomacy], Elneos, 2016, <http://www.elneos.co.jp/1608sf2.html>, 11-07-2020.

After 2002 and thanks to the Koizumi administration's efforts, the abductions were placed on the national political agenda. As noted, between 2004 and 2006 three important policy responses were enacted: the Revised Foreign Exchange and Trade Law, the Act concerning Prohibition of Entry of Specified Ships into Ports and the Law Concerning Measures to Address the Abduction Issue and Other North Korean Human Rights Violations. All these measures were aimed at constraining North Korea and clearly reflect the support organisations' call for a hard-line policy. This tendency became stronger after one of the most prominent political allies of the abductees families, Abe Shinzō, was elected Prime Minister in 2006. His premiership, began with the establishment of the Headquarters for the Abduction Issue, has been marked by an unequal responsiveness to *Kazokukai's* requests. Under his administration the GOJ has devoted itself to the promotion of the abduction issue across Japan, often partnering with the media. However, success in raising domestic awareness has not been met by concrete political results and a definitive resolution. As a matter of fact, the pressure approach adopted by Tokyo has ultimately driven Pyongyang away from the negotiating table. This could be also due to the 'negative publicity' used by the GOJ both internationally and nationally in reference to the DPRK.

During the 2000s the abduction issue has not only been presented as a humanitarian problem which possibly involves dozens of countries worldwide, but it has been tied to the DPRK missile and nuclear issues as a security matter in Japan. The link of course is represented by North Korea. The conclusion is that the abduction issue became relevant to the government when it started to serve as public legitimisation for the enactment of security policy changes.

## **Chapter 6. Conclusion**

This chapter introduces a summary of the main findings with regard to the research questions, drawing conclusions and discussing the implications of the present study. It further reflects on its contributions and limitations. Finally, it presents suggestions for future research.

### **6.1 Overview of the Findings**

As stated in the Introduction, the main aims of this thesis were to identify the causes behind the public emotional responses to the abduction issue and to analyze the role played by the victims and their families in its representation. Thus, this dissertation has investigated how the discourse has been socially and politically constructed in Japan, arguing that different frames of the issue have led to different emotional reactions.

First, FDA has revealed that emotionally rooted narratives evoked equally potent emotional responses through a process of self-identification.

The abductees' families and the returnees' have infused their personal recounts with strong emotions denoting sufferance, such as anguish and sadness, that enabled them to attract sympathy and compassion. At the same time, by pointing the finger at the Japanese government's negligence and at the media indifference, underlining their liability, they have successfully evoked anger and indignation in their audience. Japanese ordinary citizens were led to believe they could just as well have been the ones kidnapped and failed by the state. Within this frame the abductees and their families have assumed the position of 'victims of a tragedy,' a collective identity that has provided them with credibility and moral legitimation of their claims. In the end, their narrative succeeded in persuading third parties and decision makers to take up their cause. Thus, the findings of this study suggest that emotions were important in the process of recruitment and sustenance of the social movement established by the families of the abducted and that emotional resonance was instrumental in generating collective action.

Second, the evidence implies that certain emotions were politicized by actors with vested interests to construct the abduction issue along nationalist and revisionist political visions and ideological imaginaries. The associations supporting the abductees and their families, namely NARKN, ICMJPRNK and *Rachi Giren*, have presented the public with a persuasive conflict story whereby North Korea is guilty of a criminal offence against innocent Japanese citizens. The study argues that differences between North Korea and Japan have been exacerbated in order to create a perpetrator-victim dichotomy. On the one hand, by painting the DPRK as an external negative actor deprived of moral values and by its nature deceitful, a threat to the safety of the entire Japanese nation, they have fostered a sense of fear and indignation. On the other hand, by framing the issue as a violation of human rights and a matter closely related to national security, the above mentioned associations have reignited the patriotic feelings of their fellow countrymen. These emotions coupled with their position as victim advocates have enabled them to call for harsher and more repressive measures against the so-called offender, North Korea. Economic sanctions and military intervention have been presented both as a social obligation to the victims and their families to undo the harm received and as a necessity for one's own personal safety and protection.

The present study further implies that the intensity of the emotions stirred by the aforementioned frames is directly connected to the dominance of the discourse itself. Competing discourses have been silenced and overwhelmed, thereby directing public attention solely to the interpretation and the meanings validated by the abduction discourse. The acceptance of this knowledge led in turn to conformity, ultimately impeding any critical approach to the issue and encouraging passive thinking.

Moreover, the findings support the idea that the power of the abduction discourse was amplified and maintained by its vehicles.

It has been argued that the influence of the Japanese government and of mass media was crucial in raising the public awareness on the issue.

After 2002 the GOJ started a nationwide public campaign in order to rescue the abductees, passed laws favourable to the abductee families and their supporters and set

the issue as top priority in its foreign policy agenda. While professional media practices have assisted in the presentation of the discourse with an intense and often emotionalised saturation coverage of the abductions, as exemplified by Yokota Megumi's story. The study shows that news outlets have come to support the dominant discursive frames, transmitting a negative image of North Korea and giving *Sukūkai* and *Kazokukai* a platform to express their own ideas.

The current thesis has revealed that it is not only the magnitude of the emotional responses, but also their considerable duration that is relevant. This has been adduced to the Japanese government's vague set of terms for the resolution of the issue, which has stalled any progress and left the matter still unresolved. Equally important is the fact that the abductees and their families keep attracting media coverage and in turn public attention due to their tragic and unpredictable stories that have not found a proper conclusion yet.

Taken together, these results would seem to suggest that *Kazokukai*, *Sukūkai* and *Rachi Giren* have played a great role in the politicisation of the abduction issue by using persuasive frames in the construction of a dominant discourse. At the same time, however, the study contends that pre-existing cultural and structural conditions have contributed to its emergence.

As stated in the thesis, the abductees and their families wanted to be recognised as victims and they have willingly become active subjects of the discourse at the expense of being 'politically exploited'. While North Korea's position was already problematic due to historical grievances between the two countries and the emergence of other concerning security issues that negatively influenced the Japanese public's mind. At last, we should also consider the precarious political situation in Japan during the 1990s, characterized by corruption, scandals and divergent responses that increased public's dissatisfaction with the government and created a power vacuum.

Therefore, the prominence of the abduction issue cannot be entirely attributed to a single factor, but to several dynamics that have interacted with each other.

## 6.2 Contributions and Limitations of the present study

This thesis contributes to existing knowledge of the North Korean abduction issue by providing an innovative perspective. The study has not been limited to a linguistic approach to content analysis, but through a FDA approach it has addressed questions about subjectivity, identity and power in relation to wider social and material contexts. FDA has also allowed to work on a vast range of materials, from speeches and texts to advertisements and policy documents, better rendering the complexity of the issue.

In order to broaden the scope of the research, a more comprehensive methodology that includes emotion analysis as well as victimology theories has been devised. This has provided a better insight into the positioning process within the discourse, arguing that emotions have political and social implications for subjectivity and that identification plays a great role in its production.

Most importantly, the analysis framework adopted has permitted to focus on the abductees and their families as subjects of the discourse and not merely objects acted upon by external forces.

The present study, however, was subject to a number of potential limitations and weaknesses.

The first one is related to the methodology adopted. The present study does not take a historical perspective contrary to the general approach used by Foucauldian discourse analysts, who explore how discourses change over time influencing in turn subjectivity. Reflections on Japan's legacy from the past as well as on the political situation prior to the abductions might have provided useful insights into the emergence of the present discourse.

Second, due to the qualitative nature of the research questions, one-on-one interviews with members of AFVKN, NARKN and *Rachi Giren* would have probably provided more accurate insights into the discourse. However, difficulties in gaining access to these people and organisations have led to adopt already existing data available on the Internet. This challenge has been partially overcome by integrating different sources.

### **6.3 Future Research**

This research has given rise to many questions in need of further study. On a wider level, how has Japan legitimised its pursue of the abduction issue abroad? And has this concern influenced Japan's relations with the US and South Korea? In what way?

In the terms of future work, the same methodological approach used in the present study could be adapted in the analysis of other security issues with the DPRK in order to find more validity for the theoretical claims presented in this thesis.



## List of Abbreviations

AFVKN	Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea
CCJ	Community Cable Japan
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea)
FDA	Foucauldian Discourse Analysis
GOJ	Government of Japan
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICMJPRNK	Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea
IPCNKR	International Parliamentarians' Coalition for North Korean Refugees and Human Rights
JSDF	Japan Self-Defense Forces
JSP	Japanese Socialist Party (1945-1996)
KEDO	Korean Energy Development Organization
KWP	Korean Workers' Party
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NARKN	National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea
ROK	Republic of Korea
SDPJ	Social Democratic Party Japan (1996 - present)
UN	United Nations

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