Waving Israeli Flags at Right-Wing Christian Rallies in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

The impeachment of President Park Geun-hye and the ensuing shift to a liberal administration triggered massive far-right rallies in South Korea. The rally participants waved the South Korean flag to invoke their patriotism and the US flag to show their support for the Korean–USA alliance; however, a group of Protestant Christians at the front of pro-Park rallies waved Israeli flags, which was perplexing to non-participants. To explore why the Israeli flag was waved at the rallies, the study reported in this article examined video recordings of the Christian participants carrying Israeli flags. An analysis of the attendees' spoken language, signs and edited captions reveals that the Israeli flag first symbolises ancient Israel in the Bible, from which stories and metaphors legitimise the Christians' participation in the right-wing rallies. Second, the Israeli flag symbolises the modern State of Israel that was restored in 1948 together with the Republic of Korea, which supports right-wing ideology regarding the establishment of the first South Korean government. Finally, by waving the Israeli flag with the other two national flags, the flag wavers were attempting to make their Christian group identity salient without harming the right-wing identity of the rallies.

In late 2016, a massive corruption scandal involving political and business elites eventually brought down South Korean President Park Geun-hye. The scandal centred on Park's relationship with her friend, Choi Soon-sil, and included multiple allegations, such as leaks of classified information, involvement in bribery, influence peddling, and even cult activities (see *BBC*, March 10, 2017; April 6, 2018). For 20 continuous weekends from the autumn of 2016 to the spring of 2017, millions of Korean citizens took to the streets with candles in hand and called for the impeachment of President Park, dubbed the candlelight rallies (see *The New York Times*, September 14, 2017). Over the course of the rallies, support for Park's impeachment grew; by the end of February 2017, surveys showed that 77% of Koreans supported the impeachment and just 18% opposed it (*Hankyoreh*, March 3, 2017). President Park was officially ousted in March 2017 when the Constitutional Court upheld the National Assembly's decision from December 2016 to impeach her. As soon as she lost her presidential immunity, Park was charged with bribery, abuse of state power and leaking state secrets (see *CNN*, April 6, 2018).

However, the candlelight rallies and ensuing impeachment process also instigated a strong opposition movement, especially among Park's supporters in Seoul. For the roughly 20% of the population who were opposed to the impeachment – predominantly elderly citizens – the attack on the president was a politically motivated accusation based on rumours and allegations (*Hankyoreh*, March 3, 2017). The participants of the pro-Park counter-rallies waved the South Korean flag or *Taegeukgi*, earning them the name *Taegeukgi* rallies. Many of the participants also carried the US flag in support of the Korea–USA alliance (*The Korea Herald*, March 1, 2017). The waving of Korean and American flags had been seen often in earlier right-wing movements (Eom 2004). However, along with the two national flags, some participants carried a seemingly unrelated foreign flag – the Israeli flag – which had never been seen before. At these rallies, marching crowds carried a large Israeli flag and small, hand-held stick flags. This phenomenon drew considerable attention from the media, which reported that a conservative Christian group had brought the Israeli flag to the rallies to uphold its religious agenda of "saving our country by praying," similar to the story of Israelites in the Bible (see, for example, *Huffington Post*, March 2, 2017; *Korea Times*, February 20, 2017). However, behind the manifested religious agenda and media interviews, questions remain as to why the Christian group wanted to uphold its religious agenda in the midst of these political rallies and how waving Israeli flags served its religious (or political) purposes. Since the Israeli flag is a symbol of the modern State of Israel, where the citizens are predominantly Jewish, conventional wisdom suggests that the Israeli flag would not be a better symbol for Christians than the cross, the Bible or the marks of their own group. There is no academic work that provides a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, probably because the phenomenon did not last long enough to leave ample data for researchers and, as with right-wing movements in other countries, participants are hostile to "antagonistic" outsiders including researchers (see Blee and Creasap 2010, 279). In this article, we focus on this phenomenon because it reveals important characteristics of the growing right-wing movement in South Korea. To explore the role of the Israeli flag, we obtained our data by analysing video clips of the Christian group's public prayer meeting during which participants first carried and waved the Israeli flag and then marched to the pro-Park rallies. In the video clips, we analysed the different modes of communication – spoken language, symbols, and written messages – that could provide some clue as to the meaning of the Israeli flag. Moreover, as the videos were recorded, edited and disseminated by the entire pro-Park rally organiser group, the National Emergency Countermeasure Committee (NECC), it appeared that the video captions and edits could help us understand how religious and political messages are intertwined in the South Korean context.

The remainder of the article is organised as follows. First, it discusses the politics of flag-waving from two theoretical approaches: group identity construction and collective action framing. The subsequent section traces the history of the South Korean right-wing movement and Christian group's involvement in this movement. Then the Christian group's messages and discourse are analysed to explain the role of the Israeli flag at their rallies. The article concludes with a discussion on the association between religion and politics in South Korea and how this association continues to affect the country's political landscape in the twenty-first century.

Politics of Flag-Waving

Two closely related bodies of literature are useful for understanding flag-waving in the South Korean right-wing movement. The first is social identity research that examines how group identities are constructed or highlighted and the second is the social movement research that examines collective action framing using cultural elements. Social identity theorists have long argued that individuals' awareness of their membership in an important social group constitutes their own identities (see, for example, Hogg and Abrams 1988; Sidanius and Kurzban 2003; Tajfel 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Typically, group identification occurs when group members recognise their own group, known as the in-group, as distinct from, and more positive than, other relevant groups, known as out-groups. Therefore, any attack on the in-group's values is likely to spark a sense of threat, which leads to in-group favouritism and out-group hostility (Turner and Oakes 1986, 241–242). Such in-group bias occurs particularly when the inter-group comparison is highly salient (see Hogg and Abrams 1988; Tajfel and Turner 1986). When the salience of outsider identities, such as minority or immigrant groups, is highlighted, this can lead majority groups to express greater hostility to those groups (Wright and Citrin 2011). On the contrary, in-group bias can be reduced by introducing broader and more inclusive identities, which leads to a re-categorisation of group boundaries (Gaertner and Dovidio 2014; Gaertner et al. 1999).

Symbols play a critical role in the construction of group identities. For example, national symbols arouse powerful, emotional expressions of national sentiment because they uniquely accentuate citizens' identification as members of the nation (Schatz and Lavine 2007). National symbols are tangible representations of *imagined* communities where members cannot possibly have direct experience of all members; therefore, the objectification of the group by symbols is essential to arouse group identification (Anderson 2006; Lee 2019). As a representative symbol of a national group, the flag is a potent source of political power and influence, evoking emotional expressions of national identification, allegiance, and self-sacrifice (Danforth 1997; Posner 1998). National flags are displayed more frequently during times of threat, when any presence of a foreign flag can be seen as antithetical to the national values (Scanlon 2005; Skitka 2005). In the USA, immigrants and supporters of immigration often wave foreign flags as a strategic choice to remind others of the multiculturalism and civic virtue of society (Chavez 2006). However, despite the intended meaning, the majority group sees foreign flag-waving as a symbol of aggression and evidence that foreigners are taking over the country (see Page 2006; Pineda and Sowards 2007; Soto 2006). According to Wright and Citrin (2011), immigrants' waving of US flags mitigates hostility towards immigration by portraying the protestors as seeking to become loyal members of the country, whereas protesters' waving of foreign flags is more likely to be regarded as disloyalty and unwillingness to pledge allegiance to the USA's dominant values and symbols.

In some cases, people even wave the flag of a group to which they do not belong. In these cases, flag waving is rather a manifestation of political division and fear of others, as those carrying the flag are detached from the group that the flag represents. Hamber (2006) investigated the flying of Israeli flags by Protestant Unionists/loyalists in Belfast versus Republicans' hoisting of the Palestinian flag alongside the Irish tricolour. According to Hamber (2006, 128), the flying of the Palestinian flag may be a gesture of

solidarity with a cause that Republicans support, and loyalists may feel a level of threat similar to that experienced by Israelis; however, more importantly, the flying of the two flags symbolises division – that is, a way of trying to outdo one's adversary.

These aforementioned cases shed light on the South Korean Christian group's Israeli flag-waving. As discussed earlier, Korean right-wing activists have typically waved Korean and US flags in the past decade to show their right-wing identity and their anti-North Korea, pro-USA stance. However, the Christian group that participated in these right-wing rallies may have adopted the Israeli flag because the two aforementioned flags do not fully represent their group identity, and to distinguish them from other participants in the pro-Park, right-wing rallies.

The second literature that provides insights into Christian groups' waving of Israeli flags is that focused on social movements and collective action framing. Scholars have found that social movement organisations or activists mobilise potential adherents, garner bystander support, or demobilise antagonists by constructing "frames" – that is, by developing a shared understanding or action-oriented beliefs regarding some problematic situation that inspire, mobilise and legitimate their activities or campaigns (see Benford and Snow 2000). According to Benford and Snow (2000, 615–617), there are three types of framing distinguished by their core tasks. First, "diagnostic framing" defines situations of injustice, identifies the victims of a given injustice, and delineates the boundaries between "good" and "evil" or "us" versus "them" (see, for example, Čapek 1993; Dori-Hacohen 2014; Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994). Second, "prognostic framing" proposes a potential solution to the problem, suggesting some strategies for carrying out the proposal and dealing with the opponents' logic (see also Benford 1993a; Zuo and Benford 1995). Third, "motivational framing" constructs appropriate vocabularies for participants, providing a motive or rationale for engaging in collective action (see Benford 1993b; Gamson 1995).

In the process of framing, however, movement organisers deliberately connect extant cultural symbols and elements to their movement frames: they utilise various cultural resources, such as beliefs, ideologies, practices, values, myths or narratives (Benford and Snow 2000; Tarrow 2011, also see Barreto 2012). For example, in Ayodhya, India, Hindu militants legitimated their attacks on Muslims by framing the attacks as defending Hindu tradition (Tarrow 2011, 140–141). Berbrier (1998) also showed that white supremacists in the USA sought out culturally recognised rhetoric – pluralism and multi-culturalism – to portray themselves as an ethnic group equivalent to racial and ethnic minority groups. Similarly, movements for separate religious schools in Ontario, Canada successfully connected their agenda to the concept of multi-culturalism and school choice and the provincial government consequently funded their separate religious schools (Davies 1999). As Tarrow (2011, 141) pointed out, political symbols are a blend of inherited culture and invented meanings woven into collective action frames. Based on this literature, we can assume that the Israeli flag may be used somehow as a symbol of Christian values and logics that construct the diagnostic, prognostic and motivational frames for right-wing rally participants.

These two bodies of literature are intertwined. According to Hunt, Benford, and Snow (1994, 199), identity constructions, whether intended or not, are inherent in all social movement framing activities because the framing process is basically about a group's "avowal or imputation of characteristics to relevant sets of actors within a movement's

orbit of operation." This process of "characteristic attribution" tends to create three key identity fields: the "protagonists" field, where individuals and collectives advocate or sympathise with a movement's values, beliefs, goals and practices; the "antagonists" field, where persons and collectives are seen as standing in opposition to the protagonists' efforts; and the "audiences" field, where people are basically neutral or uncommitted observers, even though some of them may respond to, or report on, the events that they observe (Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994, 199–208). Although the three identity fields are elastic and often expand and contract over time, they are created recursively through the process of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing (Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994, 200). Adopting this perspective, this study analysed how the Israeli flag is used as a tool for both group identity construction and collective action framing, which are not completely different processes.

The South Korean Right-Wing Movement and the Role of Protestantism

Since the Korean War, which ended in 1953, the predominant political ideology in South Korea has equated the left with pro-communism or with being pro-North Korea and the right with anti-communism (Shin and Jhee 2005). Under authoritarian governments that forced the masses to identify with the right's anti-communist stance, post-war social movements were marked by citizens' protests against authoritarian rule and activists' efforts to dissociate communism from other left-wing agenda, such as economic equality and social justice (Shin and Chang 2011; Shin and Jhee 2005). The previously slow acceptance of such left-wing agenda gained momentum especially after the country's democratic transition in 1988 (see Shin and Jhee 2005; Lee and Yi 2018). Following the democratic transition, social movements have been dominated by a left-wing agenda. Right-wing movements were rarely seen until South Korea's first power transition to a liberal leader, Kim Dae-Jung, and the administration's adoption of the Sunshine Policy towards North Korea (Cho 2014; Eom 2004). The Kim Dae-Jung administration (1998–2003) was the first to try to ease military tension on the Korean Peninsula by building a non-hostile relationship with North Korea. In response, on March 1, 2003, the first sizable right-wing rally was held, when about 100,000 people from 114 organisations gathered to protest Kim's policy and criticise North Korea's nuclearisation (Eom 2004; Ryu 2004). Then, rally participants waved two national flags: South Korean and American. The South Korean flag was waved to show loyalty to the nation, as March 1 was a celebration of the Korean Independence Movement of 1919, when Koreans waved the national flag under Japanese rule. Rally participants also waved the US flag to show their support for the South Korean–US alliance and their hostility towards the North Korean regime. In their perspective, they appreciated the USA rescuing South Korea from North Korean communism and from poverty following the Korean War (see *The Korea Herald*, March 1, 2017). There were similar rallies in 2003 and they occurred occasionally after that until the protesters became radicalised when President Park faced scandal and impeachment in 2016.

Scholars have pointed out that the rise in right-wing movements has been a reaction to the rapid social change in South Korean society since the early 2000s (Eom 2004; Ryu 2004). The nationwide economic restructuring following the Asian Economic Crisis in 1997–1998 increased social plurality and encouraged the rise of post-Cold War/post-

modern values, which elderly and other conservative citizens viewed as a form of social instability. In particular, the liberal government's soft line on North Korea was regarded as a threat to national security and a national emergency (Eom 2004). As Park's impeachment approached, the right-wing movement was radicalised, characterised by violent actions and offensive and threatening language. For Park's supporters, the campaign against her was an attack on the legacy of her father, Park Chung-hee, the authoritarian military leader who led the so-called Miracle on the Han River in the 1960s and 1970s that rapidly transformed South Korea into one of Asia's largest economies. These citizens viewed the impeachment of the daughter of this prominent national leader as tarnishing the narrative of economic success and, more broadly, the entire older generation that had contributed to the country's spectacular development (Doucette 2017). However, to Park's opponents, her impeachment was a paradigm shift to an alternative narrative of national development based on welfare, equality and democratisation that had ended authoritarian rule.

From the outset of the right-wing movement, Protestant Christian groups played an active role. The first massive right-wing rally in 2003 involved the Christian Council of Korea (CCK), the country's largest inter-denominational church coalition, representative of the evangelical mega-churches (Ryu 2004). Subsequently, the CCK opposed the various reform or progressive bills proposed by liberal governments, such as the Sunshine Policy, the Private School Act, and the abolition of the National Security Law, which was urged by Amnesty International (see Cho 2014). The CCK held public prayer meetings during right-wing rallies and delivered messages against the government's pro-North Korean policies. These rallies involved pastors from major churches as well as the Christian media and companies and members of mega-churches (Cho 2014; Eom 2004). Numerous Christian groups were created with the support of the CCK and they played an active role in advancing a politically conservative agenda by organising and participating in these rallies (Ryu 2004, 2–3). Some pastors of mega-churches openly delivered sermons that demonised the liberal politicians and their agenda (Cho 2014, 311). In 2016, the role of the CCK in the pro-Park rallies was also crucial. When Park's scandal broke out, public prayer meetings were organised by the National Prayer Coalition (NPC), which was created by the CCK. The prayer meetings held by the NPC were given a Hebrew name – Mizpah prayer meetings – and they were led by pastors heading the NPC and a Christian movement organisation named the Esther Prayer Movement. Their motto is to "pray for the recovery of South Korea" and, as the Hebrew names indicate, the motive of the prayer movement comes from the Bible.[1] Mizpah prayer meetings were held throughout the impeachment process and the participants always fronted pro-Park rallies. The attendees of these prayer meetings, which were usually held a few hours prior to a pro-Park rally near the rally site, marched to the pro-Park rally, singing, praying and shouting for others to join in. For non-Christian right-wingers, the involvement of churches increased the success of their rallies.

Studies on South Korean Christianity show that Protestantism has not always been a conservative force. Protestantism was first widely accepted at the turn of the twentieth century among Korean intellectuals and nationalist activists who wanted to build a more civilised, democratic and stronger nation (Baker 2008; Beyer 2003). Schools founded by Protestant pioneers were at the centre of new thought and produced many patriotic reformists and independence fighters during the period of Japanese colonialism. After

World War II and the subsequent Korean War, South Korean Protestant leaders and institutions received considerable support from churches in the United States and became the most resourceful actors dealing with education, medicine, poverty and other welfare issues (see Cho 2014). First was South Korean President Rhee Syngman, who had studied in the USA and was a Protestant. His government relied heavily on US support including having the US Army based in South Korea, facing the communist North. This created favourable conditions for Protestantism, which expanded at a dramatic pace from the early 1960s to the end of the 1980s and emerged as a dominant religion with almost 20% of the South Korean population identifying as Protestants (Baker 2008, 4). During this time, Protestants generally constituted a strong progressive force seeking democracy, equal educational opportunities and human rights, mostly due to the influence of US missionaries (see Park 2000). Protestants also played a prominent role in the democratic movement in the 1980s (Cho 2014, 315).

During the period of rapid growth, the pro-USA and anti-communist orientation of Protestantism was solidified, and the majority of Korean Protestants were satisfied with the political rhetoric from the Cold War system (Cho 2014, 315). Moreover, with South Korea's dramatic economic growth, Protestants largely identified themselves with secular blessings, such as wealth and health and they became economic and political leaders in the society (Ryu 2004, 6). Churches gradually retreated from the focus on social problems and turned to evangelism and spiritual redemption, which is comparable to the Great Reversal observed among evangelical Christians in the USA in the early twentieth century (see Glazer 1987).[2] According to Ryu (2004), Korean Protestants became unwilling to decisively respond to political and social issues until their core values, including anti-communist and pro-USA stances, were challenged by the first liberal government in the late 1990s. Moreover, these churches opposed liberal values and came to symbolise anti-reform, social friction, national conflict and even corruption during the 2000s, which led to a decline in Protestantism among younger generations.[3] Many Protestants felt that they should react and stop this downward trend, and this feeling was fuelled by the impeachment of the conservative president and a possible power shift to another liberal leader. Therefore, for Christians, the impeachment of Park was a challenge to their religion, even though neither she nor her father were Protestant Christians. The impeachment pushed the CCK to more aggressively participate in political rallies. It was in this context that the Israeli flag was observed (see Figure 1).

Researching Right-Wing Christian Rallies: Methods and Data

Israeli flags were observed at a Mizpah prayer meeting held on January 7, 2017 when the confrontation around the impeachment was mounting rapidly. It was about a month after the National Assembly decided to impeach President Park, and the final step – the Constitutional Court's approval – was underway. As discussed, despite the considerable attention that the Israeli flags attracted, this short-lived phenomenon, which happened during the impeachment process, did not leave much documentary evidence of their role in the rallies. Moreover, the hostility towards outsiders – perceived as "antagonist" – significantly limited access to the prayer meeting. As a result, we used two video clips of the Mizpah prayer meeting to explore the role of the Israeli flag in the pro-Park rallies and what Israel means in South Korean Protestantism.
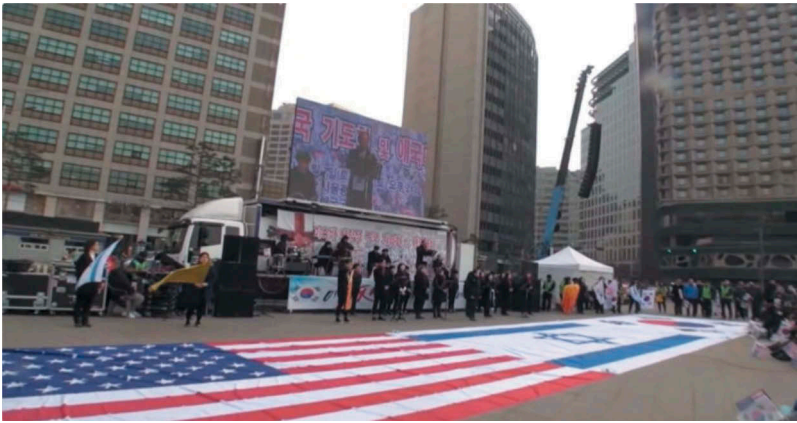
Figure 1. The stage of the prayer meeting surrounded by three national flags
Note: Sign on stage: "This is God's will and this is people's will!" Source: See note 4.

Informed by studies on discourse analysis using multi-modal data, we analysed the language, signs and graphic images in the videos altogether (see Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996; Machin and Mayr 2012). The discourse can be signified through a video editor's visual semiotic choices (Nack and Parkes 1997); therefore, we examined the captions edited for the audience of these videos as well. Video editing is important because the video footage was recorded by the NECC – the political group that organised the pro-Park rallies. As the political group recorded, edited and disseminated videos with a political purpose in mind, we could expect that the semiotics of the images and spoken language would provide an understanding of the relationship between Protestantism and politics in the South Korean context, as well as the meaning of the Israeli flag in representing the group's religious and political identities. Before conducting the analysis, we transcribed all audible sounds in the Korean language and matched them with the graphics and images in both videos. Then we translated them into English. For the translations of script from the Bible, we used the New International Version. For our analysis, we captured all messages from the script that related to Israel (both ancient and the modern state, including its cities), Israeli people (ancient and modern), and the modern Israeli flag. Then we grouped similar messages on the basis of our interpretation.

Overall, these videos were recorded in such a way that the audience would gain information not only about the prayer meeting but also about the entire pro-Park rally. The first video clip recorded the prayer meeting held at Seoul Plaza (data #1, 20 minutes and 36 seconds), and the second clip recorded the same attendees marching with flags and signs to join the pro-Park rally 1.5 km away (data #2, 26 minutes and 6 seconds).[4] More specifically, data #1 consist of the messages delivered by three pastors (Pastor Oh, 0:15–1:23; Pastor Kim, 6:45–11:45; Pastor Kwon, 17:40–19:00) who organised the prayer meeting. After each of their short messages, the pastors led a united prayer, also known as Korean prayer (*Tongsung Kido*), a ritual of unison prayer in a loud voice present in Korean evangelical churches (see Lee 2001). While they are praying, the video shows the image of hundreds of participants singing enthusiastically along with slow-paced music (data #1, 1:43–6:40; 12:41–17:40). Throughout the meeting, the video shows the stage, where there is a huge screen and a banner wrapped around the stage that states, "This is God's will, and this is the people's will" (data #1, 0:15). On the stage, a choir and

a group of dancers are standing beside the pastors and supporting the event by singing, dancing and saying "Amen," mostly with their eyes closed. Between the stage and the meeting attendees, gigantic flags of the USA, Israel and South Korea (from left to right, facing the attendees) are placed on the ground (see Figure 1). Attendees in front are holding signs that say "The spirit of lie, depart from Korea," "Hear our prayers and see our tears," "Korea shall be used by God at the end time," "May Korea be reunited" and "May Kim Jong-un's regime collapse," written either in Korean or English (see Figures 2 and 3). Towards the end of the first video clip, the final speaker, Pastor Kwon, delivers a short message and insinuates the meaning of the waving of the Israeli flag after which the attendees sing along to a Korean version of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* with the choir waving hand-held flags (data #1, 19:05–19:35).

Data #2 show the marching part of the prayer meeting. The video follows the attendees marching the 1.5 km to Seoul Station, where the pro-Park rally is about to happen. Prior to the march, the attendees waved the three gigantic flags that had been on the ground (data #2, 00:13–2:20). Each flag is carried by a dozen attendees, but the Israeli flag is particularly carried by two white, Western male attendees in front as if the group wants to show that this event is international. Then, holding small stick flags, signs and banners, the marching crowd follows the gigantic flags (Figure 4). Their messages are written in either Korean or English and they express support for President Park and her party. The messages include "Korean media, we want the truth! President Park was impeached by the press. We want a fair trial!" and "Pro-North Korean party, the spirit of lie, depart from Korea!" (data #2, 3:58; 6:56; 7:21; 10:06). Between the gigantic flags and the following crowd, several trucks carrying the pastors, who are holding microphones, lead the march. The pastors either shout "This is God's will and this is the people's will" or sing along to cheerful Christian music played via the trucks' speakers (data #2, 3:20–4:30; 8:25–11:50). While the crowd marches, some passing cars honk at the rally as a sign of disapproval with the marching crowd yelling back. When this happens, the video mutes the sound and plays sad and slow music on Jesus's sacrifice and love for sinners (data #2, 12:05–20:20). Towards the

Figure 2. A participant in public prayer.
Note: Caption states: "Do not weep away this land with the wicked!" Source: See note 4.

Figure 3. Participants in prayer meeting

Note: The sign reads: "Leave us, the spirit of lie." Source: See note 4.

end of the march, the video shows an interview with an elderly couple carrying their grandchildren (20:23–21:30). The couple says, "In order to protect our faith, our country should stand strong." As soon as the rally reaches Seoul Station, another leading pastor, Pastor Bok, shouts "Let's make the reunification of Korea happen! Leave the pro-North Korean party that is taking root in South Korean soil!" and the crowd repeats after him.

Analysing Right-Wing Christian Rallies

The Israeli flag symbolises ancient Israel and signifies that the group's agenda fits God's Will, thereby legitimising the group's actions and reinforcing its determination to fight a Holy War against its opponents during the process of impeachment. Multiple metaphors from the Old Testament are used for frames that assert an extreme contrast between "us" and "them," demonising the other side of the rallies (the candlelight rallies). Secondly, the Israeli flag symbolised the modern State of Israel, with the attendees identifying South Korea as a nation comparable to Israel: they believe that God built the two countries and thus will use these countries at the end times.[5] Behind this religious belief lies the politically charged issue of the origin of the South Korean government. Furthermore, the Israeli flag signifies the group's distinct Christian identity within the pro-Park rallies. The flag highlights that the group's final goal is not only material but also rewards in heaven. However, the Israeli flag alone does not fully represent the attendees' identity. All three flags together depict the multiple layers of their group identity. They use the flags to emphasise their unique group identity among the right-wing camp in a way that does not harm the pro-Park rally participants' political identity.

Religious Metaphors of Political Discourse: Stories from Ancient Israel

Pastor Oh, an organiser of the prayer meeting, begins it by quoting 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my

face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land" (data #1, 0:33). Then, he calls for a united prayer and shouts, "Lord, we confess, forgive us, forgive us, forgive our arrogance ... We have lost them!" (data #1, 1:19). While this is happening, the following caption, added by the NECC, appears: "God, clean the city of Seoul, the city of sin, the city of sexual immorality, the city of homosexuality .... Don't sweep away this land with the wicked ... Have pity on this land." The prayer meeting begins with a confession of sins and arrogance; however, the pastor's last words and the caption indicate that what the meeting attendees actually confess is the sins of others who have made Seoul "the city of sin." This constitutes a discourse in which the liberals on the other side of the rally are "the wicked" who support homosexuality. Moreover, they assert that God is against "the wicked," so he would "sweep" the city of such "wickedness"; however, "we," the attendees of the prayer meeting (and, more broadly, the attendees of the pro-Park rally), are not the wicked, as the caption indicates a wish that God will not sweep them away with the wicked. The pastor frequently refers to the prayer meeting as "We, the Korean Church," as if to say that non-participant Christians should join it and oppose the wicked liberals.

The caption also uses a logic from the Bible that a small number of righteous people can save an entire city. In the Bible, God is willing to save the city of Sodom for the sake of a small number of righteous people. Therefore, the meeting attendees believe that their confessions and prayers can save the city of Seoul or even the entire nation. The caption "Don't sweep away this land with the wicked!" recalls Abraham's Old Testament prayer (Genesis 18:23–32) to God for sparing Sodom's righteous while sweeping away the wicked, with the city spared for the righteous (Figure 4).

In the Bible, however, Sodom is destroyed for a lack of righteous people and its sins, exemplified when Sodom's people want to rape God's angels. This anecdote has been widely taught in Korean churches to alert their members to homosexuality and has
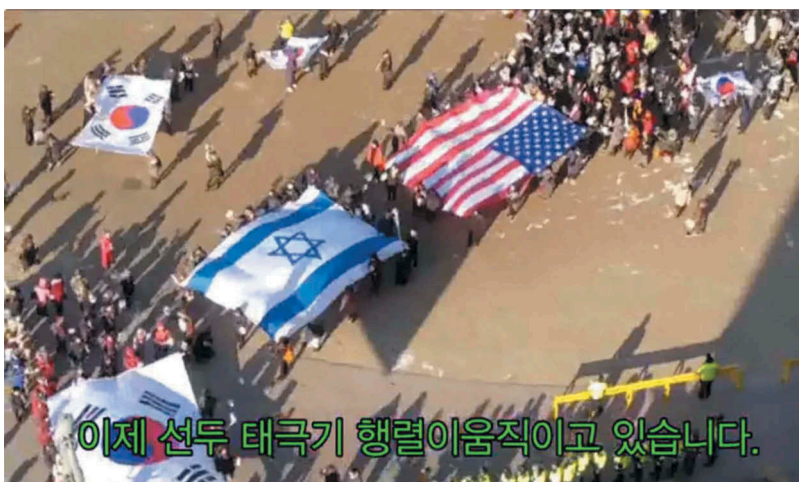
Figure 4. Three national flags fronting marching rally
Note: Caption reads: "Now the leading group of flags is marching ahead" Source: See note 4.

underpinned opposition to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) events in recent years (*UPI*, September 11, 2018).

Pastor Kim, another prayer meeting organiser, is clearer about this logic (data #1, 8:45). He says, "We need to identify ourselves with our nation; we are one and the same. Daniel embraced his nation's sins and confessed as if they are his own sins." In the Old Testament, Daniel is depicted as sincerely praying, calling upon God for the Hebrew people to be liberated from Babylon after 70 years of exile. The pastor refers to Daniel to express that meeting attendees are a small number of people praying for the sins of the entire nation. In this discourse, the meeting attendees are believed righteous and the wicked are the majority of Seoul's residents, who support the impeachment, or liberals who are North Korean sympathisers and supporters of homosexuality.

With President Park on the verge of impeachment, Pastor Kim also prays that this is " … because we did not pray for the administration. Forgive us. This is the Korean Church's fault. This is our sin. This is the nation's fault …. God forgive us" (data #1, 12:00). Then he shouts, "The enemy devil, leave us! Leave our country! The pro-North Korea party, leave us! The enemy devil, leave us! Let angels support the government!" As he prays, the caption on the video clip reads "Fix us and use us despite our many sins!" (data #1, 12:53). This reasoning provides a contrast between the sins of "us" that are forgivable and fixable and the deeds of the enemy devil – the pro-North Korea party – which should be banished from the nation.

The "enemy devil" and "angels" come from the Parable of the Weeds in the New Testament, attributed to Jesus:

> The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of evil, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of time, and the harvesters are the angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in fire, so it will be at the end of time. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil (Matthew 13:38–41).

In this narrative, the kingdom of the devil will be destroyed by angels sent by God. The devil is a target domain signified by the enemy who has sown weeds in the field of God. In Pastor Oh's prayer, the enemy devil refers to those people who support North Korea and who follow its ideology. Although the pastor's message does not directly address politically charged issues, the delivery of these biblical metaphors in the midst of the political rally frames this political situation as a Holy War between "us" and the communists, who sympathise with North Korea, or the "wicked," who support homosexuals. As Machin and Mayr (2012, 163–185) discuss, metaphors are deliberately persuasive, especially when used in political discourse. Additionally, metaphors have hidden ideological loadings due to the way in which they can conceal and shape understandings while at the same time giving the impression that they reveal them (Fairclough 1995). These metaphors become more powerful when the metaphorical language is used by people who share the same religious and political perspectives. The "us" versus "them" division that is typically found in the process of group polarisation and the use of pronouns "us," "we" and "them" are widely used to align "us" alongside or against particular ideas (Fairclough 2000, 51). During the prayer meeting, the spoken words, captions and hand-held signs of the attendees together evoke ideas that distinguish "us" from "them" as collectives with homogeneous ideas.

As the Bible stories used are about Israel and Israelites, the participants need a symbol that relates their identity with that of these biblical entities. That the Israeli flag represents the modern State of Israel is not a problem as the eschatological view on Israel does not distinguish between the Israel of the Old Testament and the contemporary State of Israel (see below). The Israeli flag is a tool that the pastors employ to create collective action frames – diagnostic, prognostic and motivational – based on their interpretation of Christianity and its texts.

"God Built Our Nations": Equating South Korea with Israel

Waving the Israeli flag is not just meant to evoke Bible stories of ancient Israel. Pastor Kwon, a former president of the CCK, briefly insinuates the meaning of this flag-waving during the prayer meeting and the pro-Park rallies (data #1, 17:40; Figure 5):

> Today, some of you might find a new flag here. This is the flag of Israel…. 70 years ago, both nations, Korea and Israel, were founded like a miracle …. Next year will be the 70th anniversary of the recovery and the founding of the two nations …. Thus, when I give the benediction at the end of this meeting, holding the Korean national flag in my right hand and the Israeli flag in my left, please say "Amen! Amen! Amen!"

According to Pastor Kwon, God saved South Koreans and built the country in 1948. Pastor Oh, too, alludes to this earlier in a prayer, saying, "To Father God, who created our nation and built the Republic of Korea, we give thanks and glory" (data #1, 0:15). Putting aside the fact that many countries gained independence after World War II, that these two countries were established in the same year is important to this Christian group in several ways.

The pastors highlight that the 70th anniversary of the two countries would see a "revival." Pastor Kim explained: "During Israel's subjugation by Babylon, Daniel confessed the sin of his people as his own, and God listened to Daniel's prayer and

Figure 5. Pastor Kwon delivers a benediction for participants holding South Korea and Israel flags
Source: See note 4.

freed the Israelites from 70 years of slavery" (data #1, 6:45–11:45). While this is said, the video shows the crowd kneeling on icy ground, praying and in tears, and the captions read, "Let the revival happen in this land once again!" and "Please, use this country for your glory once again!" In this evangelical discourse, there is a period of desolation prior to the revival. This refers to a perceived decline for South Korean Christianity, neglected over secular (or liberal) values, but that God will soon revive Christianity. In general terms, participants are praying for a revival of Christianity and churches in South Korea. However, if we consider the political context, where a conservative president was on the verge of impeachment with a liberal leader likely to replace her, it is clear that churches fear the rise of a liberal administration and a loss of power and influence. Therefore, they wish to witness a revival and the political defeat of their rivals.

This South Korean Christian group also wants the revival of the State of Israel. This meaning is made clear in the NPC's annual pilgrimage tour to Israel, in addition to its regular prayer meetings.[6] During the pilgrimage, participants meet with local pastors who work for Israeli Christian organisations. This indicates that the group is working for the rise of Christianity in Israel. As with many South Korean Christians, the group believes that Jesus's second coming, which all Christians in the world are waiting for, will happen when Israel is fully restored (that is, Christianised), and that South Korea, with its strong mega-churches that are sending tens of thousands of missionaries across the world annually, will complete the restoration of Israel (see Kim 2014, 158–159). However, their religious goal is also connected to the political situation in South Korea. The theme of the pilgrimage tour is "the restoration of Israel, the reunification of the Korean Peninsula and the calling of the Korean nation." This means that Israel's restoration will be completed by a "unified Korea" (where there are no communists). Therefore, by highlighting the 70th anniversary during the prayer meeting, the pastors indicate that a revival is coming; therefore, Christians cannot confer power to any party deemed pro-North Korean and "supporters" espousing liberal ideals.

Moreover, by equating the two countries, Pastor Kwon tacitly touches upon a controversial political topic. His message reinforces the right-wing position on when the Republic of Korea was founded (see Park 2009). Many citizens believe that the Republic of Korea was constitutionally formed through the Korean Provisional Government created during Japanese rule in 1919. However, those on the right have claimed that the Republic was founded in 1948, when President Rhee Syngman proclaimed a republic after gaining independence from Japan in 1945 (Park 2009). This is to highlight the legitimacy of President Rhee's regime despite his dishonourable resignation after 12 years of presidency and a people's uprising. As Rhee was a Christian and lived in the USA, conservative Christians believe that South Korea was established on the basis of Christian values and experienced a dramatic proliferation of churches and economic development. Therefore, by equating the two countries and claiming that the Korean nation is as special as the Israeli nation, Pastor Kwon reinforces the controversial right-wing political agenda as well. The Israeli flag is used as a symbol that supports such discourses and frames.

"People's Will" and "God's Will": Making Christian Identity Salient in Pro-Park Rallies

So far, we have explored the role of the Israeli flag as a framing tool for justifying the participation of Christians in political rallies and in supporting the right-wing agenda. However, the role of the Israeli flag is not only to uphold their political identity. Different from non-Christian participants who waved two national flags at the pro-Park rallies, the waving of the Israeli flag indicates the prayer meeting attendees' desire to make their group identity salient within the pro-Park rallies.

At the beginning of the march to Seoul Station after the end of the prayer meeting, Pastor Oh leads the rally with a large South Korean flag carried by ten people (see Figure 4). He shouts, "Hail Korea! Hail liberty in Korea! Long live Korean democracy!" (data #2, 00:15). This South Korean flag is followed by an Israeli flag of the same size, held by a similar number of people. Pastor Oh shouts, "Hail Israel! Hail the God of Israel! Hail our God!" (data #2, 00:35). Finally, the US flag follows and Pastor Oh yells, "America is our ally! America is our friend! The country protects us!" (data #2, 1:50). The South Korean flag displays the group's patriotism and political conservatism. The appearance of the US flag emphasises the group's celebration of the Korean–USA alliance and may urge the USA to side with them during the impeachment turmoil. These two flags demonstrate that the prayer meeting group's agenda and identity are in line with the entire right-wing political movement. However, the Israeli flag and the language associated with it is more indicative of the participants' religious identity.

During their previous prayer meetings and participation in pro-Park rallies, the group had waved the Korean and US flags, but the two flags did not adequately demonstrate their identity. This required the addition of the Israel flag. As their protest phrase states, the Korean and US flags represent the "people's will" and the Israel flag represents "God's will." The organisers of the prayer meeting chose an equivalent national flag that would best represent the group identity; in other words, the group wanted to add another identity without losing the existing ones. The collaboration of the three flags fully represents the uniqueness of the group within the right-wing camp, showing that it is among the rally participants but not entirely like them.

In addition, the Israeli flag indicates that *we* are fighting a Holy War in addition to the secular political war. The songs sung during the march are mostly military-style marching music, suggesting that the attendees are marching for greater causes beyond secular ones (data #2, 21:35–22:20): "And when the battle's over, we shall wear a crown in the new Jerusalem! Wear a crown, wear a crown, away over Jordan .... Even though the enemies of the Lord are strong, hold on to your army and fight for your truth. The enemies have already lost their hands in Jesus' hands."

The marchers sing along to music playing from the trucks, with the pastors leading the singing and marching. The song indicates that the attendees are participating in a Holy War and that their ultimate goal is "wearing a crown," referring to heaven. The disapproval of others becomes a path to a greater reward. While they are marching, some cars passing the crowd honk as a sign of disapproval, and the marching crowd yells back at them. When this conflict occurs, the video mutes the sound and plays sad and slow music on Jesus's sacrifice and love for sinners (data #2, 12:05–20:20). This explains the group's unique approach to the political scandal and impeachment, as exemplified by a banner stating, "We confess the

Korean Church's sins of not praying for the nation and the president. We have failed to be salt and light in the world" (data #1, 19:19; data #2, 3:58).

As discussed in the case of immigration protestors in the USA, people wave multiple national flags to show their multi-layered identities (Chavez 2006). This South Korean case supports this observation by showing that each of the three national flags represents different aspects of political and religious identities. However, in the South Korean case, the Israeli flag is a tool that connects the particular logic of South Korean evangelical Christianity to the right-wing movement's political frames.

Concluding Remarks

The aim of this study was to clarify the meaning associated with the waving of the Israeli flag at a Mizpah prayer meeting and pro-Park rally in Seoul in 2017. We analysed the language and graphics in the video recordings to see how the prayer meeting portrays itself in the pro-Park rally and how the flags are waved. In summary, we found that the Christian group uses religious metaphors to legitimise its participation in the rally and uphold its political agenda. Multiple metaphors are utilised to establish an extreme contrast between "us" and "them": the flags of Korea, Israel and the USA promote certain values and beliefs that are expected to be shared not only by the attendees of the prayer meeting but by all participants in the pro-Park rally. The metaphors demonise the liberal supporters of impeachment and call for non-participant South Korean Christians to be involved. Here, the Israeli flag provides a connection between the meeting attendees and the Israelites of the Bible. The textual and visual elements relating to the Israeli flag constitute a pro-Park conservative agenda that opposed impeachment. Moreover, in upholding their right-wing agenda, these evangelical Christians equate the building of the South Korean state to that of the State of Israel. The Israeli flag supports the group's controversial claim of the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948 and supports their political message intended to stop impeachment. Finally, by waving the three national flags together, these evangelicals make their Christian identity salient within the larger pro-Park rallies without harming their political identity. By adding the Israeli flag as part of the prayer march into the heart of the pro-Park rally, the group tries to show that its actions are in line with the "will of God," emphasising that the group's ultimate goal in this secular war is greater than victory. This separates the group from other non-Christian rally participants and legitimates its actions and determination in fighting a Holy War against its opponents during the process of impeachment. Overall, these evangelical Christians adopted the Israeli flag to serve their multi-faceted identity.

Although this Mizpah prayer meeting was supported by the country's largest Christian coalition, which is closely tied to the right-wing political movement, critics might argue that such extreme eschatological views on Israel and politicised behaviour lack a theological foundation and thus do not represent South Korea Christianity (see Cho 2014; Ryu 2004). However, it is important to note that such behaviour is a manifestation of a "sense of crisis" commonly shared by Christians in South Korea, such as a soft approach to North Korea, the rise of liberal values and the decline of Christianity. Many Christians have been introspective in response to this perceived crisis (Cho 2014), but the behaviours exhibited during the Mizpah prayer meeting reveal how evangelical

Christians lead the right-wing movement, and their religious logics and beliefs support the right-wing agenda.

The driving force of Christianity in South Korean conservative and right-wing movements leaves room for comparative studies on other emerging right-wing movements, especially in the relatively understudied Asian region. In the USA and some European countries, Nazi slogans and rhetoric are used in right-wing movements, thus providing various xenophobic, racist and anti-LGBT frames (Blee and Creasap 2010; Putnam and Littlejohn 2007). In the case of Japan, heavily debated interpretations of its colonial past in relation to neighbouring countries have motivated ultra-nationalism and xenophobic right-wing movements (Yamaguchi 2013). In Indonesia, Islamic beliefs and institutions have been used to systemically marginalise religious minorities (Hadiz 2018). The rise of right-wing movements and agendas seems to relate to the rise of anti-democratic political forces in Asia and around the world and thus requires further studies (Chacko and Jayasuriya 2018).

The scope of the present study was limited by the nature of its data. Admittedly, the two video clips contain limited information about the meeting and related activities. However, this event did not produce a lot of evidence and access to the movement's leadership is limited due to hostility towards researchers who are considered outsiders. Therefore, this study focused on messages and visuals from the prayer meeting where the Israeli flag was first introduced to the attendees. Moreover, as this study focused on the micro-analytic perspective of discourse analysis, it did not discuss other aspects of the group's organisation and work, such as the NPC's sources of funding, its connection with conservative US Christians and its position on Palestinian issues. We suggest that further studies broaden the understanding of this phenomenon through various qualitative research approaches, including ethnographic methods. Finally, despite the efforts of the prayer meeting organisers, the presence of the Israeli flag probably confused ordinary citizens. This study is inconclusive regarding whether the waving of the flag of Israel successfully served the purpose of the far-right Christian coalition. Nonetheless, it offers a window on the intertwining of religious and political messages at these right-wing rallies and how Christianity provides religious rhetoric to achieve both political and religious goals in South Korea.

Notes

1. Mizpah is the name of a few cities mentioned in the Old Testament. It means "watchtower" or "lookout" in Hebrew. In the First Book of Samuel, Israelites gather at Mizpah and confess their sins and then God saves them from the invasion of the Philistines (see 1 Samuel: 7). In the Book of Esther, Queen Esther prays and fasts for three days and finds the courage to risk her life in pleading with her husband, King Ahasuerus, to save the Israelites from destruction (see Esther: 4).
2. According to the evangelical social scientist David Moberg (1972), the Great Reversal was an the early twentieth century behavioural shift of US evangelicals away from social concerns – associated liberal theology – to individualised attention to conversion, salvation and a personal relation with God.
3. For details on the decline of Protestantism in South Korea, see Cho (2014, 317–318).
4. The video content can be found on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPBRRpJoL3Q (Part 1 – Public prayer); https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83yqN_jU6UI (Part 2 – Marching with flags)

5. This is based on an eschatological view that the second coming of Jesus will happen when Israel is fully restored. The restoration of Israel means that the Jewish people – believed to be God's chosen people – will be returned to their historic homeland and that they, as a nation, will finally accept Jesus. Korean churches believe (or hope) that South Korea will be used by God to complete the restoration of Israel (see Kim 2014, 160).

6. See Mizpah Korea's Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/mizpahkorea).

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Disclosure Statement

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