Special Feature

Volatile Biopolitics: Postwar Korean Cinema's Bodily Encounter with the Cold War*

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Introduction: Unfinished Cold War and Its Bodily Presence in Korean Cinema

Not surprisingly, "the Koreas under the legacy of the Cold War" is a recurring theme in contemporary Korean big-budget films. Quite a number of Korean blockbusters, including *Shiri* (1999), *JSA* (2000), *Double Agent* (2003), *Silmido* (2003), *Taegukgi* (2004), and *Welcome to Dongmakgol* (2005), have revived the haunting memories of the Korean War or have drawn visual pleasure from the uneasiness of North-South relations. However, it can also be noticed in these films that the long-heralded images of North Koreans as villains or enemies have waned and different types of relationships between South Koreans and North Koreans have emerged. To explain this trend briefly, two recent films, Jang Cheolsu's *Secretly, Greatly* (2013) and Won Shin-yeon's *The Suspect* (2014) show new entry points of understanding the endless Cold War politics on the peninsula, which concerns the crucial relationship between body and power. For instance, *Secretly, Greatly*, an action comedy-drama, features a North Korean sleeper agent who disguises himself as a village idiot living a less than mundane life, while *The Suspect* explores the dark and tragic side of the North Korean issue, introducing a North Korean defector who was once a top trained spy before becoming a suspect for a political crime. What is relevant here is the fact that these two figures address the bio-politics of the Cold War surveillance system through critical questioning of bodies at the border.[1] Describing the

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1. In fact, two films propose this issue in contrasting figures of representation. First, taking a look at *The Suspect*, which deals more directly with conflicts between North Korean terrorists and South Korean government agencies, the film contains many interesting scenes of a pervasive camera-eye through which multi-screened, overflowing, and excessive biopolitical images are projected on a big screen. The society of spectacle transforms the interior room of the NSA (National Security Agency) into a simulacrum of a surveillance society. However, the suspect, who is innocent from the beginning, succeeds in running away from surveillance by manipulating his North Korean body into the body stream of an ordinary citizen. In contrast, *Secretly, Greatly* seems not to engage in the biopolitical logic of sovereign power at surface. However, as much as the configuration of national conflicts is anchored on the farcical aesthetics of ideology, the film shows another distinctive cinematic image of a North Korean subjectivity traversing the border. In *Secretly, Greatly*, the North Korean spy escapes the heightened surveillance system of South Korea by concealing his identity with the comedic performance of abject behaviors, including foolish tripping, constantly picking his nose, publicly voiding excrement, and "artfully" being

peculiar lives of North Koreans on other side of the peninsula, the two films attempt to present two ways of escaping or dismantling the surveillance system of biopolitics; either by exceeding the standard or by being far below the standard of social norms, either by being a perfectly sacred human or by being less than human, an animal. Eventually, in each case the figure can be killed by either of the two nations, but cannot be sacrificed at all. These two contemporary figures of the North Korean subject show excellent examples concerning the problems of North Koreans living in the territorial space of South Korea under the on-going atmosphere of the Cold War.

To trace back this contemporary apparition of biopolitics to its historical bedrock, we see that it was under the geopolitics of the Cold War that South Korea began to utilize the biopolitics of creating the proper bodies of citizens. In the context of the Cold War, politics of the body sustained the rhetoric of a strong nation body that could be nurtured by anti-communism on the one hand, and global modernization, on the other hand. Along with the military junta of Park Chung Hee, Korean society was forced to undergo the state-driven project of modern nation building, mainly including the consolidation of anti-communist national identity and the adoption of various techniques to remake the populace into useful and docile members of the nation. In her book *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, Seungsook Moon coins the term "military modernity" for the Park Chung Hee regime's authoritarian modernity project.[2] In this context, it is not surprising to see that an anti-communist national identity was consolidated by the amalgamation of violent coercion and disciplinary bio-politics during the Cold War era. Also, another significant factor of military modernity is the economic-driven policy of industrialization and urbanization.[3] The project of economic modernization, based on high productivity and strong authoritarianism, was imagined as being

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teased by children.

2. The notion of military modernity connotes three processes of sociopolitical and economic formation: "the construction of the modern nation as an anti-communist policy, the making of its members as duty-bound 'nationals,' and the integration of the institution of male conscription into the organization of the industrializing economy" (Moon 2005, 18).
3. In his book, *Transformations in Twentieth Century Korea*, Steven Hugh Lee points out, "[d]uring these years, policy-makers and bureaucrats in the republic also established some of the foundations for the longer term accelerated integration of the peninsula into the capitalist world system, a process that has been described as Korea's 'globalization'" (Lee and Chang, 2006, 155).

inseparable from the military control of the nation-state.

What is at stake is a topographically precarious boundary between the inclusive and the exclusive in Cold War biopolitics. Some types of bodies and lives have been incorporated into the political realm of sovereign subjects while others were excluded. However, even with a glimpse at the aforementioned films, the dual understanding of bodies in postwar Korea did not find its replica in the cinematic space where non-sovereign, border-crossing, and volatile bodies abounded. The paper will trace back to the 1950s and 1960s in order to reframe the scope of Cold War biopolitics by examining the bodies of problematic subjects such as North Korean refugees, secret spies, military prostitutes, and uprooted female workers that were located at the margin of law and sovereign territory. Through the comparative analyses of *The Hand of Destiny* (dir. Han Hyungmo, 1954), *Aimless Bullet* (dir. Yu Hyunmok, 1961), *Kinship* (dir. Kim Su-yong, 1963), and *The Devil's Stairway* (dir. Lee Manhee, 1964), the paper argues that the paradoxical dialectics between the sovereign power and non-sovereign bodies makes the Cold War biopolitics of South Korean culture quite volatile. This work of reframing the scope of biopolitcs in post-38th parallel will enable us to better understand the relationship between power, body, and life in Cold War Korea.

Cold War Biopolitics and the Paradox of a Bare Life

After liberation, South Korea, like other newly independent nation-states in postcolonial Asia, encountered two urgent tasks: on the one hand, that of overcoming colonial memories, and on the other hand, of strengthening national bodies. Recent scholarships on postwar Korean society and culture underscore the cultural dilemmas of these agendas. For example, while Theodore Hughes (2014)' *Literature and Film in Cold War South Korea* delineates the various practices of negating colonial memories in postcolonial Korean society, John Dimoia (2013)'s *Reconstructing Bodies: Biomedicine, Health, and Nation-Building in South Korea Since 1945* traces the systematic construction of a public health infrastructure and the bio-political intervention of physical bodies under Western medicine. What connects two seemingly different agendas together is the Cold War politics that was driven by "the American mission to reform the world according to its own theories of capitalist modernization" (Day and Liem

2010, 1).

In this vein, the paper suggests that Cold War biopolitics is the discursive apparatus of the intertwined realm of power and body that sustains the two-headed postwar ideology made up of anti-communism and global modernity. This double structure of Cold War biopolitics is something that is commonly found in postwar East Asian nation-states revealing how the Cold War culture reconstructs a neo-colonial world system. In other words, the postcolonial nation-states, which were oftentimes labeled in between "free Asia" and "underdeveloped country," eagerly engaged in the visual politics and bio-politics of authoritarian developmentalism that the United States promoted to advocate its own capitalist vision. The East Asian experience of the Cold War, in this sense, was far distant from what John Gaddis called "a long peace" to indicate the West's ideological balance in the period from the end of the World War II to its official demise in 1989 (Gaddis 2005).

To consider the problematic life of North Koreans in South Korea during the Cold War era, two aspects need to be scrutinized critically. First, the Cold War era should not be limited to a unique historical period defined by the deterministically polar conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, but as a complicated topographical dynamic of the national interior and the outside world. This reminds us of what Partha Chatterjee points out in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. He remarks that one of the urgent tasks for the newly wed nation-state couple is to separate the domains of the inside and the outside.[4] Likewise, a critical point of this paper is that the Cold War means less the historical period than one of the principal logic of spatial and corporeal construction in which everything was calibrated in the dichotomous thinking under the Cold War mapping (Law 2009, 222). The second aspect is related to this dimension: as an internalizing and daily principle of living under geopolitical division, the Cold War took place not only in the realm of ideology and history but also in the realm of living space and culture. Wondam Baek (2009, 15) points out, "[r]egardless of the former colonial ruler, the colony, the free world and the communist camp, the Cold War becomes the

4. The original text is as follows: "[a]pplying the inner/outer distinction to the matter of concrete day-to-day living separates the social space into the home and the world. The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity" (Chatterjee 1993, 120).

cultural logic that regulates the consciousness and daily life of people in East Asia in the process that the frame of a nation-state has set in." And, this cultural sense of Cold War could bring forth what Heonik Kwon (2010, 157) refers to as the "field of semantic struggle and the decomposition of representational hierarchy." Paying critical attention to these aspects, the paper chooses a set of films that foreground and, sometimes, overturn the cultural and everyday-based practice of biopolitics, rather than war films in which conventional representations of North Korean soldiers were very popular in postwar Korea.

The geopolitical and cultural milieu of the Cold War endorsed the biopolitics of creating the proper bodies of citizens through the intersection between institutional and biopolitical models of power. In other words, as soon as a territorial issue between North and South turned into an ideological conflict between communism and "the free world," it also absorbed the legal and biopolitical distinction between lawful bodies and unlawful, thus criminal bodies. However, the troubling problem lies in that the whole issue of biopolitics does not remain a simple cut between social life and unruly life. Especially, the biopolitical practice of the Cold War regime asks us to draw a much more complicated picture and leads us to another hidden point of Cold War biopolitics. It relates to the speculation on the secret ties uniting power and "life" itself which goes beyond the relationship between power and social forms of life. Using the critical figure of "homo sacer" (the sacred man) in ancient Rome, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben expands Foucault's discussion of biopolitics.[5] According to Agamben (1998, 11), the life of the homo sacer is a paradoxical one since its "bare life remains included in politics in the forms of the exception, that is, as something that is included solely through an exclusion." To explain briefly, homo sacer is originally the ancient figure of the sacrificial man, who can be killed but whose sacrifice is banned because its body is already contaminated or defiled. Furthermore, what makes the figure more complicated is the fact that the killing of homer sacer was exempted by Roman law. Excluded from the social circle, but functioning as the very essence of modern politics, the

5. Agamben (2000, 9) is engaged with Foucault's notion of biopower in a critical way, saying "[t]he Foucaulian thesis will then have to be corrected or, at least, completed, in the sense that what characterizes modern politics is not so much the inclusion of zoē in the *polis*—which is, in itself, absolutely ancient—not simply the fact that life as such becomes a principal objects of the projections and calculations of State power."

bare life of these bodies indicates the paradox within the structure of power. In that sense, what is granted is not its life but its death, and, "what is at stake in its way of living is living itself" (Agamben 2000, 4).

Why is this ancient form of life still relevant when thinking about the Cold War? It is because of the paradoxical topology that encapsulates a body of bare life. The bare life of homo sacer is excluded from the realm of politics but is included only through the structure of exception. In other words, the body of bare life that is located outside of the normative social space, yet remains an essentially internal part of its political rule. Likewise, we can find this paradox of inclusive exclusion in the figures of North Korean spies, refugees, and criminal women because the sociopolitical significance of homo sacer lies in the conundrum of the subjects in constant danger of death, abandonment, and exile. And what determines their fate comes from the state power. As a liminal being who crosses the border, they address what the ground for the definition of citizenship is. The reframing of biopolitics, based on the distinction between bare life (in other words, naked life, which literally translates *nuda vita*) and social life, can illuminate the paradoxical topology of North Koreans in South Korea.

With these critical aspects in mind, let me keep my focus on the 1950s and 1960s during which the early Cold War ethos was formulated and accelerated. Through the reading of seminal examples of North Korean figures in Korean Cold War cinema, this paper pays attention to how the visual politics of Korean cinema established the distinction between the inside and the outside and utilized biopolitics and violence in order to integrate North Korean figures into the social and political mainstream. On the surface, it may look odd that my discussion of Cold War culture in postwar Korea focuses not on the numerous dominant examples of war films, anti-communist films, or propaganda newsreels in the aftermath of the Korean War, but rather on the seemingly distant films of the 1950s and 1960s. However, the critical reason for this selection will become apparent when the focus is shifted from the representation of ideological subjects to the representation of bare life. How do the bodies of bare life teach us more about Cold War culture than politically stabilized bodies? To what extent does the liminal status of a bare life illuminate the paradoxical double framework of sovereign power and bio-political violence? The comparative readings of the films will lead us to understand how the violent inscription of law in Korean film noir not only creates the docile and disciplined

body, but also the liminal body of bare life, drawing the constantly changing threshold of the inside and the outside.

The Divided Visual Regimes of Body-images in *The Hand of Destiny*

Produced right after the end of the Korean War, Han Hyungmo's film *The Hand of Destiny* is a primal text of Cold War film noir. Released at the end of 1954, *The Hand of Destiny* set "the archetype of the unique complication between ideology and love in Korean films" (Jo et al. 2008, 20). It was during this period of Korean cinema that people wanted to find a way of comforting the wounded hearts of the Korean War, and "a new tax exemption policy for domestic films added a financial boon to help revitalize the film industry" (ibid.). However, its reception at the time of its release was not favorable because people found its story confusing. Also, the film had to compete with the biggest box office sensation at that time, Lee Gyu-hwan's *Chun-hyang Story* (1955). But, from a contemporary perspective that re-examines the Cold War formulation, the film discloses many interesting elements.[6] Set in the reconstructing metropolis of Seoul, the film signals the emergence of criminal subjects and foregrounds their problematic bodies in a newly formed nation-state.

In a peculiar generic hybrid of thriller, espionage, and melodrama, the film describes the North Korean partisans and spies who still remained in South Korea after the ceasefire agreement. Interestingly, it introduces the first screen image of a "female spy" by adapting the image of the "aprés-girl" into the popular imagination.[7] Played by actress Yoon Inja, the female protagonist is presented as a double subject, living a precarious life as a barmaid called Margaret, and a North Korean spy in South Korea (for this, her Korean name Jung-ae is used). Thus, her life is divided as she serves American G.I.s at night

6. Recently, *The Hand of Destiny* has begun to be considered one of the more significant film texts produced in postwar Korea.

7. The term "aprés girl" was a neologism that compounded the French word "aprés-guerre," meaning "postwar," and the English term "girl." However, its meaning is irrelevant to the direct interpretation of "postwar woman" but denotes the emergence of subversive female subjects that pursue sexual freedom and consumptive lifestyle in the postwar Asian society, departing from the old virtue of "wise mother and good wife." Refer to *Aprés Girl Reads The World of Thought* (Kwon et al. 2005).

and carries out secret missions from North Korea during daytime.

As an exemplary Cold War film text, *The Hand of Destiny* foretells the bodily formation of power and politics that the 1950s Korean film began to recognize and the 1960s military government aggressively utilized in its formation of sovereign power. The opening shot of *The Hand of Destiny* gives us a cardinal image of the bodily formation of power and surveillance. The film starts with a close-up of a man's hand holding a pipe in front of a closed door. After a long take of this close-up that feels like a still image because there is no movement, the camera shows the man's feet stepping down stairs. The audience remains blind regarding the identity of the man until he appears later as Jung-ae's communist boss. There could be many ways of reading the bodily part in relation to film image and history. One way of reading this visual compulsion to gaze upon the bodily fragments could be drawn from the history of early cinema. Close-ups are used to create shock and terror within the audience because the fragmentary images of a body were a reminder of injuries, the dismemberment, and, in a more profound way, masculine anxiety (Mulvey 1999). Or, in the context of Korean history of division, the close-up of bodily parts could be read as more allegorical than psychoanalytical. Contemporary Korean film scholar Kim So-young (2010) suggests that the visual spectacle of bodily parts is an allegorical image of the Korean peninsula divided into two nations. Considering many bodies were literally injured and disabled in the aftermath of the Korean War, the fragments of a body may stir up the war trauma and the experience of loss. However, if Kim's interpretation of bodily fragments on screen is valuable in most of time, what becomes obscure is that, in this case of opening sequence, the hand does not belong to the body of a South Korean citizen. It belongs to the other body, that is, the non-authentic and illegitimate body of a North Korean.

Here, I argue that the question of a body and its fragmentation in this film is more related to the issue of sovereign biopolitics than gendered anxiety or nationalized trauma. To make this argument further, it cannot be overlooked that this fragmented image of a body is overlapped with the title credit, *Unmyung ui son* (*The Hand of Destiny*). Here, the title implies an interesting relationship between power and the body. The term "destiny" which can also be translated as "fate" in Korean, *unmyung*, is something inseparably connected to sovereign power. In his critical essay "Fate and Character," Walter Benjamin (1978, 308) articulates that the term "fate," of which two components are "guilt"

and "despair," does not mean national destination but the political burden upon the life of people imposed by sovereign power. Furthermore, while the image tells us the hand of destiny belongs to the body of a North Korean spy, the hidden power of this visual economy is the sovereign power of Cold War-oriented South Korea. This, along with Hughes's insightful remark, "the figuring of the communist as separated out from an authentic body" reveals the relation between the biopolitics and the politics of the visual, practicing "the distribution of the visible and the invisible that produces Cold War subjects in the division system."[8]

To examine this further, I want to draw our critical attention to the ways that *The Hand of Destiny* addresses the political aesthetics of body in relation to the formation of sovereign power. There are two exemplary moments of the bodily formation of power and politics in this film. These sequences reveal how certain bodies in postwar Korean society are transformed into biopolitical subjects while other bodies of bare life turn into a fragment-image, based on the cinematic double play of exclusion and inclusion. The first example concerns the consecutive sequences in which Jung-ae goes out with her South Korean lover during the daytime and gets threatened by her North Korean boss at night. It is significant that the two lovers go out into various venues for sporting events, such as boxing, cycling, and golfing. Sports are one of the most magnificent projects of bio-politics by which modern nation states advocate healthy, strong, united, and national bodies. Contrasting to the long shots that show bodies in full posture and movement, the following night shots utilize excessively close-ups of bodily fragments and the oblique mise-en-scène of interior space.

8. He writes, "[t]he early imagining of Cold War South and North Korea is, in this way, informed by a way of seeing organized by the relation between life and death. Life/South is associated with the visible/presence, death/North belongs to the realm of the invisible/absence" (Hughes 2014, 95).

Figure 1. Full body shot of the two protagonists playing mini-golf (*The Hand of Destiny* 1954). Courtesy of Korean Film Archive.

Figure 2. The close-up of a fragmented body image (*The Hand of Destiny* 1954). Courtesy of Korean Film Archive.

Here, what is striking in the biopolitics under the umbrella of the Cold War is the way that the newly established South Korean sovereign power requires these two modes of life simultaneously: a social biological body and a bare life of homo sacer. On the one hand, by grappling with questions such as "[h]ow can we overcome the poverty and trauma that pervaded the colonial and war-time peninsula?" and "[h]ow can we be a strong independent nation different from North Korea?" the postwar Korean film discovered patterns of representation that centralize a healthy national body. On the other hand, as Hughes insightfully puts, under "the Cold War distribution of the sensible in South Korea" was the effacement of the North Koreans implemented. Likewise, the bodies of criminals and social outcasts were treated as something that corresponds with those of North Korean spies and refugees.

In this vein, the dual identity of "Margaret"/"Jung-ae" has a topological significance as it reveals the aporia of the liminal subject in a nation-state that is oriented by the Cold War dichotomy. The position of the female North Korean spy in this film presents how difficult it is to distinguish between the outside and the inside, as what was presupposed as external now reappears as the inside. For instance, when Jung-ae falls in love with a poor college student who was wrongfully accused of theft in her house, her split life becomes precariously problematic. On the one hand, from North Korean perspective, her espionage activities become hampered by a romantic pursuit for love and desire and her boss threatens her for this "contamination." On the other hand, from South Korean perspective, Jung-ae's double life, not only as a spy but also as a bargirl dealing with U.S. solders, could not be socially tolerated. At the narrative dimension, the film chooses a convenient solution to make an anti-communist declaration in the end. It turns out that her lover is actually a disguised captain in the South Korean army, and when Margaret refuses to cooperate with North Korean forces she dies as Jung-ae in the arms of her South Korean lover.

In *The Hand of Destiny*, the female North Korean spy does not belong to the realm of proper citizenship, in which the "qualified life" can be incorporated into the political body, but a liminal, defiled figure epitomizing a bare life. If the spatiotemporal structure of the Cold War power is based on exclusive inclusion,[9] the life and body of North Koreans under South Korean sovereignty resemble a bare life of homo sacer. Margaret/Jung-ae's bare life and her noir body dwell on the corporeal boundary between life and death as well as at the political borderline of the interior and the exterior.

Next, through the comparative analysis of Aimless Bullet and *Kinship*, I will examine the problematic representation of North Korean refugees and the spatial marginality of their camp. Also, I will discuss how the ambivalence of the biopolitics on North Korean residents in postwar South Korea is exemplified in two configurations of military sex laborers in the films. Exclusion and inclusion play a double role in the formation of modern national subject.

9. For instance, Yi Kangchun's *Piagol* was banned due to its supposedly "pro-communist" description of North Koreans, which is considered as violation of anti-communist law. After the director inserted an overlapping image of the Korean flag with characters at the end of the film, it could be approved for screening. For the in-depth analysis of this film, see Hughes 2012.

Precarious Families Caught in Space of Liberation: *Aimless Bullet* and *Kinship*

A comparative reading of *Aimless Bullet* and *Kinship* reveals more than an individual reading. The two films deal with the marginalized subject of Korean refugees, set in the aftermath of the Korean War. Most significantly, the cinematic space of the two films is *haebangchon*,[10] which is well known as an illegal shantytown for returned compatriots and North Korean refugees after liberation and the Korean War. The houses were built with cardboard boxes and galvanized steel, and their tiny rooms have windows without glass. Located on the southwestern side of Namsan mountain and behind the U.S. military base in Seoul, *haebangchon* was close to downtown Seoul, Namdaemun market and Seoul Station; spaces that provided the residents with some opportunities for physical labor and charity (Choi 1998). Upon the visual and spatial commentaries on the North Koreans' status in postwar South Korea, the two films, as if their thematic structure was based on the same characters, include an almost similar set of social figures: an emasculated patriarch, a sick wife, an old mother who is stuck in the past, an rebellious young brother, and a (pseudo) sister who becomes a military prostitute. However, in relation to the Cold War politics and the aligned ambition of Korean nation-state, the two films deliver different sensibilities and affects.

Aimless Bullet, based on a short story of the same title written by Lee Byeomsun, depicts *haebangchon* in a neo-realistic mode and foregrounds the loss experienced by North Korean refugees.[11] In that sense, Yu's film resists the homogeneous mnemonics of national historiography and focuses on the problems of poverty, violence, and absurdity by focusing on the hopeless life of a desperate family. Its members are the eldest son, Chul-ho, who works in an accounting office, the younger son, Young-ho, who fought for South Korea as a soldier, but has been unemployed, and later tries to rob a bank, and his sister,

10. The literal meaning of *haebangchon* is Liberation Village, reflecting the ideological assumption that North Korean refugees were liberated from oppressive communist violence.

11. As an interesting anecdote, both Yu Hyunmok and Lee Byeomsun shared a diasporic identity since they were from North Korea respectively from Hwanghae Province and from South Pyoungyang Province. Based on their personal backgrounds, they must have chosen to utilize a realistic approach to *haebangchon* and its North Korean refugees. The so-called "realistic" representation of the refugee camp and the nostalgic feeling for North Korean home were enough to irritate the eyes of state-censorship (Byun 2010, 125).

Myoungsuk who becomes a military prostitute. Juxtaposing the spatial hardship of North Korean refugees situated in the odd space of postwar Korea and the corporeal emphasis on hunger, disease, pain, loss, and shameful emotion, the film delivers the uncomfortable sense of impasse and aimlessness.

It is worthwhile to note that *Aimless Bullet* was once banned from public showings for two reasons: first, for its depiction of the miserable poverty of postwar Korean society, which was not acceptable at all in the developmental atmosphere of a free world, and second, for the portrayal of a mentally troubled North Korean refugee repeating only one phrase, "Let's go!" which reads a political desire to return to North Korea. It was done under the Motion Picture Law, which was suddenly promulgated in 1962 by the military government and reorganized the Korean film industry by controlling it very strongly during the 1960s and 1970s.[12] Then, the film was rescued from the otherwise permanent prohibition when it was invited to the San Francisco International Film Festival in 1963. However, the ban of the film appeared as "a sign of what kind of films they had to make thereafter" (Lee 1998, 145). Strong censorship and administrative control on the topics of negative representation of postwar South Korea, pro-communism, and obscenity were a way of imposing military and neo-colonial modernization. Here, what cannot be overlooked is that the construction of a proper, lawful body is closely related to the cinematic apparatus based on editing as well as the ideological apparatus of censorship. In other words, the biopolitical exclusion of improper bodies forms a parallel with the editing process of the cinematic apparatus and, furthermore, governmental censorship. In the military milieu of anti-communist development, culture was placed on the table of institutional controls. By enacting the film's site of disappearance, the cut hides from our view the "face on the cutting room floor" and paradoxically creates a smooth whole culture out of violently extracted bits and pieces. In many ways, the censorship and cutting processes are inseparably connected to the biopolitical surveillance on the cultural imagination since the act of cutting away of unwanted members also promised to make the nation be a healthy and whole body.

12. Approximately 55 film production companies were forced to close and only 16 film production companies were allowed. Lee Young-il (1998, 143-44) notes, "[t]his Motion Picture Law reflecting the film policy of the 3rd Republic of the Korean Government lasted for 10 years repeating many trials and errors by modifying regulations and enforcement ordinances four times during this decade."

Made three years after the production of *Aimless Bullet* but in the same year as the lifting of its ban from theaters, *Kinship*, a 1963 film directed by Su-yong Kim, unfolds a different story from the same place. Rotating through various modes of affect including pity and comedy, it configures the disparity between old and new generations in *haebangchon*. The descriptive and witty narrative evolves around three North Korean families that neighbor in the shabby village where most of North Korean refugees settled in the southern part of the separated Korea. Despite the diversity of their familial composition, jobs, personal faith, and character, they share a common fate of economic poverty and social degradation. As an uprooted community, they sustain a marginalized, illegitimate status of bare life. In the beginning of the film, the main character, a hot-tempered single father named Deoksam Kim, asks his son to write his name on the doorplate to insist on his right to residency. However, he has to put up another signpost of "[t]here are people living underneath" on their glassless window after his sleep was disturbed by someone on the street urinating into his room. Likewise, their living environment is frequently compared to an underground tunnel (*ttang-gul* in Korean), which is ironic since their village is on the slope of Namsan Mountain, looking down on the bustling urban city of Seoul. There is one exceptional moment that the single parent called the village a paradise when he was driven by his excitement of taking a second wife.

However, due to the generic characteristic of the film as a family melodrama in which the main actor Kim Seung-ho played a central role, *Kinship* delivers a rather optimistic vision toward the major conflicts that take place between parents and children throughout the film. At the beginning, parents force their children to follow their old way of living: a father forces a son to work in an exchange shop in the U.S. military base so that they can sell American scraps on the black market, a stepmother forces a daughter to learn a love folksong in order to make her a *kisaeng*, a man supports his old mother, ailing wife, and disabled daughter but always quarrels with his younger brother. Eventually, two youngsters, Deoksam's son Keobuk and their neighbor's daughter Ok-hee, run away from their parents to pursue their own vision of life. But, the conflicts between two generations resolve as the process of modernization in which Ok-hee and Keobuk successfully get a job at a textile factory in the Youngdeungpo area, which was famous at the height of urban industrialization. In the ending sequence, the cinematography shows two fathers who have happily forgiven their runaway offspring and the new couple Ok-hee

and Keobuk walking together toward the factory gate in a high-angle shot.

Interestingly, this type of ending was quite familiar in 1960s Korean films.[13] For instance, the end of *The Coachman*, in which a belated patriarch suffered from the loss of job and pride due to the rapid speed of postwar Korean society, shows the family happily marching together on a street after seeing that their son passed the Higher Civil Service Examination.[14] The cinematography also utilized a bird-eye view in this ending, expressing an ascending mood as well as a surveillant view. It must be clear that the visual manifesto of the two films' endings demonstrate the utopian resolution of the happy ending and its collaboration with nation-state policies based on familism and nationalism. However, in spite of their visual similarity, it is also hard to neglect that there will be fundamental difference of the two sons' (and daughters') future. For the legitimate one is successfully climbing the social ladder and the other, from North Korea, will work at a factory for the remainder of his life.

Furthermore, what draws my attention in the context of biopolitical surveillance is the way the two films deal with the illegitimate figure of the sex worker, especially the figure of the military sex worker (called *yanggongju* in Korean), which appeared under the political and economic circumstance of the U.S. military base in postwar Korea.[15] The derogatory term *yanggongju*, the literal meaning of which is Western Princess, relegated Korean women working in militarized prostitution with foreign men to the lowest status, even within the community of homo sacer. They are doubly marginalized because of their objectification as a sexual commodity and their precarious contact with foreign others. Since the end of the Korean War, the figure of *yanggongju* has appeared in numerous films including Shin Sang-ok's 1952 film *The Evil Night* and his 1958 film *A Flower in Hell*. Their representational figuration shifts from the prototype of war victim—orphaned, homeless, impoverished, raped, and forced to sell their own bodies to the foreign soldiers—to that of a femme fatale,

13. The visual paradox is that the suggestion of an open space functions as a sort of suture to the cracks and conflicts that were articulated in these film texts.

14. Kelly Jeong (2012) provides an insightful analysis of this film in her *Crisis of Gender and the Nation in Korean Literature and Cinema*.

15. In the aftermath of Korean War, the number of military sex laborers approached 20,000 only within Seoul in 1953 and were over 61,833, which took 50% of the total number of sex workers in the year of 1955 (*Chosun Ilbo*, July 27, 1953; *Hanguk Ilbo*, April 29, 1955; qtd. in Yoon et al. 2011, 166).

contaminated, shameless, materialistic, and of dangerous desires.[16]

Here, let's take a look at the different ways of configuring *yanggongju* in *Aimless Bullet* and *Kinship*. On the one hand, in *Aimless Bullet*, the figure serves both, as a signifier of victimhood and shamefulness that is willingly denied by her family. It is visually exemplified in a scene in which the male protagonist accidently discovers his sister with an American G.I. in a jeep. Wearing a Western dress and sunglasses, she looks modern and affluent, but her brother could not bear the meaning that lay beneath this appearance. Feeling ashamed, he turns around and walks away. Later, while hustling an American soldier on the street, she accidently runs into her ex-fiancé, Kyoungsik who is now a disabled war veteran. This time, she feels so terribly ashamed and guilty that she runs away from his sight.[17]

Kinship also portrays the figure of *yanggongju* when the brother of a poor family meets a girl from his hometown, Boksun, who has cut off communication with other refugees. In fashionable Western modern clothes, her affluent look makes a visual contrast with his shabby black outfit. At his suggestion of a meeting next time, she shows a mixed response of gladness and hesitance. Later, he discovers what she exactly does for a living. In the scene in which Boksun discloses her work to him, they are in her room, which is furnished with a Western double bed and decorated with the posters of Western pin-up girls' naked bodies. The boldness of this honest disclosure is something unusual considering popular ways of representing military sex workers.

It is interesting to note that, in *Aimless Bullet*, when Myoungsuk's other brother, who is planning to commit the crime of bank robbery, criticized Kyoungsik's previous negligence by saying furiously, "[t]he cripples use their disability as an excuse for hurting other people. It is the bible for the helpless. Do you know who was sacrificed in that bible? Myoungsuk. She became the first to be sacrificed." Certainly, being victimized in the place of the demarcated and emasculated nation and male subject, the female subject becomes a homo sacer who is to be sacrificed. However, as her sexualized body is considered as an impurity, her sacrifice cannot be accepted for the ritual of national recovery, as shown in *Aimless Bullet*. However, in

16. Regarding further discussion on the representation of military prostitutes in popular Korean culture and literature, see Kim 1998, 217-48.

17. Concerning the analysis of the disempowered male position, see Cho 2005.

an intriguing way, *Kinship* does not follow this politics of exclusion but shows that society can embrace this problematic figure in a newly formed family. Toward the end, Boksun takes a role of a maternal figure in the family that had just lost its sick mother, making her sincere confession and desire for rehabilitation necessary for the construction of an industrial modern nation-state.

The Return of Vanishing Female Homo Sacer in *The Devil's Stairway*

The following reading of a 1964 thriller film directed by Lee Manhee, *The Devil's Stairway*, discusses how an urban film noir possibly critiqued Cold War biopolitics.[18] Lee Manhee, like other filmmakers Yu Hyunmok and Kim Su-yong, was one of the most important filmmakers during the Golden Age of Korean cinema, acclaimed by many Korean film critics as "one of the rare directors who displayed the auteurist consciousness and enhanced the quality of 1960s Korean cinema" (Sin 2003, 145). Along with the aesthetic mode of his experimental filmmaking, Yi's principal films could be categorized into two genres of war films and noir thrillers.[19] *The Devil's Stairway*, which belongs to the second category of urban thriller film, shows that the noir sensibility in Korean cinema was heightened under the Cold War culture in which South Korea underwent one of the most vigorous and violent shaping of modern society.

Starring director Lee's female persona actress Mun Jeongsuk, *The Devil's Stairway* presents the story of a female nurse, Jinsuk, who was abandoned and murdered by her ex-lover, Dr. Hyun. The film, set in the urban space of a postwar society, encapsulates the two distorted backbones of postwar Korean society, revealing the entanglement of the global ideology of the Cold War and the regional desire for industrial modernization. As the poster of *The Devil's Stairway* shows, one of the most significant allegories throughout the film is

18. The analysis of *The Devil's Stairway* is modified from another discussion of the film that will appear in "Allegorizing Noir: Violence, Body, and Space in the Postwar Korean Film Noir" in *East Asian Film Noir* (Park, forthcoming in 2015). In the paper that has different critical emphasis, I link its corporeal and spatial allegory in relation to the principle of violence that Walter Benjamin exposes.

19. Film historian Lee Young-il refers to the latter as "the aestheticism of a pure thriller film." He writes, "[m]ost noteworthy is that director Yi withdrew himself from the simply entertaining thriller style in his early days, and moved gradually toward time, space, and movement of pure films (*Sunsu yŏnghwa*) which can be considered an aestheticism toward avant-garde films" (Lee 1998, 179).

the stairway. In film noir, stairs, as dynamic and spatially fragmented structures, often lead to catastrophe. While many American film noirs present criminal violence at the top of the stairs, in *The Devil's Stairway*, the stairways represent a male subject's ambition to step up the social ladder by marrying a hospital owner's daughter. The visual allegory of stairs as a social ladder is shown in one sequence in which Dr. Hyun and the hospital owner's daughter go out on a date. But, in an intriguing way, the film does not revolve around upward movement but shows the constant failure of transcendence, as if the stairway has its own "character" in the film. Somebody's moving upward demands another body's fall.

As the male protagonist pursues for a higher social status, Jinsuk is treated as a problematic being for the unification and development of the inner circle of society. For instance, the way that she is removed from the male protagonist's path to success—for a higher position and a profitable marriage—is quite significant. At the beginning, Jinsuk, who fell down the stairs during an argument with Dr. Hyun, has her leg severely injured, loses her baby from the shock, and is hospitalized. Soon, Dr. Hyun plans a plot for the perfect crime and stupefies her under the guise of a medical treatment. This ambitious doctor in *The Devil's Stairway* tries to get rid of his lover and unborn child using his own medical knowledge and power. Here, what needs to fall is a woman's body itself. As Karen Beckman (2003, 15) posed in her book *Vanishing Women*, we need to ask questions of "not only why it is a woman who vanishes but what kind of woman in this period is most in danger of vanishing into thin air." In this film, even though it is for a brief moment, Jinsuk's background is disclosed as that of a North Korean refugee during the Korean War—a so-called "woman without any roots." With this information, her disappearance reveals not only the critical significance of vanishing women under a certain social environment, but also exemplifies the gendered life of homo sacer (in this sense, homo sacra), which needs to be exclusively included for the developmental parade of a male-oriented society.[20]

On a rainy night, he carries her stunned body down by the steep exterior stairway and dumps the body into the muddy pond in the hospital's backyard.

20. Interestingly, what is vanishing is not only the body of a woman but also her death itself. In her critical examination of a tradition female vanishing in visual culture and its cultural and political significance, Karen Beckman (2003, 11) points out, "[w]e never see the bodies in question, not only because they are long dead but because the deaths of these bodies were disappeared along with the bodies themselves. Part of violence of disappearance lies in the way it renders its victims fundamentally inaccessible."

Calculating the passage of days, Dr. Hyun waits for the body to emerge from the pond so that the death may be concluded to be a suicide. However, Jinsuk's corpse does not appear and it drives him to become extremely unstable. And this violent moment of abandonment is orchestrated with the visual and aural images of dark buildings, flickering lamps and pouring rain to create a sense of thrill and suspense. However, as the story goes into its second half, *The Devil's Stairway* foregrounds the revenge plot that was popular at the time. After Dr. Hyun succeeds in marrying the daughter of his boss, he suffers from the haunting effect of Jinsuk's ghostly apparition. At this point, the film provides a rare moment of subversion within the history of the vanishing woman. The disciplinary, masculine space of the hospital turns out to be a horrific space.

The dénouement of *The Devil's Stairway* shows how her ghostly apparitions haunting the disciplinary, masculine space of the hospital. The interior mind of the male protagonist is completely occupied by hysterical anxiety. In an exemplary sequence, the place of secret love turns out to be a horrific space. One sequence shows that he tries to catch her—in fact, her ghostly image—in the examination room that was the first place of his seduction. Likewise, Dr. Hyun loses his power of seeing and examining objects and is disturbed by aural and illusory images. Vision and visual representation are interrupted by sound and invisible presences. The psychological dimension of horror creates the optical misunderstanding. The limit of vision unsettles the boundary between dead objects and the living being, creating the ghostly feeling of the uncanny. In these shots of ending sequence, a female homo sacra's haunting presence is represented by a multitude of her faces in the surgery room. Dr. Hyun is horrified by these faces and finally falls from the stairway as he runs from her ghostly face. At the very end, it turns out that Jin-suk has not died but has actually enacted her own disappearance and apparition with the help of other female colleagues. The film ends with her startling remark: "[s]ince I was not dead, he could not be convicted for the crime of murder according to the law. Therefore, I chose this way to get revenge."

Conclusion

I have read four exemplary films from the 1950s and 1960s focusing on the relationship between the sovereign power and non-sovereign body in the context of South Korean Cold War biopolitics. The simultaneous enactment of inclusion and exclusion captured the life of North Korean refugees, secret spies, military sex workers, and uprooted female workers in postwar Korea, disclosing what lies underneath the visual and biological politics of the Cold War. Throughout the paper, I have insisted on qualifying the notion of homo sacer and its bare life to draw our attention to the complicated topology of biopolitics. This critical figure helps us to understand the life-form of North Korean subjects in South Korea as an eccentric form of life. The films analyzed in this essay, such as *The Hand of Destiny* (1954), *Aimless Bullet* (1961), *Kinship* (1963), and *The Devil's Stairway* (1964), are critical Cold War cultural texts that foreground the cultural and everyday-based practice of biopolitics. We have seen that they present the dual mode of excessive bodily formations as well as show the vanishing process of a North Korean female body, which I called *female homo sacer*. Particularly, the body of a female homo sacer, which needs to be included as an exceptional state for the foundation of sovereign power but at the same time be abandoned for the sake of its development, became something fundamental to the Cold War biopolitics.

As long as there will be more and more North Koreans who try to cross the border between the North and South, the distinction between a bare life and a social life will be always in the hands of a sovereign power. And, the paradox of their life will never stop.

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Abstract

The dominant rhetoric of Cold War culture in the last seventy years has facilitated the dichotomous framework of South and North, good and evil, the proper and the improper, and the humanistic and the anti-humanistic. Particularly, under a dual economy of visual and corporeal regime in postwar South Korea, certain types of bodies and lives have been incorporated into the political realm of sovereign subjects while others have been excluded. However, there were also liminal, border-crossing, and volatile bodies such as North Korean refugees, secret spies, military sex workers, and uprooted female workers that were located at the margin of law and sovereign territory. The paper probes into the problematic topography of inclusion and exclusion concerning the life of North Koreans under Cold War biopolitics. For instance, such figures as shown in *The Hand of Destiny* (1954), *Aimless Bullet* (1961), *Kinship* (1963), and *The Devil's Stairway* (1964) ask us to inquire peculiar ways of configuring Cold War biopolitics based on the production of healthy, strong, united, and social bodies. To speculate these figures based on the framework of Giorgio Agamben, the bare life of North Koreans in postwar South Korea has been something that needs to be included as an exceptional state for the foundation of sovereign power but at the same time abandoned for the sake of its development. Through comparative analyses of these films, this paper argues that the paradoxical dialectics between sovereign power and non-sovereign bodies makes the Cold War biopolitics of South Korean culture inevitably volatile. This work seeks to reframe the scope of biopolitics in post-38th parallel era through the filmic articulations of non-sovereign bodies in order to better understand the relationship between power, body, and life in Cold War Korea.

Keywords: Cold War biopolitics, postwar Korean cinema, North Korean refugees, sovereign power, the bare life of non-sovereign body

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