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Master's Thesis of International Studies

Democracy and Political Subjectivization
–Women's Movements in South Korea Since 2016–

민주주의와 정치적 주체화:
2016 년 이후 대한민국의 여성운동을 중심으로

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Abstract

South Korea has seen a successful consolidation of democracy ever since its democratization in the late 1980s. However, the impact of democracy in terms of equality has been skewed, especially lacking in the field of women's rights and gender equality. This thesis focuses on the two prominent events in the recent years that have shifted the direction of gender discourse in the Korean politics—the Gangnam Station Femicide case of 2016 and the Me Too movement of 2018—reinterpreting their importance through the political philosophy of Jacques Rancière. The reading of recent events as a process of political subjectivization of women allows interpreting the current conflicts in Korea not as a threat but an opportunity for greater equality and democracy. However, the prospect is not all optimistic as the unfolding of women's subjectivization severely relies on the mechanisms of consensus democracy as a way of resolving the wrong.

Keywords: Democracy, subjectivization, Korean women's movement, women's rights

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I. Introduction

Contemporary world history is the history of ideological contentions where democracy emerges as the winner. Division, competition, and antagonism between the Communist bloc and the democratic West that very much shaped the literal and figurative global landscapes for almost forty years ended abruptly with the collapse of the Soviet Union, now more than three decades ago. The West had won, it was the end of history, and democracy had come out on top as the greatest political ideology. Since then, it has situated itself as the hegemonic political system across the planet; despite the status it enjoys, however, there remains much debate regarding its scope and content.

Meanwhile, 1970s and 1980s saw a spike in democratization all around the world, starting from Europe to Latin America to Asia in what Samuel Huntington termed the third wave of democratization. South Korea (hereafter Korea) was one of the most successful cases of this “third-wave” democratization, surviving amid numerous democratic reversals elsewhere and remaining to this day as a consolidated liberal democracy (Hahm, 2008). As the conception of democracy remains contentious, however, the discussion on how democratic Korean society is today would be highly polemical. If one accepts a broader concept of democracy reaching into the socioeconomic sphere and rights of the citizens, one would find multiple areas where Korean political system is lacking in achieving higher levels of equality. One such area is women’s rights and gender equality,¹ where the cultural heritage and historical progression render a skewed and rather slow development.

While Korea achieved economic and political modernization at an unprecedented rate, Korean women’s socioeconomic status rose correspondingly; this

¹ It must be noted with emphasis that while this thesis uses the terms “gender” and “gender equality” in reference to women’s rights primarily, the concept of gender is also highly contested and a dichotomous understanding of it may be in fact imbued with the police logic.

is indirectly manifested in the changing gender preference in the Korean society from predominantly son preference to increasing daughter preference (Eun, 2013). Women nowadays enjoy far more education and job opportunities than those from 20 years ago. But the status of women and women's rights in the Korean society still tend to be sub-par, as is visible in numerous indices published by international institutions such as the OECD and the United Nations. According to OECD, Korea scored second highest in violence against women measured in terms of attitudes toward violence, percentage of women who have experienced physical and/or violence in their life, laws on domestic violence, rape, and sexual harassment among the OECD countries in 2014. (OECD, 2014). In the political sphere, Korea placed 30th out of 35 countries in the proportion of female legislators in 2017, and this is with the gender quota requirement in place. In 2018, Korea had the largest gender wage gap (OECD, 2017; OECD, 2018).

Many political scientists trace such gender inequality to the influence of Confucian patrimonialism; the Confucian emphasis on education, family order, and elite paternalism tended to favor males as heads of family and leaders in politics (Im, 2010). The deeply embedded cultural characteristic of Confucianism changed little through Japanese colonial era, which manifested itself in many aspects of the society. Gender discriminatory colonial laws, such as the family-head system, carried into modern Korean state without questions, and the role of female independence fighters was relatively undermined compared to their male counterparts. As most of the rulings Korean elite were male and not free of the colonial past, some even argue as far as that they willingly turned a blind eye to the colonial remnants of discriminatory legal system in favor of patriarchal family order, which readily extended to the organizational structure of the state (Yang, 2006).

Moreover, the issues and debates surrounding democracy itself have garnered much attention in the academic and political spheres around the globe, with many scholars expressing concerns over reversals, crises, and even death of democracy worldwide (Huntington, 1991; Kurlantzick, 2013; Pzeworski, 2019). Korea is no exception. Prominent political scientists like Hyug-Baeg Im and Jang-Jip Choi have warned against the possible deterioration of Korean democracy, the latter ironically pointing the finger at the successful installations of peaceful candlelight demonstrations that have been celebrated as its epitome as the very beginning of its demise (Seoul Shinmun, 2021). Multiple political and social issues are presented by the media and academia alike as challenges to the Korean politics; gender conflicts in particular have taken the center stage in the recent years. In the latest by-election, for example, feminism and anti-feminism became an important—perhaps overly and unjustly so—issue among the younger voters in their 20s. The election outcome displayed clearly that there was a huge discrepancy in party preference and voting patterns between males and females. Major politicians interpreted this outcome as the males in their 20s voicing the unfairness in policies of affirmative actions, while many women viewed the divergence as a severe backlash to the recent women’s movements and pointed out dangers of overrepresentation of male voice in politics. In fact, the newly elected representative of the opposition party openly deprecated women’s demands of equality and positioned himself as the speaker for the “rights” of able and competent men of younger generation. Such phenomenon is significant not only in terms of gender equality, but also in the quality of the celebrated Korean democracy, for freedom and equality are two main pillars that uphold the principles of modern democracy.

The purpose of this thesis is thus to connect women's rights and recent gender struggles in Korea with the idea of democracy, and with the concept of equality in particular. To do this, I draw from a specific understanding of democracy and politics based on the work of a French philosopher, Jacques Rancière. The aim is to read the recent women's rights mobilization in Korea through Rancière's concept of political subjectivization,² especially in the case of Gangnam Station Femicide in 2016 and the constituent responses to the crime, as well as the ensuing Me Too Movement in 2018, purposely placing these events within the historical and political context of Korean democracy. These two particular cases are selected as representative cases marking a decisive shift from the previous movements of women's rights in Korea. The Gangnam Station case was the first time the words "misogyny" and "femicide" made their appearances in the mainstream public (Lee, 2016), and the Me Too movement, especially Kim Jieun's case, was meaningful in its scope and the fact that it took place after the series of candlelight demonstrations had brought impeachment and election of new, what was perceived to be more "democratic" government.

Since democratization, *de jure* equality of women has improved correspondingly to the economic and political development of the country; the mainstream women's movements also focused on establishing institutional equality between men and women. However, the emerging gender conflicts in Korea reveal the disillusionment of Korean women over their guaranteed equality that had been attained and slowly improved throughout the years. Gangnam Station Femicide Case in 2016 served as the catalyst for this crude disillusionment, as the murder of a young woman exposed the vulnerability and fragility of *de jure* gender equality in the

² This word is the translation of the French word *subjectivation*. Although the English translation of the book *Disagreement* translates this word as "subjectification," I have adopted "subjectivization" based on the annotation in the Korean translation of *Disagreement* that Rancière himself preferred "subjectivization" as the English equivalence of *subjectivation*.

Korean society. This case shocked many women into the harsh reality that despite the improvements in legal and socioeconomic status, women were still at risk of being denied their most fundamental right to life. Similarly, the outbreak of Me Too movement exposed how women were objectified into sexual beings at workplaces and denied of their right to their body. Thus I argue that the response to these cases serves as a prime example of political subjectivization as outlined by Rancière in his work, *Disagreement*, and that such subjectivization provides a democratic opportunity and the power to extend equality between anyone and anyone at all, which is a key concept in Rancière's conception of politics. Through this, I suggest a different way to interpret the current conflicts and struggles in the Korean society that many view as harmful or plaguing.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. To begin, I will first briefly review the existing literature on the concept of democracy and its relations to women's rights in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 will elaborate on Rancière's idea of politics and democracy, with specific emphasis on equality and politics as a process of subjectivization, democratic opportunities arising from situations of dispute. Here I will outline the research questions and how Rancière's concepts fit into the research design—the general approach to the problem posed. Chapter 4 will visit and reconstruct the historical background that more or less shapes Korean politics today, focusing on the democratization of Korea and women's movements. Chapter 5 analyzes two prominent cases in recent women's movement and mobilization, the Gangnam Station Femicide case of 2016 and the Me Too Movement in 2018, the latter centering on the case of Kim Jieun, attending secretary to then-Chungnam Provincial Governor Ahn Hee-Jung. In this chapter, the ideas and concepts of Rancière mentioned in Chapter 3 are actively applied and utilized to understand these events as a process of political

subjectivization of Korean women. Then, in Chapter 6, this analysis will render a reinterpretation of the current political and social environment in Korea not as a mere crisis of democracy but as an opportunity of democratic opening. Chapter 7 will end with conclusions of such analysis.

II. Literature Review

Before jumping into the discussion of Rancière's concept of politics and subjectivization, it would be necessary to first briefly go over the existing literature on democracy and its relations to women's rights. The word democracy comes from a combination of Greek words *demos* and *kratos*, simply meaning "rule by the people." This etymological breakdown of the word, however, is insufficient in capturing the dynamics of what the term has come to encompass as a modern political system and calls for an expansion of its meaning with regards to the how, the why, and actual examples of it in the world today.

1. The (Contested) Concept of Democracy

The historical prototype of democracy is the direct democracy of Athenian citizens, where the term derives itself. However, it is well acknowledged today that the Athenian democracy was a) extremely exclusive, as it only accepted free-born, Greek, Athenian men into citizenship, effectively disregarding women, slaves, and foreigners, that accounted for more than half of Athenian population, and b) made possible only by the geographic proximity of the people's residences and relatively small population size, and is therefore not plausible at all to apply to modern states. In fact, the democratic system as we know it today is a modern invention (Im, 2021).

Liberal Roots

The most common notion of democracy is its liberal kind, and thus it is necessary to examine the historical background of liberalism before getting into the definitions of democracy. Liberalism first began to develop in late 18th century in opposition to hierarchical institutions of the medieval times. It called for rollback of state power in

order to guarantee a civil society free of state interventions, and posited that state power came from the will of its sovereign people rather than some divine right. As it focused on individual rights and freedoms, development of liberalism led to an earlier model of liberal democracy; this is sometimes referred to as “protective democracy” due to its primary concern of protecting citizens’ rights, namely property rights from governments and maximizing individual liberties. Proponents of this earlier model viewed universal franchise and the rule of law as means to secure the protection of the rights of the citizens (Sørensen, 2019).

Minimal Democracy

Many scholars identify Joseph Schumpeter’s narrow definition as a starting point of discussions on democracy. Schumpeterian definition of democracy is concerned only with the mechanism of choosing political leadership: through fair and free elections. This minimal definition of democracy treats democracies and nondemocracies as dichotomous variables; to decide whether a political regime to be considered democratic, it merely looks to the existence of a free, fair, competitive election with universal suffrage through which its important decision makers are voted into office. Because of its emphasis on elections, it is often referred to as electoral democracy and it tends to focus on the procedural aspect of democratic system rather than the content or quality (Schumpeter, 1942). In a similar vein, scholars like Pzeworski and Bobbio generally agree on democracy as an effective way to deal with struggles and contentions through the means of electoral system where regime change takes place competitively, yet without violence.

More modern concepts of liberal democracy combines competitive, fair, and free elections as a mechanism for selecting government officials as well as guarantees

of civil and political liberties of the people. Robert Dahl most notably combines the two in his concept of polyarchy. Competition, participation, and civil and political liberties are the three main dimensions of political democracy, of which the first two dimensions are concerned with elections and the latter has to do with respecting and protecting citizens' rights. Extending from the minimalist definition of electoral democracy, liberal democracy additionally holds the power accountable to the electorate, requires the horizontal accountability of those in power, and protects political and civic pluralism as well as individual and group freedoms (Sørensen, 2019). Components of liberal democracy like checks and balances imply a constitutional democracy, i.e. the rule of law. A key distinction in liberal democracy is whether the political process includes broader consideration of interest articulation, representation, and contestation rather than solely focusing on elections.

Held's Models of Democracy

David Held provides different "models" of democracy in his analysis of democracies of the past and the present, and offers the concept of democratic autonomy that stretches political democracy to encompass the government and civil society alike. In democratic autonomy, citizens enjoy fundamental rights and liberties as well as benefits and entitlements; they participate in public institutions and governmental processes as well as social institutions and economic processes. Democracy could be expanded to incorporate both more liberalization and more participation, going beyond political and indirect democracy into welfare democracy that provides substantive benefits and entitlements to its people, social democracy with participation in social institutions and economic processes, and ultimately democratic autonomy, which encompasses all of these attainments. In short, Held's

notion of democratic autonomy extends democracy from being merely a political system to a comprehensive system including socioeconomic dimensions as well.

Such definitions of democracy focus primarily on the type of government and what it outwardly entails from the perspective of political science. On the other hand, several scholars approach democracy from a philosophical view. Perhaps the most important lesson that can be drawn from the wide range in the definitions of democracy is that democracy is a multidimensional process and that there is always room for development or improvement. Both Sørensen and Diamond acknowledge that democracy is a “developmental phenomenon,” that there is no end-all, be-all model of democracy, and can emerge fragmentally without a sequence. Democratic institutions can be “improved, deepened, and consolidated” in the words of Diamond but also have the potential to “become rigid, corrupt, and unresponsive in the absence of periodic reform and renewal.” Even Huntington, who singularly utilizes Schumpeterian definition of democracy in his analysis, recognizes the protracted process of democratization and its complexity and acknowledges the need to take into consideration the content that a democracy entails.

2. Democratization and Democratic Crisis

Samuel Huntington defines a wave of democratization as “a group of transitions from nondemocratic to democratic regimes” that significantly outnumbers transitions in the opposite direction within a specific time period. He argues that there have been three waves of democratization in the world so far; the first “long” wave of democratization started in 1828, triggered by the ideals implemented through the American and French revolutions of the past century, and saw at least 30 countries building democratic institutions over one hundred years. The second, short wave of

democratization took place starting in 1943 in the wake of the Second World War, with the third wave of democratization starting in mid-1970s. Assisted by the collapse of the Communist Bloc, the latter half of the 20th century saw a great number of countries transitioning from communist or authoritarian regimes to democracy.

But concerns and apprehensions over the quality of democracy have persisted over the years. Fareed Zakaria points to the disturbing phenomenon of the rising illiberal democracies in the world that had gone largely unnoticed, because Western democracies almost always associates democracy with liberal democracy. However, the current situation exposes that while more than half of the countries in the world now are classified as democratic, the degree of civil liberties in those countries is rather limited in many cases. There is a distinction between minimalist definition of democracy as a political system that holds competitive, multiparty elections and more expansive notion that includes constitutional liberalism; the procedural democracy offers little on the goals of the government, which is where constitutional liberalism steps in. Constitutional liberalism refers to the tradition that seeks to protect an individual's autonomy by limiting government powers. It is liberal because it is based on philosophical tradition that emphasizes individual liberty, and constitutional because it rests on the tradition of the rule of law. He outlines how the Western road to democracy started with constitutional liberalism; Western European countries did not become full-fledged democracies until the late 1940s, but most of them had important aspects of constitutional liberalism, e.g. the rule of law, private property rights, separation of powers, right to free speech and assembly, a hundred years prior. However, he observes that while constitutional liberalism has historically led to democracy, the opposite does not appear to hold. Although democratic transitions in East Asia seem to follow the pattern where economic liberalization is crucial in the

development of liberal democracy, other regions such as Latin America and Africa disproportionately accentuates democratic institutions like multiparty, competitive elections, while essentially neglecting liberal governance. Furthermore, there is tension between constitutional liberalism and democracy on the scope of governmental authority, as constitutional liberalism seeks to limit government power and democracy deals with accumulation and use of power. Thus democracy without constitutional liberalism poses the “danger of oppression” and “tyranny of the majority” as Madison and Tocqueville warned, and has a high possibility of committing horizontal and vertical power usurpation.

In an analysis of the Third Wave of democratization using the transition paradigm, Thomas Carothers dissects and qualifies the main assertions of the transition approach; he analyzes the countries that have shifted away from authoritarian regime and posits that the assumptions of the transition paradigm is problematic. For one, in most countries in the third-wave of democratization, a shift from authoritarian regime has not necessarily led to development and maturation of democracy. Rather, they have fallen into a gray zone characterized by “feckless pluralism.” The political elites of such states are often perceived as corrupt, self-interested, and ineffective and disinterested in working for the country; the public is disaffected with politics and while people might participate in voting, there is a general lack of expectation in politics. In other countries, there is a dominant-power system in which the boundary of the state and the ruling party is blurring. The citizens of dominant-power systems are likewise disaffected since the alteration of power is highly unlikely. They are unhappy with the politics but do not actively participate aside from voting. Carothers’ analysis unqualified the assumptions of the transition paradigm: the assumption that any state moving away from dictatorship is moving

toward democracy is misleading, as the countries in the gray zone demonstrate, and the empirical data actually suggests against the sequential stages of democratization. The successful examples of democratization in Taiwan and South Korea display the opposite of what the transition approach suggests: slow and gradual evolutions to democracy with a persistent, organized political opposition. In feckless pluralities and dominant-powers, meaningful political participation besides voting in elections was scarce. Regular elections seem to play little role in maturing the democracy put in place. Fourth, the structural conditions exert great influence on the success of democracy, and lastly, state building is a complicated and bigger problem in successful democracy building. Contrary to the original assumption of the transition paradigm that the states in the third-wave of democratization are coherent and functioning, most states have faced grave challenges in state building.

3. Democracy and Women's Rights

As can be expected, studies linking democracy and women's rights are abundant in literature. The scope of the existing literature reflects the diverse and multifaceted nature of democratic dimensions, with topics ranging from international institutions, political participation, and even citizen perception of female politicians. One study suggests that international institutions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) positively affects women's social rights, but conditional on the level of democracy (Cho, 2013); countries with long-term stocks of democracy with longer history of women's suffrage perform better on various indicators of women's rights, such as life expectancy and labor force participation (Beer, 2009). Also, studies suggest that the female voter turnout is a greater indicator of how well the parliaments reflect the

interests of women than the actual number of female members of parliament, which is not surprising considering the basic mechanisms of modern democracy (Dingler et al., 2019; Inglehart et al., 2002).

The connection between democracy and women's rights does not exist merely on the procedural level but on the very philosophy of democracy as well. Political theorist Iris Marion Young suggests that social justice is more than simple distribution of parts to parts in the society, and that injustice has to do with the structural domination and oppression which often paves the way to systemic violence against women and other marginalized groups in society. She invites identity politics to move towards the politics of difference, and argues that such difference is a democratic resource; she suggests expanding current models and modes of democracy into a deliberative democracy that focuses more on the procedure of inclusion and achievement of justice (Young, 1990). Young's theory of democracy extends beyond the micro-mechanisms of democratic system and points to bigger and broader, systemic exclusion of women from decision-making processes and the injustice that inevitably stems from it. Young's picture of democracy provides an insight into a broader conception of democracy and politics through the lens of what is just and what is unjust.

In the Korean context, there have been a growing number of studies analyzing the new rise in the feminist movement among the younger generation, focusing on particular events of the Me Too Movement and misogynist crimes (Kim et al., 2018; Kim, 2020; Lee, 2018). These studies provide glimpses of how the mobilizations among the younger women lead to political demands and activities, but the studies placing such activities within the broader context of Korean democracy are seldom. Amid the myriads of differing concepts of democracy and the tumultuous, yet overall

victorious, journey of Korean democratization, it would be worthwhile to analyze recent women's movements in Korea in terms of what it may contribute to the quality and robustness of Korean democracy.

Social Movement Theories

The World Health Organization defines social mobilization as “the process of bringing together all societal and personal influences to raise awareness.” In a political system, interest articulation and aggregation play an integral role in policymaking and adjudication; social movements and mobilization therefore form a crucial part in articulating the interests of the civil society. While this thesis offers to interpret women's movements since 2016 through political subjectivization, it would be useful to briefly examine relevant social movement theories, as they can very well be interpreted through the existing theories.

One dominant theory in social movement is the relative deprivation theory. This theory suggests that social movement is often grounded in the sense of deprivation or a sense of grievance, that social movement begins when certain members of the society feel that they are unjustly stripped of what they deserve. Indeed, in the case of the Korean women, it may be argued that the gap between the guaranteed, institutionalized equality and substantial equality they experience in life is the motivation behind the responses they demonstrated.

The resource mobilization theory, on the other hand, suggests that rather than the social psychological aspect of collective grievances or interests, social movement occurs in the context of what resources there are to utilize. In terms of Korean women's movements, the spread of the Internet and online communities was closely aligned with success of social mobilization; as it will be examined in Chapter 4, the

crowning victory of Korean women's movement—the abolition of Hojuje—coincided with the active utilization of the Internet and online platforms that helped to convince the general public and shape the dominant opinion of the people. In the 2010s and 2020s, the rise of social media, such as Twitter and Instagram, would also serve as abundant resources for social mobilization.

Despite the relevance and usefulness of these theories, however, there are aspects particular to the historical and cultural contexts of Korea that are not sufficiently captured with them. In the next section, I will go over the theory of Rancière and how his concept of political subjectivization sheds light on such aspects in the interplay of gender conflicts and women's movements in Korea since 2016.

III. Political Philosophy of Rancière and Subjectivization of the People —

Research Design

Jacques Rancière is a French philosopher born in Algeria who is most known for his ideas in political philosophy and aesthetics. Rancière's view on politics and democracy is rather unique, distinct from the understandings of democracy as a procedure, set of institutions, or models as mentioned above. His idea of the politics and democracy rests primarily on equality between "anyone at all and anyone else"; what determines this equality is the fact that all human beings possess the ability to speak (Rancière, 15). To fully grasp his concept of politics, however, it is also necessary to note the name he gives to its adversary: "the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution" is what he calls the police (Rancière, 28). He accordingly defines "the political" as "the encounter between two heterogeneous processes," with the first being policy, regarding governing of the people, and the second being emancipation, regarding equality (Rancière, 1992). This process of emancipation, which can alternatively be referred to as politics, is "the verification of the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being." Politics depends on this sheer contingency of equality, as is "an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing" (Rancière, 30). In other words, Rancière rejects the "system of distribution and legitimization" so often taken as the role of politics and instead suggests that such police order in fact "wrongs" politics with its rigid counting of the parts of the society, concerned only with governing rather than equality and freedom (Rancière, 28).

The ancient Greek philosophers did not accept this contingency of equality. For Plato and Aristotle, a just city was where "proper distribution of "advantages"

[presupposed] prior elimination of a certain wrong”; the society would be neatly divided into parts, and people would receive the part that they are due to receive (Rancière, 4).³ According to Aristotle, such part was determined by whether a man possessed logos, i.e. speech, or merely voice, which can only indicate rather than express (Rancière, 2). The great philosophers hence deftly partitioned the political order into an arithmetic count—“compensation of profits and losses”—and geometric count, linking a specific quality to a rank (Rancière, 10). The oligarchs had wealth. The aristocrats had virtue. The people, the demos, had freedom. This is precisely where the miscount arises: in the count of the demos. Firstly, freedom is a common virtue that is exclusive to the demos only in name, to which Rancière claims “the nonexistent qualitative difference of freedom produces this impossible equation that cannot be understood within the divisions of arithmetical equality ... or of geometric equality” (Rancière, 10). Second, the demos is forever a part that claims to be the whole: “The demos is that many that is identical to the whole: the many as one, the part as the whole, the all in all” (Rancière, 10). This fundamental miscount is where politics and democracy are born.

Rancière argues that politics exists because there is no divine or natural law to predetermine the social order, and it comes into existence when “those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account”(Rancière, 27). Here lies the irony of inequality; if inequality is to exist between those who possess speech and those who only have voice, the assumption must be that those with merely vocalizations indeed have the ability to understand speech to accept their position. And thus, if the equality between anyone at all and anyone else is what enables inequality to exist, this equality must be enacted into existence, as those with

³ Page numbers are used where there are direct quotations.

speech are not likely to acknowledge that those with only the voice do, in fact, possess speech also. What enables this enactment is the process of subjectivization.

Rancière's politics occurs through modes of subjectivization that "measures the incommensurables, the logic of the mark of equality or that of the police order" (Rancière, 35). He defines subjectivization as "the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience" (Rancière, 35). The logic of political subjectivization is that of heterology, as it always involves firstly the denial of identity endowed by others, and demonstration that always supposes an other (Rancière, 1992). Moreover, it entails an impossible and sometimes untrue identification; a heterogeneous group of people at a labor rally reciting the slogan "We are all laborers!" would be an example. While the profession of some might actually be laborers, some might be activists and some might be students—the identification of the whole as laborers would not be true, but the process of subjectivization would necessitate such professions. In short, Rancière's idea of politics can be reduced to the act of those who have no part realizing that they can indeed demand to have a part. Democracy in this light is a way of subjectivization, a process of those without a part rejecting the identity endowed on them by the society, revealing the wrongs in the community, and reclaiming their part, bringing "the nonrelationship into relationship" and giving "place to the nonplace" (Rancière, 89).

While it is not Rancière poses that the process of subjectivization begins with disidentification—the rejection of accepting identity given to a particular human or group by the society— of the people who by somehow or other realize that they have been denied their equal place in the society and then is followed by their determined

enactment of this equality, acting “as if” they are already equals without recognition from others who have deprived them of a “part.” This provides the opportunity for politics as the verification of contingent equality between all, and enables those who previously had no part in the society, those who went unheard of, to speak out, occupy space, and to be actively counted. This process is summarized in Figure 1.

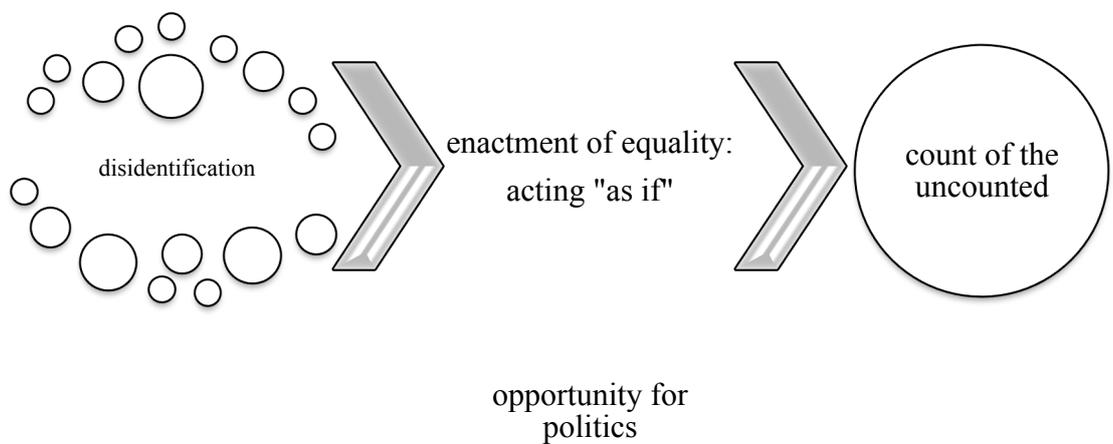


Figure 1: Rancière's Process of Political Subjectivization

Based on this understanding of politics as a stage of dissensus where the unaccounted make demands to be counted, Rancière views democracy not as a set of institutions but as “politics’ mode of subjectivization” (Rancière, 99). Democracy usurps the assumption that those who have no part are also void of logos that could make them heard. The different forms of democracy are simply different manifestations of “the place where the people appear” and “the place where a dispute is conducted. The political dispute is distinct from all conflicts of interest between constituted parties of the population, for it is a conflict over the very count of these parties” (Rancière, 100). Rancière also diagnoses the crisis of democracy in this vein,

as a crisis that has dawned precisely with the presumed victory over other political ideologies. The idyllic form of most democratic states nowadays, which Rancière terms consensus democracy or postdemocracy, is an oxymoron in name to begin with since “democracy” and “consensus” are two very different things. He explains that “postdemocracy is the government practices and conceptual legitimization of a democracy after the demos, a democracy that has eliminated the appearance, miscount, and dispute of the people and is thereby reducible to the sole interplay of state mechanisms and combinations of social energies and interests” (Rancière, 101-102). The problem, therefore, is not in the failing institutions of different forms of democracy; the emergence of consensus democracy that constantly seeks to reach “consensus” among different social groups through endless public opinion polls and groups of experts offering policy suggestions itself is the threat, for democracy and politics exist in stages of disputes and dissensus that enables subjectivization and realization of equality between anyone and everyone.

From Rancière’s process of subjectivization described in Figure 1, it may be drawn that in political subjectivization, there is disidentification, enactment of equality, and backlash (from the police order). This is summarized in Table 1.

The interplay of the three types of actions creates tension and dissensus, which is essentially the stage for true politics to emerge. It should be noted that out of the three, the first action of disidentification is an aspect that is not easily captured by other theories of social mobilization. The prominent theories of social movement do not examine how at the very beginning of the movement, there is a denial of the given identity to the subjects; Rancière’s way of understanding subjectivization as not taking for granted the identity endowed by the society fits particularly well within the Korean context, where the strong traditions of male preference and male-dominated

power spheres implicitly and explicitly require women to “keep their place,” especially in the public sphere. That is, the recent women’s movements in Korea began specifically with women refusing to be depreciated into meek, quiet, “feminized” objects in society.

Table 1: Categories of Action in Political Subjectivization

Process	Definition
Disidentification	In disidentification, subjects deny or refuse the place assigned to them by the police order. They reconfigure the previous identity bestowed on them.
Enactment of Equality	In enactment of equality, subjects act “as if” they are already equal when in reality they are not treated as equals. This may involve turning around the accepted power structures or societal stereotypes.
Backlash	Backlash, or resistance from the police order, occurs in opposition to acts of disidentification and enactment of equality. Against the process of subjectivization, existing orders assert that subjects must comply with the given identity and obey the prevailing ways of the society.

As it could be gathered from the discussion so far, Rancière’s conception of politics is that of class struggle. This reading of politics and democracy is especially relevant today in Korea, where gender struggles have reached the peak, most notably in the political sphere. The current antagonism surrounding discourses of feminism and the recent trends in women’s movements lend themselves to the application of Rancière’s concept of democracy and political subjectivization. Women, who previously did not have an equal place in the Korean society, may well be mobilizing against the part—which is no part—given to them, and shaking the existing order of police that seeks to pacify them without giving them the part they desire. While the

cultural and social factors of Korea's compressed, militarized modernity and gendered economic development, lasting impact of Confucian patriarchy, and the trajectory of women's movements thus far are not to be ignored, a broader, more abstract interpretation of recent shifts in the topography of gender politics in Korea based on Rancière's philosophy would be fruitful in determining the overall direction of this shift. By applying Rancière's concept of political subjectivization and elucidating certain social events as a stage of dissensus enacted by Korean women, it becomes possible as well to gauge the quality of Korean democracy and the danger of its reversal.

IV. Historical Trajectory of Democratic Development and Women's Movements in Korea

1. Democratization in Korea

Korean transition to democracy was situated in the midst of the third-wave democratization. Korea under Park Chung Hee's rule (1962-1979) was an authoritarian, developmental state that prioritized economic development and state building over democratic values. After Park's assassination, Park's regime was replaced by another military, authoritarian regime under Chun Doo Hwan (1980-1988). Chun lacked even more the political legitimacy, as Park was initially legitimized in his coup through the semi-competitive presidential election of 1963. Until the Yushin constitution of 1972, Park regained his power and support through elections, however biased they may be. In contrast, Chun took away the political rights of the people, limited electoral participation, and outright rigged the elections to retain his presidency. This led to a series of labor and civilian movements calling for direct election of the president, serving as the main trigger for Korea's democratic movement. Although the 1987 election saw Roh Tae Woo (1988-1993), a candidate with military background endorsed by Chun Doo Hwan, come into power, the next presidents were from strictly civilian backgrounds. The succeeding president, Kim Young Sam (1993-1998), effectively eradicated military influence on the government by dissolving the powerful military faction of Hanahoe (Diamond and Shin, 2000). His successor, Kim Dae Jung (1998-2003), propelled the country into greater democracy by naming his government "the People's Government." What characterizes the Korean democratization experience is that throughout the

authoritarian years, there was constant civilian and people's movements demanding protection of labor rights and more political freedom. This manifested in the overall pattern of transition of a transplacement in Samuel Huntington's classification of democratic transitions.

Both the authoritarian legacies and strong demand for democracy from the bottom shape the trajectory of Korea's democratic development and recession. A scholar diagnoses the Korean democracy to be simultaneously dealing with both post-authoritarian and post-democracy problems; the post-authoritarian problems stem from the inherited legacy of the authoritarian regime of the past, while the post-democracy problems mostly concern the socioeconomic developments and rights in even the consolidated and advanced democracies (Shin, 2018).

The post-authoritarian problems are most prevalent in the unsuccessful cases of the third-wave democratization. In the 1980s and 1990s when the transition from authoritarian regime to democracy was of interest, the dominant paradigm presented a rather linear process of democratization; it was soon made clear that transition to, or even consolidation in the narrow sense, of democracy did not guarantee perpetual continuation of the democratic regime. Moreover, many of the post-authoritarian societies that began transition to democracy seem to be trapped in the "gray zone," not reverting back into complete authoritarianism but not making any more progress into greater democracy (Carothers, 2002). They are diversely classified as illiberal democracy, delegative democracy, semi-authoritarianism, etc.

In contrast, even the advanced democracies may suffer from post-democracy problems if they fail to adequately address the needs of the marginalized groups in society. As capital and economic sectors gain greater political power, there is a possibility that politics would come to reflect less of the needs of the people and more

of the big players. In this case, people may feel betrayed and helpless, losing faith in the democratic system. This poses equally a great problem to sustaining healthy democracy.

According to Shin, Korea faces both post-authoritarian and post-democracy problems, which is unique to countries that have accomplished rapid democratization with an authoritarian past. It has the inherent challenge of suppressing the old authoritarian powers from regaining political influence, and at the same time proving the democratic capacity of efficiently resolving various socioeconomic problems in the society. Lee Myung Bak administration came to power precisely because Roh Moo Hyun (2003-2008) administration, which was deeply rooted in anti-authoritarian, pro-democracy struggles, failed in effectively handling economic issues in society. Although Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun administrations, both with roots in pro-democracy struggles, were successful in political reforms to move away from authoritarianism, both administrations performed poorly in proving that democracy is the more effective and desirable way to resolve economic inequality and resulting social anxiety of the people.

In addition, Korean politics have the innate problems of all newer democracies. Unlike the democratic institutions of the Western, advanced democracies that developed gradually over a long period, Korean democratic institutions were hastily placed and evolved with particular political motives (Kang, 2019). Accordingly, electoral laws, balance among the three branches of government, and constitutional rights of the president and the legislators all have room for improvement. Presidentialism in itself is more susceptible to authoritarian practices than parliamentarism; under the current system, Korean democracy delegates considerable power to the president and the Blue House, while not allowing for reelection (Kang,

2019). Hence there is always a concern for severance of policies with new administrations, and even reversals. This in part explains the dramatic shift from Kim and Roh administrations to Lee and Park administrations.

2. Women's Movements in Korea

Despite the strong influence of Confucian, patriarchal traditions, modern women's movements in Korea can be traced back all the way to the 19th century before the emergence of modern Korean state. More than 300 women from different classes came together to declare *Yeokwontongmun* in 1898, in which they proclaimed women as equal to men and demanded equal opportunity for education, jobs, and suffrage (Lee, 2020). Later, women's movement was absorbed into the national liberation movement, paving the way for women to be respected as equal members of community in postcolonial Korea. Such traditions indeed lived on after liberation; a representative case of political demands asserted by women is the movement to amend the family registration system, which started as early as the 1950s (Hwang, 2017). The agenda of women's movements of this time however often appeared to be merged with greater national agenda such as national independence and democratization. As the country's modern history is marked with dramatic sequence of events following Japanese surrender in the World War II, the split into two Koreas, a brief occupation of the American military, the brutal civil war that left the country in ruins of poverty, and years of military dictatorship that adopted the developmental state model based on the ideals of anticommunism and modernization, women's movements could not have been taken out of this tumultuous political and historical contexts. The logic of Korean developmental state that postponed political freedom in favor of economic development seemed to extend into the realm of gender equality as

well, with demands for women's rights absorbed into the greater and more general goal of democratization (Kim, 2015). On a similar note, some argue that the state's blind faith in economic development as the panacea to a sea of other problems affected women's movements in that they too held on to the blind faith that political development in the form of democratization would automatically enhance individual human rights, including gender equality. Unfortunately, the hindrances in achieving meaningful gender equality were not properly addressed after democratization in the 1990s and the 2000s (Kim, 2017). There are also analyses that suggest that the focus in women's rights movement reflects the legacy of authoritarian regime as it rested heavily on the institutionalized protection of civil and political rights, with relatively little focus on encouraging active female political participation or socioeconomic rights of women, such as income equality and regular female labor participation (Ahn, 2016; Hwang, 2017).

What is more interesting to note about the women's rights movement during this time is the multi-direction and even dichotomy in the identity of the women primarily involved in the movements. Women's movements during the period leading up to democratization took place most notably among the working class women, as a part of the *minjung* or labor movements that pushed for democratization, as is exemplified in the works of Korean Women's Association United (KWAU). Most of the participants consisted of young factory girls, who had been sent from rural families to urban areas to earn money and often aid with the family's living expenses—sometimes for the education of the sons in the family. But there was a intimate link between student movements and labor movements, and female university students involved in the student movements worked closely with factory girls, teaching at night schools and providing them with theoretical resources and

motivations to fight for their rights. As higher education for women was not as readily available in the 1970s and 1980s, it may be assumed that there was a considerable class difference between the female university students and factory workers. Nonetheless they formed solidarity in what could be seen as a process of subjectivization, as they were not bound by their separate identification of “students” and “workers.” Instead, the both groups were united in that they saw their demands were hardly heard, they were disregarded as unequals in the society, and they were determined to demand their part. Still, what could be interpreted as a possibility of political subjectivization did not last long, as women’s *minjung* movement diverged after transition to democracy.

As a fully democratic, civilian government of Kim Youngsam came into office in 1993, the *minjung* movement split into two lines. One strain continued as a labor movement (*nodong undong*), grounded in the support of workers who were likely to be economically vulnerable. Such movement often failed to garner wide popularity or support from the public, however, because of Marxist connotations of anti-capitalism attached to it. It also had to do with the diminishing number of employees in manual and manufacturing labor, as with industrialization came the enormous enlargement of the service sector. Another strain was civic movement (*simin undong*), which held the participation in the newly democratized state as its first priority. Consequently, highly educated, elite women with university degree or higher, gained entrance into the state institutions. Ministry of Gender Equality was established, and the activists of the 1990s poured most of their efforts into expanding women’s rights through participation in the institutionalized policymaking and administrative processes. A great number of legislative reforms and legal amendments regarding gender equality were made since democratization from the late

1980s to 2000s, such as Equal Employment Opportunity Act (1988, amended 1989), Family Law (1989), Child Care Act (1991), Punishment of the Crime of Sexual Violence Act (1993), Basic Act for Women's Development (1995), Prevention of Sexual Violence Act (1997), Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (1997), and Abolition of Family-head System (*hojuje*) (2005). While these legislative reforms were crucial in addressing the systemic and legal discrimination against women, active political participation in elections and appointments often meant that those with the means were the only ones who gained entrance, and sometimes biased the generated policies to be more aligned with conservative, predominantly male party leadership interests (Ahn, 2016). Women's movement post-democratization has therefore been evaluated as "institutionalized political activism in state politics" rather than a radical, dissident voice against the government (Hur, 2010).

To summarize, the patriarchal cultural heritage of Confucianism and the legacy of extremely masculinized military dictatorship were internalized and normalized as a legitimating identity for Korean women. Even the democratic pressure manifested itself in equally masculine and violent form of *minjung*, and in this society, women were given the subordinate status attached to femininity (Kim, 2015). Democratization did not prove to be the panacea for the ails of women's rights and status in the Korean society. Although there were some signs of political subjectivization of women during the struggle for democratization between the female students and factory workers, it was rather short-lived as women's movements shifted in nature to civic movement with greater priority in increased political participation within state institutions rather than from the other side. As the existing political structures were predominantly run by male elites, however, it was only the privileged few that could either lead or gain access to positions of influence and enter into the

community of equals, while the majority of women remained marginalized. On the other hand, those continuing the tradition of the *minjung*-led campaigns based on their specific situations, but those efforts remained fragmented and varied. The trends only began to turn in the 2010s, when the women born after democratization had matured into grown adults.

V. Political Subjectivization of Korean Women

The generation of women who had not experienced democratization firsthand but were born into a democracy is more likely to be (or become) aware of the internalized, microscopic discrimination within the system. This is more plainly so because, ironically, the social status of women in Korea has been raised rapidly throughout industrialization and democratization; for instance, as of 2017, about the same ratio of men and women continue into higher education such as university and graduate school, with the ratio of women being slightly higher (Statistics Korea, 2017). However, similar or higher level of education does not guarantee similar or higher pay compared to men, as was seen earlier in the large gender wage gap reported by the OECD. Such discrepancy and uneven development of women's rights in the socioeconomic sphere was the focal point of Korean women's movements in the 1990s and 2000s. Violence against women, whether it be physical, domestic, or sexual, might have been prevalent in practice but was not in the public forefront, as most women regarded themselves irrelevant to it; there was a social atmosphere that the victims of such crimes were merely "unlucky" to somehow encounter such (mostly male) perpetrators.

The case that countered this view, attracted much public attention, and even instigated heated debate and contentions around gender and women's rights that continues to this day was what is now called the Gangnam Station murder case. That, followed by movements in the similar vein of physical and sexual well being of women in terms of women's rights to self-determination, shifted the focus to women's body and its right to occupy a space, both physical and figurative, in the same fashion and assured safety of that of men.

1. Beginning – The Gangnam Station Femicide Case 2016

A. Overview of the Case

On May 17th, 2016, a man suffering from schizophrenia stabbed a 23-year old woman to death in a gender-neutral bathroom at a building complex near Gangnam Station Exit 10. He had been hiding in the bathroom, waiting, foregoing six men who entered and exited the bathroom before the victim came in. To the police, he stated that while he did not know the victim personally, he killed her because “women often ignored [him]” (Herald Corp, 2016; Maeil Shinmun, 2016; Hankyung, 2016). People were outraged, first at the crime itself and then to the way the crime was framed in the media. Media coverage preferred to call it a random murder, while most women saw it as a blatant misogynist crime. As the victim was in her twenties, the female population close to her age mobilized online and offline under hash-tags like “#killedforbeingagirl.” Numerous women and men went to Gangnam Station and left words of tribute for the victim on sticky notes stuck on the glass window of Gangnam Station Exit 10 (Kyunghyang, 2016).

Misogyny and misogynist cultures in the online space e.g. Ilbe community have garnered attentions of the scholars previous to 2016. Yoon (2013) argues that such manifestations of misogynist cultures are symptoms of the postmodern Korean society where the hegemonic male figure of the neoliberal era has broken down, leaving Korean men in a cultural despair. Analysis of misogynist utterances in the online space reveals that male-based, misogynist communities online have utilized the double tactic of shaming and hallowing different figures of women, punishing and rewarding certain types of women that fit to their liking (Eom, 2016). But overall, such utterances and expressions had not been taken seriously by scholars or even the Korean women themselves, for intangible words did not appear as a serious threat to

the position of women in the Korean society. The prevalent view was that the misogynist comments and pervasive culture of several internet communities were isolated from the “real” world, nothing more than internet “trolling” for fun. It was not until the violent murder of a young woman that the toxicity of the misogynist culture was brought into visibility.

The hateful words against women on the Internet cannot exist in isolation to actual threat to women, because the words used in misogynist discourses are precisely the words that objectify into those who may make noises but cannot be heard as equals. In Rancière’s anecdote—from Ballanche—of the plebeians on Aventine Hill, Menenius Agrippa is scolded by the patricians for thinking that the plebs are capable of speech. To the patricians, the plebeians merely produce noise, incapable of forming logical words. This is the essence of the difference between those who have a name, and those who are dramatically excluded from it—those who are nameless. It also highlights that it is important for those who have no part to realize that they too, have the language that serves as a common between them and those who do have a part. When the nameless realize that they too shall possess names and words, they may start the process of disidentification, rejecting the place they had been prescribed to by those who have a name. The Gangnam Station Femicide Case is significant precisely in this sense, that the women began the process of disidentification through their words. The words on the sticky notes made it clear that the women (and men) gathered there recognized that there was a distinction between having a part and having no part in the Korean society. The content and messages written on these sticky notes reveal that the things that were once considered natural, even mundane, like taking precautions when walking home at night, have suddenly become unnatural as they started to question who are counted and who are not.

B. Messages of Subjectivization on Sticky Notes

A total of 1004 sticky notes on the Exit 10 of the Gangnam Station has been archived, available online and as a book. Aside from the messages of sorrow or apologies, the most prominent message that appears again and again are phrases like “I am alive by chance,” “It could’ve been me,” “You are me, you are us.” Others include “Call it a Hate crime, Femicide, Misogynist crime,” “Stop calling this a random murder,” “We do not want your protection; we want a world where we do not need to be protected just because we are women,” “I don’t want to be a survivor” “Stop misogyny,” “Do not kill women, do not rape women, if this is so hard to understand just memorize!” and even “What do you not understand about this?” These messages distinguish women as “the class of the uncategorized that only exists in the very declaration in which they are categorized as those of no account” (Rancière, 38). They invoke the law, the era, and common sense as obvious reasons not to murder someone based on gender, which ironically displays that the politics indeed is tied to the police. There are also a number of messages left by men who express their empathy and solidarity with the anger and fear felt by Korean women (Kyunghyang Shinmun, 2016). In Table 2, the content of the sticky notes are analyzed and counted in terms of actions in political subjectivization.

Table 2: Analysis of Content of Sticky Notes⁴

Type of Action	Occurrence
Disidentification	187
Enactment of Equality (including messages of solidarity)	116
Backlash	279
Miscellaneous (Condolences, other messages)	288

⁴ The analysis was made based on the archived and published sticky notes messages that were found on the walls of Gangnam Station. The online link to all the sticky messages can be found in reference section: http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201605231716001&code=940100

To follow the process of subjectivization outlined in Figure 1, the messages very much reflect disidentification of women as the implicit lesser counterparts of men in the society: “Women are not quest prizes. We are equal players in the game” (Kyunghayng Shinmun, 2016). The messages reject the years of tacit learning that women must be careful of their vestiture and be on the guard to ensure their safety, that such is the natural identity of women in the society. This disidentification evolves to women physically occupying a place i.e. Gangnam Subway Station Exit 10. According to Rancière, “speaking out” is not “awareness and expression of a self asserting what belongs to it” but rather “the occupation of space in which the logos defines a nature other than the *phônē*” (Rancière, 37). What triggered such an emotional response from women that led to the beginning of subjectivization was perhaps the banality of the location of the crime itself. Gangnam Station is one of the most popular, most crowded places in Seoul for the youth. There is symbolism in the physical act of going to Gangnam Station and putting on sticky notes on the exit window—a physical manifestation of logos, of those who were regarded as not possessing logos. It is an act of those who have no part demanding to be seen and heard. It is a theatrical enactment of equality in the stage of inequality that provides the opening for politics.

It should be noted that this political activity of women was met with both solidarity and hostility from men. The site of Gangnam Station Exit 10 itself saw counter-protests of a man holding a picket that read:

It is not the carnivore that is bad; it is the animal that has committed a crime that is bad. Let us make together the Korean Zootopia without prejudice. Let us make a safer Korea together, men and women! (italics added, Chosun Ilbo, 2016).

The content of the picket enraged many who were there to pay tribute to the victim. They pointed out to how the expression “carnivore” essentially objectified women while granting the superior status of prey to men. Later in the month, members of Solidarity for Gender Equality (previously Solidarity for Men; *Namseong Yeondae*) held a protest saying that the memorial ceremonies regarding the murder in Gangnam by nature promoted misandry, and that cooperation and consensus between men and women were needed to prevent future crimes. On the contrary, there were men who joined the women in the memorial services, pointing out the absurdness of discussing misandry in a clear case of femicide. Put differently, the expression of women in the form of sticky notes, memorial ceremonies, and demonstrations online and offline enacted a stage of dissensus that had not previously existed before—this point will be further elaborated in the next section.

C. Media Response and Rising Women’s Movement

On the constitutional level, Korean women are guaranteed the same basic rights as men, as discrimination based on sex is explicitly not in accordance with the law. However, equality promised on paper does not result in equal treatment or experiences. The messages about the daily threats women must face just because they are female, “inscribe” in the words of Rancière the account of the uncounted by opening up a space where they can be counted as just that. Gangnam Station becomes a symbol of political wrong, and as Rancière says, “political wrong cannot be settled... but it can be processed” by reallocating parties and parts (Rancière, 39). Political subjectivization displayed at Gangnam Station does not ask for sympathy or understanding or consensus; it rather illustrates how women, who had been mollified into the female identification, a false sense of peace that often utilizes male protection

to disguise the fact that they were in fact not equals in the society, that the social structure does not guarantee an equal place for them, have had a rude awakening of a sort. They turn around to expose their nonexistent existence with words of logos that have been used to placate them. The mainstream media in contrast, which was harshly criticized by the women for not recognizing or making explicit the misogyny in the crime at the time, or even the sparse messages in the 1004 sticky notes that urge people not to perceive this case as a hate crime, could be seen as an accomplice of the police, maintaining and pacifying social orders without changing the distribution of the parts, trying to convince those without a part that there is no need to do so.

From the beginning, Korean media did not connect the crime to gender or misogyny and preferred instead to call it random (“don’t ask”) murder. Even after the interview of the perpetrator had been released where he iterated that he had purposefully waited for a woman to enter for the contempt he held for women in general, the media report focused on mental illness of the man as the cause of the crime. This was problematic on many levels; firstly, it again pushed the women’s rights to invisibility by not acknowledging the voice of women who indeed viewed the crime as a blatant and obvious violence against women. It also did not recognize the fact that beneath the delusions of a schizophrenic is the dominant sociocultural discourse, while further stigmatizing the already-excluded group of people—those with mental illness (Lee, 2016). As the debate became more and more heated, media reports started to take a new angle, an angle of gender struggle. The later reports display from the title of the articles how the event has become a battlefield of (undue) gender conflicts. Lee (2016) points to the inappropriateness of this, as conflict would only exist when the other genuinely accepts the party as an equal. To take from Rancière’s view once again, it is this inequality between the two parties that gives

opportunity for politics, for the process of political subjectivization of Korean women to begin. The very phrases of the women asking, “What do you not understand (about the misogyny in our society)?” twist and live Rancière’s conception of “a political structure of disagreement” (Rancière, 54). In that declarative interrogative, women flip the hierarchal implications in asking “Do you understand?” and presume themselves as a political subject who were stripped of their part but are in actuality equals to those who stripped it from them (if not actively, then those who complied with the existing order and distribution at the very least). This is a drastically different experience from the past women’s rights movements that were either led by elites or fragmented into different groups of class and interests.

It should not be overlooked that the event and voices at Gangnam Station include biological males in claiming part for those without a part. Politics, as Rancière continuously asserts, “begins when the equality of anyone and everyone is inscribed in the liberty of the people,” and Rancière’s understanding inevitably implies radical equality and inclusion (Rancière, 123). The sticky notes written by men that display similar messages, like “I survived because I’m a man, and I had no idea,” illustrates the “equality of anyone and everyone” and opens the possibility of communal relationship sharing the common. Moreover, it was perhaps not the first but one of the most influential mobilizations of women that reached and shaped the mobilizations to follow. Rancière posits that “political subjectivization produces a multiple that was not given in the police constitution of the community, a multiple whose count poses itself as contradictory in terms of police logic...the people [as those who have no part, who have the power to shake the existing structure to extend equality], are the first of these multiples that split up the community” (Rancière, 36). In that way, women as “the denatured, defeminized subject” (and therefore may include biological males)

form a certain “people” who are never a whole, but have the potential to create opening for “the equality of anyone and everyone” (Rancière, 36).

Women’s demand for increased security and the right to their body of course existed well before the Gangnam Station case as well, but the case marks the beginning of noticeable disidentification of Korean women and active subjectivization as distinct yet equal subjects in the Korean society as men. This is clearly visible in the ensuing cases of women’s rights movement and mobilizations. Later in 2016, Korea saw an installation of multiple peaceful demonstrations demanding the resignation or impeachment of then-President Park Geunhye. These demonstrations were celebrated at the time both domestically and internationally as citizens’ initiative of direct democracy. But these demonstrations were not as homogeneous and “peaceful” as the celebrative media reports assume. Against the hegemonic interpretation of the demonstrations emphasized their civilized, peaceful qualities, women asserted how such public space was not as peaceful and safe to women as they had to routinely face sexual harassment, crude comments, and even misogynist slogans regarding the fact that President Park was a woman from the fellow participants. This led to the establishment of “Femi-Zone” within the demonstrations where the marginalized groups of the gender spectrum exposed this inequality that exists in the center of what is readily accepted as a democratic opening and actively enacted the equality that they rightly demand. Here, utterances and speeches on gender equality and enhancing safety of women were made before the main events of the demonstrations. The performances and enactments of equality, the staging of the people as a one-over, were all actively engaged during this process; albeit it was a part of a greater demand of the “whole” of the Korean demos that was in a way merely responding to the brokenness of the representative democracy in which they

had placed their faith, the participants in the Femi-Zone vigorously demanded and carved out a place for themselves where there had previously been nonplace, causing a shift in the playing field (Rancière, 1992; Rancière, 37). Against those who shot disdainful looks at such “dissident” voice in a logic similar to that used in Korean democratization—that such rights of individuals and groups must for a time give way to the “greater good” or common goal of achieving democracy (or in the case of the candlelight demonstrations, the impeachment of President Park)—the subjectivized women rather emboldened their claims that even in this struggle for democracy, women (and other marginalized gender groups) were reduced to objects to the means without due parts.

This claim manifests plainly in the following impeachment and establishment of “more democratic” government, as women are still denied their due parts in the perceived “victory” of Korean democracy. Some examples of women’s continued struggle over their right to be recognized as equal subjects include “Hongdae Molka” incident and following demonstrations at Hyeohwa Station in 2018 in retaliation to what was perceived to be an unequal application of law and process of justice, the Nth Room case of digital sexual exploitation in 2019, and the Me Too Movement that will be examined in the next section. It is worth noting that women continue to actively place themselves within this discourse of people, with slogans like “We Are Also the People” continuously in these movements (Kim et al., 2018). Of course, in this case they are referring to the people as those who have a part, juxtaposing the uncouneted state of women, and claiming their part in there as well.

2. Continuation — Rise of Me Too Movement 2018

A. Overview of the Movement

Although the term “me too” was coined earlier in 2006 by Tarana Burke, the Me Too Movement worldwide first began in 2017 with exposure of multitudes of sexual harassment allegations against a renowned American film producer, Harvey Weinstein. Soon, the movement gained momentum online, at the suggestion that if all women who has experienced sexual harassment or abuse shared their stories, then the sheer magnitude of the problem may become more visible to the world.

The Me Too Movement in Korea began on January 29th, 2018, by Prosecutor Seo Ji-Hyun who exposed on the internal network of the prosecutors that she had been sexually harassed by the Deputy Chief Prosecutor Ahn Tae-Geun. Her confession was met with public outrage, and was followed by countless confessions and reports of sexual abuse and harassment by prominent men in various fields, ranging from film and theatre, literary, religious, sports, politics, and even secondary education.

Before examining more closely the way the movement unfolded itself, it is important to first trace the notable change in the Korean politics between the year 2016, at the time of the Gangnam Station Femicide case, and 2018, at the onset of the Me Too movement, as an effort to appropriately place the event within the sociopolitical context of the Korean society. The year 2016 marks, quite literally, a revolutionary point in the Korean politics apart from its significance in the political subjectivization of Korean women. The conservative Park Geun-Hye government was replaced by a more liberal and progressive Moon Jae In government in 2017, as then-President Park was impeached in February of 2017 for the first time ever in Korean history.

Under the Park government, general human rights conditions in Korea had deteriorated; the illegal inspections of civilians continued, innocent North Korean

defectors were framed into spies, and the government actively engaged in selecting news agenda on major news media. The violent repression of protests also persisted. In 2016, an activist farmer, Baek Nam Gi, died of injuries from police water cannon. It was reported that the police continued to blast water on him even after he had fallen to the ground in the antigovernment demonstration that occurred the year before. The doctors reported that he had a cerebral hemorrhage, presumably from the water cannon, highlighting the level of police brutality. In addition to the eroding right to assembly, the Park administration encouraged government-organized demonstrations to counter anti-government demonstrations. Park's Blue House was accused of ordering the Korea Parent Federation, a far-right organization, to hold protests and demonstrations.

Perhaps the gravest event relevant to human rights that took place during the Park administration is the sinking of the Sewol Ferry in April of 2014. The disaster, while it would be far-fetched to attribute the responsibility to Park's government, incited numerous events that revealed the government's poor commitment to the human rights of the people. When Park's delayed and confused response to the disaster came under criticism, the government responded by first restricting and downplaying the media coverage of the event and then directing the perspective of further media coverage. Censorship of media was strengthened to the point that the Blue House would screen through the news items of major broadcasting stations. The increasing government interference in news media eventually led to another KBS and MBC journalist strike in 2017. The government created a blacklist of artists who were deemed "unfriendly," and actors and actresses who stated their support for the victims of the Sewol Ferry were included on this list, as well as cultural figures that were favorable to Moon Jae In, then-opposition leader. Police brutality against the

demonstrations protesting the government's ineffective response to the Sewol tragedy continued. The government restricted its people's freedom of expression by filing lawsuits, creating a massive blacklist of some 9000 people from fine arts to pop music to film and dramas, and controlling the media.

Global indices such as the Economist's Democracy Index and Reporters Without Borders' Free Press Index reveal the significant corrosion in Korea's democracy and press freedom during the Park administration. In Democracy Index, Korea was classified as "flawed democracy" in 2015 and 2016 falling from its "full democracy" status in the past years. Reporters Without Borders ranked Korea's press freedom at 50th in the world in 2013, when Park came to power; it incrementally declined to 57th in 2014, 60th in 2015, 70th in 2016, and 63rd in 2017, slightly recovering as Park's government was faced with impeachment and criminal charges.

It was against this backdrop of political deterioration that the latter half of 2016 saw installations of a series of peaceful, mass mobilization of the citizens in candlelight demonstrations that initiated and finally bring about this historical impeachment. Thus, the "success" of the candlelight demonstrations in peacefully bringing out the impeachment and change of power was celebrated as the high point of Korean democracy. This sense of victory and pride had likely been transferred to a majority of Korean women as well; according to the exit poll of the presidential election in 2017, 42.0% of women voted for then-candidate Moon Jae In, who stood for progressive and presumably feminist values (The Fact, 2017). A closer look at the predicted percentage of votes by the Gallup Korea reveals a similar story; 56% of women in their twenties were expected to vote for Moon, while 18% were expected to vote for Shim Sang-Jung, a female presidential candidate from the Justice Party, a party located to the left of Moon's Democratic Party of Korea. 59% of women in their

thirties were expected to vote for Moon and 12% were expected to vote for Shim. Overall, Korean women from their twenties to fifties tended to vote much more liberal than Korean men, which indicates that process of subjectivization that begun with the Gangnam Station Femicide case has been absorbed into the police logic of distributing the parts within institutions of representative democracy, and it could be inferred that Korean women had high hopes for the new government with its progressive ideals. It is precisely the fact that the Me Too Movement occurred within this context of new, presumably more democratic government sympathetic to the rights of women that adds to the gravity and impact of the movement on the subjectivization of Korean women.

B. Formation of Solidarity for the Unaccounted — The Case of Kim Jieun

The high hopes that Korean women likely held in the new government were effectively shattered with one particular case in the Me Too movement. Starting with Prosecutor Seo Ji-Hyun's account in end of January, countless accounts and allegations of sexual harassment and assault flooded the media nearly everyday the following month. This certainly exposed the prevalence and pervasiveness of sexual violence as the banal reality of Korean women, but amid those confessions, one was of particularly explosive nature that left a lasting impact on the history of Korean women's movements. It was an interview of Kim Jieun, secretary of the Chungnam Provincial Governor Ahn Hee-Jung on March 5th of 2018 that reignited and continued the political subjectivization of Korean women. Ahn had been one of the most prominent presidential candidates within the Democratic Party of Korea; although he lost to Moon in the primary election, many predicted that the young and confident governor would rise as Moon's successor in the next presidential election. His agenda

promoted grassroots democracy and gender equality, and he made public his intentions of power distribution in an effort to achieve greater equality in his organization within the bureaucracy. All of these factors added to the shock of Kim Jieun's interview. In her interview with JTBC, she revealed that she had been sexually assaulted by Ahn four times, all the while suffering from high intensity labor as his attending secretary. It was defined as sexual violence based on authority and hierarchy—more specifically, male authority or patriarchy. Kim asserted that Ahn, as Kim's superior, had all authority over Kim's career, and it was nearly impossible for Kim to disobey him.

Just as the banality of Gangnam Station ignited heated response from the women who subjectivized themselves as a potential victim who only survived out of luck, the commonplace name of Kim Jieun at once exposed the banal danger that every woman faced in her workplace; what Kim Jieun had gone through was not an isolated case of misfortune. Kim Jieun had been wronged by the Korean society, which is strictly based on the police order. Just as the media distorted the angle of misogyny in the crime by driving at general gender inequality that men may as well suffer from in the case of the Gangnam Station femicide, it soon distracted from the marginalized and objectified position of Kim Jieun in the workplace by blasting with scandalous titles of Kim's past marriage and private messages with her friends (Kim, 2020).

As was seen in Figure 1, Rancière posits that the process of subjectivization begins with disidentification, rejecting the identity given by the police order. Often, this could occur as a disidentification from a certain group; for instance, in the Gangnam Station case, it could be argued that the men who supported the women's protest that the crime was clearly based on misogyny first of all disidentified

themselves from Korean men represented by the members of Solidarity for Gender Equality, who had been constantly arguing that men were at disadvantage compared to women. A broader disidentification seems to have occurred in the case of Kim Jieun; Korean women disidentified themselves from a gendered object as females and instead subjectivized as workers and laborers who must often submit to the wrongs and damages of the workplace solely to maintain their jobs and survive. While not all of them may have been sexually violated, they shared a common in the moments of unpleasantness they had to endure as part of what their work entails for them. As the French protesters in the '68 movement exclaimed "We are all German Jews," the Korean women in 2018 professed that to live and work as a woman in Korea meant being Kim Jieun in countless moments in life (Kim, 2019). They proclaimed, "The world where women are constantly violated is over. I, and the many ordinary Kim Jieuns, will build a new world together" (Kim, 2019). Curiously enough, this mode of subjectivization closely follows Rancière's formula of subjectivization: a proclamation of *nos sumus, nos existimus*. As he asserts, women no longer possess or are contented with the uncontested identity of "sexual complementarity" but are "the subject of experience...that measures the gap between an acknowledged part...and a having no part" (Rancière, 36). And as was the case in Gangnam Station crime, women again choose to occupy physical and visible space. Kim Jieun first bravely chose to appear on one of Korea's most popular evening news show on live. Then, while she began her lonely battle and retreated into her house, trying to erase herself from public scrutiny, women formed solidarity and continued to occupy public spaces. They printed posters to put on the walls of bookstores and organized press conferences on behalf of Kim Jieun, and encouraged speaking out in the ongoing Me Too movement online and offline (Kim, 2020; Chung et al., 2019).

On the other hand, the personal account of Kim Jieun demonstrates plainly the logic of police mobilized to silence her in speaking out against the wrong that had been done to her. After the assaults, she testifies that Ahn, while apologizing to her, repeatedly asserts that she, as his attending secretary, must do everything in her capacity to make him comfortable (Kim, 2020). By this logic, he effectively ties Kim to the identity of an object, fulfilling his needs at any hour or cost. Stripped down to an object, Kim is also stripped of her logos—it is precisely this that Ahn utilizes to silence her. Kim actually speaks of trying to convince herself that she was only doing her duty, that “it won’t happen again,” that forgetting was the easiest way when she knew of the power Ahn possessed as the “next president” (Kim, 110; Kim, 112). In a way, her speaking out was a direct result of the Me Too movement itself, as she credits the courage and solidarity of other women as the direct factor that gave her the idea to escape from the suffocating influence of Ahn on her. Thus, Kim Jieun could hold that fatal interview with JTBC because the ongoing Me Too movement allowed her to disidentify herself from the identity of submissive secretary of the most prominent politician in the Korean politics. Her interview was in the literal sense a stage where she, as an independent and autonomous subject, enacted out her equality with Ahn as a human being. This initiated and contributed to further, broader disidentification of Korean women from gendered objects to workers and laborers, and in this process of subjectivization women continued to act “as if” they were already equal, demanding and occupying public spaces to be seen and heard.

To summarize, both Gangnam Station Femicide case in 2016 and Me Too Movement, especially the case of Kim Jieun in 2018 closely follow Rancière’s description of political subjectivization of disidentification and enactment of equality,

while the latter involves disillusionment of Korean women in the hopes of institutionalized democracy as the political situation in Korea had encountered a dramatic change between 2016 and 2018. As Rancière understands such enactment of equality as an opportunity for politics in establishing greater equality and extending democracy, it is necessary to analyze and reinterpret the impact and meaning of the dissensus that inevitably breaks from women's political subjectivization.

VI. Democratic Opening in Korean Politics — An Analysis

Rancière's prominent idea is that the process of subjectivization would provide a democratic opening that leads to substantial changes in distribution of the goods; in fact, his definition of politics centers on the distribution i.e. reclaiming of the parts for those who have no part. Thus, the analysis of Korean women's subjectivization through the Gangnam Station and Kim Jieun's cases must be twofold; firstly, the current social and political environment and the evident social conflicts over the gender issue must be assessed in line with Rancière's stage of dissensus. Second, a close scrutiny of whether this opportunity for politics has actually led to the reclaiming of women of their due parts in the society is very much necessary.

1. Social and Political Environment of Korea and Ongoing Gender Conflicts

After nearly thirty years of democratization and the recent momentum of civil, participatory democracy through series of candlelight protests, Korea today faces on the one hand the adversarial political culture and on the other deep social divisions and polarizations on multiple issues like gender and income. Never before in the Korean history have gender conflicts arisen in the forefront of Korean politics as they do today. The response to the Gangnam Station Femicide case can be very much argued as the beginning of political subjectivization of Korean women where they reveal the wrongs in the Korean society and demand to be heard as a voice, to have a part. In Rancière's understanding of politics, the conflictual nature that follows from the subjectivization of those without a part is not only inherent but also desirable, as it provides an opportunity to redistribute the parts in the society based on the principle of equality. The newspaper titles that paint a negative picture of gender conflicts or the opinions on the sticky notes that call for "peace" between the two sexes then are at

best naïve to believe that consensus is always desirable, and at worst detrimental to the democratic equality in a society as they serve to legitimize and solidify the logic of the police, which only seeks to muffle the voices of those without a part as mere noises with no words or logic. Where there is disagreement, dissensus, or failure to understand, is an opening for greater democracy—for the nameless and the uncounted to be counted as uncounted, and by doing so restructure the society so that they can enter and claim a part as equals of those with names.

The demand to be treated as equals as men—as one of the sticky notes said, to be treated as “a player, not a prize”—continues on to the ensuing waves of women’s movements and female political demands. The logic of the police is simultaneously a resource and an encumbrance, as the same laws and institutions used as the basis or the common to stage the disagreement are pitted against restructuring of the parts. Still, this perception of democracy not as a consensus but an ongoing struggle for those without a part to have a part sheds a different light on the discords of the society. And the recent women’s movements seem to reflect this understanding of democracy. The rhetoric to be an equal, to be recognized as an entity that should be entitled to, but is excluded from, having a part, continues on in response to a series of events that uncover the underlying misogyny and discrimination in the Korean society. Speaking out against sexual harassment and assaults in the schools and workplaces grotesquely reveals what the police order had been carefully hiding: women, on the surface identified as equal members of society, were in fact a part of this inegalitarian order of male-based hierarchy. The act of speech and staging conflicts brings to the light this disparity and enacts equality between anyone and everyone, regardless of gender or social class.

2. Impact, Implications, and Limitations

While the trends and events in women's movements in Korea since 2016 provide ample evidence of political subjectivization of women, it is important to remember that subjectivization is an open-ended process, rather than an isolated incident. Also, although it is encouraging that the gender struggles in Korea have been providing a stage where the unaccounted can attempt to enact their equality, a closer examination at the way that it has been unraveling within the context of the current system poses some possible threats to this opening for equality. Even with the conflictual tendencies of Korean political culture and divisions in social ranks, Korea is not exempt from the shadows of postdemocracy alluded to by Rancière. The three characteristics of postdemocracy—juridification, the practiced of general expertise, and matching every one to the part through the mechanisms of public opinion polls so that there would be no room for miscount i.e. politics to occur—are all present in Korea, and especially the spread of law is the prevalent and even preferred way to resolve the dissensus raised through subjectivization. The struggle of Kim Jieun centered on lawsuits going to and fro with Ahn Hee-Jung. The demands of women in the recent women's movements focus primarily on legal punishment of perpetrators of misogyny and appeals for stronger protection by law. Government turns to a panel of experts and elites to concoct policies that might pacify the uneasy people.

In addition, although Rancière does not explicitly differentiate between different kinds of disagreements, it would be a false interpretation to read every social conflict as the stage of dissensus that provides such valuable opportunity for democracy and greater equality. Rancière's politics and democracy arise only when the unaccounted seize the opportunity to expose this wrong and make visible that they, unlike what the police order would like to have them believe, are without a part.

In other words, it would not be conducive to interpret the recent backlash on Korean women's movements by younger Korean men, accusing the government (especially the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family) of misandry and reverse discrimination as an opening for greater equality. Rather, it must be viewed as the police order fighting, as the oligarchs of the Ancient Greece did against the empty freedom of the demos, to keep the unaccounted as they are, so as not to lose even the slightest bit of what used to be without question their part always.

Perhaps most importantly, it is not easy to answer whether the subjectivization of women has led to tangible distribution of parts in the society that were previously unavailable to them. There are many ways to interpret what precisely these "parts" entail, but it would hardly be conducive to displace them into existing measures and indicators. Indeed, as it has been thoroughly emphasized, the generic indicators such as life expectancy and level of education are not appropriate in estimating the due parts demanded by women. The repeated instances and phenomena of misogyny in the Korean context, ranging from physical violence against women as was the case in Gangnam Station 2016, sexual assault and exploitation on online and offline spaces as demonstrated by the Me Too Movement and Nth Room case in 2018 and 2019 proves that the growing status of women in terms of those indicators do not shield them from crimes arising from the embedded sociocultural discrimination. On the contrary, the perceived improvement in the socioeconomic status of women fuels the illegitimate sense of injustice in male communities and masks the actual threats that women may face as those who have no part, equaling them with the misgivings that men may face without being a significant danger to their well being.

VII. Conclusion

To summarize, Korea has seen a successful consolidation of democracy ever since its democratization in the late 1980s during the Third Wave of democratization. However, the impact of democracy in terms of equality has been skewed, especially lacking in the field of women's rights and gender equality. Instead of analyzing the factors responsible for this in detail, this thesis focused on the two prominent events in the recent years that have shifted the direction of gender discourse in the Korean politics, reinterpreting their importance through the political philosophy of Jacques Rancière. Through such reinterpretation, it could be concluded that the Gangnam Station Femicide case marked the beginning of the Korean women's political subjectivization, where women realized that despite the increase in outward gender equality in terms of level of education and job choices, they were still unaccounted for; their very lives were at risk by the mere fact that they are women. This realization, combined with the media and the government's lukewarm response in conceptualizing the crime as misogynist in character, ignited the path to disidentification and active vocalization and expression of their demands. The physical occupation of publicly visible space in the Exit 10 of Gangnam Station staged an enactment of equality, with women acting "as if" they were equally heard in the Korean society as men, despite the media and government response proving otherwise.

The rise of the Me Too movement against the backdrop of installment of a progressive government through citizens mass mobilization in the form of candlelight demonstrations further disidentified and disengaged Korean women from the part assigned to them by the society, accompanied by crude disillusionment of the supposed restoration of democracy through citizen participation. The case of Kim

Jieun in particular was disenchanting as it was found that even the self-proclaimed progressive liberal male leaders took part in thoroughly objectifying women rather than viewing them and treating them as their equals. The remarkable “democracy” that they had achieved through candlelight protests bore no difference to what was perceived as the oppressive, restrictive government of before; there still was no part for those who have no part.

Such reading of the recent events explains what seems to be the ever-worsening conflicts between the male and female gender in Korea, what the media sometimes goes as far as labeling them “gender war.” The mass political subjectivization of Korean women is unlikely to scale back, especially if the current backlash on feminism continues. However, Rancière’s perspective of dissensus as an opportunity allows interpreting the current conflicts in Korea not as a threat but a necessary process to achieve greater equality and democracy. As all class struggles, the current gender conflicts would inevitably suffer from the resistance of those who already had parts, those who could unthinkingly bask in all that were given to them, those who would feel personally attacked and deprived of what they used to enjoy by the reclaiming of the parts by those who had none. In other words, since the disidentification of women has already begun, the enactment of equality will continue, and the conflicts within that process will be unavoidable; but it is also through these conflicts that the subjects may form solidarity regardless of their biological sex. The struggle of Korean women is not, strictly speaking, restricted to biological females only. As was visible in the case of Gangnam Station femicide and the establishment of Femi-Zone during the candlelight demonstrations, it is possible and expected that men and those of other marginalized gender would come to stand

together in achieving true equality: equality between anyone and everyone that forms the very foundation of politics.

This is not to say that the prospect is singularly optimistic. It still remains to be seen how the process of subjectivization would maneuver the partition of the perceptible, the actual gain of parts for those who have no part. As unfolding of women's subjectivization severely relies on the mechanisms of consensus democracy as a way of resolving the wrong, it may in the end fail to achieve the equality it seeks to achieve. Most importantly, there must be a distinction between disagreements as an enactment of equality, and conflicts that arise from the police's desire to keep the status quo, so that the demos as a one-over does not develop and each part is neatly matched with a corresponding count.

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