

Program in Transnational Korean Studies

Presents:



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(Beyond) Cold War Governmentality and Ecopolitical Cinema on the Korean Peninsula and Its Borders

Abstract: During the postwar period, South and North Korean documentary films embodied (Cold) war governmentality in relation to the discourses of economic development with anti-communism and anti-liberalism. However, at the same time, (cold) war governmentality is affiliated with ecological violence and biopolitical racism in which military occupation, mass death and displacement or self-exile occur, linking it to later catastrophes. Beginning with Korean hibakusha (A-bomb Victims) documentaries, I examine films that problematized the way that the South Korean government treated radiated bodies as excluded bodies from nation-state and the developing Korean urban landscape or contaminated slum during the Park Chung-hee era. Through these depictions, the films suggest that biopolitical developmentalism was built on South Korea's connivance of Japanese colonialism and is in collusion with U.S. militarism based on Korean hibakusha sacrifices. I also examine documentary films that depict the 'Jeju 4.3 massacre' that demonstrate more recent radiological and environmental contamination caused by military bases in exchange for economic advantages on Jeju Island. Finally, I examine documentaries on North Korean refugees, which illuminate how North Korean militarism including nuclear development brought economic failures in North Korea. By calling these documentary films 'ecopolitical cinema' in the age of the anthropocene, I trace how discourses of ecocriticism can draw out not only issues of industrial crisis, but can also critique of aspects of (cold) war biopolitical developmentalism. In other words, I show how these films respond to the governance of life and death by militarism and foreground grassroots movements such as protest and migration in relation to the ecopolitical significance; here individuals or groups act to protect their health or livelihood from threats seen as emanating from militarism and environmental changes.

Bio: Minhwa Ahn received her Ph.D. in the Asian Languages and Literature at the University of Minnesota.

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