

Postmemory and the Gwangju Democratization Movement: Focused on the Documentary *Kim-Gun**

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Abstract

Although the Gwangju Democratization Movement in 1980 (also called the May 18 Movement) is often remembered as a symbolic event in the history of South Korean democratization movements, it had been prohibited from being enunciated in the space of public memory for a long while. Instead, the sense of liberation, fear, and violence as well as the following pain and indebtedness experienced by those who were involved in the events of May 1980 have been commonly represented in works of Korean literature and film. These works valued listening to testimonies of the survivors and remembering their agony and spirit of resistance. Contrary to such works in the past that tended to recall the voices of those who directly experienced the events, several outstanding works have recently emerged from younger generations who did not directly experience the events but shared their memory. These younger generations distinguish themselves from the survivors and witnesses generation in ways that overcome the survivor's solemn attitude toward the democratization movement. A feminist Holocaust scholar, Marianne Hirsch refers to these generations as "post-generations" and calls their works "postmemorial works." This article will discuss how these postmemorial works engage in the act of remembering, mainly focusing on the documentary film *Kim-Gun* (dir. Sangwoo Kang, 2019) and comparing it to other contemporaneous works. In *Kim-Gun*, the film crew makes an effort to track down a real person who was photographed by a photo-journalist during the events of May 1980. In doing so, the film crew meets and interviews the survivors out of desperate expectations to reveal the truth in the age of "post-truth" marked by a deluge of fake news. In the end, however, it is revealed that there is something more important than finding the truth. The documentary film thus demonstrates how the post-generations remember and represent the Gwangju Democratization Movement and acquire the affect of entanglement vis-à-vis a traumatic history in a new manner that extends beyond Hirsch's formulation of postmemory as centered on familial relations.

5.18민주화운동은 사건 직후 한동안 공공 기억의 장소에서 발화가 금지된 주제였다. 대신, 80년 5월 광주에서 당사자들이 느꼈던 해방감, 공포, 폭력적 경험, 그리고 사후적 고통과 부채감은 문학과 영화의 언어를 빌려 빈번하게 다루어졌다. 그러나 최근 문학작품과 영화에서 광주를 직접 경험하지 않은 '이후 세대'들이 경험의 당사자들과는 다른 자신들만의 언어로 광주에 관해 말하기 시작하고 있다. 이들은 5.18 민주화운동을 재현하는데 있어,

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기존의 엄숙주의적 태도를 넘어서는 포스트메모리의 정동을 만들어가고 있다. 이 글은 마리안느 허쉬의 포스트메모리 개념을 경유해 비체험 세대들이 갖는 기억의 정동과 연루의 감각에 관해 살펴본다. 특히, 다큐멘터리 영화 <김군> (강상우 연출, 2019)을 중심으로 비체험 세대들이 광주를 기억하고 재현하는 방식에 관해 분석하고자 한다. 이 영화는 트라우마적 역사에 대해 ‘이후 세대’들이 어떻게 연루의 감각을 획득해 가는지, 그리고 수많은 가짜뉴스가 범람하는 탈진실의 시대에 어떻게 역사적 진실에 접근해 가고 있는지를 잘 보여준다. 이 과정에서, 허쉬가 분석한 사적 관계 내의 포스트메모리 개념을 넘어서는 새로운 포스트제너레이션들의 기억 재현 방식과 정동에 관해 논할 것이다.

Key words

postmemory, May 1980 Gwangju Democratization Movement, *Kim-Gun*, post-generations, memory studies

Introduction

As the Gwangju Democratization Movement in 1980 (also called the May 18 Movement) marks its 40th anniversary, there has been a growing interest in how its memory could be inherited to the generation after. *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, for one, featured an article on various activities related to the Gwangju Democratization Movement performed by young people in their twenties and thirties, entitled “Postcards, Cooking Shows, Fancy Goods, Fandom ... Millennials’ Memoria Technica for May 18” in its new year special edition. The special feature article begins with an excerpt from an interview of Young-soon Park who sent out the last broadcast on behalf of the civilian army at the Provincial Hall of South Jeolla Province on May 27, 1980: “Given the ongoing distortions of the Gwangju Democratization Movement, I am not confident about whether there will be people who remember us and think of the values of the movement after we pass away.” It then sheds light on works created by a younger generation that (is believed to have) inherited the memory of the events. In the words of the interviewees, the article emphasizes the need for “expanding the memory of the Gwangju Democratization Movement beyond a mode of ‘rigorism’ and into a spirit that holds true in everyday life in order to prevent it from being buried in history” and for “the younger generations without direct experience of the movement to remember it in various ways.” (Kang 2020) The people introduced in the article state that the Gwangju Democratization Movement should be remembered in less of a somber and more of an everyday manner, especially through means such as media content development which could grab the interests of younger generations. The Spring 2020 issue of the quarterly *Munhakdle* also introduced younger generation’s works such as the “May of Gwangju” music box, “We will Keep Rolling Away the Stone Tomorrow” exhibition,

and the Facebook page “Remember the May of Gwangju” (hereafter May Gwangju Facebook), and examined how the Gwangju of May 1980 is being remembered and solidarized with by younger generations. And in ruminating over the words of Sang-won Yoon, one of the protest leaders, during the last foreign press conference in front of the Provincial Hall of South Jeolla Province,¹ Dong-gyu Kim, the manager of the May Gwangju Facebook, identifies himself as one who inherited the will and purpose of those who participated in the Gwangju Democratization Movement. (Kim 2020, 76) So-jin Kim and Ha-Young Lee who produced the May 18 cooking show also highlight the role of the younger generations as messengers of memory by focusing on listening to the women of Gwangju and communicating their stories while cooking. (Kang 2020)

Nevertheless, the memory of Gwangju is not transmitted in such a simple manner. Eun-hyun Park, the producer of the “May of Gwangju” music box mentioned in both of the special feature articles, questions the identity of the subject who remembers and memorializes the Gwangju Democratization Movement and sets forth the need for “our own language” in addressing generations that did not directly experience the movement:

Who has the right to speak about May 18? If someone does have the right to speak about May 18, who is it that grants such a right? In responding to these questions, I had thought that in Gwangju, there existed a territory with a rightful holder, one who had the right to speak about May 18. (Park 2020, 66)

Here, the people with “the right to speak” refers to the subjects who actually lived the experience. As stated by Park, it is true that there has been a certain belief that the memory of the survivors is indeed the true memory of Gwangju. Given that it tended to take a long time for the truth to emerge particularly in cases of national and ethnic genocides, the survivors’ testimonies have definitely played a decisive role in divulging the truth. Likewise, survivors belatedly began to speak out about the Gwangju event after having passed through a period of forced silence. Accordingly, Gwangju was established as a site that attested to the violence of a dictatorial regime through vivid testimonies of the victims and shocking images of the events. Alongside other areas like Sabuk and Buma around 1980, Gwangju thus became a signifier for democratization. And throughout the subsequent forty years, the event has been represented in numerous literary works and films.

Recent representations of May 18, however, are seeing a transition from survivor-centered accounts into narratives created by younger generations. While there have been many works in Korean literature dealing with the theme of national division that narrativized accounts of the generations that did not experience the Korean War, it is a fairly

recent phenomenon for works dealing with the Gwangju Democratization Movement to feature voices of the generation that did not live the experience.² These works go beyond entrusting the ownership of its memories to the survivors and providing a faithful representation of them. Needless to say, the testimonies and memories of the survivors remain significant as ever, given the situation in Gwangju where there still are unidentified victims and those who are accountable have yet to be punished. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy how generations that did not directly experience the event started to speak about May 18 in their own words, because all memory will someday become postmemory. It would then be meaningful to examine what these memories intend to speak of and what they denote. How are traumatic events, the calamitous and shocking experiences, to be remembered by the generation after? This article examines how postmemorial affect emerges from contemporary representations of the Gwangju Democratization Movement and how the generation after remembers and represents it, with a focus on the documentary film *Kim-Gun* (dir. Sangwoo Kang, 2019). It will look into how the memory of a traumatic history and its mode of representation—particularly that which expands the sense of involvement—connect with post-generations and advance into a future-oriented memory.

The Involvement and Postmemory of Gwangju

In a novel by Sol-moe Park, *Then What Do We Sing* (*Geureom Mueol Bureuji*, 2014), the narrator recounts her feelings over the experience of hearing about Gwangju at a Korean language group meeting in Berkeley and at a bar in Kyoto as well as a visit to the former Provincial Hall of South Joella Province with Hanna, a friend from Berkeley. During her travel to Berkeley, the narrator happens to hear about Gwangju, a city she was born and grew up in. The subject of Gwangju she encounters at the most unexpected places comes to prescribe her identity against her will; and yet, she feels an impenetrable curtain whenever she actually tries to get close to it.

It's just that there are several layers of curtains before me and I cannot advance straight forward—only this is certain. I believe that a period of around three years could be regarded as one, that three years ago could be regarded from a perspective of three years after, and that therefore I could erase all tenses, and that there will be more and more time that I could regard as such. But this also means that my eyes cannot reach “a day in May 1980, in Gwangju” that Nam-Ju Kim³ wrote of. This could be a little mysterious but is, in fact, quite natural. (Park 2014, 167)

The novel demonstrates the perplexity of speaking about the Gwangju Democratization movement on the part of the generation that did not live the experience. Here, the memory of Gwangju is no longer in the form of testimonies but becomes an object to be imagined beyond the curtains. Noting the shift from testimony to fiction in literary works on May 18 through Sol-moe Park's novel, Lucie Angheben perceives a generational change in the representation of Gwangju. (Angheben 2018, 196) Several critics have noted the appearance of a new generation in literary works dealing with the Gwangju Democratization Movement in addition to Park's novel. Hyung-joong Kim names those who did not directly experience Gwangju in 1980 "the second generation of Gwangju" and differentiates their memory from the previous generation's memory. In analyzing the narrative of private revenge in recent novels dealing with May 18, he states that the novels reveal the impossibility of the first generation of Gwangju to take revenge in a manner that gets over the Other while the second generation of Gwangju assumes an Antigonean attitude that is at odds with the Other.⁴ On the other hand, Mi-jung Kim turns the generational problem mentioned by Hyung-joong Kim into a matter between those with direct experience and those without experience, especially paying attention to how the latter relates to an event they have not experienced. (Mi-jung Kim 2020, 31) She states that the memory of those without experience operates through imagination or affect, and refers to the affective memory of the generation after in her analysis of *Human Acts* (*Sonyeoni Onda*, 2014) by Han Kang:

They confess not having experienced it consciously. Their experience was something that could not be structured into a narrative as of yet. It is clearly communicated that they did not have their own language to speak about that experience. But frequently and assertively recollected in this photograph collection is the corporeal memory—trivial but crucial—whose heart of the matter is articulated along the lines of "feeling scared remains vivid." Han Kang's novel, *Human Acts*, narrativized memory, but not all memories can be narrativized. Memory always oscillates little by little depending on each concrete place and context. What remains certain despite all that is the affect and memories mediated by the body. (Mi-jung Kim 2020, 34-35)

Such an affect is demonstrated in Park's novel as well. The narrator cannot speak of the events due to the invisible curtain in front of her and says that even her memory grows faint because of it. The narrator does not remember precisely who invited her to the Korean language group meeting or what kinds of stories were shared. But she clearly remembers the book she was reading that day, the cup of cap-

puccino nearing its bottom, and the sensory aspects such as the air and color of the day.

It was eight o'clock on a Thursday evening, in a café with large tables near UC Berkeley. I remember that the night air was light and dry. (Park 2014, 140)

And the occasion ended like that. I think there were some other stories too, but I can't remember [...] The place I was staying was past Chinatown. The color of the night was blue and the street narrowly continued on under the blue. (Park 2014, 143)

Utterances as such cannot testify and therefore cannot speak of or remember 'fact.' And yet, they constitute a field of affect that makes one remember based on the mood of the day. On the other hand, they ceaselessly present to those who cannot speak (those who are prohibited from speaking or cannot put oneself in such a position) the need to speak, the drive to do something.

Nobody spoke up that night in Gwangju. All we had to listen to for a long, long time was about rice cakes, porridges, and noodles. The man talked about them as if there was nothing more important. Just as if the talking should not end. (Park 2014, 164)

Concerning how the memory of the generation after is described not through direct testimony but in terms of affect and mood as such, recent studies on postmemory provide productive references. Holocaust scholar Marianne Hirsch refers to the memory of the generation after as postmemory in distinction to the memory of the survivor and witness generation: "'Postmemory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up."⁵ In other words, postmemory is a critical problematic that deals with the "secondary, post-generational memory that differs from traumatic memory because of its generational distance." (Nouzeilles 2005, 265) What is notable here is that the post-generations "identify that connection [with the traumatic past] as a form of memory" and that "memory can be transferred to those who were not actually there to live an event," but that at the same time they "also acknowledge that their received memory is distinct from the recall of contemporary witnesses and participants [emphasis added]." (Hirsch 2012, 3) The sense of distanced identification is one of the significant elements of the memory of the generation after, that is, of postmemory.

Hirsch uses the term 'postmemory' rather than 'memory' particularly in order to "pay attention to the changes in memory by gen-

eration over time.” (Park 2017, 218) In other words, it is not a matter of the end of direct experience and memory thereof, but a problem of how the generations after relate to the traumatic history. Hirsch therefore pays attention to media objects like novels, paintings, photographs, and films, noting that for members of the post-generation, memory is mediated not through direct but indirect experiences such as photographs or bedtime stories shared by their parents and thus through imaginary projection and creation. (Hirsch 2012, 29-30) James E. Young also refers to the younger generation’s memory as a mediated experience represented by after-images of history—or, the afterlife of memory—and distinguishes it from the previous generation’s direct experience. (Young 2000, 3-4)

Turning to Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*, Hirsch claims that postmemory is formed within familial relationships such as those between a parent (mother) and child (daughter) and that photographs play a decisive role in it. Barthes states that photographs attest to the fact that “the thing has been there,” and that although it is a very powerful attestation to that fact, it cannot assert anything beyond such attestation.⁶ The thing has been there, but it comes to signify an eternal separation from the existing subject by remaining there in the form of a photograph. This is also because it is (eternally) deprived of the world beyond the frame as argued by Stanley Cavell. (Cavell 1971/1979, 24)

Hirsch takes from Barthes in her discussion of postmemory because of what he identifies as the allure of photography. Barthes states that he is not attracted to most photographs with the element of stadium but he is that deeply drawn to photographs with the element of punctum. Here, stadium refers to the political, social, and economic contexts. But with such contexts cleared away, punctum refers to the affective aspect that, in Barthes’s words, “pricks” the viewers. (Barthes 2010, 25-27) Hirsch indicates that in the formation of postmemory, the punctum, or affect, derived from intimate relationships is maximized.

Above all, Hirsch claims that the generation after regards photograph not as it is but in a projective manner, citing Margaret Olin who emphasized the postmemorial generation’s “performative index” or “index of identification,” which contrasts with the Barthesian photographic indexicality.⁷ The indexicality of a photograph that attests to “having-been-there” operates differently for members of the postmemorial generation in that they do not accept the photograph as it is but remember it in a way that displaces the photographic subject’s “having-been-there” and is shaped by their needs and desires. (Hirsch 2012, 47) They thus imagine implication with the past and shape their memory in a manner different from the previous generation with the actual experience.

In the meantime, many scholars regarded postmemorial affect, which necessitates a formation of intimacy, as maximized within familial and intimate relationships. Accordingly, a considerable number of studies on postmemory focus on familial or other intimate relationships—and espe-

cially on family photographs. (Hirsch 1997) Geoffrey Maguire, for instance, argues that the politics of postmemory can intervene in a past that has been co-opted in the arena of contemporary national and cultural memory “only by elaborating their narratives in the realm of the familial.” (Maguire 2017, 12)

And yet, how is postmemorial affect—that is, memory of the ‘generation after’ that is not based on intimacy or is lacking a sense of implication—possible? How does such memory exist for generations who have not heard of the Holocaust even as bedtime stories? If, as stated by Barthes, the current war on memory exists because the twentieth century was an era that ceaselessly left behind the remains of Death,⁸ how should the current generation remember the last century? How is memory transferred to those who do not have any social connections to the past? The documentary film *Kim-Gun* discussed in the following segment points to a new field of postmemory, as it demonstrates the operation of post-generational memory outside the territory of intimacy.

Truth in Void: *Kim-Gun*, the Documentary

Kim-Gun is an investigative thriller documentary that probes into the whereabouts of a photographed figure referred to as “Kim-gun” whom Man-won Jee named “Gwang-soo number one” and identified as a soldier of the North Korean special forces. The film interviews the citizens of Gwangju who are likely to know Kim-gun and retraces the memories of the Gwangju Democratization Movement through a series of photographs. Documentaries on Gwangju so far have reconstructed the events of May 1980 based on testimonies by those who actually experienced them and have focused on making known the truth of the events and the pain of those who lived through them.⁹ *Kim-Gun*, however, is distinct from such previous documentaries in that it focalizes a single photograph, arranges the testimonies around the photograph, and follows a genre format of searching for a real person in that photograph.¹⁰

The film begins with a scene from a public hearing on the Gwangju Democratization Movement held on January 26, 1989. Testifying from the witness stand is Young-taek Kim, a *Dong-a Ilbo* correspondent who notes the sudden, sizable presence of masked militia since the entrance of about 300 college students from Seoul into the strictly controlled Gwangju on May 22, 1980. He questions how they entered the city in isolation and who they actually are. The scene presents the core question of *Kim-Gun*, “who is that person?”—for it is a film that looks for an answer to that question, featuring interviewees that testify who that person is.¹¹ This is fully demonstrated in a later part of the film that cross-cuts between the scene of the public hearing from 1989 and the

present-time testimony of Jinsoo Choi who provides decisive information about Kim-gun.

Following the scene of the public hearing are shots of the citizens of Gwangju (later interviewees) who are looking at the photograph of Kim-gun projected on to a large screen. Peculiar about these following shots is the fact that they are accompanied by reverse shots that show the responses of the interviewees, that is, the film crew including the actor Ye-eun Kim.¹² Considering how the interviewer is generally positioned behind the camera in documentary films, the inclusion of the interviewees' response as reverse shots along with shots of the interviewees signifies that the film crew is participating in the film and in the presented events at the same time. The interviewees are visible not only in the aforementioned scene but also in subsequent scenes not as they pose the questions but as they listen and respond to the answers. According to Bill Nichols, the most common formulation of relationship among the filmmaker, subject, and audience is "I speak about them to you." (Nichols 2001, 17) Here, the filmmaker is defined as one who speaks with expert knowledge and the audience as one who listens attentively. And yet, the filmmakers (the director and producers) of *Kim-Gun* are not in the position of those who speak but in the position of those who listen—that is, the audience. They are not the ones that explain with their expert knowledge but those who listen, those with the need to know.¹³

The filmmakers place themselves in the position of the audience because they are not the ones who can testify. Along with Sangwoo Kang (born in Seoul, 1983) who directed this film, members of the film crew were all born after 1980¹⁴ and is of a generation that did not directly experience the Gwangju Democratization Movement. Yeon-kyoung Shin, the film's producer, states that she dared not imagine how a generation that did not experience the era could treat the event in the way it has previously been. (Lee 2019) Kang, the director, also notes that previous treatments of May 18 were too solemn, and that their display of anger and guilt felt unfamiliar to him. (Lee 2019) Most of the film crew spent their teens at a time when transitional justice for the Gwangju Democratization Movement was making headway. They also learned of May 18 not as an ongoing problem but through the media as a past history to be mourned, whose subject in mourning was the government in repentance of the past. In a study on the postmemory about the forced disappearance and abduction committed by Argentina's military regime, Jeffrey Maguire has shown how post-generations confront the coerced collective/cultural memory—that is, the government-led survivor narratives and transitional justice—and create their own narratives of memory. (Maguire 2017) Similarly, *Kim-Gun* shows how post-generations compete against the collective/cultural memory formed in the public realm and create their own narratives of memory.

In her discussion of writings by the generation after, Lucie Angheben states as follows: “How could one be witness to a part of history one has not experienced? We come to see a shift from witness to inheritor, from one generation to another, and therefore from testimonial literature to fiction.” (Angheben 2018, 202) On that account, the film crew of *Kim-Gun* was able to propel their imagination in pursuing the allure provided by a single photograph rather than the mouths that claim to testify or those who say they know. Kang mentions that it was the intense attraction of the photographed figure that motivated him to make the film. Accordingly, Kang and the producers say that they intended to structure the film in the form of a mystery in search of the object of allure—the very real person in a photograph—all in contrast to the rigorism of the previous films about Gwangju. (Lee 2019) Here, the allure of the photograph that Kang refers to is different from Barthes’s studium. The photograph of ‘Kim-gun’ stood out among the many photographs of May 18 that bore the image of the victims.¹⁵ When Kang saw the photograph, he was captivated by the allure of the figure therein, which was able to apprehend once he erased the many circumstances around Gwangju. And it is clear that this allure came across as a powerful punctum for Kang. Here, what is significant is the connection of memories by means of a photograph, because it is the allure of the photograph that serves as the starting point for the formation of relationships rather than the intimate relationships serving as nodal points for memory. It is through the powerful affect emanating from the photograph of Kim-gun that Kang reacquires a memory that he was not involved in—or did not want to be involved in—and thereby establishes his own sense of involvedness. That is, if recent studies on postmemory tended to focus on how affect is generated from familial relationships, the kind of postmemory presented in *Kim-Gun* demonstrates how a sense of intimacy and involvedness can be inversely generated through powerful affect.

In the process of searching for a real person, the film encounters testimonies by many people. The testimonies, in fact, reveal the incompleteness of memory rather than confirm the facts; they are divided into small pieces and at times further shroud the case in mystery. Furthermore, this kind of work could reopen old wounds as demonstrated in interviews by Ki-chul Oh who says “I can’t fall asleep tonight if I tell these kind of stories” or by Insoo Park who shares that he is heartbroken after he sees photographs of Gwangju. In the opening part of the film, Oh, who was part of the armed civilian militia, raises the question of whether the film crew shares the same problematic framework of Man-won Jee in their pursuit of Kim-gun. But instead of answering to the question, the film cuts from a shot of Oh to a shot of the corridor in what was formerly the Provincial Hall of South Jeolla Province. This scene prepares the audience for the following scene, but it also approximates to an avoidance of Oh’s eyes, or avoid-

ing giving him an answer. This is because the purpose of *Kim-Gun* in the first place was not about shattering Jee's logic nor about further announcing or expanding the cause of May 18, but about searching for an armed civilian militia captured in a photograph—that is, for a fact. The film, therefore, does not stop searching for Kim-gun despite the uncomfortable questions.

Here enters another aspect of postmemory. The post-generation's obsession with fact appears to prepare a new era in facing truth after the period of the survivors' having testified their memory themselves. Hirsh states that postmemory is no longer connected to the past by way of recollection but rather mediated by way of imaginary projection, reflection, and creation—it is here that the desire to know about what remains a vacuum of facts becomes conspicuous. For example, *One Left* (2016) by Soom Kim, a novel that supposes a situation in which there is one last remaining “comfort woman” alive, shares the sources of its inspiration in the form of 316 footnotes citing actual testimonies.

Truth and fact are, of course, different. Nevertheless, for the present generation living in a world flooded with countless images, fake news, and information, such an obsession with fact is related to the question of which image, information, or news is true. In fact, there are countless information available and organized in the form of the likes of Wikipedia when one actually enters the keyword “Gwangju” in a portal website. Some treat Gwangju as a pro-democratization movement or describe it as a victim of state violence, while others regard it as a leftist or North Korean political machination. Substituting words in a shrewder manner than expected, they all claim that it is no other than themselves who are “telling the truth.” The more media platforms diversify, there will be more and more of such kind of information and less and less of “the mouth that can speak” about the memory of those who lived through it.

Hence, for the postmemory of the generation after who was presented with the event only after its happening, their persistence in identifying the facts themselves is significant as a channel to come close to truth. Although Kang explained the journalistic bearing of *Kim-Gun* in terms of the genre of investigative documentary, such journalistic bearing also demonstrates the necessity for the generation after to search, collect, and analyze their own clues in order to come close to the truth. *Kim-Gun*, in particular, could get close to May 18 through the power of a photograph because the photograph is the most powerful fact that attests to “having-been-there.” And yet, as previously mentioned, the photograph does not let one see anything beyond the fact of “having-been-there.” Kang also states that it has become more and more important to show the context through the stories of other people, because photography is “a medium that eternally preserves a moment all the while erasing its context.” (Jang 2019)

The film, however, concludes by not confirming—or by failing to confirm—the fact. Gang-gap Lee cannot be sure whether the figure in the photograph is himself in the past. Although Jinsoo Choi asserts that Kim-gun is dead, nothing other than his testimony can prove its veracity, given the disappearance of the body. And Kang, the director, separates fact from truth, claiming that he felt he could at least show the process of searching for truth even if he does not actually find one. (Kang 2019a) He says it is worth looking into the memories of the survivors not because they are true or false but because they are “repressed memories.” (Kang 2019b)

Kang refers to the truth he found as a “void.”¹⁶ Hye-jin Oh states that it is no longer possible to represent “unregistered” beings such as ragpickers and vagabonds whose existence cannot be proven in the form of “facts,” and that such unprovability is indeed the truth that the film arrives at. (Oh 2019) The impossibility of confirming the fact—or, the void—is the very force of the film offers as well as a channel for an unverifiable situation (mutilation of the corpse by military authorities) to come close to a certain truth (the violence of military authorities and the wretchedness of May 18). This is linked to how the photograph of Kim-gun that had been presented in high definition throughout the film ends up being presented as pixelated dots and blurred in the film’s last part. Kang had previously mentioned that because the original copy of the photograph provided by the journalist Chang-seong Lee was in such a high resolution to the extent that he had difficulty loading the image, the circumstances featured in the photograph became more visible as he further magnified the image. (Lee 2019) The low-resolution digital image at the end, therefore, borders on an intended erasure; it is a place that reveals the void, yet not completely empty in that it is filled with numerous Kim-guns and individuals of the armed civilian militia.

In that sense, postmemory might be an operation that continuously identifies a certain void. This is because postmemory is an operation that tends to the memory (or its absence) of others and hovers around the void of memory, all in addition to the already incomplete nature of memory itself. Tessa Morris-Suzuki differentiates “truthfulness” from “historical truth” as follows:

Reflecting on our implication in the processes of history does not produce a single authoritative ‘historical truth.’ But I want to argue that it does require ‘historical truthfulness’—an open-ended and evolving relationship with past events and people. In emphasizing the word ‘truthfulness’ rather than the word ‘truth,’ I am trying to shift debate [...] towards a focus on the processes by which people in the present try to make sense of the past. (Morris-Suzuki 2005, 27)

The work of facing the truth is therefore not a process of searching for a decisive truth. On the contrary, it is a work that resuscitates the past not by way of dead history but living memory in that it continuously evokes a sense of implication. Distinct from how Hirsch imagines postmemory as based on relationships among intimate subjects, *Kim-Gun* demonstrates the possibility of getting closer to the truth—or the previous generation’s memory—through the memory of the “generation after,” the desire to know which is evoked by postmemory, and the paradoxical impossibility of such memory.

The Sense of Implication

In analyzing *Kim-Gun*, Mi-jung Kim notes that as the film progresses, it “transitions into the theme of connection and involvedness rather than proving the fact.” (Mi-jung Kim 2020, 38) This sense of involvedness, however, was not so clear when the film was screened for the very first time. Premiered in Busan International Film Festival in October 2018, *Kim-Gun* opened in the theaters in May 2019 but as a new edit that is completely different from the one screened in Busan. The principal changes made in the released version are as follows:

1. Simplification of insert shots: For example, insert shots of Joo-Ok’s everyday life have been shortened.
2. Addition of testimonies: testimonies by Dong-nam Yang, Insoo Park, Jin-soon Kim have been added.
3. Changes in the scene following Ki-chul Oh’s question: In the film festival version, the interview in which Oh raised the problem of the film crew sharing the same problematic logic as Man-won Jee’s is followed by the interviewer’s response (“Your life seems similar, sir”) over a shot of a memorial service in a mountain temple. In the theatrical version, however, Oh’s question is followed by another comment by Oh himself (“Seeing that he hasn’t shown up yet, he’s either dead or has become a monk somewhere in the mountains”) in place of the interviewer’s response over a shot of the corridor in the Provincial Hall.
4. Deletion of scene depicting lawsuit preparation: The film festival version includes a long scene featuring lawyers and the family of the deceased engaged in the process of preparing a lawsuit against Man-won Jee, as well as interviews with the lawyers. Most of the aforementioned scene is deleted in the theatrical version.
5. Addition of shots of the film screen and conversations in the movie theatre scene: The latter part of the film festival version did not include any shots of the film screen or conversations

among Jinsoo Choi, Gang-gap Lee, and Young-chul Choi who remember 'Kim-gun.' The theatrical version, however, includes a shot of the three sharing greetings, as well as a shot of the film screen (with the photographic image of Kim-gun projected onto it) they are looking at.

6. Addition of Dong-nam Yang's voice in the latter part of the film: The theatrical version includes statements by Yang in the form of a voice-over ("I couldn't visit the graveyard in Mangwol-dong until 1987 because of the fact that we survived, because of the guilt of having survived. Being sorry and feeling guilty... There are a lot of people in Gwangju whose life completely changed because of May 18. To this day, there are people who cannot fall asleep without popping a pill... I still wash my own hair by myself even at the barbershop. I get scared just by having my face down toward the water,¹⁷ and so I wash my own hair with my face down and eyes open. Because the memory is still vivid as it is").
7. Two different endings: The film festival version includes a shot of Gang-gap Lee and lets the audience know in the form of subtitles that Lee has been dismissed from the class-action lawsuit for lack of evidence. Then, following is a shot of a grave and the names of Songam-dong residents who were massacred during May 1980, ending with the subtitle 'The Unnamed Citizen in Arms' changing into 'Kim-Gun' (title work). The theatrical version, however, has all of the aforementioned shots and texts deleted and, instead, includes shots of Joo-Ok (one who delivered rice balls on May 18) giving out rice balls on the eve of the May 18 memorial day and looking down at the city of Gwangju from atop of a building. It then ends with a shot of a janitor opening the doors of the Provincial Hall at dawn.

The theatrical version left out scenes related to the lawsuit against Man-won Jee. Unlike the film festival version that merely suggested Kim-gun's death without drawing a clear conclusion based on statements by Jinsoo Choi and Gang-gap Lee, the theatrical version makes it relatively clear that Kim-gun was one of the armed civilians that were killed in the Songam-dong incident by deleting the scene of Lee's trial. If the film festival version emphasized identifying Kim-gun, the theatrical version alleviates the obsession over proving his existence by concluding with a shot of Joo-Ok's face although it does provide a clearer sense of who Kim-gun was. Moreover, it is set free from the act of telling right from wrong in a way that responds to Jee's demand for proof of facts in the legal arena, all by deleting the lawsuit scene and the interviews with the lawyers. Above all, by adding testimonies that reveal the witness's emotions (e.g. interview with Dong-nam Yang) and ending with the scene of Joo-Ok drawing a long breath, the theat-

rical version gives more weight to the affect of the witnesses such as fear, joy, and the pain after than to the fact-based testimonies like the film festival version did.

Before its theatrical release, the film had several occasions to meet with the audience through Q&A sessions in venues like Busan International Film Festival, Seoul Independent Film Festival, and Seoul Independent Documentary Film Festival. The most frequently asked question after the screenings was, similar to the question raised by Ki-chul Oh within the film, whether the film corresponds to Jee's problematic logic and why it obsesses over evidence so much. Kang has responded that he was not interested in finding the truth about Gwangju but rather in knowing and searching for the so-called Kim-gun in the photograph. He insists that he is not one to uncover the truth about Gwangju and that there already are more than enough fine materials on it.

The theatrical version of the film offers a certain kind of answer to the questions raised above. Kang has stated that he re-edited the film "in a way that reinforces the stories of the citizens' experiences rather than the timeline provided by journalistic accounts of May 18." (Jang 2019) Thus, the film has come to re-orient its narrative around Kim-gun's death instead of leaving his whereabouts ambiguous; it focuses on the emotional state of the witnesses; and, more than anything, it highlights the perspective of those who lived through the traumatic event by placing shots of Joo-Ok's present life and look at the event. Joo-Ok, in particular, was in fact the starting point of this film project. Kang has stated that he initially intended a project that presented Gwangju as a development-oriented consumer city out of his own reluctance to automatically connect Gwangju to May 18, but that it turned into the film *Kim-Gun* at the moment Joo-Ok referred to the figure in the photograph as 'Kim-gun.' (Lee 2019) That the film concludes with Joo-Ok's face, therefore, is connected to how the filmmakers' interest in a photograph was extended to the people beyond the photograph. In her discussion on how one attains the emotion of intimacy in the formation of postmemory, Hirsch states as follows:

If, however, we thus adopt the traumatic experiences of others as experiences we might ourselves have lived through, if we inscribe them into our own life story, can we do so without imitating or unduly appropriating them? (Hirsch 2012, 35)

The two versions of *Kim-Gun* demonstrate how a project that initially began with a non-emotional outlook toward a traumatic past became one that occasioned absorption in and appropriation of the experiences of others by inscribing them into the filmmakers' own story as the project went through the process of filming and screening. Such a change—from finding out the truth to providing a clearer picture of the

survivors' emotions—is the biggest difference between the film festival version and the theatrically released version. With regards to this change, Jimi Kim points out that “With the layering of testifying voices, it becomes clear that the film’s real purpose is not about finding ‘Kim-gun’ [...] the very ethical and practical question of how our society today is carrying out the memories of that day breaks through the old black-and-white photographs.” (Jimi Kim 2019, 330) What I have focused on in the theatrical version is the problem of how the post-generations connect to memories of the past and how they approach them in an ethical and practical manner.

A film that began from a single photograph and was initially oriented toward a factual investigation has ultimately come to gesture toward an affective sympathy with those who actually experienced Gwangju. Such a change interestingly shows how the filmmakers of *Kim-Gun*, who claim to have lacked a sense of implication in Gwangju before shooting the film, transform as they face the memories of Gwangju. The film shows the process of acquiring a sense of implication through the very rare ‘coincidental’ and ‘affective’ opportunities. And once the filmmakers have acquired the sense of implication, the film once again advances toward a postmemorial affect in the post-generational mode of facing a traumatic event and its memory. And this is how it summons May 18 to a still present but new field of memory.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the postmemorial affect around the Gwangju Democratization Movement with a focus on the documentary film *Kim-Gun* produced by members of a generation without direct experience of the event. As mentioned in the introduction, May 18 still remains a site of memory war that has entailed ongoing legal disputes. On February 13, 2020, Man-won Jee, charged with defamation for framing armed civilians as members of the North Korean military’s special forces, was sentenced to two years in prison. It took four years for this first ruling. Jee, however, was not detained in court for reasons of old age, which resulted in conflicts between members of the May 18 Association for the Bereaved Families and Jee’s supporters in front of the courthouse. (Oh 2020) The Association for Bereaved families objected strongly against Jee not being on remand, and Jee filed an appeal of dissatisfaction against the court’s decision on the grounds of excessive sentence. (Lee 2020) Moreover, the court day for the trial of former president Doo-hwan Chun, who was indicted for ‘defamation of the dead’ on May 2018, still has not been rescheduled even after having the prosecutor changed twice. (Cho 2020) The court debate on Gwangju continues in such manner; truth remains to be brought to light and those who are accountable are yet to be punished.

But is the work of memory in pursuit of truth completed once judicial justice is fulfilled? In discussing the pursuit of historical truth (ruined by the mediatic and archival overflow), Gabriela Nouzeilles cautions against two reductive discursive systems: first, “the postmodern spectacularization of the traumatic” and second, the reductionist viewpoint that judicial justice can be the ultimate solution to everything. (Nouzeilles 2005, 264) This is because there exists a more complicated and maneuvered politics of memory that can no longer be solved with legal rulings in the age of what is called post-truth amidst a deluge of media in which “facts are subordinate to our political point of view.” (McIntyre 2018, 11) Therefore, the more the media pours out information, the more in danger of self-contradiction the efforts to pursue the one and only truth, as well as legal solutions, are. Even more important are the questions of what the ‘present’ politics of memory around the ‘past’ implies, and how one could solidarize with the experiences of the survivors without being narrowly confined to a survivor-centric discourse.

Uchida Tatsuru states that one must recognize that “one is but a part of a long passage of time” and understand the calling for the work of “collaborating with countless people including the dead and the yet-to-be-born in a manner that transcends time and space” in order to stand against the anti-intellectualism of historical denialists in the age of post-truth. (Tatsuru 2016, 29) And here is the reason to pay heed to postmemory: because the memory of the generation after is the most present and future-oriented memory that collaborates with the memory of the previous generation.

Notes

1. "Today we will be defeated. Those of us who remain here will all die. But we will not remain defeated forever."

2. In referring to such novels, the term "un-experience (*Mi-che-heom*)" is more frequently used than "non-experience (*Bi-che-heom*)" in the field of Literature. It may be adequate to designate the modifier "un-experienced" to figures in South Korean literature dealing with the theme of national division, in terms of how the term implies the status of a generation that has not experienced the event "(yet)" as well as the ongoing condition of national division; however, there are difficulties in applying the term to the Gwangju Democratization Movement. In this article, I therefore refer to the generation who did not live the experience of May 18 not as un-experienced but as non-experienced (or, without experience). See Baek 2019, 185-206 ; Han 2010, 161-91.

3. A Korean Poet who was born in South Jeolla Province and dedicated himself to the Korean democratization movement in the 1970s and 80s.

4. Hyung-joong Kim, however, defines the second generation's Antigonean attitude as political aporia in that such an attitude is only possible through enactment on screen and not in reality. See Kim 2016, 17-32.

5. While Aleida Assmann presents a typology of memory in which the memories of the first, second, and the following generations are categorized respectively as personal, social, and political and cultural memory, Hirsch identifies cultural memory as a form of postmemory as well. (Hirsch 2012, 5 ; Assmann 2010, 35-50)

6. In other words, one can never know whether the photographed subject still exists or not. A photograph is an eternal separation from its subject. (Barthes 2010, 76)

7. Margaret Olin quoted in Hirsch, 47-48.

8. For Barthes, death refers to the photograph as well as the experience of extreme 'Death' such as the World Wars and genocides of the twentieth century.

9. Some typical examples of documentary films on Gwangju include *No Name Stars* (2010) by Tae-il Kim, *Lonely, High, and Lonesome* (2017) by Kyung-ja Kim, and *The Hinzpeter Story* (2018) by Young-joo Jang among others.

10. This is demonstrated in the comments of one of the films' producers, Yoohee Ko: "Given that they have frequently provided oral statements about the Gwangju Democratization Movement, those who have more experience interviewing would repeat their previous statements exactly the same, word-by-word, which was surprising. A lot of the statements were structured and standardized out of a sense of obligation to speak up. But their facial expressions changed completely once we showed the photographs. They looked for themselves in the photographs and shared vivid memories about them." Here, too, photographs become a channel for the survivors to relate to the memory of a past beyond a structured and standardized testimony. (Lee 2019)

11. According to Sangwoo Kang, those who participated in *Kim-Gun* as interviewees are witnesses and it was important that "they themselves speak of what they had witnessed." (Jang 2019)

12. In filming the interviews, the director chose to continuously move the camera in order to emphasize the conversations and feelings shared between the people involved rather than fix the camera as commonly practiced in previous documentaries. It is not

the director filming with the camera who conducts the interview but many others performing the role of the interviewer—a point demonstrating that the film is a generational project collectively run by a film crew comprising of those who do not have direct experience of the Gwangju Democratization Movement. (Lee 2019)

13. Film critic Sohee Kim states that although the filmmakers “are not disillusioned, do not reenact the desire of pursuit, and are not proxies for the audience at the end of the day,” the audience comes to imagine oneself as the subject who investigates as the film progresses. However, given the continuous visualization of the interviewers’ responses, it is precisely the interviewers that offer the audience a position to identify with. Therefore, it would be correct to regard the interviewers’ position as that which substitutes the audience’s position. (Kim 2019)

14. The generational composition of the film crew was intended from the beginning. Producer Yeon-kyoung Shin recollects that it was important to comprise the crew with people of more or less the same age who could cooperate together, because of the director’s proposal to “have members of a generation that did not experience May 18 to come together and work as a team.” (Lee 2019)

15. Sangwoo Kang states, “The image that immediately comes across when I think of May 18 is that of a boy carrying a portrait of his deceased father. And yet, I’ve always felt some dissatisfaction about the fact that the image of the citizens who participated in May 18 was eclipsed by the image of the victims and never actually foregrounded.” (Jang 2019)

16. Young-yup Jang also views *Kim-Gun* as “a work that layers the present-progressive tense over May 18 by rediscovering a figure and event that have been overlooked so far and by leaving some room for interpretation and imagination to intervene into a history that still is left behind as a blank.” (Jang 2019)

17. This posture is one of the symbolic images of waterboarding under the military dictatorship in South Korea.

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