



The Economy of Life:

Investigating the Symbiotic Relationship between the Young Far-Right Men and Conservative Governments in South Korea and its Subsequent Impact on Values of Lives

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In Memory of the Victims of the Sewol Ferry Sinking, the Gangnam Public Toilet Stabbing, and the Itaewon Crowd Crush.

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Abstract

Whilst South Korea embodies the modern-day capitalist dream of a country reinventing itself into a capitalist power, their fast-growing economy has caused the creation of another economy, one in which lives are assigned values. Onwards from 2010, this essay selects three cases of exceptional interest that display just how little of a value is given to certain under protected groups in society. In each of these cases, it is the attitudes of government officials and the public that demonstrate this economy of life in full effect. Whether it be a grotesque nonchalance when discussing loss of life or the shocking retaliation from groups that feel they are more oppressed, all reactions provoke one to question how this lack of empathy within society came to be.

A modern society is essentially a product of successive governments, all with the common aim, maintaining a hierarchy in society. This hierarchy has reached a malicious level wherein individuals expend all their energy attempting to stay afloat they cannot help one another. This neo-liberalism in society is not a novel and unique characteristic of South Korea, yet the way it manifests itself is of particular interest.

Through investigating sites such as Ilbe, it leads one to see just how commonplace extremist ideas are within the youth of South Korea. Throughout this essay, the relationship between Conservative South Korean governments and young men is brought to the forefront. These young men have been conditioned from a young age to have faith in this far-right system and it is this symbiotic relationship that has enabled the existence of this economy of life.

All problems have solutions; therefore this essay will also discuss the lack of sufficient laws that allow discriminatory activities to run rampant with little consequence. Whilst laws can not necessarily rewire the hive mind of these far-right young men, it can catalyse a decline in public hate speech. With less exposure to these ideas, the propaganda machine will lose its effect on the population. This is not even half of what needs to be done within society, but it is, without a doubt, a starting point.

Introduction

17th May 2016. It was a clear evening in Seoul. A 23-year-old woman would leave a karaoke bar and enter a public toilet a little after 01:00 (Park, 2016). Just over half an hour earlier, a 34-year-old man walked into this same toilet and stayed there (Park, 2016). This man would then senselessly murder this woman with a sushi knife, a woman completely unknown to him (Park, 2017). When arrested by police, this man would state that his actions were due to women ignoring him his whole life (Park, 2016)

In the days following, tributes to the young woman would decorate the nearby Gangnam Station, with white chrysanthemums and post-it notes surrounding the area. Amongst the memorial, a wreath was laid, reading 'Let's not forget the ROKS Cheonan warriors who died because they were men' (Park, 2016). The wreath was left by a user of the social media site Ilbe Storehouse. A site that mainly discusses current affairs and politics, with the demographic largely being young right-wing men. There is a multitude of hateful language used, particularly towards already discriminated groups in society, such as women, young people, foreigners, and members of LGBTQ+ community. However, the far-right young men of South Korea do not view these people as discriminated, in fact they believe as men that they are discriminated against, a term called 'reverse discrimination'.

Since Ilbe's inception in 2010, it has grown in size and influence, with its views expanding outside of its users and into the general public (DBpedia, 2013). This essay will employ this time frame of 2010 onwards as a way to investigate the symbiotic relationship between the government and the far-right young men in South Korea and the effect this has had on the value of different lives.

During Ilbe's short lifespan, there have been three key events which I believe to have brought the most attention to the 'reverse discrimination' these young men claim to be experiencing. The first instance of this was in 2014, caused by the Sewol Ferry sinking, which took the lives of over 300 people, including 250 schoolchildren. The second example is the 2016 Seocho-Dong public toilet stabbing, briefly visited at the beginning. Despite the perpetrator admitting that he committed murder due to a hatred of women, the police blamed his schizophrenia. This sparked a multitude of anti-misogyny protests which only fuelled the hatred men held towards women.

This anti-feminist movement has only continued to grow, with President Yoon Suk-yeol, championing this cause. During his election, he promised to shut down the Ministry of Gender Equality, a ministry

set up in order to protect victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault. Yoon has instead propagated the notion that men are being discriminated against and being branded 'sex criminals' at every turn by women. The young-men who are faced with a life of limited opportunities, a rising wealth gap, and sky-high real estate prices were invigorated with this misogynistic zeal. The government continues to find scapegoats as to reason why the young men of South Korea have less opportunity than before, and these men, having been raised in a hugely competitive neo-liberal environment, latch on to these falsities as a way of comfort.

Yoon's government has profited off of the negative effects of neoliberalism by mobilising insecure men against unprotected groups in society. By doing this, different lives have now had different values placed on them.

This brings me to my final key event, the Itaewon Crowd Crush in 2022. This saw huge numbers of young people and foreigners lose their lives in what should have been a fun night out. Yet this saw young men feel no pity for these people as they felt that their loss of life was insignificant compared to that of men's. Those on the right did not care for the deaths of these people due to a multitude of factors, largely being that of Itaewon being a hub for foreigners and the LGBTQ Community.

Background

In order to fully understand the context of these events, one must grasp the events that have created the current environment of South Korea. I will begin with the Miracle on the Han River, which describes the period of unprecedented economic growth in South Korea following the Korea War. This growth was accelerated under the dictatorship of Park Chung-hee, largely due to his economic policy which promoted close relations between state and businesses (Lehrer, 2023). It was during this period that chaebols would appear. Chaebol, a fusion of the words 채/chae (wealth) and 벌/bol (clan), means a family owned and controlled conglomerate and their huge success is due to the very policies implanted by Park (Lehrer, 2023). However, their government-enabled monopoly and domination of the economy has caused a multitude of not just economic issues. It has caused a plethora of social problems too, namely for the youth.

Jobs in a chaebol are what almost every Korean child is brought up to aspire to. They are raised to view each other as competitors from an early age as they are all competing for a place at one of three 'SKY' universities, which act as pool for chaebols to select their employees from (Matthews, 2015). Parents pour as much money as they possibly can to ensure a place for their child at one of these universities. However, this only widens the wealth gap as lower income families struggle to support their child's studies in comparison to their higher income counterparts. The South Korean government have created a system that is built for the most privileged in society, the rich men.

Due to the inception of chaebols during South Korea's infancy, their main benefit was providing what South Korea's minimal welfare state could not. However, this was provided mainly to the men of South Korea, as they were the breadwinners of the family. As the welfare state in South Korea has evolved and expanded over time, it has been able to provide benefits for the less privileged in society. This has led to men declaring this as 'reverse discrimination', in particular, initiatives to bring women into the workforce have been met with men stating that they are victims of gender discrimination (Choe, 2022a).

This attitude of reverse discrimination has caused these men to politicise disasters in order to fit their narrative. This was evident during the Sewol sinking, the Gangnam Station public-toilet stabbing, the Itaewon Crowd Crush. In all three of these events, the far-right would state that any criticisms of the government's actions were because they were leftists or feminists (Shim, 2015). These attitudes have become condensed on Ilbe and have become a forum for young far-right men in South Korea to vent their anger towards less protected groups. These attitudes have now become much more

commonplace within South Korean society, with the most recent Presidential election having both candidates voice their opinions on the issue of gender discrimination towards men (Choe, 2022a). This outcome of the election saw Yoon Suk-yeol, an advocate against men's apparent discrimination, take power.

Ilbe's numbers are grossly underestimated, yet their influence within society is not so immense it can dictate public policy. These opinions simply act as an echo chamber for the South Korean government's intentional acts to sustain the neo-liberal environment. This almost symbiotic relationship has caused different values to be assigned to different lives, creating an unsafe environment for a large portion of South Korea's population.

Through the three different tragedies outlined earlier, this essay will demonstrate how a stock market of lives has been created. This has been through the aggressive neoliberal environment of South Korea causing the people of South Korea, especially the young, to view each other as competitors. Yet this is not healthy competition, it is a competition to be able to afford a place to live and to have a stable job. The policy of the government has directly encouraged the young men of South Korea to shift further and further to the right. In addition to this, the growth of the internet in the past decades coupled with the lack of internet free speech regulations in South Korea, it has allowed a hub of bigotry to thrive and grow. The ideas on Ilbe are not all too different from those of the general population and their influence will only continue to increase.

Empowered Henchmen in the Face of a Tragedy: The Sewol Ferry Sinking

In September 2014, almost five months after the Sewol sank, over 100 Ilbe members would turn up to Gwanghwamun Square and would binge on pizza in front of the hunger-striking family members of those who died on the ship (Cho, 2017). These families were fasting to protest the lack of action taken by the government to investigate the cause behind the ferry sinking (Klri.re.kr, 2014). The members of Ilbe saw this instead as the families of victims trying to push right-wing government out of power as part of their communist ploy (Cho, 2017). The families were also asking for monetary compensation for the loss of their children's lives, which was met with outrage from Ilbe (Kiri.re.kr, 2014). The attention that the victims, survivors, and families of those on board the Sewol seemed unfair to many users, with many comparing the sinking to that of the ROKS Cheonan.

The Cheonan was a South Korean Navy corvette that sank in March of 2010, with 46 sailors on board in the Yellow Sea (Cha, 2016). The cause of the sinking is largely agreed to be a North Korean torpedo (Cha, 2016). The crew on board was entirely male, with 10 of the 46 who died being men who were completing their mandatory military service (Park, 2010). This event would hold more significance for far-right young men than could have been predicted.

In the case of the Sewol, far-right young men on Ilbe and offline would compare the treatment to the events to declare that men were victims of reverse discrimination. The compensation that Sewol victim families received versus the amount given to Cheonan victim families was viewed as unfair, despite the latter receiving more. Cheonan victim families could expect up to 358 million won (approximately £215,600 as of August 2023) (Park, 2010). Whereas Sewol families would be entitled to 200 million won (approximately £120,400 as of August 2023) (The Korea Times, 2018).

The view held by young men on the right was that the men that were conscripted on board died an unfair death. The concept of mandatory military service is a hot topic on Ilbe and within society, as it is only mandatory for men (Finlay, 2021). 70% of men in their 20s feel that mandatory service should be abolished (Finlay, 2021). Therefore, the far-right young men felt that the Sewol was gaining far too much attention considering none of the people on board were soldiers who they felt died a more dignified death.

Members of Ilbe have shown their anger towards the families of Sewol by making disgusting posts mocking the victims. One user posted themselves in a Danwon High uniform eating a fish cake with the caption 'I ate my friend' (Kim, 2015). This user would find themselves arrested along with a couple other Ilbe users for their use of language towards victims and families. Another user would

post stating that if there were surviving students in the ferry that due to their oxygen deprivation that 'there would a be a gang-rape of some sort' (Lee, 2014). Whilst you would be forgiven for thinking that if the above had been arrested, that it proves that the government does not enable the actions of Ilbe users. However, one must understand the sheer number of posts defaming and harassing victims, survivors, and families of the Sewol.

By scouring through Ilbe, one can see the thousands upon thousands of posts dedicated to the Sewol. However, the government does not punish these users for their actions online because they benefit from them. Whilst the families call for investigations into the sinking of the ferry, the far-right young men denounce this as a left-wing ploy to remove the government from power, leaving South Korea vulnerable to 'communist' North Korea to take control (Borowiec, 2014). This theory may be due to the working-class nature of the suburb the families hail from, leading for many of the victims and families to have become associated with the political left (Borowiec, 2014). The government has not held any of these users accountable for their online abuse because it supports the conservative power. This is the first time this essay will demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between the Conservative government and young far-right men of South Korea.

By permitting the young far-right men to harass and spread fake news regarding the victims of the Sewol, the government has enabled a system of lives possessing different values to become apparent. Ilbe users are empowered by the lack of government action to post more falsities online. The presence of Ilbe is constantly underestimate due to the lack of clear numbers of users, largely because of the anonymous nature of the site. The site is ranked at number 49 in South Korea, a ranking equal to that of Bing in the United Kingdom and Craigslist in the United States (SimilarWeb, 2023). To downplay the significance of Ilbe in age of the internet is to choose to ignore a website that is large enough to easily indoctrinate the youth.

Successive conservative governments of South Korea have enabled a competitive environment to be present in their citizens' lives since birth. The innate competition in order to succeed in the malicious neo-liberal atmosphere has forced young people to view each other as their competitors, especially men. As mentioned earlier, men feel as if they are victims of reverse discrimination. Therefore, whenever a group within society who are not rich, right-wing, South Korean men, are provided with any sort of benefits or justice, these men feel as if it is a direct attack on their very existence. In this example, this group feels that the Sewol victims, survivors, and families are asking for too much from the government in order to provide protection. These ideas leak from Ilbe and into the general society, seeping through the population thus enabling the government to continue not providing the protection for those affected by Sewol.

This huge lack of protection being provided by the government is bastioned by the far-right young men of South Korea as they harangue anyone who dares who speak against government action or inaction. In this example, the families of those who died at the hands of government policy are not provided any sort of protection from the abuse they face. The harassment from members of Ilbe and the far-right undoubtedly causes family members to quieten their voices to avoid daily abuse. This enables the government to continue their cries for justice and re-investigations. So far, both investigations have been inconclusive as to what sank the ferry, yet it is obvious it was the government's policies over decades which culminated in the deaths of 250 schoolchildren amongst other passengers (Shin, 2021). The profit first ideology caused corners to be cut and the overloading of the ferry to maximise cargo thus increasing the centre of gravity, which resulted in the ship being unable to stabilise itself, thus capsizing (Kee et al., 2017).

Therefore, to criticise the actions that led to the Sewol's sinking, would be to criticise one of the main pillars of successive conservative governments' unifying doctrine of economic growth first. Conservative governments do not punish the vast majority of far-right young men as they allow for discriminatory discourses and policies to prevail. This has resulted in a stock market of lives as government continues to invest in the wellbeing of men as opposed to unprotected groups. Government reactions focus on making sure men aren't seen as bad – they protect the image of men more than the lives of the people. With the far-right young men demanding that their supposed discrimination to be taken more seriously, the government is all too happy to address an issue that diverges attention from society's unprotected groups.

The Value of Women's Lives: 2016 Gangnam Public Toilet Stabbing

Two years after the Sewol Ferry tragedy, Kim Seong-min would stab an unnamed woman previously unknown to him due to his belief that 'women have always ignored me' (Park, 2016). This would prompt a wave of anti-misogyny protests, most notably the post-it note protest outside exit 10 of Gangnam Station (Park, 2016). On these small pieces of neon paper were messages from thousands of women who identified with the woman who was murdered. 'It could've been me' was written on one note (Gangnam Exit 10 Archive, 2016). 'How long can we survive' was written on another (Gangnam Exit 10 Archive, 2016). Both of these notes are not the only ones to contain such messages. This idea of survival is common amongst the notes left at the memorial. According to Collins Dictionary, to survive means something 'continues to exist even after being in a dangerous situation' (Collins Dictionary, 2023). The women of South Korea's lives are in a dangerous situation which successive conservative governments have failed to improve. In fact, they have directly enabled their lack of protection through their own policies and discourses.

As briefly mentioned earlier, a wreath was left at the Gangnam Station exit 10 memorial. On this wreath was a message stating 'Let's not forget the ROKS Cheonan warriors who died because they were men' (Park, 2016). The significance of the Cheonan sinking in relation to the Sewol tragedy is very similar when discussing gender. Both examples employ the usage of reverse discrimination. In addition to this, the reaction from far-right young men are a product of the government orchestrated competitive environment they have been raised in.

It is not just the presence of misogyny in South Korea that causes concern, it is rather the overt denial of it. Amongst men in their 20s, 78.9% of them believe that men are victims of serious discrimination, with this same group having just 38% think the same for women (Park, 2021). With the largest gender pay gap amongst all OECD countries, and with women accounting for less than a fifth of national lawmakers, it is difficult to see where this argument has come from (OECD, 2023) (Choe, 2022a). If one digs a little deeper into the arguments made by men's rights activists, it becomes abundantly evident that the frustrations men have with their lives is not a result of women but rather the work of conservative governments.

The competitive nature of education in South Korea forces students to see their future solely in the hands of tertiary education, thus leading to an overwhelming disparity of graduates and jobs requiring high levels of education (An, 2013). However, far-right young men of South Korea decide to

blame women instead. In addition to lack of job availability, the cost of finding an apartment in Seoul is sky-high, with only those with wealthy parents able to cover the cost (Choe, 2022b). This has only increased the income gap, something that these groups of men find a way to blame on women.

One post on Ilbe describes how women refusing to stay home and birth more children has led to social inequality (일코노미스트 2015). Instead of pointing to the clear systemic problems that have caused this dip in quality of life that has been created by conservative governments, Ilbe users blame a group that is all too familiar with being used as a scapegoat. Simply by scouring the endless pages of Ilbe, one can see that women are constantly blamed for almost all negative aspects of society in South Korea.

On Ilbe, a phrase of Kimchi-nyeo/Kimchi-nyeon meaning Kimchi girl/bitch is used extensively when used to refer to women (Kim, 2018). A kimchi-nyeo is a woman who demands gender equality whilst still expecting a man to pay for dates, are sexually promiscuous, and are addicted to cosmetic surgery (Kim, 2018). The men of Ilbe feel that women have already achieved their goals of equality and so to ask the opposite sex to use their money shows that women want to simply use men for their money. However, as seen earlier, the pay gap in South Korea is vast, meaning that women do not in fact earn equal amounts to their male counterparts (OECD, 2023).

One would be forgiven for failing to understand why this phrase is so significant in the lack of safety for women in South Korea, as misogyny on social media is not a new concept by any means. However, it is the nature of Ilbe that makes this language so dangerous and the way it has leaked into the mainstream. This idea of women contributing little and getting so much in return from men is a popular idea in South Korea. In 2014 a contraceptive poster issued by the South Korean government depicted a young couple with the man carrying the woman's handbag and shopping bags, it read 'Even though you leave everything to him, don't leave the responsibility of contraception to him as well.' (Lee, 2014). When the government eventually discarded the poster, they admitted that it was directed towards university students (Lee, 2014). Not only are the young far-right men's views echoed on Ilbe, but also by the government.

By utilising these ideas, the government is enabling misogyny to grow within South Korea.. It provokes men to perhaps resonate with the advert and seek a space online that accepts these ideas. Whilst the language used in the government advert is by no means extremist, it provides a gateway to Ilbe where extremist phrases are commonplace. A phrase such as samilhan is used extensively on Ilbe, meaning that 'women must be beaten every three days' (Kim, 2018). This pipeline to extremist misogyny is by no means to difficult to fall victim to as a young man in South Korea. Anti-feminist

groups have only grown in popularity, with the current president having secured his vote from the youth with his anti-feminist agenda.

Ilbe also goes further than simply anti-feminist. It becomes so extreme the views become anti-women. 'Boming out', derived from the word *boji* in Korean, meaning pussy, and the idea of coming out (Kim 2018). This practice essentially forbids users for disclosing their female identity online. If a user were to state their female identity, they would be attacked with a barrage of online abuse and could be found to violate the community rules of Ilbe (Kim, 2018). Yet it is not just limited to one's announcing of their female identity, rather any sort of post that would indicate your sex. If a user is found to be expressing a view that discusses women's issues or perhaps a negative stance towards men, they are also 'boming out' (Kim, 2018). This has created a website where women are entirely unprotected. The government has done nothing to regulate Ilbe and protect women from the hatred that festers on the website. Ilbe is an echo chamber of hatred towards not just feminism but also women. Yet it remains an easy to access website with no government interference due to the fact that if any government were to interfere it would lose them support. Instead, the government appeals to the men on the website and their concerns rather than women's far more real and urgent issues. This is not because there is more male support to be won, but rather that men's lives are valued more and therefore their issues are seen as more important. A government, regardless of party, is more inclined to care for men and their problems as they care more about their wellbeing than women's.

During the 2022 election, both main candidates, Lee Jae-myung of the Democratic Party and Yoon Suk-yeol of the People's Power Party, attempted to appease the young men by addressing the discrimination they feel they are facing. The fact that these ideas have broken into discourses address by presidential candidates shows the reach that these misogynistic attitudes have. What is even more concerning is the very policy that Yoon Suk-yeol has been attempting to introduce since his election. Yoon will abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality by 'all means necessary' (Delhaye, 2022).

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family was established in 2001 under the progressive Kim Dae-jung government (Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, 2023). It was established mainly to prevent domestic violence and sexual assault and to protect victims of these crimes (Encyclopedia of Korean Culture, 2023). For the president of South Korea to outwardly state that he will abolish this ministry, put in place to protect women, clearly shows how the lives of women are not protected, lessening the value their lives hold in the eyes of the Conservative government. This very discourse has been

produced by the symbiotic relationship between these successive governments and the far-right young men.

Conservative governments have created an environment that no longer serves the newer generations, due to policies that have prioritised economic growth. A clear example of this is Park Geun-hye's policy of introducing a 'creative economy' that would have decreased the influence of chaebols, but was quickly abandoned in favour of revitalising the economy (Kim, 2014). It is clear that conservative governments are well aware of the impact chaebols are having on the quality of life of many, yet it is not as important in their eyes as economic growth. The government also strategically creates discourses in favour of men, as seen under Yoon. This resonates with men who are pre-disposed to misogynistic attitudes due to societal expectations, who in turn provided a support base for Yoon. Conservative governments can now continue with their economic policy, despite its huge disadvantages, but also retain the male support base despite their policies being the root of their problems. This leaves women unprotected as the scapegoats.

Only fuelling this fire is the resistance to labelling the murder as an act of misogyny. The police arrived at the conclusion that it was not a crime fuelled by misogyny but rather due to his mental illness ('Aurora', 2016). This not only fails to acknowledge the true gravity of the situation as a hate crime towards women and also further demonises mental illness South Korea. By refusing to label it a hate crime, the police and government enable the far-right young men to accuse women of crying wolf. It fails to address the misogyny prevalent in South Korean society, which permits this unsafe environment to thrive. It is evident that it was not a random attack that did not consider gender, if this was the case then the multiple men that entered the toilet prior to the murder would not have left unscathed (Borowiec, 2016).

The government has allowed women to be almost the sacrificial lamb for the consequences of their policies. And now they are profiting off of these misogynistic attitudes to achieve political power. Women's safety is no longer guaranteed and sites such as Ilbe provide a perfect breeding ground for more extremist misogynistic views, especially amongst young men. Whilst Ilbe's popularity has declined in the past couple of years, that is not because these views are losing support, they are just becoming more mainstream. Before, users on Ilbe could assume an anonymous identity and spew bigoted vitriol, whereas in the present day, these views are shared by politicians. No longer do these misogynists seek sanctuary online, shrouded by anonymity, instead they are empowered to share these views publicly.

The government has proved it does not value the lives of women due to their lack of online hate speech laws. As of August 2023, there are no laws in South Korea in place to regulate hate speech

(Na et al., 2022). This provides a lack of protection for a multitude of groups, including women. The government is well aware of Ilbe and its contents as in 2018, a petition with 235,167 signatures was handed to the government requesting the site to be shut down (He-rim, 2018). However, nothing came of it. This is not to say the government does not hold an interest in banning hate speech, only just when it values the victims and their lives. In 2022, when Moon Jae-in and his government were facing protests, there was renewed interest in developing an anti-hate speech law (Yoon, 2022). This provides more than enough evidence that despite mounting evidence that women are victims to hate speech, with the dangers to their lives only increasing, the government will prioritise themselves over this.

It is evident that the relationship between conservative governments and the far-right young men have concocted a society where women's lives do not hold enough value to be ensured protection. Thus creating this stock market of lives where the only lives that are invested in are those of already privileged and protected groups. Due to the promotion of discriminatory views, the unprotected groups of society, in this case women, are left to fight for their own rights. They have little support from their male counterparts due to the malicious and competitive environment they have been raised in. With women's lives not being protected, the far-right young men see an opportunity to get ahead in a society that they believe they are discriminated against in.

Itaewon: The Mirroring of Sewol

Just last year on October 29th 2022, a crowd crush would occur in World Food Street in Itaewon, Seoul, claiming the lives of 159 people (Son, 2023). Yet the actions that preceded and followed this tragedy echo the Sewol sinking. Yoon Suk-yeol and his government have managed to dodge any significant consequences of this tragedy and have attempted to shift blame to lower level officials and those on World Food Street on that evening (Son, 2023).

To fully understand how the disaster was entirely preventable in Itaewon is to look towards the previous year. As party goers flocked to Itaewon for Halloween, Covid-19 restrictions were still in place which led to police officers at almost every corner to control the flow of people (Ye et al., 2022). Yet in 2022, there was only 137 plainclothes officers dispatched in Itaewon, with a focus on targeting drug use and sexual violence (Ye et al., 2022). Meanwhile, 4700 uniformed officers would be stationed around the President's Office in Seoul by the Yoon administration, in aid of monitoring anti-government protests (Lee, 2023). This was not because the government did not fully grasp the footfall in Itaewon that night, but rather that their lives were not worth enough in the government's eyes.

Four days before the tragedy, the chief of the Itaewon police station informed his higher ups that he needed more officers to specifically control the crowds 'desperately' (Choe, 2022c). Yet the next day, during a meeting between city officials, police, and Itaewon business owners to discuss Halloween, no plans were made regarding crowd control (Choe, 2022c). Instead, the government's war on drugs policy, announced days before, dictated the purpose of police officers (Lee, 2022). These policies were intended to target foreigners, with Yoon's office believing that the relaxing of Covid-19 travel restrictions has allowed for an increase in drug-related crime (Lee, 2022). Itaewon, a hub for foreigners and members of the LGBTQ+ community was the perfect target for this 'war'.

Of the 137 police officers stationed in Itaewon, only 11 were present prior to 8pm, this decision was made based off of previous Halloween footfall (Choe, 2022c). Over four hours before the crush was considered deadly, a call came in to the emergency number 112, crying to help and talking of a risk of people being 'squashed to death' (Choe, 2022d). These calls would only continue for the next hours until eventually the stationed narcotics detectives were told to assist the rescue efforts at 10:48, not a single drug user was caught by these officers the entire night (Choe, 2022c). Just under an hour later would crowd control officers be directed to Itaewon (Choe, 2022c).

159 lives would be lost due to government negligence and policy. Despite a multitude of warnings, higher-ups ignored pleas for assistance whilst the lives of those were being lost. The value of life is evident in the amount of officers deployed. Almost 5000 to protect the president's office, but less than 200 to protect the lives of over 100,000. The government prioritised its anti-drug policy and targeted Itaewon due to its large foreigner population.

However, it is not just the events of the night itself that display the lack of value the lives of those in Itaewon held to the government. The aftermath of the tragedy echoes these opinions. Kim Min-a, a conservative member of the Changwon city council, used her Facebook account to repost comments that questioned whether the victims of Itaewon had 'died saving the country' (Seo, 2022). Kim would not be removed from office despite this comment (Seo, 2022). Similar to how the Sewol was labelled an accident to shift blame from the government, the tragic events of Itaewon have been labelled a 'stampede' (Lock, 2022). By using this language, one shifts the blame to the people in World Food Street that evening. A stampede is produced by human action, thus implying that the people of Itaewon brought the tragedy upon themselves. This idea that the crowds at Itaewon are solely to blame is a popular idea on Ilbe also. One post states 'Why did you go to the gay street in Itaewon? It's the fault of the person who went there to play.' (이울법책을네 입에 서, 2023). This not only demonstrates the shifting of the blame to those who lost their lives in Itaewon, but also depicts the homophobia present within this victim blaming. The government allowing these narratives to continue in order to benefit them, only fuels the fires of bigotry. When one of the conservative government's largest support bases, far-right young men, spew their vile thoughts, the government dares not intervene for fear of losing this bastion to their power. This creates a cycle that has been seen in the previous events.

A tragic event occurs which results in the loss of life towards less protected groups in society. In the case of the Sewol sinking, it was the youth that suffered as well as their families, due to their working-class backgrounds. A woman was the victim of a toilet stabbing that occurred due to the murderer's hatred towards women. Finally, the victims of Itaewon were mostly young, in a foreigner and LGBTQ+ friendly area. In all three instances, the government enabled this victim blaming attitude in order to escape the fact that they themselves are liable. If not for direct policies and action, then through discourse.

By deflecting any criticisms they face to the victims of the tragedies, the government allows this unsafe environment to only continue. By providing special treatment towards the victims, the far-right young men will undoubtedly play the 'reverse discrimination' card. Under the current conservative government, there is an increase in pandering to this audience to secure more support.

On top of this, the government does not want to admit these faults in their system as it is the system that promotes the most economic growth. Yet this growth has been declining since 2009 (Kim, 2023). The system in place in South Korea no longer serves its purpose and is becoming increasingly damaging.

Conclusion

The cut-throat environment that the youth of South Korea have been raised in has culminated in the current political and social climate today. And it is this competitive nature that has allowed the South Korean economy to grow to the unprecedented degree that it did. Yet the novelty of this phenomenon has worn off and the South Korean public are growing tired of the consequences. The few supporters of this system that remain are largely belonging to the far-right young men of society. This system existed to serve their fathers and grandfathers, now that groups such as women, foreigners, and the LGBTQ+ are being allowed the same opportunities (yet still in much lesser capacities), these men are crying 'reverse discrimination'.

The government only further enables this ideas by victim blaming instead of accepting that their actions have directly caused these tragedies. The lives of those lost in these tragedies are not valued enough by the government to address the root of these issues, government policy and discourse. The victims are not respected enough to be provided justice and families are not given the closure they deserve. Instead, the government allows those affected to be subject to torment for simply wanting safety and protection.

Failure to address the shared cause of all three tragedies means that no meaningful changes can be made in the future to provide protection and safety to unprotected groups. They allow sites like Ilbe to thrive in order to allow their discriminatory discourses to trickle its way through society. This then becomes popular thought and leads to leaders like Yoon Suk-yeol to be elected, a man who proudly wears the label of 'anti-feminist'.

Simply implementing laws that ban hate speech online would restrict the availability of these attitudes to the general public, thus allowing these ideas to lose momentum. Whilst misogynistic ideas cannot be eradicated so easily, as globally, these views are supported by a plethora of men, it will reduce the exposure, especially to young men. It is important to always remember, when investigating social attitudes, that no single human being is born with these views instilled. These ideas are a product of intentional propaganda to skew society even further to ensure the survival of hierarchy.

It is also important to note these attitudes are by no means unique to South Korean society. Instead, they penetrate all modern societies. Governments allow these attitudes to thrive amongst their respective populations as a way to feed their longevity, with little regard to the victims of these campaigns. It is not just capitalism and the patriarchy that feed these behaviours, but simply

hierarchy. By having societies in which the value of life differs based on entirely unpreventable factors is a society that benefits off of the harm caused to those with lives deemed less valuable. These lives are seen as disposable and not necessary for society. This begs the question of who will then become the victims of the unforgiving nature of neoliberalism? It is this constant cycle of society's new, yet by no means novel, target. It causes those in privileged positions in one sense, for example a man, to lash out for fear of their less privileged position, perhaps from a lower income background, being attacked next. Breaking this cycle may seem near impossible, as discriminatory attitudes seem all too embedded into society. However, one must remember these ideas are purposefully promoted by governments to guarantee their power base. Whilst people's attitudes are heavily influenced by the surroundings the government dictates, it is key to remember that people are not their governments. It is possible to shed off the skin of neo-liberalism that clings onto global society. Only then, can lives begin to lose their pre-determined values.

Governments thrive on the public's ability to forget. By refusing to let loss of life be a lost memory, you are not allowing governments to swiftly remove a stain on their record. Though you may not know the people who lose their lives to government policy, these people had family and friends. Whilst some are granted the privilege of living without the constant reminder of the monopoly governments have on lives, others have to wake everyday knowing their loved one's death was entirely preventable. To remember is to refuse to forget the intentional acts of governments. Memory is one of the most powerful weapons a society has against its government.

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