



Department of Political Science
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Governing Life, Building the Nation: The
Biopolitics of Belonging from Developmentalism
to Multiculturalism in South Korea

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INTRODUCTION

January 2011. A new year has dawned for South Korea, symbolized by the figure of the Rabbit associated with abundance and prosperity. President Lee Myung-Bak welcomes it with the following words:

«This year marks the beginning of the next decade. The following 10 years will be the period for the Republic of Korea to rise to an advanced, leading country in both name and reality. We will open a new era of the Republic of Korea [...] We have so much to achieve this year. And the Government stands ready to do its best side by side with the Korean people to realize these goals, to raise the status of all sectors of our nation to the next level. Let us together open the door to our promised future in the global community.»¹

These words convey a sense of encouragement, optimism, and collective effort, projecting a new year that will raise South Korea's status within the global order. Yet they also articulate a clear project envisioned for the nation: the government and the people are called to work hand in hand toward a common national goal of progress and development in a globalized world. Nation-building is the path, and national citizens are its fuel and force.

Throughout most of the 20th century, the Korean peninsula, and South Korea in particular, emerged from Japanese colonial rule, the devastations of World War II, and the Korean War as an underdeveloped and backward postcolonial nation. By 2011, at the time of President Lee's New Year's address, South Korea's trajectory had changed dramatically. Once a war-torn, underdeveloped nation, the country had transformed into an industrial and economic powerhouse and was now taking further steps to become an advanced and leading actor in the global sphere.² With the institutionalization of initiatives such as the "Global Korea" project, President Lee crystallized the mission of his administration, namely, adapting the country to the demands of an increasingly globalized and competitive world, once again transforming the nation in the name of its prosperity and survival. As in previous phases of modernization,

¹ Yong-Bae Shin, "Full Text of President Lee's New Year's Speech," The Korea Herald, 2011.

² Kyung-Mi Lee, "Toward Nation Branding Systems: Evidence from Brand Korea Development," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 18, no. 1 (2011): 1–18.

citizens were called to play a central role in the process, mobilized by the state as key to national advancement.³

The globalization drive that characterizes South Korea presents several elements worthy of further investigation; existing literature on the matter is diverse and extensive. Inward and outward-oriented approaches both constituted the country's globalization strategy, ranging from market liberalization to social and immigration policies. The latter, especially when examined alongside studies on the emergence of multiculturalism as a state discourse, have been at the center of scholarly debate as a core component of the "Global Korea" nation-building strategy. Discussions on multiculturalism have generally followed two distinct directions. On the one hand, some argue that multiculturalism is destined to fail because it depends on public and institutional consensus. On the other hand, some interpret it as a state-led strategy to manage diverse populations through cultural assimilation. A third explanation, however, understands multiculturalism in South Korea as a political project that expands the borders of nationhood under global conditions, considering it neither as a temporary nor fragile policy framework.⁴

Despite these valuable insights, scholarship on South Korean multiculturalism has seldom sought to situate it within the broader historical trajectory of the state's nation-building projects toward development and modernity, with which it shares striking continuities. Some scholars have noted that South Korea's drive toward globalization and the emergence of multiculturalism maintain a "familiar relationship" with previous developmental models of national reconstruction through their appeal to nationalist rhetoric and state intervention to mobilize and shape citizens according to specific modernization goals. Others have similarly identified connections between globalization and multicultural policies and previous developmental models by emphasizing the recurring national concern with prosperity and survival in unstable global environments, whether in postwar or globalized contexts. Multiculturalism thus functions simultaneously as a tool to manage diversity and to transform the Korean citizen into a global and cosmopolitan subject capable of enhancing the country's international standing.⁵

³ Shin, "Full Text of President Lee's New Year's Speech," The Korea Herald, 2011.

⁴ Mi-Kyung Kim, "Multiculturalism as a Political Project for a New Korean Nation-Building," in *Newcomers and Global Migration in Contemporary South Korea*, ed. Sung-Choon Park and Joong-Hwan Oh (Lexington Books, 2020), 19-24.

⁵ Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford University Press, 2006), 205; Nora Hui-Jung Kim, "Developmental Multiculturalism and Articulation of Korean Nationalism in the Age of Diversity," in *Reimagining Nation and Nationalism in Multicultural East Asia*, ed. Sungmoon Kim and Hsin-Wen Lee (Routledge, 2018), 144-145.

Within this framework, South Korea's path toward modernity, whether materialized in the postwar developmental model or in the more contemporary multicultural and global project, has required the continual redrawing of the boundaries of nationhood in accordance with changing nation-building goals. Mobilizing the population through narratives of belonging, disciplining behaviors, and regulating the national body as a whole proved crucial for such transformations. In this sense, it is through belonging and identity that a political community is constructed, and the nation is built. But belonging also concerns the modes of inclusion within the national body, and it defines the standards of acceptance and exclusion of individuals, embedded in the beliefs, values, practices, and behaviors that shape how membership is recognized and performed. Citizenship, both in its formal and symbolic dimensions, figures as the most concrete mechanism through which the individual is incorporated into the political community, while its suspension or denial represents a loss of membership. Citizenship is granted based on norms and narratives of belonging, on the performance of behaviors in conformity to normative, cognitive, and affective standards of nationhood.⁶ In this way, the production of belonging and citizenship, and the exclusion from them, becomes the central mechanism through which nation-building projects unfold within the lives and bodies of the national population.

This thesis, therefore, takes as its primary object the body, the human life, and the citizen in both their individual and collective dimensions, as historically mobilized by state apparatuses for nation-building projects in South Korea. Given the focus on the body and life, the analytical framework most suited to illuminate the relationship between the citizen and the nation is that of biopower and biopolitics. As conceptualized by Michel Foucault, biopower is the set of mechanisms through which human life comes to be at the center of political strategies. It refers, in other words, to the politicization of life both in its individual form, constituted by the body, and its collective one, represented by the population. The moment when politics began to concern itself with the management of life marks the symbolic threshold of modernity.⁷

If the French philosopher proposes a genealogy of life entering the domain of politics starting with the modern era, this thesis attempts to trace a genealogy of how the citizens and the national population have entered the domain of political nation-building in South Korea, from postwar developmentalism to contemporary multiculturalism, in its path toward reconstruction

⁶ Clayton Chin, "Multiculturalism and Nationalism: Models of Belonging to Diverse Political Community," *Nations and Nationalism* 27, no. 1 (2020): 112–29.

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, and Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1; Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (Picador, 2003), 241-242.

and modernization under changing domestic and global contexts. Therefore, this thesis poses the following as its research question: *How do multiculturalism and multicultural policies in South Korea reflect a broader historical legacy of biopolitical governance in nation-building projects? More specifically, how are multicultural policies centered on marriage migrants and multicultural families biopolitical technologies of nationhood construction, in continuity with those of the postwar developmental state?*

This inquiry builds on previous scholarship interpreting South Korean nation-building projects through a biopolitical perspective, identifying population management techniques that discipline individuals and regulate the population in pursuit of national interests. Through these biopolitical mechanisms, the South Korean state has historically shaped the boundaries of nationhood by producing notions of ideal membership and excluding deemed “unfit” members to realize its nation-building goals. This is especially the case of the postwar developmental state, during which authoritarian regimes implemented techniques of discipline, surveillance, and regulation within the national population across multiple sectors of society, from the military to the domestic sphere, often articulated through neoliberal, racialized, and gendered discourses.⁸

While scholarship on the biopolitical implications of the South Korean developmental model proliferates, South Korea's multicultural and global turn has seldom been analyzed through the same biopolitical lens. This is the case despite several interpretations of multiculturalism as forms of biopolitical governance in countries such as the United Kingdom, Finland, and Australia, which reveal how multicultural policies emerge as techniques for managing diversity by either homogenizing ethnic others to dominant cultures or by excluding them as undesirable elements endangering the political community. The process unfolds through state intervention in many sectors of social life, with the family emerging as one of the main sites of population regulation and normalization.⁹ More broadly, immigration management and the differential inclusion/exclusion of ethnically diverse populations emerge as a biopolitical mechanism that, through the regulation of life, defines the borders of citizenship and the nation.¹⁰

⁸ John Paul DiMoia, *Reconstructing Bodies : Biomedicine, Health, and Nation-Building in South Korea since 1945* (Stanford University Press, 2013), 226; Seung-sook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Duke University Press, 2005), 2 ; 27-28.

⁹ Suki Ali, “Governing Multicultural Populations and Family Life,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 65, no. 1 (2013): 82–106 ; Rusten Menard and Jukka Törrönen, “Immigration, Multiculturalism and Biopolitical Projects on ‘Difference’: Negotiating Intersecting Social Divisions from Positions of Privilege and Disadvantage,” *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 13, no. 1 (2023): 1–23 ; Goldie Osuri, “Transnational Bio/Necropolitics: Hindutva and Its Avatars (Australia/India),” *Somatechnics* 1, no. 1 (2011): 138–60.

¹⁰ Thorsten Schlee, “Borders of Citizenship? Biopolitics and Differential Inclusion in Local Fields of Labor and Asylum,” in *Democratic Citizenship in Flux. Conceptions of Citizenship in the Light of Political and Social Fragmentation*, ed. Markus Bayer, Oliver Schwarz, and Toralf Stark (Transcript Verlag, 2021), 127–51.

In light of these insights, this thesis argues not only that a historical continuity between the developmental and the multicultural/global model of nation-building exists, but that, through the lens of biopower and biopolitics, it is possible to uncover deeper continuities in the ways the South Korean state has historically governed its national population through the production and redefinition of nationhood. In other words, incorporating this theoretical framework enables the analysis to highlight new genealogies of South Korea's pursuit of progress, development, and modernity. From this perspective, multiculturalism emerges as a reconfiguration of the developmental model under global conditions, in which the national population continues to be governed through the production of citizenship, or its exclusion, for nation-building projects, in a biopolitical process that unfolds through the discipline of behaviors and surveillance of adherence to standards of nationhood, particularly within the household and the regulation of women's bodies.

Methodologically, this thesis adopts a historical-theoretical approach, analyzing historical contexts and political systems in South Korea from its independence through the framework of biopower and biopolitics developed by Michel Foucault, while also engaging with later interpretations by Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembe, and Ann Laura Stoler. The multiplicity of frameworks chosen enables the analysis of techniques of population management along two interconnected dimensions: a productive force that constructs and defines the borders of ideal citizenship, and an exclusionary force that marginalizes and eliminates those who fall outside national belonging. The biopolitical framework thus constitutes an essential analytical anchor for this qualitative study, guiding the interpretation of historical and empirical phenomena. The research draws on both primary sources, including state legislation, policies, and reports, and secondary literature, as historic-discursive material.

The thesis follows a three-chapter structure, each addressing a specific aspect of the research question and contributing to fill the identified gaps in the literature. The first chapter develops the theoretical framework necessary for interpreting and understanding the historical-empirical phenomena object of the research. It builds on a comprehensive framework, including Michel Foucault's theorizations, focusing on the role of sexuality and state racism. The chapter then expands to later interpretations, mostly focused on the exclusionary dimension of biopower, with Giorgio Agamben's concept of state of exception and bare life, Achille Mbembe's *necropower*, and Ann Laura Stoler's reading of colonial governance through the lens of biopolitics, focusing particularly on the household as a site of production of citizenship. The chapter, drawing on these insights, ultimately identifies the interconnections between literature

on biopower and nationhood and citizenship, unfolding through their shared productive and exclusionary force, which will serve as the main analytical compass for further inquiry.

The second chapter explores the postwar national reconstruction of the Republic of Korea through the developmental state model of the earlier administrations, specifically the authoritarian regime of President Park Chung-Hee. Despite adopting a comprehensive approach, the chapter mainly focuses on two crucial aspects of the developmental state as important population management techniques to be understood through the biopolitical lens, namely, the National Family Planning Program aimed at reducing birth and fertility rates for economic development, and the practice of transnational adoptions, aimed instead at eliminating racialized surplus populations according to economic and normative rationalities. Considered together, these practices constitute convergent biopolitical mechanisms aimed at delineating the boundaries of nationhood in material and symbolic terms, by excluding undesirable members and producing ideal citizens within the family domain.

The third and final chapter discusses South Korea's global and multicultural turn from the late 20th century onwards as a contemporary nation-building project. Such a project, however, is analyzed through the biopolitical framework, with particular attention to multicultural policies targeted at multicultural families and marriage migrants, a phenomenon that has increased from the early 2000s as a state-led strategy to respond to domestic and global challenges. By approaching the phenomenon through the biopolitical perspective, it is possible to go beyond the established understandings of South Korean multiculturalism and unveil a broader historical continuity with the techniques of population management of the developmental period, techniques that, through the intervention in the household, produced the ideal citizen according to neoliberal, racialized, and gendered standards of belonging, thereby effectively redrawing the boundaries of Korean nationhood to accommodate ethnic diversity insofar as it remained functional to nation-building goals.

CHAPTER ONE

Borders Etched in Flesh: Unveiling the Cartographies of Life and Belonging - A Theoretical Framework

Borders are no longer sites to be crossed but lines that separate.¹

«For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question».² This iconic passage from Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge* is probably the most cited in literature on biopower and biopolitics, and not by chance, as it captures a decisive fracture in the history of human thought about power. Man no longer dwells between the parallel dimensions of the private and the public. He no longer lives as a political actor detached from his existence as a human being. In other words, as Giorgio Agamben would later theorize, *zoe* and *bios* cease to be distinct forms of life.³

At a certain point in history, life itself becomes the very concern of politics. If the discovery of the Americas once symbolized the beginning of the modern era, for Foucault and his disciples, the new symbolic threshold of modernity is, instead, the politicization of life itself. From this moment onwards, life becomes the privileged site of a new form of power, a biopower that governs bodies and populations from afar, not through overt coercion but through regulation, knowledge, and normalization of individual behaviors and collective phenomena. Biopower operates simultaneously from a distance and in a panoptic manner, where the subjects are watched without realizing it, where the illusion of freedom coexists with the reality of constant surveillance.⁴

This research takes Foucault's concepts of biopower and biopolitics as its theoretical compass, guiding the interpretation of the empirical object under investigation. Despite persisting debates over the risk of theory biasing qualitative research, a large body of literature suggests that theoretical frameworks are essential to anchor a qualitative study. A theoretical framework, in fact, is the «empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social [...] processes [...],

¹ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019), 3.

² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1, the Will to Knowledge* (Penguin Classics, 1978), 143.

³ Giorgio Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (Stanford University Press, 2017), 5.

⁴ Chiara Fonio, "Oltre Il Panopticon? Foucault E La Videosorveglianza," *Studi Di Sociologia* 44, no. 2 (2006): 267–76.

that can be applied to the understanding of phenomena».⁵ Therefore, this chapter aims to provide the analytical and interpretative framework necessary for a nuanced understanding of the research problem and for addressing its questions.

However, as Foucault himself demonstrates, theories are not rigid doctrines but living analytical tools, at times contradictory and open to reinterpretation. For this reason, it is not uncommon for qualitative studies to rely on multiple frameworks.⁶ The following chapter thus extends beyond Foucault's original formulation of theorizations on biopower and biopolitics, incorporating subsequent developments and critiques that expand and complicate the understanding of biopower while also offering a more nuanced analysis of the empirical issue in question.

Academic literature on biopolitics, evolving after Foucault, has unfolded along five main intersecting axes: life as the object of biological sciences, life as the object of politics, the relationship between life and death, the caesuras within the body of the population, and finally, the interconnection between biopolitics and economy.⁷ The following pages are certainly not the most suitable space to retrace the numerous works engaging with such issues. Nevertheless, suffice them to recall that line of reception of Foucauldian thought examining the biopolitical implications of specific scientific and medical techniques, such as assisted reproduction, stem cells, sickle cell research, and so on.⁸

This theoretical framework is therefore limited to some of those intersections, focusing on biopower as the politicization of life and on its *thanatopolitical* dimension: the power to decide who may live and who must die. Such power inevitably fractures the population, producing internal hierarchies and zones of exclusion. The economic logic of neoliberalism adds yet another layer of analysis, as the governance of life is inherently connected to a market-oriented model of governance typical of modern times.

Yet this theoretical framework aims to move slightly beyond these established readings. The leitmotif guiding this inquiry is, in fact, the idea of biopower as a productive and exclusionary force, a mode of governance that simultaneously constructs the body politic and delineates its borders. Through the management and regulation of life, biopower thus produces the population

⁵ Vincent Anfara and Norma T. Mertz, *Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative Research* (Sage, 2014), 7-12, 15.

⁶ Anfara and Mertz, *Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative Research*, 58.

⁷ Greg Bird and Heather Lynch, "Introduction to the Politics of Life: A Biopolitical Mess," *European Journal of Social Theory* 22, no. 3 (2019): 301-16.

⁸ Thomas F. Tierney, "Toward an Affirmative Biopolitics," *Sociological Theory* 34, no. 4 (2016): 358-81; Melissa S. Creary, "Biocultural Citizenship and Embodying Exceptionalism: Biopolitics for Sickle Cell Disease in Brazil," *Social Science & Medicine* 199 (2018): 123-31.

itself while also determining which lives are valuable and deserving of belonging and which are deemed threatening, deficient, abnormal, and so disposable.

In this context, citizenship emerges as a key analytical lens as an institutional mechanism of regulation of populations. It is not merely a juridical status but a technology that materializes that line between bodies that may be included or excluded from a political community.

Scholars have long noted that nations are, as Benedict Anderson famously theorized, “imagined communities” insofar as members feel a sense of communion towards their fellows whom they have probably never met.⁹ These communities are sustained by symbolic “border guards”, which are normative systems determining the type of moral conduct and lifestyle proper to members of the national community.¹⁰ Citizenship, insofar as its acquisition or suspension is determined by such norms, represents the most concrete mechanism of inscription into the national collective, not only in its formal dimension, but also in a much wider sense, encompassing civil, political, and social rights as markers of belonging.¹¹ In essence, such a system regulates a national population and can be read through a biopolitical lens.

Despite this clear convergence between theories of nationhood and of biopower, scholarship has rarely elaborated a unitary framework connecting the two. However, more or less explicitly, attempts have been made in this sense. This chapter thus seeks to bridge the gap by ultimately proposing that nation-building itself has a biopolitical dimension that functions through the mechanism of citizenship. As a system of governance concerned with life and the body of the population, biopower produces the symbolic and material boundaries of the nation. The human body becomes the crucial site upon which borders are carved and enforced.

The first section of this chapter will therefore explore Michel Foucault’s elaborations on the entry of life into the sphere of politics and the historical genealogy of the passage from classical to modern forms of governance. Biopower emerges as a form of rule that produces a “normalizing society” through techniques of discipline and regulation that penetrate life in an increasingly generalized and detailed fashion.¹² Even in domains perceived as repressed, such as that of sexuality, power functions through the proliferation of discourses and controls. Though peripheral in Foucault’s works, the notion of racism will also be analyzed as it directly reveals the exclusionary logic at the heart of biopower.

⁹ James Stinson and Elizabeth Lunstrum, “Biocultural Nation Making: Biopolitics, Cultural-Territorial Belonging, and National Protected Areas,” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 5, no. 2 (2021): 566–87.

¹⁰ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (Sage, 1997), 23.

¹¹ *Ivi*, 24.

¹² Michel Foucault, *“Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (Picador, 2003), 252-253.

The second section will then draw upon three major lines of reception of Foucauldian thought, mostly philosophers and theorists who developed historical perspectives on biopower encompassing Western and colonial contexts. These theoretical extensions range from Giorgio Agamben and Achille Mbembe, who emphasize the *thanatopolitical* and *necropolitical* dimensions of biopower, unveiling its capacity to relegate subjects to states of bare life and living death, to Ann Laura Stoler's intersectional approach in the study of colonial discourses on sexuality and race, impacting identity and belonging construction.

Lastly, the third section will narrow the focus to citizenship as a biopolitical technique, as an explicit instrument of inclusion and exclusion of modern nation-states. Not merely treated in the formal sense of holding a passport, citizenship is here considered as having broader implications on the very regulation of life within the territorial and cultural borders of a nation. In its biopolitical dimension, citizenship actively produces the desirable citizen, the one who belongs and is endowed with full membership within the community, according to whether individuals embody specific normative standards of existence.

1.1 Michel Foucault and the Governance of Life

It would be impossible to trace the origins of the concepts of biopolitics and biopower without engaging with Michel Foucault's theorizations and their impact on contemporary debates. Surprisingly, despite being regarded as the most influential scholar for the development of these rationalities, his work is far from linear and exhaustive, especially with respect to the very concepts to which he owes his fame.

While some scholars argue that this lack of "conceptual continuity" should be interpreted as Foucault's marginal interest in developing the concepts of biopolitics and biopower as analytical tools, others have managed to unveil a certain leitmotif in the French thinker's numerous works that is, exactly, the historical concern with the category of life and its employment in the political realm.¹³ Therefore, despite being certainly a complex task, the (bio)politicization of life becomes the lens through which it is possible to find continuity in Foucault's theory.

The study of biopower is the objective with which Foucault opens his lectures at the Collège de France in 1978, later published as *Security, Territory and Population*. In the 1978 lectures, Foucault complements his previous analysis in *History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*

¹³ Catherine Mills, *Biopolitics* (Routledge, 2018), 13.

(1976) and *Society Must Be Defended* (1975-76). His later series, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978-79), completes a framework that illustrates a bio-history of how life has entered the domain of politics and how it has become the threshold of a new governmentality typical of modern times.

1.1.1 The Power over Life between Discipline and Biopolitics

The historical trajectory traced by Foucault in his reconstruction of the emergence of biopolitics and biopower spans centuries of political theory and reflects shifting rationalities of governmentality.

From medieval jurists to physiocrats and seventeenth-century economists, one of Foucault's central concerns is the evolution of the concept of sovereignty and the exercise of sovereign power. In classical thought, the sovereign was situated in opposition to its subjects since it was constructed in essentially repressive terms.¹⁴ As Foucault remarks, the sovereign is «the person who can say no to any individual's desire», so that the problem of legitimization resided in the justification of this opposition.¹⁵ Perhaps, the most evident manifestation of the repressive character of sovereign power was its right to *take life and let live*. Foucault appears particularly interested in emphasizing this feature of classical conceptions of sovereignty in contrast to modern ones.

Originating from the Roman family principle of *patria potestas*, the right of the father to dispose of his children's lives, this was transferred to the sovereign and empowered the state to dispose of citizens' lives either directly, through killing, or indirectly, by "exposing" their lives to death, in cases where it was deemed necessary for the state's own existence.¹⁶ The justification for death was thus grounded in the state's survival, and the supreme manifestation of power lay essentially in its right to kill.¹⁷ Interestingly, Foucault links this logic to the public ritualization of death that characterized the classical period, when ceremonies were staged for the social body, simultaneously displaying sovereign power and marking the transition from the earthly to the eternal world.¹⁸

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, and Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 73

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 135.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended": Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (Picador, 2003), 247-248.

At the end of the seventeenth century, however, a profound shift in the conceptualization of sovereignty occurred. Death progressively lost its space in the public sphere as well as its symbolic and political meaning.¹⁹ According to Foucault, death and the right to kill:

«Tended to be no longer the major form of power but merely one element among others, working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them.»²⁰

Here, Foucault defines a new form of power, a *life-administering power*, whose main feature was a right to *make live and let die*, manifested in the fostering and maintenance of the life of the social body.²¹ Death, by contrast, becomes, «insofar as it is the end of life, [...] the end of power».²² Furthermore, Foucault not only places death outside the power relationship, provocatively stating that «power literally ignores death», but he also describes it as the individual's ultimate escape from all power relations.²³

Life-administering power evolved along two different but complementary poles. The first developed at the end of the seventeenth century and characterized a disciplinary system centered on the “body as a machine”, thus exploitable to extort docility, value, and utility.²⁴ In this context, a series of technologies of power, disciplinary technologies, emerged throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and included devices to ensure spatial distribution, serialization, surveillance, and organization of the population.²⁵ This *anatomo-politics*, centered on the individual body, was present and exercised through a wide range of political, economic, and social institutions, such as prisons, schools, the army, the family, and the police, whose shared purpose was the management and maximization of individuals' forces.²⁶

The second pole, the *biopolitics of the population*, developed at a later stage, towards the end of the eighteenth century.²⁷ Instead of focusing on the “body as a machine”, as a productive force in its individuality, biopolitics is centered around the «species body, the body imbued

¹⁹ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 247-248.

²⁰ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 136.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 248.

²³ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 248.

²⁴ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 139.

²⁵ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 241-242.

²⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 139.

²⁷ Ibid.

with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes».²⁸ A clear shift appears in the concept of population, which is no longer conceived as a multiplicity of individual bodies but as an entity governed by its own laws and natural processes. In Foucault's words:

«Unlike discipline, which is addressed to bodies, the new non-disciplinary power is applied not to man-as-body but to the living man, to man-as-living-being; ultimately [...] to man-as-species. To be more specific [...], discipline tries to rule a multiplicity of men to the extent that their multiplicity can and must be dissolved into individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used, and, if need be, punished. And that the new technology that is being established is addressed to a multiplicity of men [...] to the extent that they form, on the contrary, a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristics of birth, death, production, illness, and so on.»²⁹

On the one hand, discipline is individualizing; it prescribes the obligatory, then surveils, corrects, and punishes. On the other hand, biopolitics is massifying; it addresses phenomena that affect the population as a biological, as well as economic and political, whole.³⁰

Yet, this distinction should not be oversimplified. Discipline does not primarily concern itself with the individual taken in isolation. Indeed, discipline applies to individuals only in the sense that they are inscribed into a multiplicity.³¹ The crucial difference between discipline and biopolitics lies exactly in how multiplicity is conceived. While the judicial-disciplinary system treats the population as a multiplicity of individuals, in other words, as the mere sum of its elements, biopolitics is centered on a population that functions as a species, as something more than the sum of individual bodies. It is in this context that, from the second half of the eighteenth century, Western man started to think of himself as a living species with a living body and conditions of existence.³²

From this realization, biopower emerged, defined by Foucault as «the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political

²⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 139.

²⁹ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 242-243.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, and Population*, 12.

³² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 142.

strategy [...] or, in other words, how [...] Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species».³³

But what is it in the population as a species that is more than just the combination of individual bodies? The answer can be identified within the physiocrats' notion of "naturalness", namely, the natural laws of the population. Specifically, the naturalness of desire, understood as the pursuit of an individual's interests, is what turns the population into something more than the mere sum of individuals insofar as it produces collective benefits through the interplay of desires.³⁴ Instead of limiting desires as in classical conceptions, sovereign power, now becomes *life-administering power*, intervenes in the naturalness of the population by stimulating and regulating desires and interests to generate collective benefits.³⁵ Such interventions do not aim, as in disciplinary systems, at managing individual bodies but broader phenomena through, for example, demography and statistics, which enabled the emergence of regulatory controls on births, life expectancy, health, and mortality, and are directly linked to the introduction, for instance, of natalist policies, insurance systems, and safety measures.³⁶ These types of interventions are referred to as regulatory and security mechanisms, since Foucault utilizes the two terms interchangeably. In other words, if both disciplinary and security mechanisms share the same goal, namely, to affect the collective, to extract and maximize forces, and produce the necessary benefits, they differ in their target since the former operates at the level of the *man-as-body* and the latter at the level of *man-as-species*.³⁷

To summarize, according to Foucault, the threshold of modernity is the emergence of biopower, the moment when life enters the sphere of politics. In the modern art of government, sovereign power is no longer defined as the right to take life and let live as in the classical period. Instead, sovereign power becomes a *life-administering power*, signaling the passage to a right to ensure and foster it. This shift is essentially the reflection of a new way of thinking about subjects, who are now seen as living beings.

If, however, disciplinary techniques of power focus on the management of the individual body, biopolitics, and security techniques of power control the population as a species by supervising macro-phenomena and intervening on the variables shaping them, including desires and interests, to produce collective changes and benefits. This second technology of security, focusing on mass events within a population, has an aleatory character. Indeed, it analyzes and

³³ Foucault, *Security, Territory, and Population*, 1.

³⁴ *Ivi*, 71-74

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 137-143

³⁷ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 241-247.

predicts the probability and risk of these events and then establishes an equilibrium that guarantees the security of the whole from external and internal dangers.³⁸ As exemplified by Foucault, illnesses will not be dealt with exclusively by disciplinary measures such as quarantine, but also by medical campaigns that try to halt endemic and ordinary phenomena that structurally cause weaknesses and diseases. It is thus «a problem of circulation of causes and effects».³⁹

Furthermore, as the French philosopher warns, these two poles of biopower are not antithetical but complementary. He goes even further by stating that disciplinary and security techniques coexist around an element that can be applied to both the body and the population: the norm⁴⁰. The term indicates «something that can be applied to both a body one wishes to discipline and a population one wishes to regularize. The normalizing society is therefore [...] a society in which the norm of discipline and the norm of regulation intersect along an orthogonal articulation.»⁴¹

The main difference between disciplinary and regulatory normalization lies in the individualizing force of the former, which identifies normal and abnormal behaviors and disciplines the second, and the massifying effects of the latter, which instead distributes the population around an optimal middle, reducing abnormalities without necessarily aiming to eliminate them in toto.⁴²

The result is thus a society where biopower, through the interplay of disciplinary and regulatory technologies, has taken over both the life of the body and the population, exercising its control in an increasingly panoptic fashion that successfully encompasses all public and private domains.

1.1.2 Sexuality as a Privileged Site of Power

In a society of normalization, where power is exercised through the management of life both at the level of individual bodies and the population, sexuality occupies a privileged position, as a “dense transfer point” for multiple relations of power.⁴³ Sexuality is endowed with a double

³⁸ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 241-247.

³⁹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, and Population*, 21.

⁴⁰ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 252-253.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Foucault, *Security, Territory, and Population*, 53-62.

⁴³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 103.

instrumentality since it resides at the intersection of the body and population, serving both disciplinary and regulatory strategies.⁴⁴

In *History of Sexuality: the Will of Knowledge*, the utility of sexuality and its deployment by power techniques are tracked throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his analysis, Foucault challenges the so-called “repressive hypothesis,” namely, the widely accepted idea that a rigorous repression of discourses about sex characterized the bourgeois society of the Victorian era. In fact, with the development of capitalism, sex was thought to be incompatible with an intensive work imperative, thus reduced to its sole reproductive function, allowing for the continuous exploitation of the labor force, while repressing other useless pleasures.⁴⁵

However, according to Foucault, far from being silenced, there was rather a proliferation of discourses about sex that took place since the seventeenth century onwards. This system of knowledge production is exactly what allowed sexuality to be the privileged site for power to access life through the control of bodies and populations.⁴⁶

Starting from the Christian practice of confession, Western man has become a “confessing animal”, encouraged and incited to put into discourse not only acts infringing the law, but also desires to be transformed into morally acceptable ones. In the eighteenth century, an even larger apparatus of discourses emerged as sex became a “police” matter, that is, of governmental concern for the maximization of forces.⁴⁷ The emergence of population as an entity governed by its own specific laws and processes revealed its political and economic value, as well as its strategic point of intervention in terms of sexuality. As Foucault notes:

«One had to speak of sex; one had to speak publicly (...) of it as of a thing to not be simply condemned or tolerated but managed, inserted into systems of utility, regulated for the greater good of all, made to function according to an optimum. Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered. It was in the nature of a public potential; it called for management procedures; it had to be taken charge of by analytical discourses.»⁴⁸

Up to the end of the eighteenth century, marriage was undoubtedly the favored locus of such discourses, focusing on laws and recommendations on conjugal duties, fecundity, pregnancy,

⁴⁴ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 145; See also Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 252.

⁴⁵ *Ivi*, 1-13.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ *Ivi*, 20-23, 59.

⁴⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 24.

abstinence, violence, and so on; they all permeated the married couple, which was under constant surveillance.

Towards the end of the century, an explosion of interest emerged in other areas, especially those defying traditional heterosexual monogamy, producing four figures as the new privileged objects of knowledge on sex: the *hysterical woman*, the *masturbating child*, the *Malthusian couple*, and the *perverted man*.⁴⁹ These figures were the blatant manifestation of a progressive biological and scientific preoccupation with sex, a pathologization of women's bodies and perversions, a problematization of children's sexual potential, and finally, a socialization and responsabilization of couples' sexual and reproductive behavior in the name of the well-being of the social body.⁵⁰ In Foucault's words:

«Through pedagogy, medicine, and economics [...] sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance. [The new technology of sex] expanded along three axes: that of pedagogy, having as its objective the specific sexuality of children; that of medicine, whose objective was the sexual physiology peculiar to women; and last, that of demography, whose objective was the spontaneous or concerted regulation of births.»⁵¹

In this context, power expanded exponentially across a wide range of interventions in networks, institutions, and relations, from schools to clinics and homes. These interventions were not only aimed at controlling behaviors but, more importantly, at producing knowledge about sex.⁵² Sexuality came to infuse kinship relationships, or what he defines as the system of *deployment of alliance*, saturating them with desire and turning traditional laws on partnership, which had essentially a moral value, into matters of health, pathology, and heredity.⁵³ Foucault describes this new power-knowledge apparatus as the *deployment of sexuality*, which «operates according to mobile, polymorphous, and contingent techniques of power» in such a way that even the most intimate pleasures and bodily sensations are subjected to an increasingly pervasive population control.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 104-105.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Ivi*, 116.

⁵² *Ivi*, 105.

⁵³ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 106.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Sexuality thus appears as the pivot of the two poles along which biopower: on the one hand, it is tied to the disciplining of individual conduct; on the other, it governs collective phenomena at the level of the population, such as birthrates, heredity, and public health. «Sex was a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species».⁵⁵ For example, the medicalization of women's bodies as well as the problematization of children and perverts' sexualities, illustrate how disciplinary measures intertwined with regulatory controls insofar as the surveillance on individual behavior was exercised in the name of the solidity and health of future generations and the whole social body.⁵⁶

It is in this context that medicine became the privileged power-knowledge technique to manage both bodies and species through interventions and examinations, producing scientific knowledge and consolidating sexuality as one of the central dispositifs of the society of normalization.⁵⁷

The extension and intensification of power over the life of the individual and the population through the knowledge on sexuality achieved by multiple sites of intervention paved the way, throughout the nineteenth century onwards, for the utilization of racism in its statist form in the name of safeguarding the purity and the security of society.

1.1.3 State Racism as a Tool of Biopower

In the last chapter of *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*, and in the final lecture of the series *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault introduces a reflection on racism, which, however, only partially refers to the concept of race in its traditional sense. In fact, as Ann Laura Stoler notes, in his works, Foucault «makes only passing reference to race» since his primary interest lay elsewhere: more than race per se, what Foucault was concerned about was how racism was utilized at the state level as a technology to manage the life of the social body.⁵⁸ In other words, racism is the means by which power introduces a division within the domain of life: «the break between what must live and what must die».⁵⁹

Therefore, from the nineteenth century onwards, racism became one of the many instruments through which biopower exercised its right over life by ordering society, creating hierarchies,

⁵⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 146.

⁵⁶ *Ivi*, 146-147; See also Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 251-252.

⁵⁷ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 252.

⁵⁸ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Duke University Press, 1995), 59.

⁵⁹ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 254.

and distinguishing between whose life represented an investment and whose life did not, or rather, represented a danger of contamination. Racism thus enabled biopower, both in the form of discipline and regulation, to distinguish between “good” and “bad” races, to create caesuras within the population in the name of maintaining, preserving, and improving its purity and vitality.⁶⁰ This last point is particularly crucial since, in Foucault’s words:

«Racism does make the relationship of war – ‘If you want to live the other must die’ – function in a way that is completely new and that is quite compatible with the exercise of biopower. On the one hand, racism makes it possible to establish a relationship between my life and the death of the other that is [...] a biological-type relationship: “The more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole, and the more I-as-species [...] can live, the stronger I will be. I will be able to proliferate.”»⁶¹

Foucault then interestingly and importantly notes that the death of the other race is not simply to be conceived as direct murder, but also as every form of indirect elimination, such as exposing individuals to death, increasing their risk of death, also in a political and social sense.⁶² In its statist form, racism thus becomes biopower’s tool to eliminate external and internal threats to the population’s “pure blood”. In other words, in a biopower system, racism legitimizes the “murderous function of the State”.⁶³

It is within this framework that Foucault situates phenomena such as colonization and colonizing genocide, where the killing of “inferior” civilizations was not a matter of imminent danger for the colonizing powers but, rather, a drive for the biological preservation and regeneration of the “pure” race.⁶⁴ However, as Stoler rightfully notes, racism in the Foucauldian sense represents an inherent characteristic of biopower and does not derive from anything other than the need for a hierarchization of groups within the population to exercise sovereign power; thus, it does not consolidate through colonizing missions and the encounter with diversity, but through the management of internal abnormalities within Europe itself.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 255.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 256.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 257.

⁶⁵ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 60.

In this context, the medicalization of women's bodies, the problematization of children's sexuality, the pathologization of perversions, and, more generally, the sexualization of a broad network of social relations were techniques that served to ordinate society, to distinguish between normal and abnormal, and exclude what was considered a disease. Whether it concerns sex, bodily and cognitive impediments, or race in the restricted biological and cultural sense, the Foucauldian notion of race appears extensive insofar as it encompasses all forms of abnormality. It is a general principle of division and exclusion. Indeed, «racism against the abnormal, against individuals who, as carriers of a condition, stigmata, or any defect whatsoever, may more or less randomly transmit to their heirs the unpredictable consequences of the evil, or rather of the non-normal that they carry within them [...] It is an internal racism that permits the screening of every individual within a given society.»⁶⁶

Foucault presents Nazi society in twentieth-century Germany as the extreme manifestation of a biopower operating through this racist strategy. In fact, the “final solution” was the result of the continuous exposure of the population to death, which began with controls over procreation, illness, and heredity, and culminated in the systematic attempt to eliminate the Jews and other races. It was also a regime where the murderous function of the state was extended to a whole series of institutions and individuals, from the SA and SS to ordinary neighbors, eventually to the entire social body. Nazi Germany was, ultimately, the biopolitical society par excellence: it deployed a series of individual controls and a eugenic ordering of the collective to preserve and regenerate the purity of the “superior” blood through the genocide of abnormalities.⁶⁷

This logic of hierarchization and exclusion of the abnormal, the undesirable, or the inferior from the collectivity, determining who must live and who must die in the name of a “common good”, will be at the center of later theorizations, which, through a critique of concepts of biopower and biopolitics, sexuality and racism, extended Foucault's analytical potential and provided a nuanced framework to be applied to many historical contexts.

1.2 Beyond Foucault: States of Exclusion in Biopower

While it is evident that Michel Foucault and his concept of biopower profoundly transformed the understanding of modern forms of governance, it is also equally necessary to account for the extensive literature of critical reconsiderations that have sought to fill in the gaps within the French philosopher's framework. The questions raised by Foucault are, in fact, numerous and

⁶⁶ Mills, *Biopolitics*, 170

⁶⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 149-150; See also Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 255-260.

sometimes messy, due to the complexity of forces at play in biopower itself, which encompass institutions, discourses, laws, and practices interconnected in multiple sites of individuals' existence.⁶⁸

Later scholars have thus elaborated and expanded the concepts of biopower and biopolitics in different ways. In particular, the focus on the relationship between life and death, as well as the biopolitical strategies of defining who must live and who must die according to qualified standards of belonging and worthiness, requires further scrutiny here.

Within this general objective, Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembe, and Ann Laura Stoler provide, in distinct yet convergent ways, illuminating interpretations of the management of life, respectively, through the paradox of sovereignty and exception, the racialized production of death, identity, and membership. Taken together, their contributions reveal how the (bio)politicization of life, as the threshold of modernity, operates through shifting dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that continuously shape the biological, political, and cultural borders of nation-states.

1.2.1 Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty, Exception and Bare Life

Giorgio Agamben developed arguably one of the most influential engagements with Foucault's theory of biopower. The Italian philosopher does not merely criticize Foucault but rightfully identifies two major gaps. Firstly, despite the emphasis on biopolitical spaces such as clinics, schools, households, and the brief reference to totalitarian regimes, especially Nazism, as the epitome of biopolitical governance, Foucault seems to overlook the concentration camp as another, and perhaps the most striking, site of modern biopower. Secondly, and most importantly, Agamben notes that Foucault «refused to elaborate a unitary theory of power», leaving unexplored the precise point of intersection between juridic-institutional and biopolitical models of power.⁶⁹ By contrast, Agamben shifts his analysis to an ontological-juridical plane.

Central to his theorization is the notion of *homo sacer*, an archaic figure of Roman law excluded from both divine and human law. The specificity of its sacrality derives precisely from the fact that this life cannot be sacrificed to the gods due to its impurity, while at the same time can be killed without its murder being considered a crime. *Homo sacer* thus embodies a «life

⁶⁸ Greg Bird and Heather Lynch, "Introduction to the Politics of Life: A Biopolitical Mess", *European Journal of Social Theory* 22, no. 3 (2019): 301-16.

⁶⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer* (Stanford University Press, 2017), 8.

that cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed».⁷⁰ By not belonging to either the gods or the human community, *homo sacer* is placed under a double exclusion, representing an exception to both the gods' jurisdiction, due to its non-sacrificability, and human jurisdiction, as its killing is not punishable.⁷¹

However, exclusion from the judicial order does not imply exclusion from power altogether. Here lies the paradox of sovereignty: the sovereign stands both outside and inside the juridical order. By suspending the law's validity, it places itself outside the law. In other words, by deciding on the exception, namely, the spaces where the rule no longer applies, the sovereign captures what it abandons. The state of exception, therefore, follows a logic of "inclusive exclusion".⁷² Following this logic, *homo sacer*'s double exclusion constitutes a double inclusion. This opens an essential space for sovereign power, a zone of indistinction between sacrifice and homicide, and between inside and outside the law; it is a space where everything becomes possible.

«The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life- that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed-is the life that has been captured in this sphere [...] What is captured in the sovereign ban is a human victim who may be killed but not sacrificed: *homo sacer*.»⁷³

To illustrate this dynamic, Agamben reintroduces the Roman principle of *patria potestas* that Foucault utilized in his analysis of sovereign power in *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. The principle conferred the unconditional authority to the father to dispose of his children's lives, specifically, his sons. The relationship implied in *patria potestas* was, in fact, one between free male citizens, integral parts of the political community, who, paradoxically, were constantly subject to the possibility of being killed without it constituting a crime under Roman law. Therefore, citizens belonged to the *polis* insofar as their lives were potentially exposed to death, as they themselves virtually were *homines sacri* in respect to their father.⁷⁴

Here, life becomes the political element of inclusion in the community through its simultaneous abandonment. Agamben takes his argument further by drawing on the Greek

⁷⁰ Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 70.

⁷¹ *Ivi*, 69-72.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ivi*, 74-76.

distinction between *zoe* (the mere biological condition of living) and *bios* (qualified life proper to human beings, including political life).⁷⁵ In *sacred life*, these two categories merge: natural and political life are no longer distinct but constitute each other. Furthermore, as the Italian philosopher notes: «The tie itself originally has the form of an untying or exception in which what is captured is at the same time excluded, and in which human life is politicized only through an abandonment to an unconditional power of death [...]. The sovereign tie is in truth only an untying. And what this untying implies and produces [...] is, from the point of view of sovereignty, the originary political element.»⁷⁶ The product of this structure is precisely *homo sacer*, a “bare life” that dwells in the liminal land between inclusion and exclusion, between natural and political life. It is within this framework that, in modern times, life became the central element of Western politics, and its management legitimized the emergence of the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century.

Interestingly, Agamben notes that the integration of bare life into the political sphere was implicit in the very foundations of the nation-state system. The declarations of rights that proliferated from the eighteenth century onwards proclaimed eternal and absolute rights belonging to man as such, even if they remained essentially unprotected outside the status of citizenship.⁷⁷ The originary difference between *zoe* and *bios*, between birth as human and birth as citizen, disappears in the nation-state system, and natural life fully enters the juridical-political order of the state.

However, after World War I, a crisis of this nexus appeared with the rise of refugee seekers and the practice of denationalization. In this context, totalitarian regimes provided redefinitions of the man-citizen relationship based on the resurfaced gap between natural and political life.⁷⁸ In Agamben’s words:

«The totalitarianism [...] has its ground in this dynamic identity of life and politics [...]. When life and politics -originally divided, and linked together by means of the no-mans-land of the state of exception that is inhabited by bare life- begin to become one, all life becomes sacred and all politics becomes the exception.»⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 5.

⁷⁶ *Ivi*, 77.

⁷⁷ *Ivi*, 105-109.

⁷⁸ *Ivi*, 109-110.

⁷⁹ *Ivi*, 122.

In the Nazi state, the entire population was mobilized as the target of biopolitical projects in the name of the protection of the purity of German blood and race. The concern with purity and health was fundamentally political because the elimination of abnormalities was not only a matter of “care of the biological life” but also coincided with the fight against a political enemy.⁸⁰ In this context, the concentration camp is not an anomaly of the past but the hidden matrix of modern politics. The camp becomes the space where the rule is permanently suspended, creating an everlasting state of exception, where specific groups, such as the Jews, are reduced to bare life and unconditionally subjected to death.⁸¹

It is important to highlight here that a feminist critique has expanded Agamben’s concept of *homo sacer* and bare life to include women’s peculiar experiences in Nazi concentration camps. Indeed, the figure of *homo sacer* remains largely neutral, lacking any concrete markers such as race and gender. However, in concentration and rape camps, biopolitical techniques were gendered practices with gendered effects on women who, due to their sexual vulnerability and their function as reproducers of “inferior” races, became *femina sacra*: «she who can be killed, but also impregnated, yet who cannot be sacrificed due to her impurity».⁸² In the female body, the link between natural and political life is arguably even clearer, as it carries both biological and symbolic boundaries of the nation-state. This intersection of biopolitics, citizenship, and gender will be of crucial importance in the following sections and chapters.

In any case, by being stripped of any political rights, camp prisoners were fundamentally excluded from membership in the community while simultaneously captured by the state through their abandonment to bare life, exemplifying the progressive dissociation of biological birth and political birth in the nation that characterizes contemporary political systems. Contemporary spaces such as detention centers, refugee camps, cities’ outskirts, and airports reproduce the same logic: zones where law is suspended and everyone is virtually exposed to being bare life.⁸³ These are the places where the biopolitical foundations of the modern nation-state emerge in full force.

⁸⁰ Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 121.

⁸¹ *Ivi*, 140-141.

⁸² Ronit Lentin, “Femina sacra: Gendered Memory and Political Violence”, *Women’s Studies International Forum* 29, no. 5 (2006): 463-73; See also Sarah Smith and Christine Agius, “Bodies/Biopolitics/Identity”, in *Routledge Handbook of Feminist Peace Research* (Routledge, 2021), 277-278.

⁸³ Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 144.

1.2.2 Achille Mbembe: Necropower and the Society of Enmity

When introducing the concepts of race and racism as strategies of biopower to distinguish between valuable and threatening life and to achieve the optimization of forces and the biological and political purity of the social body, both Foucault and Agamben overlook the specific significance that race assumes within relations of power. Foucault's notion of racism against the abnormal and Agamben's *homo sacer* remain abstract formulations that neglect the racialized and gendered effects that biopower technologies produce as well as the racist and sexist motives underlying their application. In an attempt to elaborate a critical reinterpretation of both theorists, Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe reintroduces precisely the centrality of race by analyzing how biopower impacts racialized and colonized populations.⁸⁴

Mbembe builds upon Foucault's concern with the sovereign management of life, which includes its instrumentalization, regulation, and, in certain cases, elimination.⁸⁵ According to Foucault, racism is the biopolitical technology with which this objective is achieved, as it operates through the subdivision of the population into groups that must live and must die. Mbembe's fundamental contribution lies exactly in contextualizing this process within modern democracies, which, he argues, appear as "societies of enmity".⁸⁶

In such societies, the emergence of physical and symbolic security structures, such as checkpoints, concrete walls, and watchtowers, is a manifestation of a generalized anxiety to separate and destroy threats and dangers. The fantasy of separation and extermination is characteristic of a time when the world is perceived as threatening and anxiogenic, when the desire for an enemy becomes almost an ontological need for the very constitution of a nation.⁸⁷

Through a historical analysis of modern democratic societies, Mbembe unveils a rather uncomfortable truth: "pacific" democratic societies were built upon logics of violence and exclusion of "surplus" populations, externalizing their inherent brutality onto third places. The United States, as a pro-slavery democracy, epitomizes this double-sided system in which the founding principles of equality and democratic governance were applied differently to the community of citizens and to unequal members, namely, slaves. The plantations relegated slaves into a third place in which the distinction between licit and illicit no longer existed, and,

⁸⁴ John E. Dranbinski, "Life, Death, and Futurity in the Work of Achille Mbembe", in *Globalizing Political Theory* (Routledge, 2022), 35-36.

⁸⁵ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Duke University Press, 2019), 68.

⁸⁶ Ivi, 40.

⁸⁷ Ivi, 43-48.

resembling Agamben's states of exception in the concentration camps, the most horrific forms of cruelty were normalized.⁸⁸

Similarly, colonial wars operate within the same indistinction, exporting the violence of democracies into the oppressed colonies. By resting upon a desire for extermination, the colonial war achieves occupation and a domination that encounters no limits and subjugates the colonized to a permanent exposure to death, to genocide, and to massacre.⁸⁹

Colonization thus functioned as a technology of regulation and management of superfluous categories of individuals, not only those deemed as enemies from a racial standpoint, but also at the "surplus" classes of Europe, such as the poor, vagabonds, and delinquents, who were relegated to the distant territories in an effort to preserve the security, productivity and purity of the metropole.⁹⁰ As Mbembe notes: «The colonial world, as an offspring of democracy, was not the antithesis of the democratic order. It has always been its double or [...] its nocturnal face. No democracy exists without its double, without its colony [...]. The colony is not external to democracy [...]. Democracy bears the colony within it, just as colonialism bears democracy, often in the guise of a mask.»⁹¹

In other words, democracy has always harbored within itself the logic of exclusion and elimination of enemies, threats, and dangers. The creation of security infrastructures in recent times is thus an inherent feature of modern governance, characterized by the constant fear of violence within the borders of the democratic order and the need to construct new enemies.⁹² On the one hand, existential enemies are constantly reinvented: the Black slave, the Muslim, the Arab, the refugee, and the immigrant are only a few of the faces assumed by the threat.⁹³ On the other hand, a renewed enthusiasm for common origins, blood, culture, and religion emerges, accentuating the antagonism between kin and non-kin⁹⁴.

Mbembe, extending Foucault's framework, argues that this government of fear and terror operates more through the management of life with death as its main concern. Therefore, biopower here functions through techniques of surveillance, aiming to eradicate "corruptions", displace and confine superfluous bodies, and place them within an economy that extracts utility and enjoyment.⁹⁵ Mbembe defines this form of power as *necropower*, which "proceeds by a

⁸⁸ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 15-19.

⁸⁹ *Ivi*, 26.

⁹⁰ *Ivi*, 10.

⁹¹ *Ivi*, 26-27.

⁹² *Ibid*.

⁹³ *Ibid*.

⁹⁴ *Ivi*, 56.

⁹⁵ *Ivi*, 35-38.

sort of inversion between life and death, as if life was merely death's medium. It ever seeks to abolish the distinction between means and ends. Hence, its indifference to objective signs of cruelty. In its eyes, crime constitutes a fundamental part of revelation, and the death of its enemies is, in principle, deprived of all symbolism.»⁹⁶ Within this system, racism represents the driving principle of separation and the operating logic that cheapens the price of undesirable and unvaluable lives.

Towards the end of his essay on *necropolitics*, he introduces a novelty with respect to previous theorizations of biopower. Whilst Agamben analyzes the dynamics of separation and exclusion within the population, and more generally, the management of lives, through the perspective of bio/*necropower*, the Cameroonian philosopher also places a focus on the subjectivity of those inscribed in such relations of power. Instead of portraying them as passive victims, he restores agency to the subjugated. In slave plantations and colonies, he argues, «death and freedom are irrevocably interwoven» since, paradoxically, living under such conditions means existing in a permanent state of unfreedom, while death can signify liberation from terror and bondage.⁹⁷

As some have noted, this conceptualization of the intersection between biopower and death has nuanced implications since it appears that forms of agency, such as practices of suicide, emerge from the difference between an actual death against conditions of “social death” experienced in what Mbembe calls, *death-worlds*: «the new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the *living dead*».⁹⁸

In this sense, Mbembe's notion of *death-worlds* expands the horizon of biopower and *necropower* in an interesting direction, including the production of conditions of existence where certain racialized communities, by being identified as enemies and thus, dangerous or disposable, are stripped of political, social, and existential value despite being kept alive for economic purposes, namely, the extraction of productive force and enjoyment. Here, *necropower* no longer operates merely through physical extermination and exclusion but through the systematic exposure of certain populations to “social death”, including precarity, invisibility, and disposability. It also appears to represent a politics of letting live in conditions where life is continuously devalued, surveilled, and exhausted.

⁹⁶ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 35-38.

⁹⁷ *Ivi*, 91.

⁹⁸ *Ivi*, 92; Eugene Brennan, “Necropolitics and Surplus Life : Mbembe and Beyond”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 41, no.3 (2024): 3-19.

1.2.3 Ann Laura Stoler on the Colonial Intersection of Sexuality and Race

The focus on colonialism constitutes the central theme of Ann Laura Stoler's extension of Foucault's theorization of biopower, which moves beyond his largely Eurocentric framework. Stoler's contribution is crucial for multiple reasons, the most important being her insight that classed and racialized discourses on sexuality in the colonies, specifically in the Dutch and British Indies, functioned as technologies of power-knowledge production of European identity and standards of citizenship.

Stoler's reading of Foucault rests on two fundamental critiques. Firstly, the analysis of discourses on sexuality in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries cannot be confined to Europe alone but must be situated within the broader context of imperialism and colonialism, which represented crucial sites of knowledge production. Secondly, discourses on sexuality as technologies of biopower did not merely aim at disciplining individual behaviors, but by identifying abnormalities, they defined the standards of membership to European nations. In the colonies, a proliferation of discourses emerged around the meaning of being European and the cultivation of the European self. These discourses developed through a series of micro-sites, such as pedagogy, parenting, education, management of the household, and hygiene, where the standards of proper behavior were intimately tied to classist and racist notions of authentic Europeaness and whiteness.⁹⁹

In this sense, Europeaness was either a fixed attribute or secured by birth, but a quality sustained by specific moral and cultural assets, modes of behavior, and bourgeois sensibilities to be preserved and transmitted in the privacy of the home. Therefore, not even European-born individuals living in the colonies were automatically guaranteed full citizenship rights. The colonial right to command over the natives excluded those men who did not possess a certain amount of wealth and culture, and full Dutch or British blood. Similarly, mixed-blood individuals and Creole families who had permanently settled in the Indies were denied full metropolitan membership since they were not deemed to be "pure-blood" citizens.¹⁰⁰

However, the purity of blood was less a biological fact than a cultural and moral standard of living. In fact, continuous exposure to natives and the colonial environment represented a

⁹⁹ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 7-11.

¹⁰⁰ Ivi, 103-105.

“moral degradation” of European essence, thus transforming even whites into suspect degenerates.¹⁰¹ It is in this context that, as Stoler observes:

«Given the emphasis placed on “character” and conduct, the sustained attention of the colonial state to the importance of home environments is not surprising. The increasing attention given to a moral “upbringing” (...) turned on a basic assumption: that it was in the domestic domain, not the public sphere, where essential dispositions of manliness, bourgeois morality, and racial attribute could be dangerously undone or securely made.»¹⁰²

Regulatory mechanisms based on racism were thus employed in the colonies to manage the population and identify internal enemies, including both the colonized and other ranks of Europeans.¹⁰³

Biopower operated through a series of interventions in home environments, child-rearing practices, and sexual arrangements between Europeans and native populations, aiming to regulate the modes of living in the colonies in an increasingly detailed and intimate manner in the name of the preservation of European identity against the potential degeneration that always lurked in the private sphere. The proliferation of housekeeping guides, medical manuals, and pedagogic journals in the nineteenth-century Indies can be read as the manifestation of such preoccupations and anxieties.

These texts targeted specifically mixed-blood and full-blood European children, who needed to be either salvaged from the “damaging domestic milieu” and their native mothers, or shielded from excessive contact with native nursemaids and playmates. Even the legal access to European equivalent status was linked to the individual’s domestic upbringing, as the Indies’ 1884 law specifically required «indisputable evidence that the concerned party was brought up in European surroundings as a European».¹⁰⁴ Within this framework, women obviously occupied a crucial role due to their traditional association with the domestic sphere and sexual arrangements. The emergence of debates over proper maternal care, potential “white sexual slavery,” and mixed marriages with native men reflected broader concerns over citizenship and national belonging that strictly depended on women’s reproductive and nurturing labor.

¹⁰¹ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 106.

¹⁰² *Ivi*, 108.

¹⁰³ *Ivi*, 96.

¹⁰⁴ *Ivi*, 112-116.

Bourgeois women in the colonies were perceived as the custodians of morality and the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation; «motherhood specifically was a class obligation and a duty of empire».¹⁰⁵ Thus, not only did women belong to the nation insofar as they raised authentic Europeans, but their sexual relations were also determinants of their access to citizenship. If a European man could marry a native woman without risking losing his European rank or status, a European woman who married a native man was accorded native legal status on the grounds of social and moral degeneration.¹⁰⁶ As Stoler rightfully notes, these debates and regulations should be situated within the general development of liberalism in the nineteenth century, which, despite its universalistic claims, was inherently exclusive and, as Mbembe also observed about democracies, found its grounds on a logic of separation within the body politic. Indeed, liberal principles lacked any real pretense of being equally and democratically applied outside the middle class, or, more precisely, those who embraced the Western and bourgeois notion of rationality and self-management. Those who lacked “an ethics of how to live” and the “ability to govern themselves” were perceived as threats to the well-being of the social body and thus excluded from citizenship rights and benefits.¹⁰⁷

Here, since there was a general agreement on the fact that European women would never willingly engage in sexual relations with foreign men¹⁰⁸, those who did were stigmatized as irreparably degenerated and, therefore, unfit for membership. Discrimination towards the colonized, mixed-blood people, and other categories of Europeans, such as vagabonds, beggars, and criminals, followed the same logic, determining national belonging on the grounds of notions of rationality and self-mastery that were gendered, raced, and classed.

Ultimately, Stoler’s contribution demonstrates that the production of European identity and standards of citizenship was a biopolitical process grounded in the regulation of sexuality, race, and morality. The colonial household became a laboratory for the consolidation of the boundaries between self and Other, purity and degeneracy, political and social inclusion and exclusion. In this sense, Stoler exposes the colonial applications of the biopolitical logics that Foucault restricted to the metropole, which in every case managed the life of the population through distinctions between who was fit to live, to reproduce, and to belong.

¹⁰⁵ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 135.

¹⁰⁶ *Ivi*, 115.

¹⁰⁷ *Ivi*, 120-127.

¹⁰⁸ *Ivi*, 132.

1.3 An Entirely National Technology of Power over Life: The Biopolitics of Citizenship

Foucault's conceptualization of biopower unveiled the mechanisms through which power began to concern itself with the regulation and management of life itself, for example, through the medicalization of certain bodies considered abnormalities based on sexual behaviors or the separation of those perceived as contaminations to the purity and vitality of the race. Yet, if observed from the perspective of a state power that has the right to decide on who must live and who must die, an essential dimension of the matrix is clearly missing in Foucault's account. If he certainly describes how knowledge production about life became the privileged site of power intervention (including both knowledge about sexuality and race), he does not address, at least explicitly, the institutional form through which such knowledge materializes most directly in the state's exclusive ability to separate populations into groups, into those who deserve to live in the body politic and those who don't: citizenship. As the French philosopher analyzes sovereign power in the modern state and its concern over the management of bodies and populations, over the identification and elimination of abnormalities in the name of the biological and social health of the whole, a fundamental question comes to mind: *whose society, whose population is he talking about when speaking of the governance of life?*

Later theorists, more or less explicitly, have grasped this missing link. Agamben, for instance, reflects on the possibility of being exposed to bare life as the paradoxical inclusive element in the body politic through exclusion. Mbembe describes modern states as societies founded on the principle of enmity and separation, which create the *living dead*: life kept alive but socially and politically dead. Stoler, in turn, unveils how discourses on sexuality and race in the colonies functioned as forms of knowledge production of a bourgeois European identity, which directly determined national citizenship.

In light of these contributions, when examining Foucault closely, it appears unclear what the discourses that pathologized figures such as the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, or racism that identified degenerate groups actually implied, other than being merely strategies of separation between normal and abnormal in a biological sense. Here, what is at stake is their functioning as productive forces of national identity, shaping legitimate and illegitimate subjects and, ultimately, members of the socio-political community.

Within this framework, biopower extends far beyond the regulation, preservation, and optimization of health and reproduction of the man-as-species; it is about belonging. The categories it produces, namely, the healthy, the rational, the pure blood, the cultured, and so on, define the contours of citizenship itself. Deviation from these is not only pathologized but also

relegated to spaces of partial or suspended membership, ranging from the extreme site of the camp to less evident spaces of exclusion like the domestic sphere. Therefore, to understand how biopower operates, it is necessary to emphasize citizenship as an institutional biopolitical device for nation-building and the construction of belongingness.

1.3.1 Introducing the Biopolitical Dimension of Citizenship

«“Citizenship” has become a very popular subject of debate in the last few years, appropriated by both left and right, nationally and internationally, as well as by feminists. Here “citizenship” is used not just in the narrow formalistic sense of having the right to carry a specific passport, but as an overall concept which sums up the relationship between the individual and the state.»

¹⁰⁹In this passage from the book *Gender and Nation*, Nira Yuval-Davis understands the notion of citizenship as encompassing a broad range of individuals’ rights and duties related to their status as members of a socio-political community. In this same framework, T.H. Marshall’s definition becomes particularly relevant when he defines citizenship as a «status bestowed on those who are full members of a community». ¹¹⁰ As Yuval-Davis rightfully notes, this conception implies the existence of a “full membership” that exceeds a purely legal dimension: it requires an active participation in, and engagement with, the “common good”.

Yet, this very ideal of attachment and participation as conditions of citizenship produces a residual category of those who cannot perform such belonging. Citizenship then emerges as an inherently exclusionary system, differentiating between those who can be included and those deemed “pathological deviations” endangering the proper functioning of the whole. ¹¹¹

Here, the gap between citizenship and belonging disappears as statehood ceases to be a mere formal instrument acquired by birth and instead requires self-identification with a specific historical, political, economic, and moral position, one that is inevitably defined in opposition to “the Other”. ¹¹² If agency and participation are the standards of full membership, then citizenship becomes performative: it must be enacted, rehearsed, and embodied in everyday life through kinship, labor, and moral conduct. ¹¹³ Citizenship is less a matter of birth than it is a matter of experiencing life. Therefore, it becomes possible to mark the boundaries of inclusion

¹⁰⁹ Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (Sage, 1997), 68.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ *Ivi*, 72-73.

¹¹² Bishnupriya Dutt, Janelle Reinelt, and Shrinkhla Sahai, *Gendered Citizenship : Manifestations and Performance* (Springer International Publishing, 2017), 27.

¹¹³ *Ivi*, 31.

and exclusion through embodied norms of behavior and modes of living. The nation, consequently, is not a pre-existing entity but an ongoing project constructed, reproduced, and negotiated through practices and discourses of belonging.¹¹⁴

Both the exclusionary and performative/productive dimensions of citizenship parallel biopolitical mechanisms. As seen in Foucault's and subsequent analyses, biopower not only aims to eliminate anomalies from the body politic but also produces knowledge about normality itself, shaping identity and belonging through disciplinary and regulatory techniques. For instance, knowledge-producing discourses and practices of sexualization, medicalization, and racialization construct the very notion of population by hierarchizing the bodies within it, defining regularities, and pathologizing deviations. Biopolitical interventions thus render the population both the target and product of power. In this sense, biopower governs life through producing and defining what forms of life are worth living, and under which standards and conditions.

From this perspective, scholars have noted the striking lack of dialogue between academic literature on nations and on biopolitics despite sharing a nearly identical object of analysis: the national population.¹¹⁵ While they hold some truth, the literature on biopolitics reveals a different reality. Firstly, Foucault already tied the emergence of biopolitics to nation-states, especially in developing the analysis of racism. Secondly, as citizenship is accepted to be the main marker of national belonging, both politically and socially, it is a concept that permeates Agamben, Mbembe, and Stoler's works quite thoroughly. What remains missing, however, is a unitary framework connecting biopolitical regulation of life to the productive and exclusionary force of citizenship. Perhaps this gap derives from the restrictive reading of Foucault, which isolates biopolitics within biological management of life (births, disease, mortality), overlooking its prescriptive force in shaping proper ways of living, behaving, and belonging for human beings.¹¹⁶

In this regard, Willem Schinkel offers an interesting point of departure to reconcile literature on citizenship and on biopolitics, affirming that a crucial distinction exists between biological and socio-political population controls.¹¹⁷ His argument lies upon the interpretation of Foucault

¹¹⁴ Dutt, Reinelt, and Sahai, *Gendered Citizenship: Manifestations and Performance*, 38; James Stinson and Elizabeth Lunstrum, "Biocultural Nation-Making: Biopolitics, Cultural-Territorial Belonging, and National Protected Areas", *EPE: Nature and Space* 5, no. 2 (2021): 566-87.

¹¹⁵ Stinson and Lunstrum, "Biocultural Nation-Making: Biopolitics, Cultural-Territorial Belonging, and National Protected Areas", 566-87.

¹¹⁶ Gordon Hull, "Biopolitics Is Not (Primarily) about Life: On Biopolitics, Neoliberalism, and Families," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 27, no. 3 (2013): 322-35.

¹¹⁷ Willem Schinkel, "From Zoēpolitics to Biopolitics: Citizenship and the Construction of 'Society'", *European Journal of Social Theory* 13, no. 2 (2010): 155-72.

and Agamben's notions of biopower as two divergent but coexistent forms of management of life, namely, a *zoepolitics* centered on the biological body, and a biopolitics centered on the *bios*, the society, and its *ethos*.¹¹⁸ Here, biopolitics merges with *ethopolitics*, which is not concerned with the biological but with the sentiments, the choices, the moral nature, and the beliefs of individuals; in other words, what is central is the "politics of life itself and how it should be lived."¹¹⁹

Thus, citizenship is understood as a technique of population control both in a *zoepolitical* and biopolitical sense. It is *zoepolitical* insofar as it excludes individuals from citizenship and reduces them to bare life through its suspension or absence. It is biopolitical insofar as it differentiates internally between highly culturized and normative notions of active and passive citizenship, thus producing a «social schizophrenic who is a member of the nation-state but not of society».¹²⁰

It is important to underline that Schinkel's categorical distinction between these poles may not always hold empirically, especially since only the formal dimension of citizenship is considered in *zoepolitics*, as it appears in Schinkel's work. Indeed, other scholars reveal that certain categories of formal citizens, such as political dissidents, women, domestic workers, documented immigrants, and so on, do experience forms of exclusion akin to bare life without necessarily resulting in a loss of citizen status.¹²¹

Nevertheless, Schinkel's framework reveals a crucial truth: citizenship is itself a biopolitical technology of power over life, which operates both through the exclusion of bodies and the production of standards of living, thus shaping meanings of identity and belonging within the borders of the nation. Therefore, biopower acquires its most concrete form through citizenship, the institutional device through which modern states manage, regulate, and produce the national population.

1.3.2 Biopolitical Citizenship and the Neoliberal Production of National Populations

If biopower defines the boundaries of life and, through the mechanism of citizenship, determines the bodies that can inhabit the nation, it becomes necessary to acknowledge that standards of belonging can take various forms depending on the specific historical, political,

¹¹⁸ Schinkel, "From Zoēpolitics to Biopolitics: Citizenship and the Construction of 'Society'", 155-72.

¹¹⁹ Nikolas Rose, "The Politics of Life Itself," *Theory, Culture & Society* 18, no. 6 (2001): 1-30.

¹²⁰ Schinkel, "From Zoēpolitics to Biopolitics: Citizenship and the Construction of 'Society'", 155-72.

¹²¹ Seung-Ook Lee, Najeeb Jan, and Joel Wainwright, "Agamben, Postcoloniality, and Sovereignty in South Korea," *Antipode* 46, no. 3 (2013): 650-68; Charles T. Lee, "Bare Life, Interstices, and the Third Space of Citizenship," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 1-2 (2010): 57-81.

social, and economic context in which that nation is inscribed. As seen above, modern understandings of citizenship associate full membership with active participation and specific modes of experiencing life, which cannot be studied without accounting for a neoliberal system characterizing the global scene throughout the twentieth century until the present day.

As previously noted, citizenship serves as a biopolitical instrument, embodying both a productive force that shapes national societies and an exclusionary logic that delimits their borders. This raises an essential question: what kind of society does biopolitical citizenship produce and, consequently, what characteristics must individuals display to be successfully included in the national community? Answering this is not an easy task, especially due to the intersection of multiple standards of belonging that are grounded in gender, race, culture, and other factors. However, it is equally evident that, since the emergence of a neoliberal regime of governance, the acquisition and suspension of citizenship, both in its formal and moral sense, have followed economic rationales.

In his 1979 lectures published under the title *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault already situated biopower within the broader framework of neoliberal governance. Twentieth-century neoliberalism, he argues, involves the economization of the social field, which generalizes market-based mentalities to non-economic domains, including social relationships and individual behaviors. The result is the emergence of an “enterprise society” where market rationalities of investment, capital costs, risk management, and profits govern choices and human interactions.¹²²

While classical liberalism established a laissez-faire model of non-intervention in the market, neoliberalism replaces this logic of self-limitation with a “do-not-laisser-faire” government, thus introducing an indirect but permanent control of society through economic rationality.¹²³ Within this framework, individuals are encouraged to act as entrepreneurs of themselves, managing all aspects of everyday life through logics of responsibility, productivity, risk management, and interest maximization.¹²⁴

By constructing “market-conforming” subjects, neoliberal governance enables society to flourish seemingly spontaneously, while simultaneously exercising disciplinary and regulatory controls through this very autonomy.¹²⁵ Indeed, these economic subjects are rendered

¹²² Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 242-243.

¹²³ *Ivi*, 247.

¹²⁴ Lois McNay, “Self as Enterprise,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 6 (2009): 55–77.

¹²⁵ McNay, “Self as Enterprise”, 55–77; Carlos Palacios, “Society, like the Market, Needs to Be Constructed,” *History of the Human Sciences* 31, no. 1 (2017): 74–96.

governable not by direct coercion but through their rational conduct.¹²⁶ Biopower thus operates as a form of power over life, not by restricting individual freedoms but by intervening in the natural processes characterizing populations, particularly in the tendency towards self-interest. Freedom and autonomy thus cease to be antithetical to power but become the very sites of indirect regulation of society.¹²⁷

This transformation has crucial implications for the role of the state, especially concerning its duties and responsibilities in reducing social injustices and ensuring access to welfare. Those in need of assistance are stigmatized as irresponsible or irrational actors in neoliberal terms, thereby relegated to spaces of exclusion. Inequalities are addressed only insofar as they obstruct competition and economic efficiency; the aim is not their elimination, but containment within a system of “equal inequality”.¹²⁸ The result is thus a progressive erosion of the role of the state’s social functions, which, however, does not entail the absence of control. Rather, notions of self-governance and self-management become the normative standards of belonging to the national community and the moral criteria for the enjoyment of citizenship rights and benefits.

Several empirical studies have demonstrated how the imposition of neoliberal behavioral norms successfully manages to include and exclude citizens from policies and rights. For instance, a regime of biomedical citizenship has been enacted among people affected by HIV and AIDS in South African squatter camps. Here, access to state-led treatment depends on individuals’ compliance with specific disciplinary behaviors, such as adherence to strict medication schedules, dietary requirements, and so on. Such expectations essentially imply individualized responsibilities, which, however, are hardly achievable in structurally precarious conditions in the settlements.¹²⁹ Such a regime effectively demarcates who is excluded from life-saving treatment according to neoliberal standards of citizenship.

Similarly, North American border-crossing programs such as NEXUS lanes allow regular travelers to speed up the border-crossing experience and avoid normal customs and immigration questions. On the one hand, these privileged programs are obviously targeted towards the entrepreneurial and mobile class that embodies the “neoliberal-citizen-player”. On the other hand, migrants deemed unfit for capitalist standards often experience inhumane and violent

¹²⁶ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 270.

¹²⁷ McNay, “Self as Enterprise”, 55–77.

¹²⁸ Jacques Donzelot, “Michel Foucault et l’Intelligence Du Libéralisme,” *Esprit* 11, no. 319 (2005): 60–81.

¹²⁹ Claire Laurier Decoteau, “Exclusionary Inclusion and the Normalization of Biomedical Culture,” *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 1, no. 3 (2013): 403–30.

treatment at border controls, relegating them to spaces of exception where they are stripped of those transnational citizenship rights reserved for desirable individuals.¹³⁰

These examples reveal how the paradigmatic neoliberal subject functions as the exclusionary benchmark of biopolitical citizenship, while also unveiling how national populations are produced through the promotion of lifestyles aligned with that standard. A clear case is Canada's "Connecting Canadians to Nature" project, which, while formally enhancing visitors' experiences in national parks, represents in reality a nation-building project that targets "risky" populations such as minority communities and immigrants and promotes cultural integration as well as lifestyles in line with neoliberal conceptions of health and productivity.¹³¹

The reach of biopolitical citizenship extends beyond individuals; rather, it permeates affective and reproductive spheres, where the household becomes the crucial site of governance. Under neoliberalism, the family is constructed as a private enterprise in which women, in particular, are expected to adhere to gendered neoliberal norms. Motherhood becomes another form of self-actualization and is subject to controls aimed at identifying worthy recipients of citizenship rights according to normative criteria such as responsible sexual conduct and consumer capacity.¹³²

Reproductive and caregiving practices are redefined through market logics of risk management, profit, and investment in human capital. Therefore, families unwilling or unable to act accordingly are subjected to punitive measures, restrictions on reproductive rights, and other forms of social exclusion and stigmatization.¹³³ Throughout the twentieth century and still today, images of the "good" and the "bad" mother have been constructed exactly upon such neoliberal standards of conduct, the former celebrated for being economically autonomous, not burdening the state's welfare, and adopting a healthy lifestyle through monogamous sexual relationships, while the latter stigmatized and abandoned due to her economic dependency and sexual deviancy.¹³⁴

The diverse cases discussed above highlight the crucial role of citizenship as a biopolitical technology that produces and reproduces a national population through its differential application based on neoliberal standards of existence. By redefining belonging in terms of

¹³⁰ Matthew B. Sparke, "A Neoliberal Nexus: Economy, Security and the Biopolitics of Citizenship on the Border," *Political Geography* 25, no. 2 (2006): 151–80.

¹³¹ Stinson and Lunstrum, "Biocultural Nation-Making: Biopolitics, Cultural-Territorial Belonging, and National Protected Areas", 566–87.

¹³² Gillian Hewitson, "The Commodified Womb and Neoliberal Families," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 46, no. 4 (2014): 489–95.

¹³³ Hewitson, "The Commodified Womb and Neoliberal Families," 489–95.

¹³⁴ Molly Ladd-Taylor, "Saving Babies and Sterilizing Mothers: Eugenics and Welfare Politics in the Interwar United States," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 4, no. 1 (1997): 136–53.

neoliberal rationality, self-responsibility, productivity, and self-management, it establishes criteria of inclusion and exclusion contingent upon behavioral conformity. Those who fail to embody such standards, such as the poor, the migrant, the unemployed, become those “pathological deviations” that endanger the proper functioning of the whole by economically depending on a state that progressively seeks to avoid responsibility for eliminating social inequalities. These lives are thus exposed to a sort of social death by being perpetually positioned at the margins of citizenship and belonging.

In this light, biopower crystallizes itself through the institutional instrument of citizenship, which, taken in its broader terms, manages life by actively shaping society and prescribing its proper ways of living. Therefore, the social body of the nation is not only preserved through the exclusion of threats, but is also constructed through the moral regulation of its members according to the *ethos* of the market and mainstream culture.

CHAPTER TWO

From the Shadow of the Rising Sun, a Nation Reborn: Governing Bodies and Making Nationhood in South Korea's Developmental Era

*I sang the national anthem along
with everyone else, my heart about to burst
[...] Before those faces were annulled, erased by
the white paint.¹*

Piles of bodies stripped of their names and souls, pale, lifeless gazes fixed into the void, surround Jeong-Dae, one of the protagonists of Han Kang's novel *Human Acts*.² He stands as a silent witness to one of the most traumatic chapters of South Korean history, a wound that persists in the memories and in the tales of its people, a not-so-distant past in which belonging itself was conditional. Yet, paradoxically, it was precisely on these shaped and annulled lives that the nation was built. After the military's brutal repression of civilians protesting against the government in Gwangju, Jeong-Dae finds himself suspended between life and death, not only as a physical space, but as a state of detachment from his qualified existence, from that mode of life proper to human beings. His narration invites the reader to reflect on the fragile boundaries of humanity, on the absurdity of violence reducing lives to mere flesh, stacked, abandoned, and disposable.

But this reflection opens onto a broader discussion concerning the conditions that made such a brutal massacre possible. As Giorgio Agamben warned in his analysis of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, the most constructive question is not how such atrocities could be committed against human beings; rather, it is what structural forces, embedded in the very architecture of the nation-state, enabled such devaluation of human life.³ In other words, it is not just about violence. It is about the underlying power logic that constructs the individual as an object to be regulated, shaped, excluded, and exposed to material and symbolic death in the name of the

¹ Han Kang, *Atti Umani* (Adelphi, 2017), 61. Author's translation from Italian «Avevo intonato l'inno nazionale assieme a tutti gli altri, il cuore che mi scoppiava [...] Prima che quelle facce venissero annullate, cancellate dalla vernice bianca.»

² Han Kang is a South Korean writer from Gwangju and the 2024 Nobel Prize winner for Literature. *Human Acts* narrates the events of the 1980 Gwangju Massacre from the perspective of ordinary civilians participating in anti-government protests, then violently repressed by the regime. For its criticism of the authoritarian rule of the time, the book was banned and Han Kang blacklisted in South Korea during the Park Geun-Hye administration, daughter of former President Park Chung-Hee. Ga-young Park, "Han Kang: From Blacklist to Nobel Laureate," *The Korea Herald*, 2024.

³ Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 141.

nation's survival and prosperity. It is about the interconnection between biopower and nation-building through the production of citizenship and belonging.

Nation-building and the reconstruction of a postcolonial identity were the central concerns of the early administrations of the Republic of Korea following the collapse of the Japanese Empire, the end of World War II, and the armistice of the Korean War. This process, of course, was influenced by imperial legacies and foreign expectations, especially those of the United States of America, as South Korea became a crucial terrain in the Cold War confrontation between capitalist and communist blocs. Within this climate, the South Korean state embarked on a path of accelerated economic development, culminating under the Park Chung-Hee regime (1961–1979).⁴

Park's model of governance, often defined as a *developmental state*, was centered on a pragmatic focus prioritizing state-led economic growth over social welfare, subordinating society to national goals.⁵ This period has also been characterized as one of *militarized modernity*, underscoring the regime's equation of the modern nation with a strong military apparatus and industrial economy.⁶ Nation-building in South Korea, therefore, emerged from a combination of nationalist, political, and economic rationalities that mobilized the entire population. Even further, the population became the very site of state intervention for the construction of a modern nation.

Through the theoretical framework developed in the previous chapter, this one explores the making of postwar South Korea as a biopolitical project centered on the construction of citizens and their participation in national reconstruction and development. The South Korean state sought to build a national identity rooted in anti-communism, ethnic nationalism, and specific notions of modernity, including discipline and self-management, which permeated numerous aspects of public and private life, such as the military, workforce, family, and sexual morality. In this context, gender and race became crucial in shaping the contours of the ideal modern citizen; thus, they constitute additional criteria for the functioning of the biopolitical dimension of nation-building.

As established in the previous chapter, the point of intersection between biopower and nationalism lies in their productive and exclusionary force, which shapes the national body. The

⁴ John Paul DiMoia, *Reconstructing Bodies : Biomedicine, Health, and Nation-Building in South Korea since 1945* (Stanford University Press, 2013), 216.

⁵ Soon-Yang Kim, "The East Asian Developmental State and Its Economic and Social Policies: The Case of Korea," *International Review of Public Administration* 12, no. 2 (2007): 69–87.

⁶ Seung-sook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea* (Duke University Press, 2005), 2.

instrument of citizenship, both in its formal and symbolic sense, serves to produce the citizen by identifying those who belong, and on what standards, while simultaneously excluding non-citizens, either by suspending their socio-political rights or rendering them socially invisible. Here, the population becomes the terrain where the material and symbolic boundaries of the nation are drawn, and where desirable members are distinguished from those deemed “enemies” or “threats” that endanger the national collectivity.

The case of South Korea’s nation-building during the developmental era will be interpreted through this theoretical lens, with particular attention to the insights of Foucault, Agamben, Mbembe, and Stoler. In particular, the latter three will prove to be relevant in the analysis of states of exclusion experienced by specific “undesirable” populations. The theoretical-historical approach adopted by this chapter is not abstract or detached; rather, it is functional to the contextualization of South Korea’s historical trajectory and to illuminate the understanding of more contemporary state-led projects in light of longer legacies of biopolitical governance.

Despite adopting a comprehensive perspective on nation-building and nationhood, this chapter mainly centers on two pivotal state-led projects: the National Family Planning Program (1961–1980s) and the system of transnational adoptions (1953–1970s). Both initiatives, in fact, functioned as mechanisms regulating mass demographic phenomena of population growth and circulation, specifically emigration, while simultaneously disciplining the reproductive and sexual behavior of South Korean women in a biopolitical fashion. Although a broad body of literature exists separately evaluating these projects in biopolitical terms, the two have seldom been connected within a unitary framework. Therefore, these pages aim to close the mentioned gap by analyzing the Family Planning Program and transnational adoption policies as parallel techniques of population management structured around the gendered construction of the ideal citizen and the exclusion of those deemed “social risks”, namely, unwed single mothers and their mixed-race children. Through these mechanisms, the South Korean state successfully operated a form of “internal colonization” upon the entire population⁷, marginalizing the “unfit” and producing the new favored national member: patriotic, “pure”, healthy, disciplined, and self-governing in her reproductive and sexual behavior.

The first section will thus provide an overview of the historical context surrounding South Korea’s emergence as an independent nation-state, with a particular focus on the foundations of its first approaches to modern forms of biopolitical governance, beginning with the legacies of Japanese colonial rule in the implementation of techniques of population management

⁷ DiMoia, *Reconstructing Bodies : Biomedicine, Health, and Nation-Building in South Korea since 1945*, 226.

ranging from surveillance apparatus to education and biomedical campaigns. These legacies paved the way for the establishment of a strong military and security apparatus during the first ROK administrations, specifically in the construction of an anti-communist national identity under a pervasive system of surveillance, thought control, coercion, and culminating in mass repressions such as the 1980 Gwangju Massacre.

The second section will then analyze the biopolitical dimension of the National Family Planning Program within the developmental logic of Park Chung-Hee's regime. Following the explanation of the developmental model implemented by Park, the Family Planning Program emerges as a pivotal element in achieving national reconstruction and growth. However, the Program extended far beyond demographic control to promote a new model of modern woman as a standard of gendered nationhood.

Lastly, the third section will focus on the interpretation of transnational adoptions as a biopolitical mechanism of population management through the regulation of "undesirable" categories of individuals, who represented either a racialized "surplus" population or an "unfit" one according to modern standards of female membership. The South Korean state, in cooperation with other international actors, thus targeted Korean women, especially workers in U.S. camp towns, and their mixed-race children, relegating them to the edges of the national community while simultaneously transforming them into human commodities from whom to extract utility and resources for its advancement.

2.1 The Historical Foundations of Biopolitical Governance from Empire to Independent Nation

Korea has long been regarded as an interesting case study in the literature on nationalism and, even if more rarely, in that of biopower. In the first domain, Korean nationalism differs from that of many Western countries in its privileging of ethnicity over territorial belonging as a key marker of national identity. Furthermore, it is widely recognized by Korean studies that its population is relatively homogenous, which accentuates ethnic notions of nationhood.⁸ In the second domain, namely the study of biopower and biopolitics, existing literature has also emphasized Korea as a distinctive case. For instance, some studies have focused on the analysis of Korea in the context of the Cold War and following the ceasefire of the Korean War, which left the peninsula in a perpetual state of emergency, enabling the creation of zones of

⁸ Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford University Press, 2006), 18.

indistinction in which certain categories of individuals were relegated to bare life and stripped of membership either through their social exclusion or material elimination.⁹

However, as Gi-Wook Shin notes in his outstanding work on ethnic nationalism, the Korean case should not be understood merely as a peculiar episode. Rather, it is theoretically and empirically significant when contextualized within the broader historical contingent circumstances that shaped «the rise and dominance of nation as a categorical identity».¹⁰ Given the already clarified interconnection between nationalism and biopower in the process of identity formation and nation-building¹¹, it becomes crucial to apply a similar historical lens when tracing the legacies of biopolitical governance in South Korea. Such legacies emerged from Korea's encounter with modernity under the Japanese colonial rule and were later cemented in postcolonial times by autocratic regimes that drew upon colonial models of governance to produce inferior subjectivities in accordance with normative standards of nationhood.

The following section will therefore mainly focus on the production of an anti-communist national identity in postcolonial South Korea through the biopolitical instruments acquired from its Japanese colonial background, including an ethnicity-centered notion of nation and strong institutional surveillance and repression of the bodies and minds of the population. In particular, the assimilationist rhetoric promoted by Japan in colonial Korea sought to construct Koreans as simultaneously included and excluded from full membership on racial grounds, while techniques of control from educational materials through security apparatuses aimed at producing a “pure” population both physically and ideologically. After independence, these mechanisms were reconfigured within anti-communist discourses, similarly seeking to purify the nation and regulate belonging. However, anti-communism did not exclude the coexistence of other criteria of membership that gained momentum specifically in the context of President Park Chung-Hee's developmental state, which will be the object of later sections.

⁹ Seung-Ook Lee, Najeeb Jan, and Joel Wainwright, “Agamben, Postcoloniality, and Sovereignty in South Korea,” *Antipode* 46, no. 3 (2013): 650–68; Hyun Seon Park, “Volatile Biopolitics: Postwar Korean Cinema's Bodily Encounter with the Cold War,” *The Review of Korean Studies* 18, no. 1 (2015): 103–26.

¹⁰ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 9–10.

¹¹ See Chapter One «Borders Etched In Flesh : Unveiling The Cartographies Of Life And Belonging-A Theoretical Framework », Section 1.3 «An Entirely National Technology of Power over Life: The Biopolitics of Citizenship».

2.1.1 Korea as a Biopolitical Laboratory under the Japanese Empire

The complexity of Korean history and political culture cannot be fully understood without addressing the long period of domination that the Japanese Empire imposed on the peninsula for a period of thirty-five years. Being a Japanese colony not only signified subordination to a foreign power but represented Korea's first direct encounter with modernity and, consequently, with modern forms of governance. An encounter, this one, that would inevitably shape the trajectory of Korea's postcolonial nation-building.

The annexation of Korea by the Japanese Empire was formally institutionalized in August 1910 through the Treaty of Annexation, which brought the 518-year-old Choson Dynasty to an end and transformed Korea into a colony.¹² The form of colonialism adopted by Japan followed the same objectives of its Western counterparts, seeking to "civilize" and "enlighten" colonial populations by introducing modern administrative systems and institutions. However, the Japanese model distinguished itself from the British and French ones through its assimilationist character. Unlike Western empires, Japan and Korea were believed to share similar cultures and origins; thus, annihilation through assimilation was perceived as the most efficient way to secure Korean subjects' obedience and loyalty to the Empire. Yet assimilation did not result in equality between the Japanese and Korean people. On the contrary, as "biologically inferior", Koreans did not enjoy the same legal and political rights as metropolitan subjects, and never acquired full citizenship on racial grounds.¹³

Assimilationist policies intensified after March 1919, when mass demonstrations against the Japanese rule, fueled by the end of World War I and by U.S. President Wilson's articulation of the self-determination principle, culminated in the self-proclamation of Korean independence and widespread strikes and shutdowns in the peninsula. Even though Japan managed to counter the movement through brutal and violent repression, the March events made it clear that a reform of colonial governance was necessary to prevent future uprisings and ensure cooperation and security within the Empire, eventually leading to the introduction of *bunka seiji* (Cultural Policy). Through this policy, Japan ostensibly acknowledged the need to incorporate Korean traditions and customs into colonial administration, realizing that Korea could not be ruled exclusively with an "iron fist". Assimilationist rhetoric thus increasingly portrayed Koreans as

¹² Adrian Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea* (Routledge, 2017), 46.

¹³ Leighanne Yuh, "Contradictions in Korean Colonial Education," *International Journal of Korean History* 15, no. 1 (2010):121–50.

part of a greater East Asian nation united by race, despite the assertion of Japan's innate superiority.¹⁴

Under the illusion of easing discrimination and allowing a margin of self-expression, Japan developed more subtle forms of control over Koreans' daily lives by introducing them into public spaces and educational institutions where surveillance and indoctrination could be achieved without necessarily resorting to overt repression. For example, police forces led investigations and interrogations, operating a form of thought control over the social body.¹⁵ This obviously did not imply that coercive measures disappeared altogether. Japan's colonial rule was, in fact, characterized by a strong repressive apparatus including police and military, as well as by a powerful bureaucracy headed by the Governor-General, himself a military general.¹⁶ These institutions, beyond surveillance techniques, also utilized torture and psychological trauma to achieve ideological conversion.¹⁷ Furthermore, the persistence of flogging as a substitute for carceral punishment, despite its unacceptability and illegality in Japan, is only one of the examples illustrating the violent nature of repression existing in the peninsula.¹⁸ Rather than being replaced, repression began to coexist with modern forms of governance aimed at disciplining and regulating the colonial population, also through micro-sites such as education and health campaigns.

In her analysis of European rule in the Dutch and British Indies, Stoler already showed how the proliferation of discourses on hygiene, sexuality, and parenting permeated colonial territories to produce knowledge about standards of membership to the metropole, and how the colony itself was a biopolitical laboratory of identity production.¹⁹ Following this framework, many studies on moral education textbooks in colonial Korea demonstrate how Koreans were constructed as imperial subjects, stressing unity among all citizens of the empire while simultaneously relegating them to a secondary status. For instance, such textbooks never referred to Korea as a "colony", utilizing instead terms such as "annexation" or "union", with the specific intent of depicting an apparently equal relationship within the Empire. The figures of the police officer and the imperial official were portrayed in a positive light, since they

¹⁴ Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea*, 57 ; Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 42-46.

¹⁵ Dong-Suk Oh, "Legal Mechanisms of Thought Control through Anticommunism in South Korea: Focusing on the National Security Law," *Korea Journal* 65, no. 2 (2025): 131-71.

¹⁶ Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea*, 57 ; Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 42-46.

¹⁷ Oh, "Legal Mechanisms of Thought Control through Anticommunism in South Korea: Focusing on the National Security Law," 131-71.

¹⁸ Yuh, "Contradictions in Korean Colonial Education," 121-50.

¹⁹ Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 7-11.

maintained order and security, and that further reinforced the narrative that Japanese domination was “benevolent” as all peoples could equally enjoy the benefits brought by its modernity and progress.²⁰



Figure 1: A Korean classroom during the Japanese occupation. The class was held in Japanese as it was the national language promoted in the Empire's assimilation policies.²¹ (Courtesy of Korean Image Archive).

Yet this façade of equality revealed an underlying discourse of inherent exclusion and discrimination grounded in the presumed inferiority and backwardness of Korean traditions, arguments that functioned as legitimizers of Japan's “civilizing” mission and Korea's supposed incapacity for self-governance. Particularly relevant in this sense were depictions of Korean customs as barbaric or primitive in contrast to Japan's modernity, especially in the field of medicine and hygiene. Japanese educational materials encouraged Koreans to modify their lifestyles by adopting modern standards of cleanliness and by abandoning superstitions in favor of modern medicine.²²

From a biopolitical perspective, everyday behaviors and customs became the markers of Korean identity in contrast to Japanese modernity, while assimilation in reality reinforced rather than erased distinctions between the “barbaric” and the “civilized”, identifying and constructing belonging around material and moral standards of living. Such rearrangements of daily life were framed as meaningful opportunities to become full members of the imperial community, though, in reality, Korean people were systematically relegated to second-class citizens, excluded from

²⁰ Yuh, “Contradictions in Korean Colonial Education,” 121–50; Hai Suk Kim and Dong Bae Lee, “Japanese Surveillance in Colonial Korea: Analysis of Japanese Language Textbooks for Korean Students during the Colonial Era,” *Cogent Education* 10, no. 2 (2023): 1–22.

²¹ See also, Yuh, “Contradictions in Korean Colonial Education,” 121–50.

²² Yuh, “Contradictions in Korean Colonial Education,” 121–50.

higher education and positions of authority, and effectively confined to a subordinate status defined by ethnic and cultural backwardness.²³

Education thus served as a key site of biopolitical population management, producing docile and loyal subjects without fully integrating them as “real” Japanese citizens. Education, however, was not the only space of production and mobilization of docile human capital for Japan’s imperialistic ambitions. Under assimilationist slogans such as *naisen ittai* (Korea and Japan as One Body), a series of health campaigns incentivizing population growth were launched in colonial Korea, facilitated by the institution of the “Civil Registration Law”, which, for the first time, enabled the collection of demographic data on women’s legal and reproductive status. These campaigns targeted women specifically through the dissemination of knowledge about maternal and infant health while also emphasizing their central role as the foundations of the Empire, as illustrated by the slogan *fujin koso kokka no motoi* (Women as the Basis of the State).²⁴

Governmental bodies such as the Investigative Committee in rural Korea were established to collect detailed information on families’ reproductive knowledge and behaviors, to be then utilized as the basis for the elaboration of population growth campaigns. On the one hand, restrictive measures such as the censorship of birth control movements and the abortion ban, introduced in 1912 under the Meiji Criminal Code, limited reproductive autonomy; on the other, women’s healthy reproductive and sexual behavior, associated with motherhood, was promoted as a standard of membership. While men were expected to serve the empire through labor and military service, women’s patriotic duty lay in their role as mothers and wives, supporting their male counterparts in complying with manly duties, and producing future subjects for the Empire.²⁵ As Japanese physician Kudo Takeki wrote in the context of health campaigns in colonial Korea, childbirth was not to be conceived as a mere individual desire but as «the aspiration of the State that seeks to raise quality citizens», linking parental care and health standards to the broader imperial goals.²⁶

Through these educational and medical policies, as well as security apparatuses, it becomes clear that the Japanese Empire pursued a similar path to its European counterparts as it operated through a biopolitical mode of governance typical of modern times. The imperial project had at

²³ Yuh, “Contradictions in Korean Colonial Education,” 121–50.

²⁴ Jin Kyung Park, “Bodies for Empire: Biopolitics, Reproduction, and Sexual Knowledge in Late Colonial Korea,” *Korean Journal of Medical History* 23, no. 2 (2014): 203–38.

²⁵ Ivi, Kyung-Sook Shin and Helen J.S. Lee, “Living as a Colonial Girl: The Sonyō (少女) Discourse of School Curriculum and Newspapers in 1930s Korea,” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 18, no. 1 (2020): 119–34.

²⁶ Yuh, “Contradictions in Korean Colonial Education,” 121–50.

its very core the regulation of colonial subjects, which combined disciplinary and regulatory techniques aimed at disciplining and maximizing individuals' forces while also managing broader phenomena such as population growth. Such mechanisms effectively targeted the Korean population not only in its quantitative terms, but also, and most importantly, in a qualitative and normative sense, through the reshaping of its identity as simultaneously included and excluded component of the Empire. Included insofar as they served as loyal citizens and docile human resources for Japan's military aspirations, as well as for the quantitative growth of the empire, which was considered to be the result of Japan's colonial administration and Korea's own modernization, thus considered an incomparable manifestation of its success as an empire.²⁷ Excluded insofar as they never truly achieved the same status and rights as "pure" Japanese people, maintaining a distinct and subordinate position as biologically and culturally "inferior". This paradox, inclusion into the sphere of power through an inherent exclusion, lay at the heart of Japan's colonial modernity, and more broadly, of modern biopolitical governance.

Beyond the Western context, Korea served as the Japanese laboratory of modern forms of population management, where boundaries of citizenship and national identity were shaped and reshaped according to biological, moral, and cultural elements. The imperial state's concern with health, discipline, education, and reproduction was thus not merely a civilizing mission but a broader strategy to create the very borders of the Empire by defining what constituted the proper material and ideological ways of living and of belonging. Ultimately, the Japanese colonial state sought to produce a Korean identity as a separate and inferior subjectivity in contrast to the "proper" Japanese subjects, effectively operating through a biopolitical racism managing the national population.

The colonial legacy continued to permeate the spirits of the Korean people long after the liberation from Japanese rule at the end of World War II. It is not by chance that the specific model of biopolitical nation-building adopted in postcolonial Korea would emerge from this first direct encounter with modernity and its technologies of power over life.

2.1.2 Postcolonial South Korea and the Making of an Anti-communist Nation

With the foregone collapse of the Japanese Empire, eventually culminating in its unconditional surrender to the Allied Powers in August 1945 following the atomic bombings of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the fate of Korea fell into the hands of the global powers that emerged

²⁷ Yuh, "Contradictions in Korean Colonial Education," 121–50.

at the end of World War II. Amid the strategic uncertainty surrounding Korea's future independence, the two major superpowers of the time, the United States and the Soviet Union, agreed to a joint occupation of the peninsula, divided along the 38th parallel of latitude, with the southern region assigned to the former and the northern to the latter.²⁸ What was supposed to be a temporary division soon turned into a permanent rupture both in the soil and in the spirits of the Korean people: a historical trauma that profoundly shaped the destiny and the very identity of the national population.

The United States arrived in South Korea on September 8th, 1945, establishing the U.S. Military Government in Korea (USMGIK), which immediately came into conflict with the Preparation Committee for Korean Independence (PCKI). The latter, an organizational body created by a leftist leader in cooperation with a Japanese Governor-General, sought to bring together Korean political figures of different ideologies with the common objective of establishing an independent and unified state. However, due to the Committee's leftist orientation and the U.S. authorities' unpreparedness in an unfamiliar political environment, the USMGIK adopted an incoherent and alienating political direction, favoring English-speaking moderate personalities while excluding people's committees altogether.²⁹

In this context, Koreans began to fear a new form of foreign domination and the definite loss of a semblance of independence. Such fears materialized in December 1945 with the institutionalization of the Moscow Agreement, which established a four-power trusteeship for a period of five years, effectively excluding Korean voices from the process. Reactions within Korean society in the U.S.-occupied zone were paradoxical: anti-communists clashed with American occupying forces in opposition to the trusteeship agreement, while leftists either accepted it with resignation or supported it as the most pragmatic solution for a country in dire political and economic straits.³⁰

Despite anti-communist rightists' resistance to the trusteeship, U.S. occupiers soon realized that no viable leaders existed in the region, except for the rightist Syngman Rhee, especially after the assassination of his only competitor, Lyuh Woon-Hyung. Consequently, on August 15th, 1948, the Republic of Korea (ROK) was formally established under Rhee's presidency.³¹ The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, which cemented the division in the peninsula, now governed by two incompatible political systems, each claiming sole legitimacy, reinforced the

²⁸ Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea*, 85-86.

²⁹ Ivi, 88-89.

³⁰ Chris Suh, "Diasporic Politics in the Age of Decolonization: *Korean Independence* and the US Military Occupation of Korea, 1945-1948," *Diplomatic History* 49 (2025): 576-602.

³¹ Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea*, 100.

Rhee administration, especially due to its mobilizing anti-communist rhetoric, which became the cornerstone of South Korea's emerging national identity.

The first ROK president was guided by a particular nationalist principle, known as *Ilmin chuui*, meaning “One People”. This ideology directly appealed to ethnic nationalist discourses that had already emerged under Japanese colonialism, and, along with the quasi-total survival of Japanese militarist and bureaucratic apparatus, effectively continued to shape the country's postcolonial authoritarianism.³²

Ilmin chuui ideology revolved around three cardinal elements. First, anti-Japanism was deployed as a rhetorical device to manipulate the collective sentiments of humiliation and trauma experienced during colonial domination. Second, the myth of the “Great Han Race” portrayed the Korean people as a homogenous community sharing the same history, blood, and fate, legitimizing the restoration of a unified Korea, even by force. This translated into a highly racialized conception of nationhood, derived from the specific type of nationalism that emerged during colonial rule, privileging blood and lineage over political ideology or religion as markers of national belonging. Therefore, the «nation was considered natural, indivisible, and immortal», framed in collectivist terms with individual interests and personal beliefs subordinated to the national whole.³³ Lastly, the third element of *Ilmin chuui* was a strong anti-communist discourse, depicting communists as Korea's greatest enemies and the revival of nationalism as the most powerful weapon against them. In particular, Rhee's anti-communist propaganda drew upon historical narratives of foreign subjugations, especially the Choson Dynasty's subordination to China, which nationalist thought interpreted as a loss of identity and the nation's “effeminization” in contrast to its ancient military tradition. Similarly, North Korea's embrace of foreign communist ideology was conceived as a betrayal to the Korean nation.³⁴ This reading should, of course, not be detached from the broader geopolitical context of the Cold War and the United States' foreign policy interests, which directly influenced the construction of anti-communist South Korea as a crucial battleground to showcase the ideological superiority of democracy and the “free world” over the communist bloc. In fact, the Korean peninsula, with its division between North and South, represented the natural stage on which the merits of each system could be displayed to the eyes of the world.³⁵ Nevertheless,

³² Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 99-102.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ivi, 101; Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Narratives of Nation-Building in Korea : A Genealogy of Patriotism* (Routledge, 2016), 4.

³⁵ Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea : Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 2-7.

the early ROK administrations and their successors managed to combine American strategic agendas, the Japanese legacy, and the trauma of the Korean War, translating them into an effective nationalist ideology.

In the postwar years, the term “communist” started to be used as an umbrella label incorporating all individuals or groups opposing the regime, legitimizing the brutal repression and permanent surveillance of perceived threats to national security. The enactment of the National Security Law (NSL) in 1948, soon after the establishment of the ROK, epitomized how nationalism and anti-communist ideology not only justified the authoritarian state’s murderous character but also served as the grounding principles of its biopolitical dimension. By identifying and eliminating “enemies” and “traitors” of the nation through a comprehensive system of surveillance, the NSL functioned as one of the major mechanisms of population management.

Under the NSL framework, police and prosecution apparatuses, inherited from Japanese colonial rule and left intact, were empowered to punish, arrest, and investigate potential threats to public security through their intelligence and security divisions. Under Article 1 of the law, “impersonating the government” and “causing rebellion” were introduced as clauses enabling the death penalty, and were directly targeted at “communist” forces and associations, which, however, included, *de facto*, all political opponents, lawmakers, and even students or workers’ organizations leaning towards leftist ideals. The 1958 NSL revision further expanded the mechanism of surveillance by permitting the investigation and punishment of not only concrete acts of subversion, but also alleged espionage, information gathering, media distortion, and defamation of government institutions, thereby eroding the civil liberties of accused individuals and, virtually, of the entire social body.³⁶

It is evident that the NSL legal framework was fundamentally arbitrary in nature; thus, it illustrates how forms of ideological control were institutionalized, framing communist and leftist forces as internal enemies of the nation. In fact, the NSL did not target specific criminal acts, but presumed intentions, thus focusing on ideological risk management rather than actual dangers to public security.³⁷ Seen through biopolitical lenses, the “communist threat” represented a broader concern with the proper functioning of the national population and the maximization of its forces for the state’s nationalist interests; a quintessential exercise of

³⁶ Oh, “Legal Mechanisms of Thought Control through Anticommunism in South Korea: Focusing on the National Security Law”, 131–71.

³⁷ *Ivi*.

biopower as theorized by Foucault.³⁸ Not only was the population managed through disciplinary measures targeting concrete crimes or suspected individuals, such as law enforcements and correctional institutions, but the surveillance apparatus appeared so comprehensive that it also exposed the whole social body to the fear of being targeted for mere intentions, thus exercising an indirect control over thoughts and sentiments in a panoptic fashion, compelling individuals to constantly self-monitor, self-censor and report others to maintain their belonging. By equating all forms of anti-state or anti-social tendencies with “communism”, the state defined a standard of proper citizenship through contrast with the deviant, producing the citizen while simultaneously excluding the “traitor” who, as a non-member, became the object of the state’s *thanatopolitical* function.

Police brutality, surveillance, and nationalist ideology were the hallmarks of the earliest ROK’s administration, which intensified dramatically after the coup d’état of May 16th, 1961, led by Park Chung-Hee, ending a 13-month-long democratic government. He then established a military junta composed of colonels and brigadier-generals, and dissolved all other political activities within the state apparatus.³⁹ Park’s rule reinforced the anti-communist national identity and reimagined the myth of militarized Korea as a symbol of modernity. Although Park’s model of governance will be analyzed in further detail in the following sections, it is relevant here to underline the continuity with Rhee’s regime, particularly in the use of disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms to produce the anti-communist nation through population management.

One of the novelties of Park’s junta in this sense was the 1962 Resident Registration Law, which introduced a detailed identification system containing 140 items of information for each individual (including birthdate, address, marital status, degree of education, and so on), enabling a rather excessive monitoring of the Korean population under the pretext of identifying North Korean spies and “impure elements”.⁴⁰ In 1961, the NSL was integrated and progressively replaced by the Anticommunism Act, expanding the scope of prosecution, even in the absence of intent, to a wide range of activities from the dissemination of literature to failure to report suspicious behavior. Park’s regime also launched an ideological conversion campaign to be carried out by special task forces on prisoners, “spies,” and young people participating in student movements. Such campaigns included torture, psychological and

³⁸ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 241-247.

³⁹ Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea*, 141.

⁴⁰ Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 28-29.

financial pressure on the individuals and their families, as well as educational reprogramming that could allegedly “purify” them of “red communist ideology”.⁴¹

Such surveillance mechanisms rested on a specific model of nation-building pursued by both Rhee and Park’s administrations and on the biopolitical categories of citizen and non-citizen, represented by the figure of the “communist enemy”, who threatened not only national security and the very definition of Korean identity. This framework gained significant momentum, especially after the Korean War, as it served to legitimize South Korea’s existence against North Korea’s regime, while also mobilizing citizens in defense of the “free” state. On the one hand, the extermination of the communist Other became a national obligation, a marker of citizenship, and a standard of nationhood. On the other hand, *bbalgengi* (alleged pro-communists) were stripped of membership and subjected to unconditional state violence.

Perhaps the most extreme manifestation of this *thanatopolitical* dimension under the military regime consisted of the mysterious deaths of long-term prisoners, labor union members, opposition party members, as well as of ordinary students and intellectuals who criticized the government. All of them were relegated to the margins of membership in a context where the uncertain fate of Korea resulted in exceptional security measures, such as the NSL and the 1972 Yusin Constitution, which entitled the President to disproportionate powers by appealing to a state of emergency.⁴²

This feature of exceptionality continued to characterize South Korean governments even after Park’s death, which followed the establishment, in 1979, of a new military power led by General Chun Doo-Hwan. During this period, the 1980 Gwangju Massacre probably represented the culmination of a *thanatopolitical* governance that remains to the present day an open wound in the minds of South Koreans. In that event, civilian protesters in opposition to the regime were branded as communists, thus brutally slaughtered by the military and reduced to a state of bare life stripped of political and social rights.⁴³

The Gwangju Massacre is only the extreme manifestation of South Korea’s biopolitical trajectory, as the city was transformed into an Agambenian camp: the paradigmatic site of biopolitical governance.⁴⁴ Yet, as with Nazi Germany, the path leading to such an extreme outcome began well before then, with the progressive normalization of exceptional measures

⁴¹ Oh, “Legal Mechanisms of Thought Control through Anticommunism in South Korea: Focusing on the National Security Law,” 131–71.

⁴² Seung-Ook Lee, Najeeb Jan, and Joel Wainwright, “Agamben, Postcoloniality, and Sovereignty in South Korea,” *Antipode* 46, no. 3 (2013): 650–68.

⁴³ *Ivi*.

⁴⁴ Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 140–141.

and a generalized regulatory logic applied to the collectivity in the name of national security and the common good. From Rhee's *Ilmin chuui* to Park's autocratic state and beyond, South Korea was built on the definition of specific standards of citizenship, such as anti-communism, through the exclusion of internal enemies and threats. Such regimes should thus be understood in light of a broader biopolitical project typical of modernity, one inherited in part from Japanese imperialism. A project in which life itself became the object of political governance, operating through individuals' bodies and minds. Population management, however, was not neutral; rather, it sought to shape the ideal modern citizen and, ultimately, produce the modern nation.

2.2 Governing the Female Body: Family Planning and Gendered Citizenship in the Developmental State

The construction of an anti-communist national identity constituted a core pillar of the ROK's postcolonial nation-building, resulting from a combination of global political contexts and nationalist ideological discourse. This project operated through a double biopolitical logic, simultaneously producing standards of membership and excluding undesirable and "dangerous" elements from the body politic. Yet anti-communism did not represent the only criterion determining whether an individual could live or die within the national community, both in a material or symbolic sense. The biopower embedded in South Korea's nation-building project functioned through numerous sites and mechanisms, regulating the life of its citizens thoroughly, embracing the most intimate spaces of kinship and individual desires, and ultimately transforming bodies into key arenas where national borders were carved and produced.

Such a biopolitical project of national construction, however, is never neutral to qualified human subjectivities. For instance, one of the major criticisms raised by scholars against Foucault and Agamben's theorizations was precisely the marginal or absent position that gender and race occupied in their analysis of causes and effects of biopower.⁴⁵ Adopting this perspective, the following analysis of the ROK's nation-building project in the postwar period will focus on specific groups within the South Korean population, namely, women. Their peculiar position offers an interesting lens to understand the biopolitical dimension of nation-

⁴⁵ Smith and Agius, "Bodies/Biopolitics/Identity", 277-278; See also Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 7-11.

building and how citizenship was produced through the promotion of gendered norms of belonging.

It is therefore necessary to explore the interconnection between the ROK's political and economic agenda and the gendered dimension of population management characterizing, in particular, Park Chung-Hee's developmental state and the nationalist ideology justifying such model, where notions of nationalism, modernity, and development resulted in the production of the woman citizen, who acquired her membership through her relegation to the household and her participation in the National Family Planning Program (1961–1980s). In this sense, the female body became one of the privileged sites of national reconstruction and identity formation, as well as the paradigmatic point of intersection between nationhood and biopower due to her reproductive and sexual power. Through the mechanism of citizenship understood in its symbolic dimension, the Family Planning Program constructed the standard of the modern woman as a responsible contributor to the national community.

2.2.1 The Developmental State and the “Modernization of the Fatherland”

As introduced in the previous section, Park Chung-Hee rose to power as the new ROK's president following the 1961 military coup, which established a highly militarized and autocratic regime. Despite some criticism of the Rhee administration, particularly regarding political corruption, excessive dependence on foreign aid, and the government's inefficiency in implementing economic reforms, Park crystallized and reinvented its nationalist ideology to serve his agenda and to lead the country toward rapid economic transformation.⁴⁶

Since the end of the Korean War, as previously mentioned, a pervasive sense of threat had shaped South Korean society and political life. This resulted not only in an intensification of surveillance and the strengthening of military and security apparatuses, but also in the growing realization that technological and industrial backwardness could undermine the state's legitimacy and independence, especially in light of Japan's rapid recovery and North Korea's comparatively stronger economy.⁴⁷ Consequently, the construction of an anti-communist nation overlapped with the creation of a modern state through rapid economic development, forming the core objectives of Park's regime.

The specific model of governance emerging from Park's economic policies would be later defined as a *developmental state*: a state that controls financial resources and subordinates

⁴⁶ Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea*, 145.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

society and enterprises, more generally, the market itself, to national goals. Through this system, the state directs market actors to invest in its long-term developmental and industrial plans. The emergence of the South Korean developmental state should also be understood within the broader context of the country's transition to capitalism, a process that had already begun under Japanese colonialism and acquired renewed significance amid the global confrontation with communism. For instance, the dismantling of the Korean bourgeois class during the Japanese Empire and the subsequent low level of capital accumulation meant that the postwar capitalist class was largely shaped by the state under the guidance of the U.S. occupiers, which privileged managerial elites and former collaborators with Japan over other social groups, such as the working class. Therefore, state-led development and capitalism were not merely interconnected: the very "autonomy" of the state from the market and society was itself the historical product of a particular capitalist transition and the repression of "communists" and leftists.⁴⁸

Through this developmental strategy, the state coordinated economic activity, mobilized resources, and focused on export-oriented industries. Central to this process were the elites of *chaebols*, large industrial conglomerates run by elite families and individuals linked to the government through personal networks of favoritism, which became the main drivers of growth. This model, despite the introduction of economic liberalization and neoliberal reforms in later decades, has proven incredibly resilient exactly due to these structural features.⁴⁹

After the consolidation of the regime and the implementation of the first Five-Year Economic Development Plan (1962–1966), Park's government outlined specific economic objectives and policies to achieve progress and modernize the nation. Some key measures included the stimulation of exports and export-enhancing infrastructure, especially in the manufacturing sector, through cheap loans, tax benefits, and investments, while simultaneously limiting consumption and imposing high savings rates. These pragmatic policies exploited a favorable context characterized by openness and internationalization of market movements.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Plan emphasized the need to build an efficient and self-sufficient economy through improvements in agriculture, electrification, oil refining, and infrastructure. During the Park administration, subsequent Five-Year Plans expanded these objectives, with the second

⁴⁸ Hae-Yung Song, "The Developmental State and the Neoliberal Transition in South Korea," in *Economic Transitions to Neoliberalism in Middle-Income Countries*, ed. Alfredo Saad-Filho and Galip L. Yalman (Routledge, 2009), 141–147.

⁴⁹ Long Piao and Sangin Park, "The Limitations of South Korea's Government Led, Chaebol-Centered Development Strategy," *Journal of Asian Governance* 2, no. 1 (2025): 1–23; David Hundt, "Neoliberalism, the Developmental State and Civil Society in Korea," *Asian Studies Review* 39, no. 3 (June 19, 2015): 466–82.

⁵⁰ Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea*, 149.

(1967–1971) and third Plans (1972–1976) further promoting import-substitution industries, as well as heavy, chemical, and transport sectors.⁵¹

Another field of particular interest within this broader economic development and modernization framework was that of health and biomedicine. Progress in medical and scientific fields did not only symbolize material transformation, such as achieving more favorable living conditions and public health for a productive population, but also ideological and symbolic superiority: proof of the ROK's advancement and the legitimacy of the democratic, capitalist bloc over the communist one. Within this context, numerous public health campaigns were launched in the 60s and continued to be implemented in later decades, such as the Family Planning and Anti-Parasite Programs.⁵² Yet this emphasis on biomedicine revealed a perhaps darker dimension of its commodification as a marker of modernity. The mass application of medical interventions became problematic when targeting specific categories of individuals, such as women and displaced populations. In this sense, medicine operated within the context of the Korean War, family planning, and transnational adoptions, transforming patients' bodies into sites of "purification" and instruments for shaping the national population.⁵³

The emergence of the developmental model under Park's regime was justified through the concept of "modernization of the fatherland", a rhetorical device grounded in the nationalist discourse inherited from his predecessor, Rhee. Park framed modernization as a patriotic and collective mission, in which the entire Korean population, as a homogeneous entity, was called to unite. Anti-communism was further stressed since communists were deemed betrayers of national unity and identity. This ideology thus became an official doctrine, reinforced by the expansion of the security apparatus and the militarized structure of the state.⁵⁴

The project of "modernization of the fatherland" thus perfectly encapsulates the interconnection of developmentalism, modernization, and nationalism during Park's regime. Economic progress was conceived not merely as a means for the improvement of living standards and national wealth, but as the most effective strategy, alongside strong military and moral discipline, for building an independent nation that could survive against foreign dominations, whether from Japan, communism, or Western powers.

⁵¹ Young-Iob Chung, *South Korea in the Fast Lane : Economic Development and Capital Formation* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 368-369.

⁵² DiMoia, *Reconstructing Bodies : Biomedicine, Health, and Nation-Building in South Korea since 1945*, 11.

⁵³ *Ivi*, 9-10.

⁵⁴ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 103-104 ; Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 26.

It is interesting to notice how such an understanding of nationalism did not necessarily lead to xenophobia. As Shin observes, Park accepted a certain degree of assimilation of «superior aspects of foreign civilization» insofar as they served strategic national goals; however, rejecting those elements deemed incompatible with Korean culture.⁵⁵ This selective adaptation of foreign influences has long been a defining feature of Korean nationalist thought, traceable to the nineteenth century with the appropriation of Western notions of Social Darwinism and civilization, as well as Pan-Asianism.⁵⁶ In the postcolonial context, Korea's ability to reinvent foreign ideas and technologies, ranging from American capitalism and Japanese legacies to modern medicine, according to its own interests and traditions, enabled the country's impressive economic transformation from an agrarian society into "Asia's next giant", second only to Japan.⁵⁷

In South Korea, modernization, both as a material and moral project, targeted the national population as its main site of intervention. The developmentalist focus on health and medicine is particularly revealing of this logic as it exposes its interconnection with biopolitical governance, specifically, with its productive dimension, constructing the "pure" and modern citizen. The previous analysis of the formation of an anti-communist national identity constituted only one of the aspects of this process. For instance, the specific economic concerns of the Park's era gave rise to other standards of membership within the nation, standards fundamentally intertwined with gendered constructions of belonging.

2.2.2 Chasing the Demographic Dividend: An Overview of the National Family Planning Program

One of the most ambitious policies implemented under the Park administration was undoubtedly the National Family Planning Program, a project that would define the South Korean state for more than two decades, beginning with its official approval in 1961, immediately following the military coup, and extending to the mid-80s.⁵⁸ The program effectively redefined the relationship between the state and the citizens' bodies within the domestic sphere through newly introduced techniques of statistics and demography, not only in

⁵⁵ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 105.

⁵⁶ Ivi, 28-29.

⁵⁷ Ivi, 104.

⁵⁸ DiMoia, *Reconstructing Bodies : Biomedicine, Health, and Nation-Building in South Korea since 1945*, 112; Chan Moo Park and Nam Hoon Cho, "An Overview of National Family Planning Program in Korea: A Summary Explanation," *Repository Kihasa* (Korea Institute for Population and Health, 1982).

quantitative terms but, more importantly, through the transformation of Koreans' modes of living and thinking about family, marriage, and reproduction.

As previously mentioned, the introduction of Family Planning formed part of the broader project of economic development embedded in the Five-Year Economic Development Plans promoted by the Park regime. Specifically, the rationale guiding its implementation rested on the notion of “demographic dividend”, referring to the idea that excessive population growth in underdeveloped countries could hinder economic progress, whereas a decrease in birth rates could release resources for investments in those sectors enabling economic growth. This would be due to the joint consequence of the introduction of birth control and the production of a smaller cohort of population, which would imply the emergence of a smaller and healthier generation of children, resulting in health and education savings for the state, to be used as investments for national economic development. Furthermore, this logic was further reinforced by the preoccupation with overcrowding in the Seoul metropolitan area, where an urbanization process was taking place due to the influx of job seekers migrating to the capital.⁵⁹



Figure 2 (Left): A PPFK family planning poster of the 1970s depicting a chili pepper and people. The headline translates “Because of one son...Overpopulation is everybody’s responsibility”. The poster implies that Koreans’ preference for sons caused overpopulation. (Picture and translation by James Turnbull, “Learning from Korean Family Planning Advertisements of the 1960s-1980s,” *The Grand Narrative*, 2012).

⁵⁹ Id, “(Let’s Have the Proper Number of Children and Raise Them Well!): Family Planning and Nation-Building in South Korea, 1961–1968,” *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: An International Journal* 2, no. 3 (2008): 361–79; See also, DiMoia, *Reconstructing Bodies : Biomedicine, Health, and Nation-Building in South Korea since 1945*, 119.

Figure 3 (Right): A PPFK family planning poster of the 1970s depicting an overpopulated (top) and a healthy (bottom) household of eggs. The text translates "Korea's population has already exceeded 40 million". (Picture and translation by James Turnbull, "Learning from Korean Family Planning Advertisements of the 1960s-1980s," The Grand Narrative, 2012).

The program operated through meticulous organization among different ministries, private associations, and international partners. One of the main actors in its implementation was the Planned Parenthood Federation of Korea (PPFK), a private and voluntary civilian organization formed in 1961. With the technical and financial assistance of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the support of the military regime, the PPFK was responsible for on-the-ground management, advocacy, dissemination of information, and public mobilization to achieve the state's goals of population control.⁶⁰ In addition, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (MOHSA) was responsible for the overall execution of the program through local health centers and field workers, providing contraception and sterilization services at the city and country levels. The semi-governmental agencies of the National Institute for Health (NIH) and the Korea Institute for Population and Health (KIPH) were responsible for the training of personnel and for carrying out research and evaluation of population control projects, respectively.⁶¹

During the program's early phase (1961–1964), research teams also worked on establishing ties with international partners, visiting countries such as Taiwan that had implemented similar family planning projects, thus representing an important model and data source. Simultaneously, a series of surveys of attitudes on health and family planning was conducted nationwide, including the Koyang Study, initially published by Yonsei University in 1963. Its results proved to be crucial for the implementation of the program, as they revealed the effectiveness of media communication in disseminating the state's message on birth control and family planning.⁶²

It is therefore not surprising that the state launched an aggressive propaganda campaign to promote modern forms of contraception and reshape public attitudes toward the ideal family size, framing smaller families as both a national responsibility and an expression of individual rationality. Traditionally, Koreans tended to have many children both for cultural and practical reasons: having numerous offspring was associated with good luck and economic security, and a strong preference for sons prevailed since property and inheritance were transmitted through the male line only. Birth control methods had previously been limited to herbal remedies and the practice of abortion, often performed in unfavorable conditions, thus leading to health

⁶⁰ Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 81.

⁶¹ Park and Cho, "An Overview of National Family Planning Program in Korea: A Summary Explanation".

⁶² DiMoia, *Reconstructing Bodies : Biomedicine, Health, and Nation-Building in South Korea since 1945*, 118.

complications. Within this context, governmental bodies and civil associations, especially the PPFK, heavily relied on mass media, including radio, television, newspapers, educational texts, propaganda posters, and slogans, to influence the public perception of birth control and family life and encourage the population, especially the rural communities, to adopt a “modern” form of domestic life. The PPFK also sponsored conferences and workshops for medical professionals and on-the-street campaigns for married couples, specifically targeting wives and mothers, which were usually followed by free sterilization.⁶³ This reveals that the program’s objective extended beyond the mere pursuit of a demographic dividend and the quantitative reduction of births, but it also sought to achieve a cultural transformation of the very values and aspirations of individuals.

In total, the PPFK, in collaboration with the ministries and other agencies, organized around 25,000 clubs and civil associations to reach the demographic targets in rural areas and distribute birth control technologies and knowledge on family planning. The most notable among them, the Mother’s Club for Family Planning, composed of indigenous rural women, played a crucial role in disseminating information on birth control, nutrition, child rearing, maternal and child health, as well as sexual and reproductive behavior in married life. The club’s action managed to persuade and “convert” many rural women into using birth control and accept sterilization through their network of interpersonal communication and local leadership.⁶⁴

The specific technologies of contraception promoted by the program included IUD insertions, notably the Lippes loop, oral contraceptives, sterilization, and condoms, in chronological order.⁶⁵ The IUD in particular became the “patriotic” form of contraception par excellence and was the government’s initial focus, with approximately 300,000 units distributed by the mid-1960s, as it provided a long-term effect and a relatively fast procedure. However, the state’s urgency and excessively pragmatic approach in achieving population goals resulted in a superficial distribution of the device, ignoring the need for post-surgical care and the counter-effects associated with it, such as discomfort and bleeding. Furthermore, the shortage of trained medical personnel for such an extensive campaign led to the employment of other figures, such as paramedics, who were often unfamiliar with the insertion procedure or scarcely trained, exacerbating the issue. Despite this, patients were frequently blamed for the onset of

⁶³ Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 82-83; Park and Cho, “An Overview of National Family Planning Program in Korea: A Summary Explanation”; DiMoia, *Reconstructing Bodies : Biomedicine, Health, and Nation-Building in South Korea since 1945*, 123.

⁶⁴ Hyung Jong Park et al., “The Korean Mothers’ Club Program,” *Studies in Family Planning* 7, no. 10 (1976): 275–83.

⁶⁵ Chai Bin Park, Lee-Jay Cho, and James A. Palmore, “The Euiryong Experiment: A Korean Innovation in Household Contraceptive Distribution,” *Studies in Family Planning* 8, no. 3 (1977): 67–76.

complications, especially younger women with high levels of education, who were labeled as “too sensitive” and “psychologically weak”.⁶⁶ In general, the medical apparatus operated through a quantitative rather than a qualitative logic, prioritizing the numerical targets for IUD insertions and contraceptive distribution over individuals’ comfort and safety.

Despite being far less emphasized, vasectomies on male citizens were also included in the Family Planning Program. Contrary to the female population, which was, in any case, the primary target, men were offered various forms of incentives for undergoing sterilization, such as financial compensation, paid recovery time, housing benefits, and early release from home reserve training.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, male sterilization was not nearly as successful as female sterilization, which was introduced later in the program to alleviate the issues raised by the IUD campaign. Described by some as “sterilization mania”, the campaign was massively and aggressively implemented, reaching around two million women in only five years.⁶⁸

The National Family Planning Program evolved alongside the implementation of each of the Five-Year Economic Development Plans, adjusting its targets and objectives to the shifting demographic situation in the country. By the end of 1968, the program managed to reduce the fertility rate from 6.0 in 1960 to 2.7, while increasing the acceptance of family planning practice from 9% in 1964 to 49% in 1978, meaning that nearly half of the Korean population was actively participating in the program. Undeniably, the introduction of Family Planning contributed significantly to the emergence of the notions of maternal and child health, and to a broader public awareness of health and contraception. It has also contributed to the partial erosion of traditional norms, such as sons’ preference over daughters, which resulted in greater rights for women in terms of inheritance with the revision of the Family Law.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, such a project reveals an emblematic utilitarian rationality that underpinned the broader economic development experienced by South Korea during the Park regime. Its underlying quantitative nature resulted in a privileging of national demographic targets over individuals while simultaneously framing individuals’ commitment to family planning as “patriotic” and national duties. The female body, a Foucauldian “Malthusian” woman⁷⁰, in particular, became the privileged site of state intervention, regulating both the body and the

⁶⁶ Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 83-84; DiMoia, *Reconstructing Bodies : Biomedicine, Health, and Nation-Building in South Korea since 1945*, 125-26.

⁶⁷ Ivi, 133-135.

⁶⁸ Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 84.

⁶⁹ Jae-Mo Yang, “An Overview of Family Planning in Korea (1961-1978),” *Yonsei Medical Journal* 20, no. 2 (1979): 184-84.

⁷⁰ Foucault identifies the *Malthusian couple* as one of the objects of knowledge production on sex, characterized by a responsabilization of the couple’s sexual behaviors for the collective interest. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 104-105.

population through the responsabilization of her reproductive and sexual behaviors for broader demographic and economic transformations. Within this process, the state shaped and transformed how women and families lived, according to the ideals proper of a modern nation in the making.

2.2.3 The Female Womb as a Biopolitical Site of Modern Nationhood

The overview of the Family Planning Program, adopted within Park Chung-Hee's developmentalist approach, highlights several interesting points of discussion to be interpreted within the broader nation-building process in the path towards modernity. This trajectory unfolded within the very bodies of the population, specifically, the female population, through the state's penetration into the private sphere and, more precisely, into sexual and reproductive life. It is not accidental that these state-led interventions appeared at the level of sexuality, since, as Foucault argued, sexuality lies at the intersection between the individual and the collective, making it a privileged site through which biopower can operate by both disciplinary and regulatory techniques.⁷¹

As previously discussed, in the case of the Family Planning Program, not only did the ROK's state apparatus implement mass-level policies aimed at influencing demographic trends, namely fertility and birth rates, through the promotion of sterilization and contraception, but it additionally relied on private and voluntary associations of civilians targeted at specific groups in urban and rural areas. Through these quasi-official instruments, the state effectively entered the bodies, families, and households, subjugating intimate aspects of life to political control. Within this framework, the female body became a privileged target of the state's intervention, in which the regulation of demographic trends and the disciplining of individual behavior converged in the construction of the modern nation and female citizenship.

Reshaping individuals' sexual and reproductive behavior represented a crucial aspect of this effort. Voluntary organizations and clubs actively sought to promote "modern" approaches to sex and married life. The PPFK, in particular, with the publication of a monthly magazine titled "Happy Home", disseminated information and educated the population on a variety of topics, ranging from family life to parenting, even covering deemed "taboo" subjects, such as sexual dysfunctions and sexual education for children. However, the message portrayed by the PPFK was one articulating a "modern" sexual behavior, one that did not rest on repression or

⁷¹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 145; Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 252.

prohibition but rather on the encouragement of sexual enjoyment and on the strict separation between sex for pleasure and sex for procreation. Contraception was thus promoted in the magazine as enabling individual fulfillment in sexual relations without the preoccupation of undesired pregnancy.⁷²

This conception of intimate relationships, characterized by the separation between reproduction and romance, is peculiar to modernity. As Anthony Giddens observes, pre-modern marriage was predominantly an economic arrangement rather than a choice grounded in attraction or romantic feelings; thus, physical affection was rare among married couples and was often sought outside such relations. The idea of romantic love in conjugal relationships emerged in Europe in the eighteenth century, when it also began to be associated with notions of freedom and self-realization, while sexual relations were detached from the demands of reproduction.⁷³

From this perspective, Giddens argues that the retreat of sexuality from the bounds of reproduction and into the private sphere of human relationships has liberated sexuality from power control, both in a physical and social sense. He thus rejects the very existence of biopower as theorized by Foucault, since he understands transformations in sexual attitudes as originating from evolutions in individuals' desires and aspirations rather than from institutional interventions and, more generally, power apparatuses.⁷⁴ Yet Giddens' position underestimates the interconnection between public and private spheres of life and the profound influence of institutional discourses on the very attitude changes that he deems responsible for social transformations. As Foucault demonstrates, modern biopower is not limited to formal state structures; it permeates society through multiple spaces, including medicine, media, education, and daily practices, which produce knowledge on subjectivities and define their proper behaviors. Foucault's *deployment of sexuality* operates through mobile sites and techniques of power; hence, it would be rather restrictive to limit the analysis to the formal state apparatus.⁷⁵

Not to mention, Giddens's bottom-up conception of social transformations perhaps presumes a certain degree of individual freedom and agency. If even merely formal institutions are taken into consideration, Giddens' argument can be applied only to political contexts where private life rests outside the state's explicit control. The case of South Korea offers a clear

⁷² Eunjoo Cho, "Making the 'Modern' Family: The Discourse of Sexuality in the Family Planning Program in South Korea," *Sexualities* 19, no. 7 (2016): 802–18.

⁷³ Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Polity Press, 2013), 39–40.

⁷⁴ *Ivi*, 173–175

⁷⁵ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 106.

counterexample: through the implementation of the Family Planning Program, the state directly intervened in the household, not only to redefine the relation between sexuality and reproduction, but also between the public and private. The home and the woman became sites for the production of norms of citizenship and belonging.

Civilian organizations facilitated this process by reshaping individuals' attitudes towards sexuality and producing social change. These actors enabled the dissemination of a specific discourse on sexuality that promoted a modern vision of sex, love, and reproduction. The PPFK framed marriage as an institution based on romantic love, where sex should represent a source of enjoyment and an expression of affection instead of a duty for procreation. This type of relationship was also emphasized as the basis for a fulfilling and healthy family life, as Figures 4 and 5 illustrate. Passages from "Happy Home" go even further by equating traditional practices such as arranged marriages and sexual attitudes limited to reproduction to "animal-like" modes of living, whilst stressing intentional and romantic choices as the very essence of human beings.⁷⁶ Biopower thus operated not through the repression, but the disciplining of sexual relations by their encouragement, on the condition of conforming to modern standards.



Figure 4 (Left): A PPFK family planning poster of the 1970s depicting a couple of a man and a woman. On the umbrella, there appears the sentence "The path to youth and beauty is family planning" and at the bottom "Don't discriminate between boys and girls, have only two children and raise them well". (Picture and translation by James Turnbull, "Learning from Korean Family Planning Advertisements of the 1960s-1980s," *The Grand Narrative*, 2012).

⁷⁶ Cho, "Making the 'Modern' Family: The Discourse of Sexuality in the Family Planning Program in South Korea," 802–18.

*Figure 5 (Right): A PPFK family planning poster of the 1970s depicting a family of three with only one child. The sentence translates "One family, full of love. One child, full of health." (Picture and translation by James Turnbull, "Learning from Korean Family Planning Advertisements of the 1960s-1980s," *The Grand Narrative*, 2012).*

The proliferation of magazines, clubs, and "mothers' classes" in rural and urban areas nationwide, alongside the broader project of controlling births through the distribution of contraception techniques to fertile women and the surveillance of health record-keeping systems tracking women's reproductive behavior, resulted in the production of a specific type of subject: the woman as wife and mother, visible to the state and to society solely as the biological reproducer of a modernizing nation.⁷⁷ For instance, in postcolonial South Korea and especially under Park's developmentalist regime, citizens' inclusion into the political and social collective depended on specific gender roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women. As already mentioned in previous pages, Park Chung-Hee pursued his nation-building project based on the understanding that modernization meant creating a strong state in both military and economic terms, which ideologically rested on an anti-communist identity in light of the domestic and global context of the time. This nation-building project required, of course, not only the mass mobilization of all national subjects but the construction of their very identity as loyal members, actively participating in the pursuit of the state's goals. Therefore, while men were incorporated into the political community through mandatory service and as the primary participants in the labor force, women gained membership through their relegation to the home, where their main contribution to the nation-building process derived from their participation in the Family Planning Program.⁷⁸

The subordination of women to the role of wives and mothers is certainly not peculiar to this time nor to South Korea. Globally and historically, women have long been emphasized as both biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, particularly in those societies where nationalist thought had developed through the myth of common origin and ethnic homogeneity.⁷⁹ For instance, already during the colonial period in Korea, discourses produced by the Japanese Empire and the Korean resistance movements similarly invoked the figure of the woman for nationalist purposes, consistently positioning her within the domestic kin structure.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 86-88.

⁷⁸ *Ivi*, 2.

⁷⁹ Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 26-27.

⁸⁰ Jager, *Narratives of Nation-Building in Korea : A Genealogy of Patriotism*, 45.

Nevertheless, what is relevant in the case of Park's nation-building project is the deliberate and state-led biopolitical production of standards of citizenship and belonging through the regulation of individuals' attitudes and behaviors, and mass population phenomena simultaneously. The Family Planning Program represents a paradigmatic case of biopolitical governance since it did not merely function through coercive and aggressive mechanisms, but it operated in a much more comprehensive fashion, penetrating and influencing the very desires and interests of individuals themselves.⁸¹ By incentivizing birth control and framing sexual pleasure as distinct from reproductive duties, as well as a desirable and rather cardinal element for the success of personal and family life, women were offered a site of semblant emancipation and agency. Paradoxically, while a space was created for women to pursue self-realization, that same space further crystallized their relegation to the household. The program thus sought to transform women's subjectivity into autonomous and rational members of the nation, into modern women who were simultaneously emancipated from undesirable customs and patriotic contributors to the state's developmental goals, without, however, challenging their structural role.

In this sense, the underlying logic of Park's nation-building project was essentially a biopolitical one. Modernization was pursued through an interweaving of economic development and population management, particularly within the domestic sphere. In this private space, the regulation of reproduction and the disciplining of sexual behavior resulted in the production of women as citizens according to reconfigured norms of intimacy, modernity, and belonging. These feminine subjectivities became agents of national development and members of the polity precisely through their reproductive and emotional labor, even as they remained excluded from other male-exclusive domains of active participation and citizenship, such as the military and the workplace.

2.3 Managing Unwanted Lives: The Biopolitics of Transnational Adoptions

As the Republic of Korea embarked on an accelerated path toward economic growth and modernization, the social body became a crucial terrain of state intervention. As seen in the case of the Family Planning Program and in the making of an anti-communist identity, the state deployed a biopolitical mode of governance aimed at producing the citizen and defining its belonging through a complex apparatus of discipline and population management. Yet, the

⁸¹ Cho, "Making the 'Modern' Family: The Discourse of Sexuality in the Family Planning Program in South Korea," 802–18.

construction of nationhood cannot be understood without considering the inherent exclusionary and *thanatopolitical* force that distinguishes between desirable and undesirable subjects, between those who can belong and those who represent a “social risk” and a “threat” endangering the nation-building project.

The South Korean state thus offers a particularly emblematic example of how development and modernization have been achieved also through the exclusion and elimination of certain categories of individuals deemed “unfit” according to nationalist, economic, and moral standards of citizenship. These subjects, positioned in an ambiguous territory at the margins of society, became the sites where biological and symbolic boundaries of the nation were engraved. In this context, it was the children of Korean women and Western, mostly American, servicemen, and their mothers, who were identified as the targets of these biopolitical interventions due to their bodies being at the intersection point where ethnic nationalism, Cold War geopolitics, developmental rationales, and gendered moralities converged.

In this framework, the institutionalization of transnational adoptions emerged as a paradigmatic biopolitical mechanism, which, through the governance of the circulation of bodies from South Korea to the Western world, effectively eliminated a “surplus” population and produced human commodities to serve national agendas. It is no coincidence that transnational adoptions expanded alongside South Korea’s rapid economic development, peaking during Park Chung-Hee’s developmental state, and making South Korea the main global supplier of children until the mid-1990s, with a total of 167,245 children adopted between 1953 and 2014, the majority of whom were not war orphans but mixed-race children, especially until the 1970s.⁸² Their Korean birth mothers, mainly unwed women, became the objects of a parallel regime of regulation centered on their sexual and reproductive roles. They were no less of a “social problem” and a “national shame” due to their deviation from prescribed norms of proper female citizenship, thus equally relegated to the margins of society by the state. However, their bodies were also transformed into commodities for national interests and subjected to forms of surveillance and discipline, ultimately leading to reintegration into the national community. Taken together, the practice of transnational adoption and its racialized and gendered rationales and effects on the population reveal the biopolitical dimension of South

⁸² Youngeun Koo, “The Paradoxical Development of Liberal Governance: International Adoption Policy and Professional Social Work in Authoritarian South Korea, 1953–1976,” *Journal of Social History* 00 (2024): 1–30; Jungyun Gill, *Unequal Motherhoods and the Adoption of Asian Children* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), Chapter 1, Section “The Beginnings”.

Korea's nation-building and the productive yet exclusionary character of its construction of belonging.

2.3.1 The ROK-US Adoption Nexus between Developmentalism and Humanitarianism

Scholarship on transnational adoption in South Korea generally interprets the phenomenon as a response to a double crisis, involving both the South Korean state and the United States, and shaped by their respective political and economic agendas. In the years following the U.S. occupation and the Korean War, specifically between 1953 and 1971, approximately 40,000 children were abandoned and relinquished for overseas adoption. Even though the devastation and poverty caused by the Korean War have certainly influenced the increase in poor South Korean families' decision to opt for adoption, these conditions alone do not wholly grasp the scale of the phenomenon.⁸³ Indeed, the situation in postwar South Korea was far more complex, as transnational adoptions became an institutionalized instrument of South Korean nationalist and developmental projects, as well as of American humanitarian and political interests.

The origins of transnational adoptions can be traced to the presence of U.S. and UN soldiers stationed across camp towns and in the sexual exploitation characterizing gendered militarized relations during wartime. In many militarized contexts, women become sites of exploitation for their sexual labor, which serves the military apparatus as a means to satisfy soldiers' desires, preserve their "fighting morale" through prostitution, sex tourism, or even rape in exchange for some form of economic compensation. Although prostitution was illegal under the ROK legislation, it was accepted and permitted in U.S. military camp towns, where Korean women were allowed, and even encouraged, to engage in sexual relations with Western soldiers.⁸⁴ Some of them also became steady partners, girlfriends, and wives of the military personnel, creating a subculture in camp towns where interracial relationships were the norm.⁸⁵ Within this environment, the first cohort of mixed-race children appeared in South Korean society and public discourse, born from the neocolonial encounter of Korean women and Western soldiers.

⁸³ Arissa H. Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption* (Stanford University Press, 2015), 179-182.

⁸⁴ Gill, *Unequal Motherhoods and the Adoption of Asian Children*, Chapter 1, Section "The Beginnings".

⁸⁵ Yuri W. Doolan, "The Problem of the Mixed Blood Child," in *The First Amerasians* (Oxford University Press, 2024), 48.

The emergence of the figures of the mixed-blood child and *mihonmo*⁸⁶ raised numerous concerns for the South Korean state under both Rhee and Park's regimes. Beyond their significance for nationalist and ideological concerns, which will be the object of further discussion in the following sections, it is crucial to highlight the welfare burden they represented for the developmental logic during the years of economic reforms.

From the beginning, postwar recovery and social welfare relied heavily on foreign aid from a network of institutions and organizations, specifically the U.S. government and humanitarian agencies, which provided food, medicines, and other services, such as hospitals, schools, and orphanages. The creation of this external welfare infrastructure fundamentally enabled the South Korean state to deploy most of its financial budget to military expenses and industrial investments and avoid establishing a national social welfare system, except for programs deemed functional to its economic development goals, such as the National Family Planning Program.⁸⁷

Some of these humanitarian organizations operated through fundraising programs, involving "sponsorship adoptions", a program matching donors, mainly Americans, with South Korean war orphans who would later be adopted abroad. This fundraising strategy was then adopted by many other humanitarian agencies, which began promoting transnational adoptions in the United States and encouraging South Korean mothers to give up their children for adoption, thus extending the program to non-orphans. From the late 1950s to its peak in the 1960s under Park's government, the transnational adoption system saw the proliferation of foreign aid agencies with the specific mission of facilitating the adoption of mixed-blood children. Specifically, four main adoption agencies emerged, namely, Holt International, Korea Social Service, the Social Welfare Society, and Eastern Children's Welfare Society. These did not operate independently but were licensed and supervised by the South Korean government.⁸⁸

The enormous success of the transnational adoption practice depended not only on South Korean interests in benefiting from foreign material and financial support, but also largely on the American discourse constructing the figure of the Korean adoptee and their Korean mothers. Within this discourse, "half-American" children born to U.S. soldiers were portrayed as neglected, mistreated, and objects of prejudice in a "backward" and racist Korean society.

⁸⁶ The term translates as "unwed mothers" but it became also a synonym for "birth mothers" of mixed-race children. Hosu Kim, "The Biopolitics of Transnational Adoption in South Korea: Preemption and the Governance of Single Birthmothers," *Body & Society* 21, no. 1 (2015): 58–89.

⁸⁷ Hosu Kim, *Birth Mothers and Transnational Adoption Practice in South Korea: Virtual Mothering* (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), Chapter 2, Section 2.2 "Foreign Aid-Based Welfare: The Development of the Transnational Adoption Practice".

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Korean mothers were also portrayed as neglectful and unable to properly raise their children due to their social status as prostitutes living in poverty, and their insufficient legal protection as single mothers. While racial discrimination and the paternal *ius sanguinis* principle certainly existed in South Korean society and rendered interracial children's situation difficult and legally precarious, their stories in American media were exaggerated and sensationalistic, going from depictions of neglectful and unloving mothers to children "stoned to death", sold or forced to engage in sex work. Such images were mobilized with the specific intent to provoke sentiments of pity and even patriotic duty, implying that Americans, as nationals of a free and developed state, were almost morally obliged to save these unwanted children and offer them a better life.⁸⁹ The discourse thus contributed to the crystallization of global power relations, which portrayed South Korea as an underdeveloped and backward nation and the United States as a benevolent "savior" without acknowledging its responsibility in creating the very conditions of such problems.

Humanitarianism was not the only rationale guiding the U.S. involvement in the adoption system. In fact, adoption advocates, specifically those operating within the Holt organization, conducted extensive lobbying campaigns with American lawmakers, emphasizing the international role that the U.S. could play in underdeveloped South Korea by contributing to its social welfare system, thus gaining the reputation of a democratic and tolerant partner, while simultaneously symbolizing the ideological superiority of the capitalist bloc over the communist one and countering communist accusations of U.S. irresponsibility in the Third World.⁹⁰

The convergence of political, economic, and ideological interests of the South Korean state and the American superpower produced a system that both parties were invested in maintaining, even at the cost of exaggerating information and coercing single mothers and families in need into relinquishing their children. This adoption infrastructure, alongside other foreign relief measures, such as orphanages, became the only form of child social welfare available in the country, embedded in Park's developmental logic of "growth first, redistribution later"⁹¹, which relegated welfare responsibility to foreign agencies.

Supported by both South Korean and American interests, international adoption agencies were granted immense power in the mechanisms utilized to administer the adoption system. As

⁸⁹ Yuri W. Doolan, "Confucius Outcasts," in *The First Amerasians* (Oxford University Press, 2024), 93-94; Doolan, "The Problem of the Mixed Blood Child," in *The First Amerasians*, 45-48.

⁹⁰ Doolan, "The Problem of the Mixed Blood Child," in *The First Amerasians*, 46-47.

⁹¹ Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption*, 179.

a result, children effectively became a product. Their lives were transformed into commodities, a source of financial gains for agencies and the South Korean state, and a human instrument for reinforcing American influence. All this at the expense of the most vulnerable sectors of the South Korean population.

2.3.2 Racialized Surplus: The Problem of Mixed-Blood Children

As introduced in the previous section, the institutionalization of transnational adoptions emerged from the perceived “social problem” of war orphans, specifically, interracial children born to Korean women and Western soldiers. Their problematization resulted from a combination of economic and political concerns, which framed mixed-blood children as a “surplus” population to be excluded and ultimately eliminated to advance South Korea’s nation-building project.

South Korea’s path towards modernization has heavily relied on nationalistic myths of “common origin” and a homogenous social body, which both justified autocratic and aggressive campaigns of population control, such as the Family Planning Program, by appealing to the unity of the people and the collective effort in national reconstruction. Within this ideological climate, mixed-blood children were perceived as contaminations threatening the purity of the national body, not only due to their “impure” Korean blood, but, more importantly, due to their value as living reminders of foreign influence and interventions in the postwar period. Their very existence, in a context of ideological competition over political legitimacy with communist North Korea, symbolically weakened the country’s claim of autonomy and independence from the U.S. Indeed, mixed-blood children even became the object of North Korea’s accusations against South Korea’s dependency on Western forces.⁹²

Therefore, as soon as the United States implemented the Refugee Relief Act in 1953, President Syngman Rhee immediately sought to establish the first channels facilitating the adoption of interracial children. In a letter to the South Korean ambassador to the UN of the time, Rhee specifically emphasized the necessity to reach certain quotas of adoptions and expressed his preoccupation with sending as many orphans as possible to the United States since, he argued, it would have been impossible for them to find a place in Korean society.⁹³

⁹² Kim, *Birth Mothers and Transnational Adoption Practice in South Korea : Virtual Mothering*, Chapter 2, Section 2.2 “Foreign Aid-Based Welfare: The Development of the Transnational Adoption Practice”, Sub-section “Kijich’on Mothers—Give for Life”.

⁹³ Eleana Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Duke University Press ; Chesham, 2011), 62.

Despite being framed by both South Korean and American discourse as orphans, in reality, the vast majority of mixed-blood children were living with their biological Korean mothers and, in general, their adoption was the result of a wide variety of situations and forces, mostly poverty and social stigma.⁹⁴ The South Korean government consistently depicted interracial children as unfit for Korean society, a narrative that international adoption agencies reinforced by convincing birth mothers that their children would never enjoy full social acceptance in South Korea and that they would instead benefit from a better life in a Western bourgeois family. The case of Holt International is particularly significant for its employment of aggressive and even coercive techniques of “baby-hunting” in military camp towns, targeting mixed-race children to be relinquished, occasionally even engaging in kidnapping. Such agencies also began to hire other figures, especially women, to persuade birth mothers to give their babies up for adoption in the name of securing a better future, and even equating relinquishment to an act of selfless maternal love. As a result, despite birth mothers’ fears of being separated from their children, and some attitude changes in the acceptance of mixed-race children in camp towns, a wide consensus was created by both the ROK and U.S. governments, as well as humanitarian adoption agencies, around adoption being the best, and only, solution for interracial children who would otherwise face racial discrimination.⁹⁵



Figure 6: A mixed-race child, probably in a refugee camp, military camp town, or orphanage. (Courtesy of Korean Image Archive).

⁹⁴ Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption*, 194.

⁹⁵ Doolan, “The Problem of the Mixed Blood Child,” in *The First Amerasians*, 69-71.

Although these narratives were often exaggerated to reach adoption quotas, they were grounded in some truth. The pervasive social stigma associated with interracial children led mothers to avoid interactions with the outside world, shielding their children in the familiar environments of the home or camp town. Efforts to disguise the interracial identity of their children were also common techniques to protect them from racial discrimination, by dyeing their hair black or covering their heads. Even though social workers acknowledged the need to promote acceptance and assimilation due to the growing presence of mixed-race people in South Korean society, institutional discrimination remained. At the legal level, children placed for overseas adoptions did not appear in the state's family registry system, which conferred legal citizenship through the patrilineal principle, according to which the entire family was registered under the name of the male head. Therefore, mixed-race children and children born to unwed single mothers were instead included in the "orphan registry", which designated them as heads of single-person households and omitted all information about their origins and family ties. This legal exclusion effectively relegated children to the margins of society and stripped them of legal protection and full citizenship status. They became individuals without past or lineage, dwelling between material existence and socio-political vanishment. This legal condition inevitably translated into other forms of structural discrimination, such as the impossibility for children to enroll in schools and receive an education, a barrier used as an additional rationale by adoption agencies to further convince birth mothers to relinquish their children.⁹⁶

Racialized discourses further aggravated the situation, as mixed-race individuals were often portrayed as inherently problematic or having a natural inclination to violence and criminal behavior. These images populated the social workers' declarations and reports, and crystallized the perception of interracial children as unable to assimilate into South Korean society, further isolating them from the national community. The children fathered by Black soldiers faced a particularly intense form of discrimination as their physical appearance rendered them much less racially passable in South Korean society compared to their white counterparts.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Doolan, "Confucius Outcasts," in *The First Amerasians*, 88-103; Koo, "The Paradoxical Development of Liberal Governance: International Adoption Policy and Professional Social Work in Authoritarian South Korea, 1953-1976," 1-30.

⁹⁷ Doolan, "Confucius Outcasts," in *The First Amerasians*, 99-104.



Figure 7: American soldiers with a Korean Black infant. (Courtesy of Korean Image Archive).

Mixed-blood children and those deemed “adoptable” subjects were typically sent to orphanages or foster care facilities that cooperated with the four international adoption agencies operating in the country to facilitate the adoption process. As exemplified by the Brothers Home, a “social welfare” facility that operated also as an orphanage, these institutions presented themselves as surrounded by walls, barbed wire, and armed guards, and it was not uncommon for them to function in violation of human rights and through violent measures.⁹⁸ Within this context, the transformation of interracial children into “adoptable” subjects and human commodities for the ideological, political, and economic interests of the state revealed a deeper but evident biopolitical dimension. From their birth at the margins of the legal and social system throughout the entire process leading to overseas adoption, children constituted an undesirable part of the population to be regulated, excluded, and eventually eliminated, to preserve the ethnic and moral integrity of the nation. Before even entering these “social welfare” facilities, their lives had already been nullified in their political and social dimensions, reduced to bare existence, precluded from the very possibility of tracing their origin and identity. Scholars have therefore long regarded these facilities as biopolitical “camps” as theorized by Agamben, and, more broadly, have analyzed the transnational adoption practice as a biopolitical strategy aiming at purifying the nation-state of unwanted populations, while simultaneously maintaining diplomatic relations through the exchange of “pitiful creatures” to satisfy the humanitarian

⁹⁸ Eli Park Sorensen, “Brothers Home and the Production of Vanished Lives,” *Genealogy* 7, no. 101 (2023): 1–15

desires of the American population, who generated the necessary financial aid for economic development.⁹⁹

Yet the biopolitical project pursued by the South Korean state extended beyond the material exclusion and elimination of populations through adoption, but was also situated within the broader context of national identity construction in the path towards modernity. For instance, it included the knowledge production of a standard of citizenship embedded in specific understandings of nationalism and modernization, constructing precisely the ideal citizen as an active and patriotic contributor to national reconstruction and part of a homogenous whole. Within this ideological framework, mixed-blood children were not only perceived as a contamination to the ethnic purity of the nation but also as economic burdens endangering its rapid economic development, since their very integration and sustenance would necessarily require social welfare resources in a society where women were structurally discouraged from entering the workforce. Furthermore, in a period characterized by aggressive birth control policies aimed at freeing revenue for the economy, a cohort of single-mothered children with no legal status would represent a massive threat to national economic goals.

The result was then the emergence of a generalized discourse producing the figure of the *non-citizen*: an interracial individual, oftentimes problematic and unable to integrate into society by means of public rejection and inherent biological ambiguity. These *non-citizens*, in both formal and symbolic sense, were thus relegated to third spaces, either the camp town or “social welfare” institutions such as orphanages and foster care facilities, where they ceased to exist as political and social beings while awaiting rebirth as adoptees in the Western world. Building on, but also moving beyond, existing interpretations of adoption facilities as “camps” in the Agambenian sense, it becomes evident that the specific racial dimension of this biopolitical project enabled the South Korean state to relegate mixed-blood children to third spaces of existence excluded from the social body as undesirable *non-citizens* but kept alive as human capital from whom to indirectly extract economic resources. Notably, emigration was generally discouraged in the years of economic development; the government instead emphasized the moral obligation for “right-minded and able-bodied” Koreans to remain in the country and contribute to nation-building.¹⁰⁰

Transnational adoptions thus constituted an exception in the country’s emigration policy, clearly revealing how the “adoptable subjects” were designated as a “superfluous” population

⁹⁹ Sorensen, “Brothers Home and the Production of Vanished Lives,” 1–15 ; Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging*, 68.

¹⁰⁰ Kim, *Adopted Territory : Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* ,68.

that could contribute to the nation only insofar as a human product to be sent abroad. Drawing on Mbembe's theorizations, this system exemplifies the *necropolitical* dimension of biopower, not necessarily resulting in physical death but, as in the plantation and the colony, normalizing systemic forms of "social death", invisibility, and disposability. This way, racialized "surplus" populations are turned into *living dead* whose political and social existence is nullified and whose value lies solely in their utility as physical bodies.¹⁰¹ In this sense, transnational adoptions functioned as a *bio/necropolitical* technology for South Korea's "surplus" populations, relegating them to camp towns, orphanages, foster care facilities, and eventually to homes abroad, to preserve ethnic purity and economic prosperity as integral components of its nation-building project.

During the developmental era and as the nation moved towards ideological, political, and economic reconstruction, interracial children became another target of the state, identified as "dangers" to society due to their precarious legal and financial status and as physical symbols of a recent past and ambiguous present of foreign domination. While operating internally through discourse, producing the undesirable *non-citizens* and their exclusion from the body politic, biopower also functioned through a transnational infrastructure in which the circulation of bodies transformed "surplus" populations into diplomatic and economic resources insofar as their mere biological existence could be preserved as a commodity, yet extinguished in its qualified value. Seen in this biopolitical light, the practice of transnational adoption, as part of the broader nation-building project, constituted both a form of national purification, through exclusion and displacement, and a technology of production of citizenship through the discourse of inherently "unfit" individuals, an imaginary that was promoted by the combined effort of the South Korean state and international humanitarian agencies.

2.3.3 At the Margins of the Nation: Camptown Workers, Unwed Mothers, and the "Unfit" Woman Discourse

In the years of postwar reconstruction and modernization, if mixed-race children represented a material and symbolic "threat" to the nation-building project and were thus positioned outside the boundaries of the national whole, their mothers constituted no less of a "social risk". While formally citizens, they were subjected to a parallel yet distinct regime of biopolitical regulation which constructed their marginality as "unfit" members: women who contradicted the moral

¹⁰¹ Mbembe, *Necropower*, 35-38, 92; Brennan, "Necropolitics and Surplus Life : Mbembe and Beyond", 3-19.

norms of female citizenship, thus excluded, but simultaneously included as useful and redeemable subjects due to their sexual and reproductive power.

As noted earlier, depictions of mothers of mixed-blood children as neglectful, immature, and unloving permeated South Korean, American, and international adoption agencies' discourses. In particular, they cultivated an image of the Korean birth mother as an uneducated young girl, often engaging in prostitution and living in inadequate conditions for the proper rearing of her child. Dehumanizing and sensationalistic stories of Korean mothers also emphasized scenes of abandonment and suicide, in an attempt to produce an emotional and racialized narrative mobilizing the American population to "save" these neglected creatures through adoption.¹⁰²

These representations, however, were not entirely accurate to the living realities of these women and children. Despite some of them being indeed prostitutes or living in precarious conditions, life in camp towns was relatively advantageous compared to the broader Korean context, and many of these mixed-race children recall their mothers as being loving and compassionate. In fact, it was not uncommon for the general population to view mixed-race children and their mothers as a privileged class of Koreans, due to their proximity to American soldiers.¹⁰³

¹⁰²Doolan, "The Problem of the Mixed Blood Child," in *The First Amerasians*, 45, 55.

¹⁰³Doolan, "Confucius Outcasts," in *The First Amerasians*, 82.



Figure 8: A Korean birth mother (*mihonmo*) holding her mixed-race child. (Courtesy of Korean Image Archive).

It should be understood, however, that these advantages were often fragile, fundamentally depended on the father's presence and his willingness to provide financial support to his child and the child's mother. Many of these camp town women, in fact, were not occasional sex workers but became steady partners, girlfriends, and fiancées of American soldiers. Yet their condition was no less precarious since, in the absence of a formal marriage, which required the approval of military authorities and the father's recognition, their children could not be registered as either South Korean or American citizens. Furthermore, it was not uncommon for soldiers to abandon their Korean families once returned home to the United States, leaving them without any form of support.¹⁰⁴

It is not easily discernible whether these long-term relationships were rooted in genuine romantic feelings and affection, or if they functioned just as temporary arrangements for servicemen to benefit from a monogamous relationship. In militarized contexts, the boundaries between prostitution, dependence, and romance can often blur.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, what resulted were situations in which these women became single mothers who, abandoned by their

¹⁰⁴ Doolan, "The Problem of the Mixed Blood Child," in *The First Amerasians*, 48-49; Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea : The Cold War Origins of International Adoption*, 51.

¹⁰⁵ Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea : The Cold War Origins of International Adoption*, 80.

American partners, rejected by their own families, and stigmatized by society, constituted the perfect target for adoption agencies.



Figure 9: A U.S. serviceman with his Korean girlfriend. (Courtesy of Korean Image Archive).

As noted in the previous section, the decision to give children up for adoption did not come from a place of neglect, but from a complex combination of economic and social hardships, and, most importantly, from the production of a discourse framing Korean mothers as “unfit” and raising a mixed-race child in South Korea as impossible. By equating adoption to the only rational choice and an act of motherly love, and by contrasting Korean birth mothers with American families, state institutions and humanitarian agencies effectively contributed to the emergence of the narrative distinguishing “good” and “bad” motherhood. For instance, the latter were depicted as «warm, stable, and Christian homes» providing «a good education, a wonderful time growing up in peaceful surroundings, and the heritage [...] as citizens of a free nation».¹⁰⁶ In contrast, Korean single mothers were deemed incapable of raising a child due to their “inappropriate” sexual behavior and their unwedded status.

¹⁰⁶ Doolan, “The Problem of the Mixed Blood Child,” in *The First Amerasians*, 57.

The standard of “good” motherhood invoked by these actors was deeply rooted in neoliberal ideals circulating between U.S. interventionism and the international adoption apparatus, which introduced such understandings despite the authoritarian character of the South Korean regime. Although it may seem contradictory that neoliberalism and authoritarianism coexisted, the two were in fact mutually reinforcing. The introduction of the “orphan registry” derives precisely from the complex interplay between South Korean authoritarian population control and liberal social policies that emphasized the “free-standing” and individualized nature of subjects ready for adoption.¹⁰⁷ Within this framework, the family is an efficient, stable, and self-functioning unit, responsible for managing economic risks and maximizing profits by investing in children’s human capital. A “good mother” is thus a self-managing woman in a heteronormative relationship, sexually disciplined, family planner, economically rational, and dedicated to the household.¹⁰⁸ The discourse produced by the state and adoption agencies introduced and crystallized these neoliberal understandings of the family and motherhood, naturalizing the idea that Korean birth mothers were intrinsically “unfit” against Western families’ embodiment of proper standards of parenthood. The emergence of such narratives further cemented the state’s deresponsibilization in terms of social welfare and contributed to shaping women’s conviction that adoption was indeed the only rational choice in a South Korean society where mixed-race children were structurally excluded and where female citizenship was defined by marriage and family planning.

Within a nationalist context that equated citizenship with patriotism and reproductive discipline, unwed mothers of mixed-blood children experienced an additional level of stigmatization. Alongside the myth of a homogenous society sharing a common blood and common ethnicity, patriotism for women was also defined by their sexual and reproductive behavior. In particular, nationalist narratives during the period of U.S. military presence in South Korea emphasized the threat symbolized by the foreign soldier to racial integrity and national identity due to his capacity to “penetrate” into the social body.¹⁰⁹ In this sense, women who formed sexual relationships with foreign soldiers became “traitors” of the nation, as they enabled the biological and cultural contamination of the Korean essence. They violated both the idealized woman as the “reproducer of the nation”, preserving the ethnic and cultural continuity of the national community, and the proper female citizen advanced by the

¹⁰⁷ Koo, “The Paradoxical Development of Liberal Governance: International Adoption Policy and Professional Social Work in Authoritarian South Korea, 1953–1976, 1–30.

¹⁰⁸ Hewitson, “The Commodified Womb and Neoliberal Families,” 489–95.

¹⁰⁹ Jager, *Narratives of Nation-Building in Korea : A Genealogy of Patriotism*, 70–72.

developmental state. Instead of entering the patriarchal family structure, rationally managing the household and her sexual and reproductive power, unwed mothers of interracial children symbolized the disruption of the homogenous imaginary and the “unfit” citizen.

Dwelling in a liminal territory between formal citizenship and marginalization from the community as “unfit” members, South Korean *mihonmo* were the object of biopolitical population management, simultaneously excluding and including them through several mechanisms. First, the state and adoption agencies’ discourse production of the “unfit” mother and citizen, as a system of power-knowledge, constituted the foundation of such biopolitical regulation, primarily through their sexuality. Furthermore, despite such constructions and social stigma, the South Korean government relied on camp town workers to maintain diplomatic and economic relationships with the occupying forces through their sexual labor. Their bodies functioned as instruments of “civil diplomacy”, serving the nation through the economic revenue they generated.¹¹⁰ Through a *bio/necropolitical* lens¹¹¹, camp town women were simultaneously relegated to a third space where sexual labor suddenly became not only acceptable, but valued insofar as it generated economic resources. While their utility derived from their physical endowments, camp town women became *living dead* and human commodities, deprived of moral and social membership due to their contamination and undesirability.

A second mechanism of inclusion through exclusion was the establishment of maternity homes in the 1960s, during Park’s developmental era. Designed as “social welfare” institutions where unwed mothers and prostitutes could receive shelter and rehabilitation services, in reality, as some have noted, they acted more as “adoption facilitation” facilities in collaboration with adoption agencies. Women were often forced to enter these institutions if suspected of engaging in sexual work. Therefore, unwed pregnant women or young mothers living in poor financial conditions were identified as potential social risks and confined. Once there, they were subjected to strict regulations, medical controls, surveillance, and disciplinary measures, all aimed at “converting” them into proper members of society. Some of these measures included psychological assessment, sex education, IUD insertion or sterilization, professional training, and workshops persuading them to relinquish their children. The discourse surrounding adoption equated that of adoption agencies, presenting international adoption as the rational

¹¹⁰ Gill, *Unequal Motherhoods and the Adoption of Asian Children*, Chapter 1, Section “The Beginnings”.

¹¹¹ Mbembe, *Necropower*, 35-38, 92; Brennan, “Necropolitics and Surplus Life : Mbembe and Beyond”, 3-19.

choice for “unfit” mothers, since children would be adopted by «well-educated, professional, middle-class heterosexual couples».¹¹²

Through this process, not only was information about the “unfit” mother collected, further reinforcing the biopolitical knowledge production of the socially undesirable subject, but also unwed mothers were reshaped into rational and self-governing subjects aligned with neoliberal and national norms.¹¹³ Through a comprehensive regulation of their sexual and reproductive behavior, involving their children’s relinquishment, contraception, and the development of “healthy” sexualities, women were reintroduced into the social body as “proper” citizens.

The case of camp town workers and unwed mothers further reveals how postwar South Korea’s nation-building relied on the biopolitical governance of women’s bodies and how it shaped the standards of proper citizenship. These women occupied a liminal position, dwelling between inclusion and exclusion due to their deviation from gendered, developmentalist, and nationalist norms of female membership. As internal “traitors” and “threats” to the national community, the South Korean state, in collaboration with other actors, developed a system of biopolitical surveillance, confinement, discipline, and regulation through indoctrination and knowledge production, while also constructing them as economically useful and redeemable if conformed. This governance of women’s sexuality and body represented a foundational element in South Korea’s development and modernization. It unveils the biopolitical dimensions of nation-building and citizenship construction through the delineation of who may live and who may die, in other words, who may belong to the nation and who may not, and under what terms.

¹¹² Hosu Kim, “The Biopolitics of Transnational Adoption in South Korea: Preemption and the Governance of Single Birthmothers,” *Body & Society* 21, no. 1 (2015): 58–89.

¹¹³ *Ivi*.

CHAPTER THREE

After the Miracle Comes the Global Turn: Redrawing the Borders of the Nation and the Citizen through the Multicultural Project

You are a beloved wife. You are a respected mother. You are a wonderful daughter-in-law. You are a valuable new citizen of Korea.¹

At first glance, these words certainly appear welcoming. It may seem striking that they figure as the concluding lines of an official Guidebook for Marriage Migrants to South Korea, given the treatment to which ethnically diverse populations were subjected during the period of national reconstruction and economic development. References to love, respect, and worthiness in terms of acceptance and inclusion into the national collective appear in stark contrast with earlier discourses, which emphasized the undesirability of ethnic diversity and the supposed impossibility of integration for mixed-blood children during the developmental era. Yet this apparent inclusion does not come without conditions, and this desirability does not transcend explicit gender roles and standards of belonging related to marriage, motherhood, and care.

Unsurprisingly, scholarship has paid considerable attention to this rhetorical transformation, which apparently constitutes a clear rupture with South Korea's not-so-distant past of ethnic homogeneity as one of the core pillars of national identity. Within this narrative, the story of Hines Ward Jr. is often cited as a symbolic turning point in South Korean media and state discourse, marking the beginning of a shift from the myth of ethnic homogeneity toward the public embrace of multiculturalism. For the world, Ward was a successful football player for the Pittsburgh Steelers and the recipient of the MVP award at the 2006 Super Bowl XL. For South Korea, he embodied a figure long associated with social marginalization: a mixed-race child born to a Korean mother and an African American father whose future could not possibly unfold within the country, eventually leading to his upbringing entirely in the United States.

If for years Ward remained largely unknown in South Korea, it was only following his success in the 2006 Super Bowl that his image proliferated across Korean media, with pictures of him displaying a tattoo of his name written in Korean, accompanied by praises and calls to grant him honorary citizenship. Ward truly became a national hero.²

¹ Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs, "Let's Live a Happy Life in Korea: Guide Book for Married Immigrants in Korea," 2019.

² Timothy C. Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea* (Routledge, 2020), 42-43.

The experience of Hines Ward not only challenged earlier narratives surrounding mixed-race Koreans, contributing to the recognition that ethnically diverse individuals should not be excluded from membership altogether, but also revealed the peculiar nature of inclusion into the national collective. For instance, Ward's story became a convenient opportunity for political leaders who strategically mobilized it to raise public awareness on the need for national modernization and enhance South Korea's global image as an open, cosmopolitan, and multicultural society aligned with globalization and shifting political and economic rationalities.³

These developments must be situated within a broader historical context in which globalization-driven policies were already shaping state strategies. In an attempt to transform the country from an industrial powerhouse to a global leader, the South Korean state sought to adapt every sector of society to new standards of development and progress by implementing the "Global Korea" and the "managed globalization" (*segryehwa*) initiatives.⁴ These represented key state-led projects aimed at reconstructing both the nation and the ideal national citizen under global conditions. The related policies included, for instance, market liberalization, social and education initiatives to cultivate "global citizens" endowed with the human capital deemed necessary to enhance the country's position in the global order.

This inward-oriented strategy was accompanied by an outward-oriented one, centered on the realization of a multicultural society through the selective incorporation of ethnic diversity. This was supported by an "open-door" immigration policy designed to attract valuable forms of human capital serving broader nation-building goals. However, openness toward migrants appears less as an unconditional embrace of diversity than a conditional and selective strategy targeting specific categories of foreigners perceived as desirable according to neoliberal standards of utility and productivity, such as overseas Koreans and highly skilled professionals, who could serve as transnational bridges and economic resources.⁵

Building on this historical framework, this chapter examines the specific phenomenon of multiculturalism in its South Korean configuration, focusing on the group most directly targeted by multicultural policies, namely marriage migrants. A broad body of literature has described "Korean-style" multiculturalism as diverging from its common liberal denominations, implying

³ Ivi, 44.

⁴ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 205-206; Jojin V. John, "Globalization, National Identity and Foreign Policy: Understanding 'Global Korea,'" *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 33, no. 2 (2015): 38-57.

⁵ Gi-Wook Shin and Joon Nak Choi, *Global Talent : Skilled Labor as Social Capital in Korea* (Stanford University Press, 2015), 18.

minority rights protection and political representation. Instead, multiculturalism in South Korea has been largely associated with the selective social integration of marriage migrants, which borders on cultural assimilation. Some scholars have described this model through the *bibimbap* metaphor, rather than the popular *melting pot*, alluding to the incomplete integration of diversity into South Korean society, where multiculturalism appears more of a one-sided process of assimilation than a promotion of mutual understanding between ethnic communities.⁶

Nevertheless, scholarship on the South Korean model of multiculturalism has seldom expanded beyond this interpretative framework, even though attempts to analyze the multicultural turn within a broader historical trajectory of development exist. In fact, while it might seem surprising that globalization and multiculturalism policies have appeared in a society long shaped by ethnic nationalism, in reality, some scholars have begun to interpret these state-led strategies as political projects of nation-building, seeking to expand the borders of nationhood beyond mere ethnic origin to include desirable subjects possessing the human capital to enhance South Korea's global standing, in what can be defined as a new state-led developmental project under global conditions.⁷ What emerges is thus a state-led effort to redefine the standards of belonging to the nation through the selective inclusion of new desirable citizens in a paradigmatic biopolitical fashion.

It is therefore striking that South Korean multiculturalism has only rarely been examined explicitly through the analytical framework of biopower and biopolitics, particularly in light of existing biopolitical readings of multicultural governance in countries such as the United Kingdom and Finland. These studies conceptualize multiculturalism as a homogenizing project operating through supposed standards of "civilization", often influenced by neoliberal notions of productivity and self-management, regulating populations along the lines of gender, race, and citizenship in the name of social order and national health.⁸

⁶ The *bibimbap* is a traditional Korean dish in which rice, vegetable toppings, chili paste and raw egg yolk are mixed in a bowl. The metaphor is used to highlight the incomplete integration of migrants within mainstream society. Shawn Shen, "The Bibimbap Migration Theory? Challenges of Korea's Multicultural Mix and Social Integration Development," *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 18, no. 3 (2016): 771–89.

⁷ Mi-Kyung Kim, "Multiculturalism as a Political Project for a New Korean Nation-Building," in *Newcomers and Global Migration in Contemporary South Korea*, ed. Sung-Choon Park and Joong-Hwan Oh (Lexington Books, 2020), 27; Nora Hui-Jung Kim, "Developmental Multiculturalism and Articulation of Korean Nationalism in the Age of Diversity," in *Reimagining Nation and Nationalism in Multicultural East Asia*, ed. Sungmoon Kim and Hsin-Wen Lee (Routledge, 2018), 143.

⁸ Rusten Menard and Jukka Törrönen, "Immigration, Multiculturalism and Biopolitical Projects on 'Difference': Negotiating Intersecting Social Divisions from Positions of Privilege and Disadvantage," *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 13, no. 1 (2023): 1–23; Suki Ali, "Governing Multicultural Populations and Family Life," *The British Journal of Sociology* 65, no. 1 (2013): 82–106.

Therefore, the following pages will address this gap by analyzing marriage migration and multiculturalism in South Korea through the biopolitical framework outlined in previous chapters, while simultaneously situating the phenomenon within broader historical trajectories of nation-building through population management.

The first section of the chapter will discuss the historical context leading to South Korea's multicultural turn, namely, focusing on the emergence of globalization and the "Global Korea" project as the new national strategy of development and modernization operating through the production of "global" Korean citizens and the selective "open-door" immigration policy, including desirable migrants.

The second section will then narrow the analysis to marriage migration and the emergence of the multicultural policy framework, examining the production of female marriage migrants as desirable members of the nation insofar as instrumental solutions to demographic and social concerns through the fulfillment of reproductive and care labor, alongside the consequent mechanisms of surveillance and exclusion activated in case of perceived failure.

Lastly, the third section will situate the multicultural project within the broader historical trajectory of nation-building in South Korea, starting with the developmental era. It argues that developmentalism and multiculturalism emerge as two distinct yet continuous nation-building projects and modes of governance, both operating through the management of bodies and populations, which simultaneously produce and exclude subjectivities to redefine the borders of national belonging. Multiculturalism, therefore, rather than constituting a radical rupture with South Korea's developmental past, appears as its reconfiguration under global conditions, with biopower continuing to operate through power relations within institutions, policies, and discourse shaping the national population.

3.1 Global Korea: Reframing the Nation and the Citizen in the Global Era

In the context of the Cold War, hosting the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul, the only Asian nation to do so after Tokyo in 1964, held a significance that went well beyond sport competition and entertainment. After decades of intensive focus on national reconstruction and economic development, South Korea finally stepped onto the global stage, no longer as an underdeveloped war victim, but as an Asian powerhouse that had achieved modernization and prosperity in record time. By 1996, this trajectory was further consolidated as the ROK celebrated its entry into the OECD group as one of the world's most advanced economies. Furthermore, the successful hosting of the 1988 Olympics served as both a source of national

pride and a moment of awareness of the importance of global recognition and reputation in an increasingly globalized world.⁹

In response to this new awareness, subsequent ROK administrations introduced a wide range of policies and a globalization-driven discourse aimed at further elevating the nation's international standing to the level of the most advanced global powers. A new era thus emerged, requiring a new nation-building project and the adaptation of all sectors of society to new standards of progress. As the nation itself had to be reimagined, so too did its population, which became once again the central target of social and educational policies, producing them as “global citizens”. These measures not only addressed formal nationals but also extended beyond national borders, encompassing those categories of foreigners who could represent a desirable source of global human capital, such as international students, skilled workers, and overseas ethnic Koreans from developed countries.

Yet this apparent opening to globalization did not entail an unconditional embrace of foreign individuals and ideas. Rather, the drive toward the construction of a “Global Korea” followed a state-led approach and unfolded through a persistent nationalist framework, which transformed global integration into a carefully calibrated strategy to identify and include useful members while others were excluded as undesirable subjects according to neoliberal standards of belonging.

3.1.1 Between Globalization and Nationalism: The Paradox of Global Korea

Throughout much of the twentieth century, South Korea was internationally perceived as a poor and underdeveloped country, situated in a geopolitically unstable area. Park Chung-Hee's developmental model, despite being implemented through an authoritarian regime, nonetheless was given the merit of reconstructing a war-torn nation and transforming it into one of the most advanced economies in Asia. However, as economic conditions rapidly evolved in the global scene, the structural weaknesses of the developmental state became increasingly evident, culminating during the 1997 financial crisis, and signaling the need for a new nation-building strategy.

During the postwar period, Park Chung-Hee promoted a vision of national reconstruction based on the equation between modernization, military strength, and economic growth. This model produced an advanced economy relying on exports, industrialization, and scientific and

⁹ John, “Globalization, National Identity and Foreign Policy: Understanding ‘Global Korea,’” 38–57; Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea*, 226.

technological development, allowing South Korea to enjoy economic prosperity and occupational stability for almost three decades.¹⁰ However, in 1997, the so-called “Asian Debt Crisis” overtook the Asia-Pacific region, leading to major economic instability. The crisis, which originated in Thailand and rapidly reached all Asian countries through the sudden flight of foreign capital, resulted in a widespread devaluation of Asian currencies, business and corporate failures, trade decline, and overall undermining of the financial and business sectors. The Debt Crisis had a particularly significant impact on South Korea, mainly because of structural weaknesses and deficiencies of the developmental model that were largely ignored by previous governments, such as the export-reliant system, the lack of liberalization of the economy, and the excessive influence of *chaebols* on governmental decision-making.¹¹

Therefore, the domestic and international pressure for liberalization, accentuated by the crisis and the International Monetary Fund directions, combined with ongoing processes of democratization, prompted the South Korean administrations to pursue a new strategy of national reconstruction and economic growth, one that could simultaneously respond to state imperatives and the demands of a liberalizing, globalizing, and increasingly competitive market.

Initial attempts to transform the ROK’s state-led economy had already been undertaken by previous governments under Presidents Kim Young-Sam and Roh Tae-Woo, who sought to elevate South Korea’s global position to the level of the most advanced world-class economies following decades of rapid economic advancements.¹² In particular, in 1994, Kim Young-Sam elaborated *seggyehwa*, a state-led policy of “managed globalization”, namely a state-led effort to transform South Korea into a globalizing nation, recognizing the necessity to adapt to rapidly changing world markets and increasing global competition. A first concrete step in this direction was the establishment of a Globalization Promotion Committee to oversee the whole globalization reforms in economic, administrative, and social sectors.¹³

Following the Debt Crisis, President Kim Dae-Jung further implemented the structural transformations promoting the transition toward a post-developmental, neoliberal, and democratic state. While maintaining a strong role of the state, the Kim administration introduced more extensive social policies, which were largely neglected during the developmental era, and encouraged partnerships with civil organizations and NGOs, in an

¹⁰ Kyung-Mi Lee, “Toward Nation Branding Systems: Evidence from Brand Korea Development,” *Journal of International and Area Studies* 18, no. 1 (2011): 1–18.

¹¹ Buzo, *The Making of Modern Korea*, 217-218; Jesook Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society* (Duke University Press, 2009), 4-5.

¹² Lee, “Toward Nation Branding Systems: Evidence from Brand Korea Development,” 1–18.

¹³ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 205-206.

attempt to align with domestic and international demands for liberalization and democratization.¹⁴

Globalization (*seggyehwa*) discourse continued to shape subsequent administrations, particularly that of President Lee Myung-Bak, who articulated a “Global Korea” policy including a comprehensive economic, political, social, and cultural strategy to realize national progress and innovation through a neoliberal framework. This strategy did not only focus on internal transformations, but was equally externally oriented, emphasizing the need for a foreign policy that could position the country as a developed one, at the level of the most advanced and influential global actors. Initiatives such as participation and membership in international organizations, including the UN and the OECD, as well as the hosting of major international events such as the 2010 G20, reflected precisely the state’s global orientation.¹⁵

Central to the “Global Korea” strategy was also the deliberate construction of a positive international reputation and image abroad through the enhancement of soft power, cultural diplomacy, and nation-branding. In particular, the nation-branding campaign launched by President Lee in 2009 aimed at addressing the existing gap between the country’s economic development and the international reputation of its image and products, which were still overshadowed by negative associations with «North Korean brinkmanship and lingering images of the Korean War».¹⁶ The campaign followed a ten-point action plan, including, among others, student-mobility programs during university for both Korean and foreign students, increased external aid, development of technology, innovation, and cultural industries, dissemination of Korean traditions and culture abroad through the adoption of a “Korean Wave” project, and, crucially, the transformation of Koreans into “global citizens”.¹⁷

What emerges from this trajectory is a persistent emphasis on reconstructing both the nation and citizens’ identities in accordance with a globalizing world and in service of the state’s development goals. Despite its liberalizing and democratizing aspirations, the “Global Korea” strategy remained an inherently state-led and top-down approach to national transformation. As several scholars have observed, *seggyehwa* discourse was characterized by a unique coexistence of openness towards new markets, ideas, and mobility with a deep-rooted ethnic nationalism permeating both political and social spaces.¹⁸

¹⁴ Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society*, 8.

¹⁵ John, “Globalization, National Identity and Foreign Policy: Understanding ‘Global Korea,’” 38–57.

¹⁶ Ivi; Keith Dinnie, “Repositioning the Korea Brand to a Global Audience: Challenges, Pitfalls, and Current Strategy,” *Korea Economic Institute, Academic Paper Series* 9, no. 4 (2009): 1–7.

¹⁷ Dinnie, “Repositioning the Korea Brand to a Global Audience: Challenges, Pitfalls, and Current Strategy,” 1–7.

¹⁸ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 207–208.

This apparent “Korean paradox” is, in fact, perfectly consistent with the historical and political legacy of Korea’s modernization process towards development. As discussed in the previous chapter, the nation-building project implemented during the postwar years was primarily rooted in the construction of a strong industrial economy that could transform South Korea into a self-sufficient and independent nation. To achieve this, the Park Chung-Hee regime employed a collectivist and nationalist rhetoric that could mobilize the entire national population in various ways, from fighting against communists to fulfilling specific citizenship duties, all in the name of the nation’s prosperity, productivity, and survival. Similarly, globalization discourse rested on nationalist ideals as it portrayed the construction of a “Global Korea” as the most efficient way to secure the state’s positive image abroad and its position as a world-class and developed nation. Therefore, this ideal global status effectively started to be framed as an urgent national project to be achieved through the active participation of all citizens. Consequently, the globalization drive did not necessarily translate into a weakened nationalist sentiment; on the contrary, since globalization policies represented a mere “situation-specific tactical adaptation” to a changing global scene, they were not only compatible with but directly enabled by nationalist ideology.¹⁹ In this sense, “Global Korea” represented not a rupture but a different reconfiguration of the nation-building project, in which globalization and liberalization were primarily carried out through a top-down approach and served as a necessary instrumental technology to advance national interests.

Within this reconfiguration of the nation-building project, nationhood had to be rethought and reshaped in light of new national interests and needs. As the state sought to position South Korea as a global and advanced actor, the national population once again emerged as a site of intervention requiring new forms of subjectivity aligned with standards of citizenship proper to a global and neoliberal context. Beyond economic restructuring, *seggyehwa* and “Global Korea” discourse thus extended to the production of a new ideal citizen, subsequently generating new forms of exclusion and inclusion into the national whole.

3.1.2 Producing the Global Citizen: Neoliberal Citizenship and Human Capital

Within the framework of *seggyehwa* and the subsequent “Global Korea” strategy, not only did nation-building assume a new form, but citizenship itself came to be redefined according to new standards of productivity, competitiveness, and self-management. The emergence of

¹⁹ John, “Globalization, National Identity and Foreign Policy: Understanding ‘Global Korea,’” 38–57; Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 207–208.

neoliberal policies and globalization-oriented aspirations thus translated into the biopolitical production of new ideal citizens, no longer mobilized in the service of industrial economic development and anti-communist nationhood, but equally constituting human capital. In this sense, citizens, as well as certain categories of formal non-citizens, were reconceptualized as global human capital capable of enhancing the nation's position in the new competitive international order. More specifically, the new ideal citizen was reframed as a "global talent", endowed with key technical, professional, and cultural skills to perform across global markets and transnational spaces.

Economic globalization increased the demand for professionals able to manage the transnational flows of goods, services, and capital, while the expansion of new markets, knowledge-based and high technology sectors, equally required skilled workers possessing not only expertise and competencies, but also the right entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, and flexibility to build South Korea as a global competitor.²⁰ In response to these structural transformations, the South Korean government advanced a range of social and educational policies that aimed, on the one hand, to produce citizens endowed with useful skills, and on the other hand, to exclude those who did not represent a viable source of human capital. Viewed through a biopolitical lens, these measures functioned as population-management techniques that distinguished between valuable and disposable lives through the establishment of new standards of neoliberal citizenship.

Education policy constituted one of the main instruments through which the South Korean state sought to transform its nationals into "global citizens". Within his *segyehwa* initiative, President Kim Young-Sam stressed the importance of English education as a national priority necessary to «meet a global standard of excellence», a focus that was later intensified under President Lee Myung-Bak's "Global Korea" strategy. The latter has been described as a "dramatic overhaul" of English education policy, characterized by an almost obsessive emphasis on English fluency as a prerequisite for achieving national competitiveness. The government's obsession with English permeated the whole population, influencing both public discourse and family choices. In extreme cases, not only did it result in the public stigmatization of students unable to communicate in English, but it also encouraged family practices such as

²⁰ Shin and Choi, *Global Talent : Skilled Labor as Social Capital in Korea*, 3.

subjecting children to tongue surgeries to improve their pronunciation or sending them abroad with a parent.²¹

Within this context of “English frenzy”, the inability to speak English came to represent a marker of weakened global competitiveness and, by extension, lower global status. Accordingly, several measures were implemented, from the introduction of English education at elementary school to the establishment of the “Gyeonggi English Village”: a simulated foreign environment near Seoul in which students could experience immersion in an English-speaking setting and in foreign cultures without leaving the country. The intended outcome was to produce “true global citizens” who could speak English fluently and navigate foreign environments.²²



Figure 10: Banner of the English Village in Gyeonggi Province. The slogan clearly states the goal of forming Global Koreans through English language education (Picture by Jamie Shinhee Lee, “Globalization and Language Education: English Village in South Korea,” in *Newcomers and Global Migration in Contemporary South Korea*, 67).

Beyond linguistic skills, the construction of “global citizens” also required an understanding of foreign cultures and transnational relations. Within the framework of the “Global Korea” initiative, the South Korean government thus promoted student mobility at the university level through the introduction of programs such as CAMPUS Asia, a trilateral agreement among South Korea, Japan, and China. This program followed a strong top-down approach and was

²¹ Jamie Shinhee Lee, “Globalization and Language Education: English Village in South Korea,” in *Newcomers and Global Migration in Contemporary South Korea*, ed. Sung-Choon Park and Joong-Hwan Oh (Lexington Books, 2020), 62-64.

²² *Ivi*, 64-67.

explicitly linked to the strategic objective of producing global-minded citizens with a deep understanding and awareness of the East Asian context, who could serve national interests in foreign policy, economic cooperation, and diplomacy, and consolidate East Asia's global status.²³

Similarly, the higher education reform under the BK21 (Brain Korea 21) project to cultivate the new generation of "global talents" by investing in human development within key sectors of a knowledge-based economy. The program centered around increasing the academic productivity of national universities in knowledge and technological production, particularly promoting specialization in high-demand fields, such as design, film, telecommunications, and foreign language translation.²⁴

This logic of "global talent" production did not remain confined to education policy but extended to welfare reform, specifically through the renewed concern with youth unemployment and the subsequent preoccupation with their material and social well-being in the national community in the aftermath of the 1997 crisis. President Kim Dae-Jung, in fact, implemented what has been defined as "productive welfarism", which represented the first attempt to introduce a welfare system providing a "minimum standard of living" for the national population. Previously, welfare policies were generally nonexistent, and the South Korean government typically relied on foreign aid from governments and organizations to provide for its people, as well as on the role of the family unit.²⁵ Indeed, as discussed in the case of the developmental state, the state essentially focused on pursuing economic development, while neglecting social policy, with social responsibilities relegated to foreign intervention or the family structure.

By contrast, the Kim administration introduced a welfare system; however, it was conceived as a rather neoliberal measure instead of a veritable social-democratic one, as welfare provision highly depended on the perceived usefulness of its recipients. In other words, this first welfare state focused on the rehabilitation and reintegration of those sectors of society that could represent a resource in terms of human capital to be transformed into productive and self-reliant citizens with the necessary skills required by a globalizing economy, hence unemployed youth and short-term homeless men became the new targets of welfare policies while other vulnerable populations, such as street-living men and homeless women, remained excluded as they were

²³ Ja-hyun Chun, "Can CAMPUS Asia Program Be a next ERASMUS? The Possibilities and Challenges of the CAMPUS Asia Program," *Asia Europe Journal* 14, no. 3 (2016): 279–96.

²⁴ Joon-Young Hur and Donata Bessey, "A Comparison of Higher Education Reform in South Korea and Germany," *Asia Pacific Education Review* 14, no. 2 (2012): 113–23.

²⁵ Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society*, 15–22

deemed “unredeemable” and “unethical” according to neoliberal standards of self-management and heteronormativity. Within this system, institutional and media discourse on unemployed youth thus suddenly turned them from “good-for-nothings” into “new intellectuals”, valued for their adaptability to a fast-changing information age, cosmopolitan skills, and creative potential.²⁶ Welfare policies specifically designed for their rehabilitation into the job market, either by their employment into firms and enterprises or by encouraging them to become entrepreneurs of themselves and create their own jobs, thus operated alongside educational reforms as necessary measures to promote and produce neoliberal “global talents”: self-sufficient, self-entrepreneurs, creative, cosmopolitan, and adaptable subjects to globalization.

Beyond this inward-oriented transformation of national citizens, globalization policies advanced by the South Korean government also resulted in the selective opening of national borders to a new generation of foreign “global talents”. The government began to acknowledge skilled foreigners and overseas Koreans as strategic sources of human capital and as useful “transnational bridges” between South Korea and the global arena, enhancing its international reputation. The introduction of the Industrial Trainee System (ITS) in the early 1990s marked the first attempt to end South Korea’s “closed doors” immigration policy in favor of a more global outlook.²⁷

Subsequent measures further signaled the state’s new approach, for example, through student mobility programs, privileged visa procedures, and citizenship acquisition for specific categories of desirable individuals. Within the “Global Korea” framework, the introduction of the Global Korea Scholarship aimed to attract talented foreign students, improve the country’s global reputation, and cultivate networks of young talents yielding economic and political benefits. Furthermore, such student mobility initiatives contributed to improving South Korean universities’ position in international rankings.²⁸

One of the most relevant and perhaps striking measures adopted in the drive towards globalization and cosmopolitanism was the enactment of the Overseas Koreans Act in 1999, which conferred privileged visa acquisition to overseas ethnic Koreans holding foreign nationalities. Notably, the Act did not apply to all overseas Koreans but favored those nationalities in proximity to American and Western influence, thus excluding, for example,

²⁶ Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society*, 15-22.

²⁷ Shin and Choi, *Global Talent : Skilled Labor as Social Capital in Korea*, 18.

²⁸ Kadir Jun Ayhan and Moamen Gouda, “Determinants of Global Korea Scholarship Students’ Word-of-Mouth about Korea,” *Asia Pacific Education Review* 22, no. 1 (2021): 15–29; Shin and Choi, *Global Talent : Skilled Labor as Social Capital in Korea*, 33-36.

Korean Chinese individuals. This differentiation reflected, of course, race and class assumptions associating Western nations with skilled and wealthy human capital.²⁹

In this sense, the global era marked a striking reversal of the status of overseas Koreans, the majority being adoptees. While during the developmental state, mixed-blood and orphan adoptees were considered a “social risk” and undesirable individuals, their lives experienced a sudden revaluation as desirable assets for a multiplicity of national interests, from attracting foreign investments and providing linguistic and cultural capital, to the “purification” of South Korea’s image. Therefore, institutional and media discourse on overseas Koreans portrayed them simultaneously as pitiful victims and valuable resources, stressing those ethnic ties with South Korea that were previously neglected and erased through transitional adoption policies.³⁰

Taken together, these educational, social, and immigration policies paint a clear picture of South Korea’s nation-building project pursued during the global era. This new project aimed at transforming the nation into a global power through the production of a new form of citizenship grounded in neoliberal norms of self-management, competitiveness, cosmopolitanism, and economic utility. Membership in the nation no longer relied solely on ethnic purity, but could also be obtained, or at least facilitated, through economic contribution and utility. This logic is clearly reflected in contemporary point-based immigration systems, in which access to permanent residency for workers is determined by features such as age, educational background, and annual income, with maximum scores assigned to those qualities that are perceived as most desirable. According to the system, an “ideal” permanent foreign resident would be a 30-year-old with a doctorate in scientific or technological fields, providing an annual income of more than 100 million Korean Won. Furthermore, under Article 7 of the Nationality Act, special naturalization can be granted to foreigners who have «contributed greatly to the Republic of Korea», specifically to those who possess excellent skills in fields of national interest, such as science and economy.³¹ This implicitly excludes unskilled workers from the same legal treatment.

At the same time, this relative openness of South Korean immigration policy did not necessarily signal the dissolution of the ethnic component of nationalist discourse. The interconnection between globalization and nationalism did not only emerge through the instrumental use of the *segyehwa* discourse to mobilize citizens in becoming global subjects in

²⁹ Kim, *Adopted Territory : Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging*, 178-180.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Study in Korea| Run by Korean Government, “Employment System for Foreigners,” Studyinkorea.go.kr, 2025; Republic of Korea, “Nationality Act,” Art. 7 (Wholly Amended by Act No.8892, Mar. 14, 2008) § (1997).

the name of national prosperity and reputation, but also in the contradictory implementation of immigration policies. As seen previously, not all foreigners and overseas Koreans were equally accepted as desirable members and contributors to the nation, at least not to the same degree. Such a differential inclusion remained conditional upon neoliberal standards of citizenship as well as perceived compatibility with economic needs, social and cultural norms. Therefore, it is within this selective and conditional redefinition of belonging that the biopolitics of multicultural policies and marriage migration governance must be situated.

3.2 Making a Multicultural Nation: The Biopolitical Governance of Multiculturalism and Marriage Migration

South Korea's embrace of globalization through its *seggyehwa* and "open-door" immigration policies has led to increased immigration rates and greater visibility of the country on the global stage. At the same time, domestic transformations in the demographic and social context, together with international pressure to adapt to ethnic pluralism through the legal and regulatory reforms, have led South Korean governments to introduce, both in policy and public discourse, the "Multicultural Korea" project as a central pillar of its broader "Global Korea" strategy.

Contrary to common understandings of multiculturalism, which emphasize the protection of minority rights and their representation within society and institutions, South Korea's version of multiculturalism (*damunhwa*) is rather distinctive. This is especially evident in its highly selective and assimilationist character, which has consequently attracted scholarly attention. According to existing literature, multiculturalism in South Korea functions less as a state policy protecting minorities and promoting mutual understanding among ethnic communities than as a mode of governance of marriage migration and their offspring. Such policies and respective integration programs thus aim to include and assimilate desirable individuals due to their potential reproductive contribution to the nation's human capital.³² Therefore, the acceptance of marriage migrants into the national body strictly depends on their utility as gendered bodies capable of biologically and culturally reproducing the nation, while also serving as important solutions to contemporary demographic and social challenges and contributing to broader nation-building goals.

Despite South Korean multiculturalism and marriage migration having become central topics of academic debate, and scholarship on the subject has proliferated, it remains partially

³² Sojin Yu, "Gendered Nationalism in Practice: An Intersectional Analysis of Migrant Integration Policy in South Korea," *Gender & Society* 34, no. 6 (2020): 976–1004.

misunderstood. More importantly, it is striking how existing literature has rarely analyzed the phenomenon of South Korean multiculturalism through a biopolitical perspective, neglecting clear parallels between biopolitical forms of governance, population management, and multicultural families' regulation. In particular, it is within the family unit that state intervention and regulation of marriage migration and multiculturalism primarily unfold, through techniques aimed at surveilling and disciplining behavior, especially in relation to marriage and motherhood, thereby directly producing notions of "proper" nationhood while excluding "unfit" individuals according to state interests.³³

Drawing on the theoretical framework of biopower and biopolitics, a comprehensive analysis of multicultural practices in South Korea reveals how the state manages its national population and delineates the boundaries of belonging through the governance of the multicultural family. This occurs across legal frameworks, including the most relevant 2008 Multicultural Families Support Act, social welfare institutions such as Multicultural Families Support Centers, and immigration policies concerning visas, residency, and citizenship acquisition. Taken together, these practices function as a state apparatus that assimilates desirable bodies and grants membership based on their biological and symbolic contributions, while simultaneously marginalizing and excluding those deemed suspicious and incompatible with its interests.

3.2.1 The Emergence of Marriage Migration

Beginning in the late 1990s, South Korea experienced a change in its migration patterns, going from being historically an emigration country to witnessing a rapid increase in immigration rates. Transnational factors played an important role in this shift, including the diversification of Asian economies and the globalization of flows of goods, services, and capital. As South Korea implemented its *segyehwa* strategy and gradually adapted to globalization by loosening its strict "closed-door" immigration policies, the inflow of immigrants increased accordingly. The main categories of immigrants entering South Korea consisted of workers, overseas Koreans, and marriage migrants.³⁴ Among these groups, marriage migrants followed a distinct trajectory, both in terms of the structural causes of their mobility and in the ways they were managed and received in the host country.

³³ Ali, "Governing Multicultural Populations and Family Life," 82–106.

³⁴ Min Lee, Geetha Govindasamy, and Soo Kee Tan, "Korean Multiculturalism and the Emergence of Foreign Brides in South Korea," *International Journal of East Asian Studies* 14, no. 1 (2025): 83–96.

Marriage migration refers to the crossing of international borders for the purpose of marrying a partner residing in the host country. In South Korea, this is a relatively recent phenomenon, as international marriage rates increased rapidly between the late 1990s to the early 2000s, rising from 3.4 percent in 1995 to 13.5 percent in 2005. Literature on marriage migration generally explains it through the framework of “gendered geographies of power”, which identifies the economic inequalities between the industrialized Global North and the less developed Global South as the main cause driving marriage mobility. This dynamic encourages predominantly women to move from poorer to wealthier countries to “marry up” and seek a better life. Furthermore, the phenomenon is intertwined with marital heteronormativity, which pressures individuals to achieve a “respectable marital status” through international marriage in contexts where marriage within national borders becomes unattainable.³⁵

Beyond economic rationales, other scholars emphasize other social reasons shaping migration patterns, such as what has been described as “cartographies of desire”, underlining the role of desires and socio-cultural imaginaries about gender, sexuality, and modernity. Rather than unidirectional economic power dynamics, marriage migration thus emerges at the intersection of cultural constructions of men and women, framing Western men as “modern”, more romantic and egalitarian, while Asian women are stereotypically considered more “traditional” and more committed to family values. Mass media are important transmitters of such hegemonic gendered assumptions, as various studies on Asian women’s perceptions of Western men have demonstrated.³⁶ In the South Korean context, a similar narrative has been reproduced through the “Korean Wave”, a core element of the “Global Korea” strategy. Notably, K-dramas and K-pop, highly popular across Asia, often depict Korean men as caring and romantic, thus contributing to their construction as desirable and modern partners.³⁷

Alongside these global and cultural factors, marriage migration to South Korea has been deeply influenced by domestic demographic transformations characterizing the country following economic progress and industrialization. Two interrelated elements were particularly relevant. First, previous fertility control policies and women’s changing attitudes towards marriage and childbearing, especially among highly educated women prioritizing their careers,

³⁵ Minjeong Kim, *Elusive Belonging : Marriage Immigrants and “Multiculturalism” in Rural South Korea* (University Of Hawai‘i Press, 2018), 5-6 ; Nicole Constable, *Cross-Border Marriages : Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia* (University Of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 4.

³⁶ Constable, *Cross-Border Marriages : Gender and Mobility in Transnational Asia*, 7-8; Nadia Y. Kim, “‘Patriarchy Is so Third World’: Korean Immigrant Women and ‘Migrating’ White Western Masculinity,” *Social Problems* 53, no. 4 (2006): 519–36.

³⁷ Euna Lee, Seung-kyung Kim, and Jae Kyung Lee, “Precarious Motherhood: Lives of Southeast Asian Marriage Migrant Women in Korea,” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 21, no. 4 (2015): 409–30.

led to declining fertility rates and produced a sex imbalance between men's demand for wives and women's willingness to marry. Second, neoliberal globalization and urbanization severely impacted the rural population of farmers and fishermen, resulting in the so-called "rural bachelor's crisis": as economic stagnation created unfavorable economic conditions in rural areas, women's willingness to marry rural bachelors decreased accordingly, leaving a significant number of these men wifeless.³⁸

This crisis, combined with the decline in fertility rates, prompted the launch of a comprehensive campaign by private actors, civic associations, and the South Korean government as a response to the crisis. These actors actively promoted marriage migration by performing "matchmaking" functions, later institutionalized through the establishment of the National Committee for Rural Bachelor's Marriage, which organized matchmaking tours aimed at recruiting foreign brides, specifically from China. These early efforts focused on ethnic Korean women from China's northeastern regions (*Joseonjok*), who were deemed ethnically similar to Koreans and emphasized as important ties for the restoration of "ethnic homogeneity". Therefore, they were targeted by marriage brokers and the government as assimilable and acceptable immigrants. This resulted in a sharp increase in Chinese women immigrants in South Korea, going from 3,566 in 2000 to 20,582 in 2005.³⁹

However, the initial preference for *Joseonjok* women progressively declined due to the emergence of the so-called "runaway bride" phenomenon. Media discourse on *Joseonjok* women changed drastically, reframing them from "innocent" and "sacrificing" wives to "cold-hearted" and "opportunistic" women seeking economic gains and social mobility through the exploitation of marriage and Korean citizenship. In reality, the majority of "runaway brides" left their marriages with rural husbands due to the lack of state protection and support programs against recurrent episodes of domestic violence. Such a phenomenon sparked international attention and criticism toward the South Korean government, accused of enabling human trafficking and abuses.⁴⁰

Therefore, to protect its international reputation and solve the "runaway brides" issue, the South Korean state implemented a series of structural changes and legal reforms. One of the

³⁸ Stella Jang, "Multiculturalism in South Korea: Putting Migrant Wives in Their Place," *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 28, no. 5 (2022): 1–15; Kim, *Elusive Belonging: Marriage Immigrants and "Multiculturalism" in Rural South Korea*, 30–32.

³⁹ Kim, *Elusive Belonging: Marriage Immigrants and "Multiculturalism" in Rural South Korea*, 34–35; Lee, Govindasamy, and Tan, "Korean Multiculturalism and the Emergence of Foreign Brides in South Korea," 83–96.

⁴⁰ Jiyoung Lee-An, "'Fake' or 'Real' Marriage? Gender, Age, 'Race' and Class in the Construction of Un/Desirability of Marriage Migrants in South Korea," *Studies in Social Justice* 2020, no. 14 (2020): 125–45; Jang, "Multiculturalism in South Korea: Putting Migrant Wives in Their Place," 1–15.

first measures in this sense was the revision of the Nationality Law in 1998, which introduced a minimum two-year residency requirement for marriage migrants to be eligible for Korean naturalization in order to prevent “fraudulent marriages”. Additionally, legal frameworks regulating immigration were introduced alongside support programs for integration and human rights protection. At the same time, target countries for foreign brides recruitment shifted away from China toward Southeast Asia, especially toward the Philippines and Vietnam. Discourse on Southeast Asian women framed them as more docile and less inclined to run away due to their inability to speak the Korean language and their unfamiliarity with the Korean environment, making them more dependent on their Korean husbands and in-laws.⁴¹ This resulted in a decrease in Chinese marriage migration, in favor of migrants from the Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam, the latter gradually becoming the largest group of foreign brides from the late 2000s.⁴²

Some scholars have interpreted this shift toward brides from ethnically different backgrounds as a signal of South Korea’s progressive departure from the myth of ethnic homogeneity, in favor of a more open approach to cultural diversity. According to Timothy C. Lim, for instance, the reason why the South Korean state has chosen to address its demographic crisis by turning to international marriage in the first place symbolizes a clear distancing from a “hardcore ethnonationalism”.⁴³ This interpretation, however, risks overlooking key continuities with South Korea’s nationalist past. Going beyond the demographic rationale, the turn toward Southeast Asia does not represent a rejection of ethnonationalist logics, but rather a reconfiguration through gendered assumptions identifying foreign women as more traditional, docile, and family-oriented, thus reproducing the same ethnonationalist gender roles historically applied to Korean women. In this sense, Southeast Asian women were expected to better align with the gender role historically imposed on Korean women, which relegated them to the domestic sphere.⁴⁴

Furthermore, Lim interestingly utilizes the historical stigmatization of international relationships to highlight the increased tolerance, and even active promotion, of marriage migration in contemporary South Korea.⁴⁵ However, it is important to note that the majority of

⁴¹ Kim, *Elusive Belonging : Marriage Immigrants and “Multiculturalism” in Rural South Korea*, 41; Lee-An, “‘Fake’ or ‘Real’ Marriage? Gender, Age, ‘Race’ and Class in the Construction of Un/Desirability of Marriage Migrants in South Korea,” 125–45.

⁴² Lee, Govindasamy, and Tan, “Korean Multiculturalism and the Emergence of Foreign Brides in South Korea,” 83–96.

⁴³ Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea*, 129.

⁴⁴ Jager, *Narratives of Nation-Building in Korea : A Genealogy of Patriotism*, 45

⁴⁵ Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea*, 129.

international couples were historically comprised of South Korean women and Japanese or Western men⁴⁶, as in the case of South Korean camptown workers and American servicemen mentioned in the previous chapter. This is not a negligible element, as gender deeply affects the way states tolerate migration. As Sara R. Farris observes in her study on European nationalisms and immigration policies, while male foreigners represent a sexual and security “threat” contaminating the nation, female migrants are constructed as passive and “redeemable” subjects whose bodies can be assimilated due to their potential to contribute to the reproductive and cultural order of the host nation.⁴⁷ In the case of South Korea, while camptown workers were stigmatized because they enabled a biological and cultural “contamination” of the national collective by the foreign man, marriage migrants are tolerated because, on the contrary, they are viewed as “vulnerable” subjects who could also enable the reproduction of the Korean nation through marriage to Korean men. Nevertheless, it remains evident that ethnic purity no longer functions as an absolute criterion of belonging, as membership and integration mainly derive from individuals’ desirable contributions to the nation, which are conditioned by gender roles and expectations.

Therefore, the emergence of marriage migration and its institutionalization must be understood at the intersection of demographic, economic, and social transformations in the context of global South Korea, thus representing a broader shift in the state’s approach to population governance in terms of national belonging. It is within this context that marriage migrants became a new target of the state’s policies, regulations, and disciplinary measures that sought to manage their reproductive and familial roles within South Korean society and determined membership in accordance with national interests.

3.2.2 Governing Migration: An Overview of the Multicultural Policy Framework

The emergence of marriage migration and the growing visibility of foreign brides, both domestically and internationally, especially in relation to human rights concerns and accusations of insufficient state protection, prompted the South Korean government to elaborate a comprehensive legal framework institutionalizing the management of diversity, giving rise to “multicultural” policies. The meaning and scope of multiculturalism, however, have taken a

⁴⁶ Lee, Govindasamy, and Tan, “Korean Multiculturalism and the Emergence of Foreign Brides in South Korea,” 83–96.

⁴⁷ Sara R. Farris, *In the Name of Women’s Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism* (Duke University Press, 2017), 77–79.

distinctive form in South Korea, diverging from their Western understandings, which are usually associated with the pursuit of minority rights and the promotion of cultural diversity in all sectors of public life, including active participation and political representation.⁴⁸

In the South Korean case, the emergence of multiculturalism (*damunhwa*) is closely linked to the broader political agenda of promoting the country as a “Global Korea”; the slogan “Multicultural Korea” has often accompanied this effort to symbolize the nation’s embracing of globalization, cosmopolitanism, and general alignment with global norms. Interestingly, despite the constant mobilization of the “Multicultural Korea” discourse by governments from the mid-2000s onward, data demonstrate that South Korea cannot be considered a multicultural society as it has not yet reached the demographic threshold, identified as 5 percent of foreign residents. Nevertheless, such a lack of objective requirements has not prevented, among others, the Lee Myung-Bak administration from including the term “Multicultural Korea” as one of the core elements of its “Global Korea” nation branding strategy, both as a desirable achievement and as a given fact describing an image of a modern, tolerant, and foreign-friendly nation.⁴⁹

Within this context, President Lee consolidated the “Multicultural Korea” discourse through the institutionalization of legal and regulatory frameworks codifying state support for migrants and their families in the 2008 Multicultural Families Support Act. Yet, a closer examination of the Act reveals important elements of the distinct South Korean model of multiculturalism, consistent with what scholars have described as the Korean-style “gap hypothesis”: a discrepancy between “soft talk” and “tough practice” characterizing the South Korean state rhetoric and actions in terms of embracing migration and diversity. For instance, while public authorities and media discourse extensively emphasize the necessity of embracing multiculturalism, in reality, they disguise and neglect the discriminatory practices embedded within the state’s structure, often equating integration and adjustment with assimilation, while also serving specific state interests.⁵⁰

From its very title and purpose, the Multicultural Families Support Act already hints at a narrow understanding of multiculturalism. Article 1 states that the main objective of multicultural policies is «to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of multicultural family members and the unity of society». Article 2, instead, defines a “multicultural family”

⁴⁸ Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea*, 5-8.

⁴⁹ Ivi, 16 ; Lee, Govindasamy, and Tan, “Korean Multiculturalism and the Emergence of Foreign Brides in South Korea,” 83–96.

⁵⁰ Sookyung Kim, “Soft Talk, Hard Realities: Multiculturalism as the South Korean Government’s Decoupled Response to International Migration,” *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 24, no. 1 (2015): 51–78.

exclusively as comprising a married immigrant and a Korean national by birth.⁵¹ This definition implicitly excludes a broad range of families comprising, for example, two foreigners or Korean nationals and other categories of migrants such as workers and professionals. Multiculturalism thus appears to be less a true embracing of diversity and more a state concession to certain individuals, marriage migrants, as socially manageable, assimilable, and functionally useful for broader national goals.

This framing reflects another core element of Korean-style multiculturalism, namely, its assimilationist character, which, however, focuses on family units and marriage migrants. While the Act mandates measures to prevent discrimination and promote understanding of multicultural families, it provides no detailed and concrete actions to be taken in this sense. The majority of the Act emphasizes measures aimed at integrating marriage migrants and their families instead. These include the periodic provision of fundamental information about daily life in South Korea, education for social adaptation, counseling for couples, parenting, human rights education, and support for victims of domestic violence.⁵²

Here, it is evident that social integration is perceived as a one-sided process, with the state's role being limited to guaranteeing a smooth adaptation of foreigners into society while neglecting its responsibilities in promoting a mutual understanding between the foreign and national communities through structural efforts. This further reflects a broader pattern of contradictory actions in South Korea's anti-discrimination agenda on the international scene, as, while at the forefront of signing international conventions on minority rights protection, an anti-discrimination law against foreigners has yet to be implemented, despite public debate on the matter that has been unfolding since 2007.⁵³

Specific measures introduced in Articles 9 and 10 regarding childbearing and children's education further emphasize the familyist logic of social utility embedded within the legal framework. The Articles mandate the provision of necessary information on health management during pregnancy and childbirth for marriage migrants, education support for multicultural children in acquiring proficiency in the Korean language, and adaptation to the school system through extracurricular and pre-school education programs.⁵⁴

Once again, the provision of such services is not universally granted to any individual within a multicultural family but explicitly targets female marriage migrants as their recipients,

⁵¹ Republic of Korea, "Multicultural Families Support Act (Act No. 8937)" (2008).

⁵² Republic of Korea, "Multicultural Families Support Act (Act No. 8937)" (2008).

⁵³ Lim, *The Road to Multiculturalism in South Korea*, 16; Lee Si-Jin, "Anti-Discrimination Law Back in Spotlight," *The Korea Herald*, 2025.

⁵⁴ Republic of Korea, "Multicultural Families Support Act (Act No. 8937)" (2008).

therefore excluding, among others, Korean women by birth married to a foreign male partner. The great emphasis of the Act on childbearing further reveals the familyist and gendered conception of multiculturalism by South Korean authorities, in which female marriage migrants are often the exclusive subject of state simultaneous support and concern in light of their contribution to demographic and social reproduction, while also requiring assimilation. This selectivity is consistent with existing scholarship on immigration policies towards migrant women, such as the previously mentioned analysis on European countries' migration frameworks. As Farris demonstrates, state support often represents an implicit concession to female migrants, deemed "redeemable" and assimilable subjects insofar as capable of biological and cultural reproduction of the nation and functional in filling care labor shortages.⁵⁵

The 2019 Guidebook for Married Immigrants, prescribed by the Multicultural Support Act's Enforcement Decree as one of the concrete measures to provide information on life in South Korea to multicultural families, confirms this interpretation. The Guidebook presents multiple sections, including information on legal residency and naturalization acquisition, education programs on life in South Korea, health education on pregnancy and childbearing, employment and training information, and protection of human rights. This comprehensive guide for life in South Korea underlines the construction of marriage migrants as in need of guidance and instruction to adapt to social and cultural norms. Additionally, permanent residency is strictly tied to performance of reproductive and care labor, as marriage migrants can retain it even after a divorce, only insofar as they are raising underage children or taking care of in-laws, while permanent residency is revoked when failing to fulfill such roles.⁵⁶

Within the Guidebook, even measures concerning job training and employment reflect this gendered and instrumental approach. While these policies aim at providing marriage migrants with the necessary skills to become active and self-reliant members of society, they tend to focus on the agriculture, education or translation sector, relegating migrant women to gendered roles as wives contributing to the agricultural activity of their husbands, who are often rural bachelors, and as foreign care laborers, leveraging their language skills for supporting other migrants in multicultural support centers, nurseries and elementary schools.⁵⁷ Additionally, within broader immigration policy frameworks, such as the Basic Plans for Immigration Policy,

⁵⁵ Farris, *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*, 77-79.

⁵⁶ Republic of Korea, "Enforcement Decree of the Multicultural Families Support Act," Art. 11 (Amended by Presidential Decree No. 23356) § (2011); Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs, "Let's Live a Happy Life in Korea: Guide Book for Married Immigrants in Korea," 2019.

⁵⁷ Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs, "Let's Live a Happy Life in Korea: Guide Book for Married Immigrants in Korea," 2019.

employment opportunities for immigrant spouses focus on jobs such as baristas, multiculturalism instructors, English storytelling instructors, and child welfare teachers.⁵⁸ This further reinforces the migrants' value as simultaneous sources of cosmopolitan capital and care labor.

Another interesting aspect of the South Korean state's model for transforming the country into a multicultural one is evident through cultural initiatives aimed at enhancing Korean society's understanding and awareness of cultural diversity and multicultural communities. The Basic Plans notably present such initiatives as a means to promote a harmonious living environment and achieve that mutual understanding that seems to be neglected in other policy frameworks. However, such an idea of harmonious coexistence is centered around shared Korean values, and it remains within the symbolic realm, as state-led initiatives include, for example, educating the Korean population on different cultures through art expositions, museum exhibitions, media promotional material, and national events and festivals, the most popular one being "Together Day". The event is held locally and regionally across the country every year in May, attended by Korean nationals, government officials, and foreign ambassadors to celebrate cultural diversity and promote coexistence between Koreans and foreign communities through music performances and contests. On these occasions, speeches from relevant personalities often emphasize the broader goal of transforming South Korea into a "global leader" and fostering "global talent" through multicultural acceptance.⁵⁹ While these initiatives publicly promote cultural diversity and understanding, they appear performance-centric, with multicultural identities being aestheticized and showcased for the general public to appreciate, but neglecting the state's instrumental selectivity of immigration policies, which enables structural discrimination.

Therefore, the analysis of existing legal and policy frameworks reveals four key dimensions that characterize the distinctive form of multiculturalism in South Korea. First, the legal selectivity of multicultural integration targets specific categories of individuals, mainly female marriage migrants, as the primary recipients of state support. Three additional dimensions emerge beyond this selectivity, namely, an assimilationist logic privileging a one-sided integration process, a gendered form of inclusion that recognizes marriage migrants mainly through their reproductive and care labor, and the performative character of multicultural

⁵⁸ Korea Immigration Service, Ministry of Justice, "The 2nd Basic Plan for Immigration Policy," 2012; Korea Immigration Service, Ministry of Justice, "The 3rd Master Plan for Immigration Policy," 2018.

⁵⁹ Korea Immigration Service, Ministry of Justice, "The 2nd Basic Plan for Immigration Policy," 2012; Hyunjeong Koh, "Together Day Festival Seeks to Raise Multicultural Harmony," Korea.net, 2025.

understanding initiatives, which limit cultural representation to the artistic and symbolic realm without challenging structural inequalities.

Taken together, these four dimensions reveal a state-led multiculturalism that operates less as a framework for minority rights and pluralism and more as a technology of population management aimed at assimilating desirable individuals in accordance with national interests while maintaining social harmony under shared Korean values. Within this context, “Multicultural Korea” serves as an instrument of a broader nation-building process and a constitutive dimension of the “Global Korea” project aimed at positioning the country as a global power in line with internationally established norms. The state thus shapes its population into human capital suited to the cosmopolitan demands of globalization, while simultaneously selectively incorporating foreigners into the national body and attributing membership on the grounds of gendered and neoliberal standards of utility.

3.2.3 Multicultural Families Support Centers: The Biopolitical Site of Citizenship Production

Assimilation and incorporation of female marriage migrants are pursued comprehensively by the state through a system of regional and local institutions providing support services for multicultural families. These institutions, the Multicultural Families Support Centers, are mandated by Article 12 of the Multicultural Families Support Act, which also outlines the range of activities they must provide to foster integration, including education, counseling, cultural adaptation training, interpretation services, and occupational training.⁶⁰ Either fully or partially subsidized by central and local governments, Multicultural Centers operate as everyday contact points between multicultural families and the state, intervening in the household through courses on cultural and parenting practices and socialization initiatives. In this sense, they also function as sites of biopolitical production through which desirable individuals are transformed into “proper” Korean citizens for nation-building purposes.

As previously discussed, Multicultural Centers are not exempt from the selective logic of foreign integration, as their support services are exclusively directed to female marriage migrants and their multicultural families. As wives and mothers, marriage migrants are expected to conform to Korean customs and norms, especially in the domains of child-rearing, education, and family life. By contrast, there is no expectation or requirement for Korean

⁶⁰ Republic of Korea, “Multicultural Families Support Act (Act No. 8937)” (2008); Jang, “Multiculturalism in South Korea: Putting Migrant Wives in Their Place,” 1–15.

husbands to participate in Multicultural Centers' services and activities or to embrace their foreign wives' cultural backgrounds.⁶¹ This asymmetry reflects the broader one-sided process of integration promoted by the South Korean state, in which cultural diversity is framed less as mutual exchange and more as cultural assimilation.

On a practical level, this assimilationist logic emerges in the core activities of the Multicultural Centers, which focus primarily on providing cultural classes promoting traditional Confucian values and family roles. Marriage migrants are taught to behave as traditional Korean wives and mothers, learning etiquette, domestic responsibilities towards their husbands and in-laws, and expectations that many Koreans no longer perform in contemporary society. Cooking classes are a key component of such services since mastering Korean cuisine symbolizes a tangible demonstration of commitment to family, in-laws, and South Korea as a whole.⁶² More broadly, performing belonging unfolds through these activities, which thus become the very way in which marriage migrants can embody citizenship and acquire acceptance from Korean society.

Children's education constitutes another key dimension of this process. While Multicultural Centers offer education and language classes for children, marriage migrants are also encouraged to be "education managers", responsible for every aspect of their children's lives and success, including education, sleep schedule, nutrition, and language proficiency. This aligns with neoliberal expectations of motherhood, in which women are positioned as managers of the family unit with total responsibility for the success and maximization of children as human capital. Therefore, children's achievements are perceived as reflections of their mothers' ability to perform "good" motherhood. As this understanding is particularly accentuated in Korean society, Multicultural Centers promote the ideal of "proper" Korean motherhood, encouraging marriage migrants to wholly dedicate themselves to child-rearing and education.⁶³

Within this context, multicultural children's ability to speak fluent Korean becomes a central indicator of integration and the mother's commitment to her family. Furthermore, marriage migrants' poor language skills are also seen as limiting children's academic success and self-reliance within society. Due to these concerns, Multicultural Centers offer a variety of language courses, including bilingual development support and in-home services. While Multicultural Centers justify these initiatives as constructing bilingual citizens and future "global talents",

⁶¹ Jang, "Multiculturalism in South Korea: Putting Migrant Wives in Their Place," 1–15.

⁶² *Ivi.*

⁶³ Euna Lee, Seung-kyung Kim, and Jae Kyung Lee, "Precarious Motherhood: Lives of Southeast Asian Marriage Migrant Women in Korea," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 21, no. 4 (2015): 409–30; Hewitson, "The Commodified Womb and Neoliberal Families," 489–95.

they also presuppose foreign mothers' inability to foster children's language skills. Participation in these services even requires the signature of a formal pledge of commitment, with absence resulting in termination of the course, further illustrating the state's preoccupation with linguistic assimilation as a pathway to self-reliance and productive citizenship.⁶⁴

It is therefore not surprising that discourse on language education and the pressure on foreign mothers to integrate and become "proper" Korean mothers would result in the crystallization of the belief that children's difficulties in academics and social life are a direct consequence of "bad" motherhood. For this reason, foreign mothers find it challenging to transmit their native language to their children, both discouraged by society's negative attitude towards non-Western, particularly Southeast Asian, languages and by Multicultural Centers' emphasis on prioritizing the Korean language. Many mothers, in fact, come to believe that their native language could hinder children's ability to develop Korean proficiency and socialization. Furthermore, attempts to teach their native language to children are often negatively received and met with conflict or hostility within the Korean household, further prompting marriage migrants to subordinate their native culture and identity to dominant Korean norms.⁶⁵

What emerges from these practices is the position of Multicultural Families Support Centers as institutions reinforcing mainstream Korean culture and encouraging foreign women's assimilation in an attempt to produce Korean mothers and wives rather than fully embracing cultural diversity. In this sense, "Multicultural Korea" serves as a rhetorical catchphrase operating as a performative discourse to frame South Korea's image of openness, competitiveness, and global leadership while maintaining selective and assimilationist practices in everyday governance. For instance, cultural diversity in the fields of family life and education is at times discouraged in favor of mainstream Korean norms. Multicultural Centers' efforts in promoting diversity and bilingual abilities thus remain mainly performative, celebrated through events such as cultural festivals and language contests, which are often portrayed as initiatives fostering bilingual skills for the construction of "global talents".⁶⁶

Inclusion into the national body is therefore conditioned upon both reproductive and care labor and cultural assimilation, following what previous literature has defined as "gendered nationalism": marriage migrants are incorporated into the nation as useful gendered bodies that help foster national continuity through marriage and motherhood. They are often praised as

⁶⁴ Eunjung Lee, "Migrants' (M)Othering under a Neoliberal Gaze: An Ethnographic Inquiry on Multicultural Family Services in South Korea," *Affilia: Feminist Inquiry in Social Work* 40, no. 4 (2025): 1–18.

⁶⁵ Mi Yung Park, "Challenges of Maintaining the Mother's Language: Marriage-Migrants and Their Mixed-Heritage Children in South Korea," *Language and Education* 33, no. 5 (2019): 431–44.

⁶⁶ Kim, *Evasive Belonging : Marriage Immigrants and "Multiculturalism" in Rural South Korea*, 46–47.

“patriotic” insofar as they commit to Korean mainstream culture and contribute to the nation by fulfilling traditional gender roles. Furthermore, the emphasis on constructing “proper” Korean mothers and wives represents the very way in which the national collectivity is reproduced. Historically, women’s “proper” behavior has often symbolized the collectivity’s boundaries while simultaneously being excluded from the social body as “others” and subordinate objects.⁶⁷ The case of South Korean multiculturalism follows this logic: marriage migrants represent those functional objects to the collective who, due to their potentially disruptive ethnic background, are expected to conform and further reproduce the national collective’s boundaries. Support services promoted by Multicultural Families Support Centers thus operate as concrete technologies reinforcing the borders of nationhood.

From a biopolitical perspective, Multicultural Families Support Centers represent the disciplinary techniques of biopower theorized by Foucault. As biopower not only aims at excluding undesirable subjects but also actively produces them in conformity with knowledge of normality, Multicultural Centers become the very site of biopolitical production through the discipline and surveillance of individuals’ behaviors, shaping subjectivities in conformity with “proper” cultural norms and customs. At the intersection of national, gendered, and neoliberal standards of citizenship, marriage migrants are produced as “proper” Korean mothers and wives through participation in cultural classes, adoption of Korean etiquette and values, and performance of motherhood and familial duties. As Stoler also underlined, the intertwining between biopower, education, and family life is not casual but rather, as the household represents the site where abnormalities can be identified and cultural and moral values reproduced, it also emerges as the biopolitical site of membership production par excellence.⁶⁸ Through education, counseling, and surveillance, Multicultural Centers enable governing authorities’ intervention in multicultural households, regulating behaviors, producing knowledge about the “Korean-self,” and molding marriage migrants and their children accordingly. Therefore, it is through this conformity that marriage migrants are granted the right to citizenship, recognized as dutiful members deserving of welfare support as well as national belonging.⁶⁹

Multicultural Families Support Centers thus become the site through which the family unit, as it is positioned at the intersection of the population and the individual, is surveilled and

⁶⁷ Yu, “Gendered Nationalism in Practice: An Intersectional Analysis of Migrant Integration Policy in South Korea,” 976–1004; Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 46–47.

⁶⁸ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 241–242 ; Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 7–11.

⁶⁹ Yu, “Gendered Nationalism in Practice: An Intersectional Analysis of Migrant Integration Policy in South Korea,” 976–1004.

disciplined. Simultaneously, the national collective is regulated in accordance with nation-building goals. As the national population requires management in accordance with the demographic context and globalization, marriage migration and multicultural families become the targets of state intervention as the potential solution to such problems, therefore disciplined at the individual level to achieve broader goals without disrupting social harmony and the presumption of an ethnically homogenous whole which, in the contemporary era, is not represented by biological “purity” but cultural and moral homogeneity.

3.2.4 Managing Marriage Migrants and Multicultural Families through Exclusionary Citizenship and Intimate Surveillance

The acquisition of citizenship and the right to belong to the national body unfold through a productive and performative process, most evident within Multicultural Families Support Centers, which operate as the primary and concrete technologies through which the state produces knowledge about the “Korean self” and “good motherhood” as standards of inclusion. Such a process, however, also contains an inherently exclusive dimension: the very definition of standards of belonging simultaneously identifies undesirable subjects and legitimizes their consequent exclusion from the national collective. This dual character of citizenship, productive and exclusive, marks precisely the point of intersection through which politics of belonging and nationalism can be analyzed from a biopolitical lens. Biopower itself is inherently constituted not only by knowledge production on normality and deviation, but also by a *thanatopolitical* logic entailing the elimination and marginalization of those lives deemed undesirable or threatening to the proper functioning of the social body. This interpretation becomes particularly relevant in the analysis of multiculturalism in South Korea.

Marriage migrants represent a hyper-desirable category of foreigners for the South Korean state and society due to their potential in reproducing the national collective in both biological and cultural senses, as well as their performance of a traditional ideal of familial commitment no longer performed by contemporary Korean women. Yet their inclusion and desirability remain conditional and partial. The status of marriage migrants and multicultural families is consistently constructed as inferior and never fully equivalent to that of Koreans by birth. This hierarchy emerges in Multicultural Centers, which, while designed to provide support services for integration, also undermine their mothering practice and ethnic background in more or less explicit ways. Multicultural families are frequently framed as “problematic” in contrast to “ordinary families”, thereby constructing multiculturalism as a deficit rather than a resource, and

legitimizing state intervention in family life through cultural and language classes for both marriage migrants and their children.⁷⁰

Such conditional inclusion generates a generalized suspicion toward marriage migrants that extends beyond their ability to perform “good motherhood” to the genuineness of their marriage and family commitment. This dynamic reflects a broader neoliberal logic of risk management, where societies are permeated by speculation and identification of “risk” behaviors, and state policing prioritizes regulation of potential threats rather than responding to current needs. For instance, neoliberal risk societies, as characterized by surveillance and management of aleatory and risk factors, represent one of the central points of analysis for Foucault’s theorization of biopower and biopolitics. Within this context, both disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms are employed to manage populations and individuals. This regulation of motherhood, through the identification of “bad” and “good” mothers, mirrors precisely the techniques of surveillance and exclusion applied to marriage migrants in South Korea.⁷¹

Beyond Multicultural Families Support Centers, surveillance over marriage migrants is embedded within the legal framework governing immigration, including visa, residency, and citizenship acquisition and suspension. In this context, performing “good motherhood” and genuineness not only becomes a strategy for social inclusion but a formal legal requirement to maintain the right to stay in the country. Failure to demonstrate such performance often results in total exclusion, both formally and symbolically, from the body politic.

Several ethnographic studies demonstrate how legal and judicial authorities operate surveillance into the private and sexual lives of marriage migrants by assessing the authenticity of their marriage in accordance with the constructed knowledge of desirable wives. In numerous cases, permanent residency status was revoked due to perceived “promiscuous” sexual behavior. South Korean authorities tend to interpret sexual relationships outside marriage as a suspicious sign of “fake” marriage, constituting a “special circumstance” that justifies the revocation of legal residency. The specific context of such extramarital relationships, whether due to the disappearance of the Korean husband, during divorce proceedings, or even shortly after divorce, is wholly disregarded; instead, the foreign wife’s sexual behavior alone constitutes sufficient ground for suspension of legal benefits. Even forms of affection toward foreign ex-partners are heavily policed by state authorities, treated as an indicator of fraudulent marriage and infidelity.

⁷⁰ Lee, “Migrants’ (M)Othering under a Neoliberal Gaze: An Ethnographic Inquiry on Multicultural Family Services in South Korea,” 1–18.

⁷¹ Melinda Vandenberg, “From ‘Need’ to ‘Risk’: The Neoliberal Construction of the ‘Bad’ Mother,” *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative* 3, no. 1 (2012): 112–33.

Paradoxically, being sexually reserved within marriage can also be constructed as proof of a fake marriage, insofar as it is interpreted as an unwillingness to consummate the marriage and bear children. It is worth noting that such practices are not enacted towards Koreans by birth, but represent a unique feature of multicultural marriage surveillance, particularly towards female marriage migrants from Southeast Asia and China.⁷² Therefore, these surveillance practices demonstrate how fulfillment of gender roles as “good” wives and mothers represents the main reason and enabler of formal and symbolic belonging to the nation.

Within this context, factors such as age and disabilities also become objects of scrutiny by immigration offices, as they are perceived as limiting women’s reproductive capacity and productivity. Older marriage migrants encounter obstacles in proving the genuineness of their marriage solely based on their age. Similarly, migrants married to disabled Korean citizens are more readily suspected of fraudulent marriage due to the presumed barriers to childbearing and economic self-reliance within society. These practices are highly discriminatory and discretionary; marriage migrants frequently experience rounds of invasive and private questioning before state officials, in many cases resulting in a denial of Korean citizenship. This further reveals that marital and family commitment is not measured through emotional dedication, care, and romantic love, but rather through material contributions to the biological and cultural reproduction of the nation, to the point that many marriage migrants and even social workers have come to believe that «having a child or not is a basis of checking the sincerity of the relationship for the government».⁷³

However, bearing a child does not necessarily guarantee or secure legal status, especially after divorce from a Korean spouse. Even when granted legal custody, many marriage migrants must perform motherhood in compliance with national interests and cannot freely exercise their parental rights. For instance, it is not unusual for immigration authorities to revoke permanent residency or migration visas, or even initiate deportation, when marriage migrants fail to demonstrate sufficient commitment to their child’s education or when they temporarily return to their native country. In such cases, state authorities assume that education in South Korea is inherently superior and more beneficial than in the mother’s home country, justifying this in the name of the child’s best interest. In reality, this reveals less concern for the child’s well-being than a conditional inclusion within the national body that is highly dependent on the

⁷² Nora Hui-Jung Kim and Hyemee Kim, “From a Spouse to a Citizen: The Gendered and Sexualized Path to Citizenship for Marriage Migrants in South Korea,” *Law & Society Review* 54, no. 2 (2020): 423–52.

⁷³ Lee-An, “‘Fake’ or ‘Real’ Marriage? Gender, Age, ‘Race’ and Class in the Construction of Un/Desirability of Marriage Migrants in South Korea,” 125–45.

cultural, beyond the biological, reproduction of the next generation of Koreans and “global talents” within a Korean environment. In fact, while immigration authorities pressure marriage migrants to perform motherhood in South Korea, they simultaneously forbid other categories of migrants, such as labor migrants, to bring their children into the country, forcing them to perform remote parenting.⁷⁴

Furthermore, to maintain visas and legal residency in South Korea, divorced marriage migrants are required to schedule an annual appointment at immigration centers and provide micro-documentation as evidence of their continued relationship with their children. Such documentation typically includes receipts of purchases, as well as videos and photographs of everyday interactions and private moments of the mother-child relationship. These elements are then heavily scrutinized by immigration authorities, which may deem evidence of suspicious behavior even when pictures appear too similar to those submitted in previous years. Failure to provide sufficient documentation may result in loss of residency and visa revocation. Through this process, motherhood is constantly surveilled and evaluated, adding a layer of pressure for performance in a way that is “legible” and desirable to the state.⁷⁵

As these practices reveal, the South Korean state operates through a governance of marriage migration and multicultural families in a distinctly biopolitical fashion, functional to nation-building interests. Such a process is composed of two complementary dimensions, a productive and an exclusionary one: the institutional apparatus simultaneously seeks to produce “fit” citizens and marginalize or exclude those deemed incompatible with state expectations through the discipline and surveillance over individual bodies and behaviors, particularly reproductive, sexual, and parenting ones. The result is a multicultural state that does not merely include or exclude migrants, but continuously evaluates and regulates its population according to their contribution and utility, permeating even the intimate spheres of life with suspicion and state control. Within this process, the South Korean state effectively manages the collective by delineating the internal and external boundaries of the nation, shaping bodies in accordance with gendered and neoliberal citizenship requirements. Therefore, membership in the national collective is no longer a stable legal status, but a precarious condition of belonging based on the individual’s conduct, modes of living, and instrumentality to nation-building goals, permanently subject to surveillance and potential revocation.

⁷⁴ Sohoon Yi, “Suspicious Mothering: Maternal Labor and Marriage Migration in South Korea,” *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 28, no. 1 (2019): 71–93.

⁷⁵ Yi, “Suspicious Mothering: Maternal Labor and Marriage Migration in South Korea,” 71–93.

3.3 Developmentalism and Multiculturalism: Different Faces of the Same Biopolitical Coin

Multiculturalism is a relatively recent phenomenon in South Korea, a society that is arguably one of the most ethnically homogenous in the world, and in which the myth of shared common origin and single blood was long mobilized by the state, especially during the developmental era, in the pursuit of nation-building goals. It is therefore not surprising that the proliferation of references to multiculturalism in discourse and policies from the early 2000s onwards was initially perceived as unexpected and paradoxical, given South Korea's past.⁷⁶ This apparent rupture has produced a broad body of literature seeking to frame the phenomenon of the country's multicultural turn. Yet is South Korea's multiculturalism really an anomaly, or can it be more productively understood within the country's historical trajectory as part of a longer continuum of nation-building projects?

Scholarship has seldom sought to answer this question; the majority of the literature on South Korean multiculturalism focuses instead on its contemporary manifestations, underlining its assimilationist and internal contradictions, particularly in the differential treatment reserved for different categories of migrants, and the lived experiences of female marriage migrants dealing with social inclusion and acceptance. Far less attention has been given to its historical roots or its relationship with South Korea's developmental past. Even more rarely is multiculturalism analyzed through a biopolitical lens, as a technique of population and migration management situated within broader strategies of governance and nation-building.

Nevertheless, some contributions have begun to move in this direction, going beyond the assimilationist approach and conceptualizing South Korea's multiculturalism as a nation-building project in which migration management strategically serves an ambitious political project of expanding the ethnic boundaries of nationhood in the age of globalization.⁷⁷ Other authors adopt a more explicitly historical approach by directly linking globalization and multicultural policy in South Korea with its developmental legacy through the logic of national reconstruction in an age of vulnerability. From this perspective, the two eras share a sense of insecurity stemming from South Korea's vulnerable position within the global order; therefore, confronted with domestic challenges and external pressures, the nation has reconfigured the

⁷⁶ Kim, "Developmental Multiculturalism and Articulation of Korean Nationalism in the Age of Diversity," in *Reimagining Nation and Nationalism in Multicultural East Asia*, 143.

⁷⁷ Kim, "Multiculturalism as a Political Project for a New Korean Nation-Building," in *Newcomers and Global Migration in Contemporary South Korea*, 27.

developmental logic under new global conditions, mobilizing multiculturalism as a tool to manage and embrace diversity as well as to transform the Korean citizen into a global and cosmopolitan one, advancing the country's international standing.⁷⁸

Building on these attempts, the following section aims to trace the historical trajectory of nation-building projects in South Korea by bringing together developmentalism and multiculturalism under a biopolitical framework, identifying the continuities between the two nation-building projects through the examination of the productive and exclusionary dimensions of biopower and population governance, which have remained central in the nation's path towards modernity despite their historical reconfiguration.

3.3.1 The Productive Dimension of Biopower across Two Developmental Projects

In his theorizations, Foucault defined biopower as the set of techniques and mechanisms through which the life of individuals and populations came to be placed at the center of political strategy and intervention. This new form of governmentality, which emerged alongside the modern era and neoliberal rationalities, does not primarily aim to suppress life but rather to produce, regulate, and foster it. In particular, biopower is enabled through disciplinary and regulatory technologies that operate upon the national population to extract forces, optimize capacities, and improve the functioning of the nation as a whole. This dimension is what, in previous chapters, has been defined as the productive force of biopower, which does not merely manage the population as a given entity but actively shapes it according to nation-building goals, ranging from biological and social health to economic and political objectives. What emerges is thus a mode of governance that, throughout history, has intervened comprehensively into every sphere of human life, producing knowledge on regularities and abnormalities, and defining national, or subnational, subjectivities.⁷⁹

In light of the analysis of post-war national reconstruction of South Korea in the developmental era, the productive dimension of biopower emerges as a central element of the nation-building project of earlier administrations, enacted through both disciplinary and regulatory technologies targeting the national population. This period, particularly under Park Chung-Hee's regime, was characterized by a generalized subordination of society to nation-

⁷⁸ Kim, "Developmental Multiculturalism and Articulation of Korean Nationalism in the Age of Diversity," in *Reimagining Nation and Nationalism in Multicultural East Asia*, 144-145.

⁷⁹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, and Population*, 1; Stinson and Lunstrum, "Biocultural Nation Making: Biopolitics, Cultural-Territorial Belonging, and National Protected Areas," 566-87.

building goals conceived as modernization and rapid economic development. To achieve this, the state required a significant mobilization of citizens, who were expected to transform their modes of living, conduct, and contributions in accordance with the broader collective project of development. Consequently, standards of belonging were redefined around a new model of ideal citizenship, characterized by anti-communist identity, gendered roles, and contributions to economic progress and modernization, as well as ethnic nationalism and notions of biological “purity”.⁸⁰

The production of modern citizens was enabled by the simultaneous proliferation of disciplinary and regulatory techniques deployed by the state apparatus through both centralized and decentralized institutions, at times including active participation of the civil society actors functioning as state agents, enabling the state’s intervention into intimate spheres of life and individual behaviors. Citizens were mobilized, for instance, in the identification of “communists” and “spies” through the obligation to engage in constant surveillance of their neighborhoods and report potential threats to the authorities. At the same time, private and voluntary associations and clubs, such as the PPFK, played a crucial role in disseminating information and promoting education to family life, sexual conduct, and parenting style within the framework of the National Family Planning Program.⁸¹ Participation in surveillance and educational campaigns thus became symbols of patriotism and markers of national belonging grounded in citizens’ material and symbolic contribution to the nation-building project.

Population management operated in great detail during the developmental era, particularly through the intervention within the family unit, which functioned as one of the main sites for the condensation of technologies of power concerned with the biological and moral health of both the body and the population. Women, historically positioned as bearers of the collective and associated with the domestic sphere, became the primary target of family-related regulations. Family forms, sexuality, and motherhood practices functioned as indicators of “proper” nationhood, and through their regulation, the state constituted citizenship according to a normative ideal often symbolized by heteronormativity, bourgeois modernity, and self-reliance, elements deeply embedded in the neoliberal conception of normality.⁸² This understanding has informed both the production of modern families and female citizens within South Korea, through the institutionalization of the Family Planning Program and the campaign

⁸⁰ Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 2-3.

⁸¹ Oh, “Legal Mechanisms of Thought Control through Anticommunism in South Korea: Focusing on the National Security Law,” 131–71; Cho, “Making the ‘Modern’ Family: The Discourse of Sexuality in the Family Planning Program in South Korea,” 802–18.

⁸² Ali, “Governing Multicultural Populations and Family Life,” 82–106 ; Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, 26-27.

for the rational management of the household, and the practice of transnational adoptions of mixed-race children.

Notably, the Family Planning Program did not only aim to regulate demographic macro-trends for economic purposes, namely birth and fertility rates, but also the very production of a new family model in which sexuality and procreation were increasingly distinct. Modern notions of romantic love, sexual enjoyment, and rationality in family life were introduced as functional to broader modernization projects. State agents, as well as health and educational campaigns, promoted new conceptions of marriage, family life, sexual behavior, and health, actively constructing an ideal of self-reliance and rational planning in private life, targeted especially at women as their main contribution to the nation and as a standard of belonging. Similarly, transnational adoption practices, involving both domestic and foreign institutions, promoted “proper” nationhood through rehabilitation programs for unwed women and mothers of mixed-race children. Such programs, by identifying the standard of “good” motherhood and “proper” family life, encouraged women to relinquish their children for adoption and reproduced that same model of neoliberal and gendered citizenship based on rational management and disciplined sexual and reproductive behavior.

From the mid to late 1990s onward, national reconstruction took a different form while remaining anchored to a nationalistic project of modernization and development. Through the “Global Korea” project, of which “open-door” immigration policies and multiculturalism became central components, South Korean administrations once again sought to mobilize the national population toward nation-building goals. This time, however, instead of being exclusively inward-looking, modernization required a more outward-looking approach to effectively promote South Korea’s image and reputation abroad and position the country as a global leader. Both during developmentalism and during the global turn, the mobilization of citizens through nationalistic discourse enabled a smooth transformation of earlier conceptions of family life, health, and ethnic homogeneity toward new standards of citizenship. As a result, the ideal Korean citizen was redefined in the course of these historical shifts.⁸³

At its very core, the production of Korean nationhood has remained anchored in neoliberal and gendered standards of belonging. This is evident in the comprehensive attempt by the South Korean government to construct “global citizens” and “global talents” through the implementation of social welfare, education, and immigration policies. Taken together, these policies crystallized criteria of inclusion based on cosmopolitan potential and productivity,

⁸³ Kim, “Developmental Multiculturalism and Articulation of Korean Nationalism in the Age of Diversity,” in *Reimagining Nation and Nationalism in Multicultural East Asia*, 146.

explaining the extensive focus on youth and on specific categories of foreigners, such as students, highly skilled workers, and marriage migrants. These groups of migrants benefit from privileged acquisition paths of visa, residency, and citizenship precisely because of their perceived instrumentality for new developmental strategies aimed at enhancing the nation's international reputation in line with globalization imperatives, a necessity well captured in the popular phrase within South Korean discourse, «globalization or perish!»⁸⁴

Marriage migrants and multicultural families, however, have become central not only for their contribution to national branding but also as a solution to domestic demographic and social challenges. For instance, the rationale leading to the implementation of the Multicultural Families Support Act and its related policies was explicitly framed as a means to «improve Korea's class» and incorporate marriage migrants within the national collective. Multiculturalism, therefore, also functions as a contemporary developmental nation-building project; from here, the term *developmental multiculturalism* emerged in recent literature.⁸⁵ Marriage migrants are simultaneously expected to contribute to the biological reproduction of the nation by bearing future human capital with multicultural sensibilities, and perform “good” motherhood in accordance with neoliberal and cultural standards that are partially inherited from the developmental era, including rational management of the family and children's education, and emphasis on the genuineness of marriage. This historical comparison reveals a clear continuity in the production of women as citizens, whose membership is continuously mediated through their relegation to the domestic sphere and their role as biological and cultural reproducers of the nation. Although the objectives of population management have shifted in response to changing historical contexts and domestic and global expectations, such as the transition from reducing to increasing birth and fertility rates, the core state rationality has remained intact, insofar as women's belonging continues to derive mainly from their reproductive and care labor.

During the global and multicultural era, the South Korean state has once again targeted the family unit, this time the multicultural family, as a key site of population regulation through disciplinary and regulatory techniques in a biopolitical sense. Through an institutional apparatus composed of legal frameworks, immigration authorities, and, especially, Multicultural Families Support Centers, state power has operated in an increasingly comprehensive manner, enabling intervention into the intimate spheres of human life. This process has actively produced marriage migrants as conditionally desirable citizens only insofar

⁸⁴ Ivi, 150.

⁸⁵ Ivi, 153-156.

as they perform motherhood in accordance with neoliberal and cultural standards, encouraging conformity through cultural and language classes, as well as through surveillance by authorities, where suspicion can result in serious legal repercussions and loss of rights and benefits.

Taken together, this comparative analysis reveals that South Korea's multicultural project does not represent a radical rupture with its developmental past, but rather a reconfiguration under new global contexts. Despite the different objectives of nation-building, from industrial and military reconstruction and family planning to population growth and globalization, the biopolitical logic of population management remains significantly consistent. In both eras, the state apparatus has targeted the family unit and the female body as the primary sites of biopolitical governance operating through its productive dimension. In this sense, the household has become the space for delineating the borders of nationhood and shaping the population according to those standards and nation-building goals, informed, among others, by neoliberal understandings of productivity, self-reliance, and rationality from which to extract useful human capital. Multiculturalism and the governance of marriage migrants, in particular, not only represent attempts at social inclusion but also the contemporary mechanisms through which the boundaries of Korean nationhood are redrawn in response to global challenges.

3.3.2 The Exclusionary Dimension of Biopower across Two Developmental Projects

Drawing on the theoretical framework discussed in the first chapter, biopower emerges as a dual-faced mode of governance typical of modern nation-states, composed of both productive and exclusionary dimensions. The latter, previously defined as the exclusionary force of biopower, intersects with the literature on nationalism and citizenship in its shared logic of hierarchization of national subjectivities according to constructed standards of belonging that regulate the acquisition of formal and informal membership or its suspension and denial. It is precisely the suspension and exclusion from citizenship rights and benefits, or more broadly, marginalization from the national collective, that constitutes what Foucault conceptualized as state racism, Agamben as the *thanatopolitics* of the camp, and Mbembe as the *necropower* of the society of enmity. Despite their conceptual differences, these terms all converge in the identification of techniques of population management that categorize human life into valuable

and disposable, into those who may live and those who may die in the name of the health and proper functioning of the national body.⁸⁶

This deadly side of biopower targets those subjects deemed undesirable or endangering the integrity of the national collective, resulting in their material and symbolic elimination. Such exclusion unfolds through loss of political rights and membership status, social marginalization and death, and, in extreme cases, physical death. The shared exclusionary force of biopower and citizenship is thus functional to nation-building projects as it enables the fostering of “valuable” life, the homogenization of the collective, and the shaping of the population according to specific national objectives. As Mbembe observed in his theorizations on *necropower*, these existential enemies are also constantly reinvented and assume different identities in response to shifting nation-building projects, since the production of standards of belonging simultaneously produces their antinomy. From the “mentally ill” to the racialized figure of the “Black slave” in the colonial era, or the “migrant” in contemporary times, these groups become the targets of population management technologies aimed at excluding the “deviant” to preserve the imagined national body.⁸⁷

The historical experiences of developmentalism and multiculturalism in South Korea illustrate how the state has deployed the exclusionary dimension of biopower in the pursuit of two distinct yet interconnected nation-building projects, revealing important continuities across the country’s trajectory toward modernization and development. In particular, racialized and gendered categorizations emerge as core elements of continuity between the two eras. While they are redefined in response to changing historical contexts, domestic interests, and global expectations, their functioning as biopolitical technologies of exclusion remains fundamentally intact.

During the period of post-war national reconstruction, nationalist ideologies such as Rhee’s *Ilmin chuui* and Park Chung-Hee’s “*Modernization of the Fatherland*” discourse emphasized the homogeneity of the nation in both ethnic and ideological terms, which was utilized to mobilize the population for national economic development and in legitimizing the elimination of the “communist threat”, since perceived enemies were constructed as traitors of the nation.⁸⁸ Ethnicity, however, also functioned as a means to legitimize the practice of transnational adoptions and the exclusion of mixed-race children from citizenship and, ultimately, from the

⁸⁶ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 254; Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, 121, 140-141; Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 40-48.

⁸⁷ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 26-27.

⁸⁸ Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea : Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 101-103.

material boundaries of the country. As the ideal citizen was constructed upon ideals of ethnic homogeneity, patriotism, and active contribution to the national reconstruction, mixed-race children became primary targets of exclusionary biopolitical mechanisms. Their marginalization extended beyond transnational adoption practices, but was embedded in the very legal and institutional architecture of the state, as they could not be registered in the family registry nor access the education system and related citizenship rights due to the patrilineal citizenship acquisition mechanism.⁸⁹ The structure of the state was itself organized around the exclusion of ethnically “deviant” subjects.

Mixed-blood children were constructed as an “ethnic surplus” population, rendered structurally incapable of active participation and contribution to the nation altogether. This group of subjects was, therefore, regulated through adoption practices and emigration policies as “unfit” and disposable lives. Similarly, birth mothers of mixed-blood children were framed as “unfit” for motherhood due to their unwedded status and their allegedly “deviant” sexual behavior. Marginalized by the social collective, they were encouraged to relinquish their children for adoption and rehabilitated through social welfare institutions and programs. These not only reinforced gendered models of citizenship grounded in women’s role as biological and symbolic reproducers, but also produced birth mothers as potentially dangerous and burdensome in need of “repair” and disciplinary correction. The process of rehabilitation functioned precisely as a biopolitical technology of normalization, shaping women’s behaviors and bodies according to national standards of belonging informed by neoliberal notions of rational management of the family, including sexual restraint, heteronormativity, and self-governance.

A comparable process emerged during South Korea’s multicultural turn in the global era, in which racialized and gendered standards of belonging, once again, emerged as the markers of inclusion and exclusion from the national collective. The role of ethnicity, however, underwent a significant transformation in response to the demands of globalization and domestic demographic and social concerns, particularly the challenges of reproducing a national human capital that could be both productive and cosmopolitan. Ethnic diversity, previously inherently framed as a social threat, was gradually rearticulated as a potential asset for national development, paradoxically, reinforcing rather than disrupting nationalistic logics of

⁸⁹ Doolan, “Confucius Outcasts,” in *The First Amerasians*, 88-103; Koo, “The Paradoxical Development of Liberal Governance: International Adoption Policy and Professional Social Work in Authoritarian South Korea, 1953-1976,” 1-30.

modernization. Nevertheless, diversity is still not fully tolerated but accepted insofar as it can be managed and instrumentalized as a tool for nation-building goals.

This is evident in the differential treatment accorded to different categories of migrants, with membership and benefits more easily granted to those possessing the economic, demographic, and symbolic human capital deemed valuable for national growth, such as highly skilled professionals, overseas Koreans, particularly those from Western countries, students, and female marriage migrants. In particular, the inherent selectivity of multicultural policies and the high degree of intimate surveillance exercised by immigration authorities reveal the persistence of the exclusionary logic of biopower grounded in ethnicity, as it continues to be perceived as a reason for suspicion capable of eventually legitimizing loss of citizenship and residence rights.⁹⁰ Marriage migrants, in particular, are included conditionally insofar as they conform to mainstream culture and fulfill gendered expectations of biological and cultural reproduction of the South Korean nation. At the same time, they remain targets of “repair” processes in the form of assimilation and integration programs within Multicultural Families Support Centers⁹¹, which underline the continued perception of ethnic difference as a potential disruptor of social harmony and national cohesion, homogeneity having lost much of its biological relevance, yet still very central in symbolic and cultural terms.

Through this comparative analysis, it is possible to identify the shared biopolitical rationality of the developmental and multicultural era, also in the dimension of exclusionary mechanisms. Despite their apparent ideological divergence in embracing ethnic diversity, in both periods the state apparatus has governed its population as a means to pursue national development through the exclusion of life deemed undesirable and disposable, especially in racialized and gendered terms. While the objects of exclusion have shifted, from mixed-race children and their mothers to female marriage migrants and multicultural families, and the borders of belonging have apparently extended to include ethnic others, the underlying logic remains constant: national development is pursued through the management of bodies and families, while the nation is built upon lives that are permanently surveilled and exposed to potential marginalization, dwelling in the liminal space between inclusion, social death and exclusion. Once again, multiculturalism does not mark a rupture with the developmental past, but rather its reconfiguration under global conditions.

⁹⁰ Yi, “Suspicious Mothering: Maternal Labor and Marriage Migration in South Korea,” 71–93.

⁹¹ Jang, “Multiculturalism in South Korea: Putting Migrant Wives in Their Place,” 1–15.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has sought to propose a genealogy of how the citizen and the national population have entered the domain of politics in South Korea, and how they have constituted the primary site of state intervention within nation-building projects throughout the country's historical path toward postwar reconstruction and modernization. More specifically, it has sought to address the following research questions: *How do multiculturalism and multicultural policies in South Korea reflect a broader historical legacy of biopolitical governance in nation-building projects? And, how are multicultural policies centered on marriage migrants and multicultural families biopolitical technologies of nationhood construction, in continuity with those of the postwar developmental state?*

Therefore, the research has traced historical continuities, through the biopolitical framework, in the techniques of population management and regulation deployed across both postwar developmental and contemporary global and multicultural projects, unfolding through citizenship as the mechanism of inclusion and exclusion from nationhood. In this sense, the biopolitical production of ideal bodies for citizenship and the biopolitical exclusion of undesirable lives from the national collective emerge as central mechanisms through which the political community is constructed, and nation-building goals are pursued.

Through the comparative analysis of the developmental state's techniques of population management, namely the National Family Planning Program and the practice of transnational adoptions, and South Korea's multicultural model, it has been possible to identify significant continuities in the nation's trajectory toward modernity and development, adding a further analytical layer to existing scholarship on the similarities between the two models. What emerges is that the state has consistently governed the population through interventions in life itself, exercising discipline and surveillance over values, behaviors, and bodies in a generalized way, with particular focus on family structures and biological and cultural reproduction. Such a process unfolded through a comprehensive apparatus that involves not only central state institutions but also the decentralized participation of civilians and private organizations, thereby enabling political intervention in all sectors of society, including the most intimate ones. In both historical moments, the household emerges as a central site of biopolitical governance, targeted as the space in which the boundaries of nationhood are shaped and reproduced. From the regulation of macro-level phenomena according to economic and socio-demographic rationalities, such as the increase or decrease of birth and fertility rates, to the disciplining of individual behaviors in line with normative standards of belonging and ideal citizenship, the

family unit becomes the primary space to pursue transformations and progress, and the woman's body regulated accordingly.

Within this framework, multiculturalism and the governance of marriage migration and multicultural families do not constitute a rupture with previous developmental projects, despite the emerging tolerance of ethnic diversity in a society historically characterized by ethnic homogeneity and ethnic nationalism as a marker of belonging. Rather, multiculturalism operates as a mechanism of population management itself, serving not only to expand the boundaries of nationhood in response to globalization and demographic pressures, but also to regulate diversity according to standards of utility. In this sense, it functions to produce a form of citizenship that is functional to nation-building goals while excluding those lives deemed incompatible with the project, as integration programs and surveillance of everyday practices and legal mechanisms of citizenship acquisition emerge as techniques of discipline and regulation. Once again, inclusion is conditional and contingent upon the performance of commitment to gendered, racialized, and neoliberal standards, while exclusion and social death remain a constant possibility.

Read through a biopolitical perspective, multiculturalism in South Korea appears not as a radical rupture but as a continuation and reconfiguration of developmental nation-building under global conditions. This research, therefore, contributes a new perspective by applying the framework on biopower and biopolitics to South Korean multiculturalism, revealing how previously overlooked historical continuities emerge when nation-building is analyzed in connection to population management.

In light of these insights, future research could further explore the biopolitical implications of multiculturalism in South Korea, for which the theoretical framework developed in this study may provide a productive point of departure. Approaching multiculturalism as a mechanism of population management could offer insights into contemporary modes of governance of diversity. Furthermore, this analytical framework could be further extended to illuminate the historical continuities of nation-building within other national contexts, especially within East Asia, where countries such as Japan and Taiwan have followed a similar path of developmental nation-building and are facing the challenges posed by globalization, demographic transformations, and immigration in recent years.¹ Such future inquiries could pay particular

¹ Song, "The Developmental State and the Neoliberal Transition in South Korea," in *Economic Transitions to Neoliberalism in Middle-Income Countries*, 141-142 ; Stephen Robert Nagy, "Politics of Multiculturalism in East Asia: Reinterpreting Multiculturalism," *Ethnicities* 14, no. 1 (2014): 160-76 ; Zeljana Zmire, "Integration of Marriage Migrants in Korea and Japan: A Comparative Analysis of Ethnic Nationalism and Citizenship," *Pacific Focus* 37, no. 2 (2022): 316-42.

attention to the role of the family and women as pillars of nation-building, especially through the regulation of gendered and racialized bodies within immigration and citizenship regimes and through the biopolitical logics of inclusion and exclusion that underpin the production of national belonging.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This thesis explores the emergence of multiculturalism in South Korea as a contemporary nation-building project alongside the country's global turn, rooted in a broader historical legacy of biopolitical governance. Moving beyond existing scholarship that interprets South Korean multiculturalism as a rupture with an ethnonationalist past or as a mere assimilationist project, this inquiry argues that multiculturalism represents, under global conditions, a reconfiguration of earlier nation-building projects that have characterized the country's historical path toward progress, reconstruction, and modernity. By analyzing the phenomenon through a biopolitical framework, it is possible to trace a genealogy of continuities within nation-building projects, operating through techniques of population management that have historically targeted the household, the woman's body, and reproduction as sites of political intervention, simultaneously producing the ideal citizen and excluding the "unfit" to construct and redefine the boundaries of nationhood and the nation itself.

The analysis follows a historical and comparative approach and a theoretical biopolitical framework drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of biopower and later elaborations on the interconnections with states of exclusion, race, households, and citizenship. The intertwining of biopower and citizenship is approached as a dual mechanism composed of a productive dimension, which aims at fostering, regulating, and disciplining the national citizen according to standards of belonging, and an exclusionary one, centered on the marginalization and material or symbolic elimination of "unfit" lives. The first chapter, therefore, develops this theoretical framework, which will guide the analysis of the empirical and historical contexts of nation-building in South Korea.

The second chapter examines the postwar national reconstruction of the country through the developmental model of authoritarian regimes, specifically Park Chung-Hee's (1961–1979), with a particular focus on mechanisms of population management regulating families, women's bodies, and ethnic others through the Family Planning Program and transnational adoptions. Through these practices, the South Korean state sought to produce an ideal citizen according to gendered, racialized, and neoliberal standards of nationhood and modernity, while excluding undesirable lives from the national collective in a broader attempt to construct a modern and developed nation.

The third chapter explores South Korea's global and multicultural turn, from the mid to late 1990s onward, as a nation-building project through the biopolitical lens. In the contemporary

era, families, women, ethnic others, and reproduction remain the targets of political intervention through the governance of multicultural families and female marriage migrants, included into the national collective insofar as functional to nation-building goals and prescribed gendered and neoliberal standards of nationhood and utility, and excluded for the failure to do so. Through conditional acquisition of membership, integration programs, and state surveillance, multicultural families and marriage migrants are therefore produced as conforming citizens in a broader attempt to expand the boundaries of nationhood in response, once again, to developmental needs, this time calling for a more globalized and cosmopolitan South Korea.

Ultimately, despite apparent diverging ideological approaches to ethnic diversity, shifting targets of exclusion, and an expansion of notions of citizenship, the South Korean state has continuously operated its nation-building projects through the regulation of population and belonging, combining mass mobilization and individual disciplining as enduring strategies for the achievement of development, progress, and modernity.