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Multiple Temporalities of State-Building and Care in South Korea

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ABSTRACT

State-building in South Korea since liberation in 1945 has seen some successes. However, from a care perspective—considering that women and families bear the primary burden of care responsibilities, the discrimination and disadvantages caregivers face both at home and in the labor market, and the reality that few are willing to engage in marriage, childbirth, or caregiving—it is challenging to evaluate the overall success of state-building in South Korea to date. This article highlights the diverse temporalities that have emerged in modern state-building in South Korea since 1945 and examines how these various temporalities serve as structural constraints on care. Amid the compressed timelines of state-building, I analyze how care is systematically overlooked, silenced, and marginalized; how it is devalued; how it is relegated to women's and family work; and how caregivers experience discrimination and disadvantages, alongside the ideologies, norms, and socio-economic and political conditions and circumstances that contribute to these issues.

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Introduction

The past 80 years of Korean history have been marked by a tumultuous period of state-building. Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule in 1945 but was divided into North and South Korea and governed by the U.S. military from 1945 to 1948, when a separate government was established in South Korea (hereafter referred to as Korea). However, shortly after, the country faced the Korean War (1950-1953), which resulted in massive casualties and completely devastated its socioeconomic infrastructure. The war was followed by prolonged periods of gloom and undemocratic military authoritarianism (1963-1979, 1980-1988) by the coup forces. Nevertheless, due to citizens' struggles for democracy and fierce resistance, Korea achieved democratization in 1987 and has since solidified its position as a democratic country. Additionally, despite enduring an economic crisis in 1997, when it received the largest bailout in its history from the IMF due to a foreign exchange crisis, the nation successfully overcame the challenge and experienced remarkable economic growth. Since the 2000s, Korea has been dedicated to establishing a welfare state and is recognized as having the fastest welfare expansion rate among East Asian countries, closely resembling the European welfare state.

Today, Korea is recognized as an economically advanced nation, ranking in the top 10 globally in economic size. It is culturally thriving, exemplified by the hit drama Squid Game, the acclaimed film Parasite, and the globally popular idol group BTS. Korea is also noted for its advanced welfare and healthcare systems, having successfully navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, it stands out as a technology-driven country and a democracy that has successfully experienced multiple peaceful transitions of power. However, Korea faces significant challenges. Over the past two decades, it has consistently ranked low among OECD nations in key areas, including female employment rates, women's labor force participation, the gender division of household and childcare duties, the gender wage gap, and the representation of women in leadership roles. In response to these issues, many women have united to promote the globally recognized '4B Movement' — which stands for non-marriage, non-birth, non-dating, and non-sexual relations — to confront patriarchy and the unequal division of labor (Kaur 2024). As of 2023, Korea's total fertility rate stands at an extremely low 0.72, one of the lowest rates in the world.

A recent paper by Shin and Kim (2022) presents research results that offer valuable insights into the other side of Korea, as mentioned. According to their findings, the wage penalty for care workers is a global phenomenon; however, the wage gap between care workers and non-care workers in Korea is significantly larger than in other countries. The hourly wage for childcare jobs in Korea is 46.2% lower than that for non-care employment, which is significantly larger than the wage gap observed in other countries, including Denmark (6%), France (12.9%), Japan (19.6%), and the UK (24.8%). Although their study may not account for

all aspects of the other side of Korea mentioned and its causes, I believe that the high care penalty observed in Korea reflects a direct and indirect relationship to the low employment rate (relative to men), low labor force participation rate, low average wage, a low rate of advancement to high-ranking positions, and the low birth rate of Korean women, who primarily handle a significant amount of housework and childcare labor hours.

State-building in Korea since liberation in 1945 has experienced some successes. However, from the perspective of care—specifically considering that women and families bear the primary burden of care responsibilities, the discrimination and disadvantages caregivers face both at home and in the labor market, and the reality that few are willing to engage in marriage, childbirth, or caregiving—it is difficult to assess the overall success of state-building in Korea thus far. This paper highlights the multiple temporalities that have emerged in modern state-building in Korea since 1945 and examines how these various temporalities function as structural constraints on care. Amid the compressed timelines of state-building, I analyze how care is systematically overlooked, silenced, and marginalized; how it is devalued; how it is relegated to women's and family work; and how caregivers face discrimination and disadvantages, alongside the ideologies, norms, and socio-economic and political conditions that contribute to these issues.

This paper is based on two conceptual frameworks. The first is the concept of 'non-simultaneity of the simultaneous,' proposed by the German historian Ernst Bloch (1935). The non-simultaneity of the simultaneous is an idea that Bloch used to explain the multiple temporalities of modern German state-building, and it is a concept that Korean historians and political scientists often draw on to explain Korea's complex modernity convincingly. This paper utilizes Bloch's notion of multiple temporalities to illustrate how Korea's state-building process coexists with multiple temporalities, including anti-communist warfare, industrialization, democratization, neoliberalism, and the welfare state, while navigating historical junctures such as post-colonial division, war, a coup d'état, dictatorship, democratic revolution, and the financial crisis. The second framework is 'structural injustice,' a term introduced by the political philosopher Iris Young (2000). This idea describes the multilayered yet systematic ways certain social groups are structurally excluded and oppressed. In my analysis, I employ Young's account of structure to demonstrate how different, non-synchronous times of Korea's state-building create structures in which care is discriminated against, excluded, ignored, overlooked, and undervalued.

In this article, I first introduce the concepts of 'non-simultaneity of the simultaneous' and 'structural injustice,' arguing that these ideas provide useful frameworks for discussing the diverse temporalities of state-building and the structural constraints on care in Korea. Then, I examine the various overlapping times of state-building—anti-communalist warfare (1950s-60s), industrialization (1960s-70s), democratization (1980s-90s), neoliberalism (1990s-2000s), and the welfare state (2000s-20s)—along with the norms, ideologies, and institutions that

shaped them. Next, I illustrate how the ideologies and social structures characteristic of these periods, such as anti-communist ideology, military culture, patriarchy, maternal ideology, gender division of labor in the modern family, work ideology, market orientation, elitism, and developmentalism, serve to exclude and discriminate against care systematically. Finally, I conclude by briefly envisioning the future of state-building with care.

1. 'Non-simultaneity of the Simultaneous' and 'Structural Injustice'

The German historian Bloch proposed the concept of 'non-simultaneity of the simultaneous' to illustrate the complex aspects of interwar Germany (Bloch 1935). In contrast to England and France, where pre-modernity gradually gave way to modernity over time, interwar Germany was characterized by a period of contradictory coexistence, with both pre-modern and modern cultures, politics, and societies coexisting simultaneously. Bloch introduced the term 'non-simultaneity of the simultaneous' to describe the phenomenon of different historical times coexisting concurrently.

Bloch's idea of 'non-simultaneity of the simultaneous' serves as a valuable discussion framework for prominent Korean historical and political scholars (Im 2014; Choi 1996; Kang 2014) analyzing Korea's 20th century. Through this concept, they aim to demonstrate the coexistence of multiple temporalities and orders in modern Korea. Political science scholar Im Hyug Baeg (2014) examines Korea's 20th century, where multiple non-simultaneous times coexist, collide, and evolve, by utilizing and innovating upon Bloch's concept of non-simultaneity within the simultaneous. "Unlike advanced countries that have gradually transitioned from pre-modern to modern and post-modern, Korea's defining characteristic is the non-simultaneity of the simultaneous, whereby non-simultaneous historical times of pre-modern, modern, and post-modern coexist at once" (Im 2014, 40). While in the West, state-building, ethnic nation-building, industrialization, and democratization progressed gradually over 200-300 years following the modern era, in Korea, all these developments emerged together in less than a century since liberation, illustrating the coexistence and conflict of historical times.

I also draw on Bloch's and Im's concept of 'non-simultaneity of the simultaneous' to analyze the periods of state-building in Korea. According to Im (2014), various times coexist and clash within Korea's modernity, including the eras of pre-modern patrimonialism, modern democracy, state-centered capitalism, market-centered neoliberalism, and Nordic welfarism. Im explains that these synchronized times were beneficial for rapid modernization but hindered the substantive deepening of democracy. In the next section, I demonstrate that the asynchronous time of state-building encompasses periods of anti-communist warfare, industrialization, democratization, neoliberalism, and the welfare state. I highlight that these asynchronous multiple times create structural conditions that systematically exclude, marginalize, and oppress care.

To explain the structure surrounding care, I draw on the idea of 'structural injustice' articulated by the political philosopher Iris Young (2000, 81-120). Young defines structural injustice as institutionalized oppression that restricts and disadvantages the life opportunities, capacities, and possibilities of certain individuals and groups while conversely granting advantages to others. She argues that these inequalities are naturally embedded in daily life, reflected in the language and symbols we use, as well as in the institutions and rules we adhere to, without anyone needing to exert force or resist. In other words, inequalities are perpetuated and solidified through our everyday interactions, media, and the frameworks of institutions and rules.

I aim to demonstrate that the asynchronous periods of state-building form the structures of oppression surrounding care. In describing the structure of oppression, young references Marilyn Frye's metaphor of the birdcage to illustrate the concept of oppression. The birdcage, Young emphasizes, is a social structure that limits people's capacities at the first level of intuition.

> The cage makes the bird entirely unfree to fly. If one studies the causes of this imprisonment by looking at one wire at a time, however, it appears puzzling. How does a wire only a couple of centimentres wide prevent a bird's flight? One wire at a time, we can neither describe nor explain the inhibition of the bird's flight. Only a large number of wires arranged in a specific way and connected to one another to enclose the bird and reinforce one another's rigidity can explain why the bird is unable to fly freely (Young, 2000, 92-93).

Individual wires might be viewed as random occurrences or outcomes of particular policies, but when numerous strands are considered collectively, they act as a net that constricts and strengthens certain individuals' living environments, capacities, and opportunities.

The metaphor of the cage effectively illustrates the structure of oppression surrounding care during various state-building instances. Although each instance of state-building has its own context, reasons, and ideological and socio-political dynamics, these concurrent instances are "constituted by how the positions are related to one another to create systematic constraints or opportunities that reinforce one another, like wires in a cage," thereby systematically oppressing and excluding care. This results in discriminatory ideological, socio-cultural, political-economic, and legal conditions for care (Young 2000, 94).

2. Multiple Times of State-building

2.1. Time of Anti-Communist Warfare State (1950s-1960s)

On August 15, 1945, Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule. After three years of U.S. military governance (1945-1948), the Korean government, led by Rhee Syng Man, was established on August 15, 1948. At that time, amid the international Cold War, Korea was

expected to serve as a bulwark against communist countries and an outpost state to block the spread of communism worldwide. Thus, the value of security was prioritized over the value of liberal democracy in Korea. In the Korean War (1950-1953), which erupted shortly thereafter, countless individuals were killed and injured, and the socio-economic system was completely devastated. Ironically, however, the war further accelerated and solidified the state-building process. It facilitated the creation of a modern army without resistance and allowed for the efficient recruitment of police officers necessary for maintaining domestic security (Im, 2014, 295-301, 313-321). Additionally, the Rhee Syng Man government sought to establish a patriarchal patrimonial state, where the president was regarded as the father of the national family. Consequently, the early government sought to exert control over oppressive state organizations, such as the military and police, and to privatize state power through patriarchy (Im 2014, 322-327).

(a)Anti-communism and Military Culture

The Rhee Syng Man government transformed the war into an anti-communist state defined by the ruling ideology of anti-communism through an authoritarian dictatorship. This ideology served as the primary guiding principle in state construction at the time. It was not an ideology that individual citizens could choose; rather, it was a mandated norm that had to be codified and internalized. The Korean War led to the widespread acceptance of anti-communist ideology as the dominant belief throughout society, regardless of social class or hierarchical status. Anti-communism was not merely a superficial acceptance of the ruling class's ideology; it reflected the collective sentiment of fear regarding the "communist invasion," the suffering and deprivation it caused, and the hostility it incited (Im, 2014, 313-321).

The Korean War led the Korean people to accept conscription through the National Recruitment System with little resistance. Consequently, the standing army grew more than sixfold, increasing from 100,000 to 600,000 soldiers. This conflict not only expanded the military significantly but also enlarged the repressive state apparatus, including the police and intelligence services, beyond societal needs. As a result, the military came to symbolize much more than the country's defense. By the war's end, it had evolved into society's most powerful, cohesive, and influential institution. Under the National Recruitment System, Korean soldiers, enlisted through national conscription, were trained, educated, and disciplined while being instilled with patriotism, anti-communism, and pro-Americanism, thus transforming them into citizens with the national character expected of modern citizens (Im, 2014, 316-318).

With the establishment of a military authoritarian regime under Park Chung Hee, who seized power in a coup d'état in 1961, military culture extended beyond the military and infiltrated society. The Park Chung Hee government (1963-1979) declared that the military was the most organized and rational promoter of modernization, disseminating military culture throughout society. The distinct 'military organizational culture,' characterized by uniformity, collectivity, a superior-subordinate system, and vertical hierarchy, evolved into 'military culture' and

transformed into a political culture that permeated society. In the three decades following the Korean War, military veterans transitioned into civilian life and became key proponents of military culture, driving economic development and industrialization. For instance, former military executives actively integrated military culture into corporate management practices. Moreover, the Park Chung Hee government not only transplanted and introduced military culture into civilian society but also imposed a military-style control system to regulate citizens in a manner reminiscent of military discipline (Im , 2014, 486-488).

(b) Patriarchalism and Maternal Ideology

The first Rhee Syng Man government actively employed and leveraged familial values to legitimize its patriarchal dictatorship. Rhee was called the Founding Father and adopted a paternalistic, king-like ruling style. For instance, in October 1954, Rhee delivered a discourse on the necessity of adopting Confucianism. This religious advocacy aimed to promote patriarchalism, which extends the paternal authority traditionally held by the patriarch within a Confucian family to a national level. It sought to broaden the paternalistic dominance of the patriarch, the father of the family, to the nation centered around the president (Im, 2014, 322-327, 391-398).

State patriarchal dominance has created an image of a 'sublime' mother who obediently follows and submits to her husband, the head of the family, while caring for her children with absolute love through dedication and sacrifice. This maternal ideology ties caring to women and motherhood, reflecting a social belief that all women (mothers) are inherently maternal by nature. Moreover, motherhood is praised for its 'nobility' and celebrated for the significant social value it brings to humanity and society. The dedication, sacrifice, and care of children are seen as natural for all women, something expected and deemed irresistible, aligning with the laws of nature. Because sacrifice and devotion to childcare are instinctive, society both celebrated their 'nobility' and took it for granted. The caring responsibilities associated with women became accepted as common sense (Yoon, 2001, 33-56).

2.2. Time of industrialization State (1960s-70s)

The Park Chung Hee government (1963-1979), which rose to power through a military coup in 1961, aimed to address the legitimacy issues surrounding its establishment and to build new legitimacy. It adopted a developmentalist strategy. Developmentalism prioritizes economic growth as essential for the nation's survival in the precarious post-colonial international landscape. These priorities indicate that state-led economic development became the primary objective of government actions. Park's regime sought to validate its inception and sustain its authority by enhancing financial performance. To achieve this, it initiated a state-led economic development plan in 1962 that revised performance targets every five years. This economic development plan persisted beyond the Park Chung Hee government for over 30 years until 1996.

The plan's centerpiece was a series of economic reforms that transformed Korea's economy into one that favored exports. The Park government implemented a developmentalist, export-led industrialization strategy that relied on exports for economic growth, which proved successful. Between 1961 and 1972, exports increased 40-fold, with merchandise exports rising 170-fold. With merchandise exports accounting for 60 % of total exports, Korea successfully transformed from an agricultural country into a manufacturing-based industrialized nation (Im, 2014, 456-463).

(a). Fordist Industrialization and Labor (Diligence) Ideology

The export-oriented industrialization promoted by the Park Chung Hee government implemented what is known as 'bloody Taylorism,' which followed Taylor's principles of productivity and management. 'Bloody Taylorism' is a form of Fordism characterized by excessive labor exploitation, including standardization, consistent production, and disciplined work processes, all aimed at establishing an efficient mass production system. The landscape of export-oriented industrialization at that time depicted workers sitting along designated conveyor belt production lines, where they repeatedly assembled standardized products. Workers had to engage in endless labor, except for a brief lunch break, much like components in a complexly interconnected production system. According to Im, the industrialization of the 1960s was defined by Taylorist Fordism, where workers became integral parts of the assembly line, mechanically engrossed in and driven to perform repetitive tasks (Im, 2014, 488-491).

The state praised the dedicated workers who wore overalls, laced up their work shoes, and went to their factory jobs to meet the growth targets outlined in the economic development plan as key players in industrialization. They were boldly given titles like 'export force,' 'industrial force,' and 'industrial warriors,' and their commitment to the nation's development and economic growth was celebrated. (Im, 2014, 491). Society appreciated these workers for their hard efforts in economic development, and the labor ideology, emphasizing diligence, served as the cornerstone of societal values. Thanks to the workers' affordable labor, along with their dedication and sincerity, Korea successfully established the foundation for modern industrialization and rapid economic growth.

(b) Family Planning Project and Modern Family in the Gendered Division of Labor

The Park Chung Hee government implemented the 'Family Planning Project' as part of its economic development plan. The family planning project, which was conducted for approximately 25 years starting in 1961, illustrates a different aspect of Korea's industrialization trajectory. This national initiative was executed nationwide by mobilizing state organizations to achieve the goal of population control. The strategy aimed to influence the reduction of birth rates through the distribution of contraceptives and sterilization techniques to individual citizens and households, as a population control policy was essential for economic development. The most significant aspect of the family planning project was the distribution of contraceptives; however, it encompassed a range of initiatives, including the distribution of

condoms, the enactment and revision of the Maternal and Child Health Act, and the contraceptive culture project, as well as the establishment of the family management research institute. Consequently, "all matters related to pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing were included within the scope of the project" (Cho, 2018, 75-77). As a result, Korea's population growth rate decreased from 3.0% in 1960 to 1.7% by the end of 1976, and the total fertility rate fell from 5.95 to 3.

The contemporary family structure, rooted in modern motherhood and a gendered division of labor, emerged and proliferated through the family planning initiative. This initiative depicted a good mother as a capable individual responsible for organizing and managing her children's education, as well as a diligent manager with the skills and knowledge to effectively implement modern child-rearing practices. The nuclear family, composed of a father who serves as the breadwinner rather than an all-powerful patriarch, and a mother who efficiently oversees childrearing, caregiving, and household tasks to ensure her children develop into well-adjusted adults, and their children, became the paradigm of the modern family (Cho, 2018, 234-258).

2.3. Time of Democratization State (1980s-1990s)

The military authoritarian regimes of Park Chung Hee (1963-1979) and Chun Doo Hwan (1980-1988) sought to stifle the emergence of an autonomous civil society by forcefully suppressing the democratization movement. However, the torture-related death of college student Park Jong Cheol, who was arrested during a democratization demonstration in 1987, galvanized the middle class and religious groups to engage in the demonstrations actively. This participation brought together existing students, workers, and the largest coalition for democratization, consisting of the opposition party, workers, students, the middle class, and civic forces. The democratization of Korea represented a prolonged struggle characterized by confrontation, conflict, and mobilization between the military authoritarian regime and the civil society coalition advocating for democracy. Following the June Civil Struggle, the civil society coalition succeeded in securing concessions regarding democratization from the military regime on June 29, 1987. This marked a significant turning point in Korea's democratization, symbolized by the June 29 Declaration. (Im 2014, 596-601).

(a). The Politics of Elite Collusion

With the June 29 Declaration in 1987, the politics of democratization shifted from street protests to negotiations in the halls of the National Assembly and from the citizenry to the political elites. Central to the democratization deal was a constitutional amendment. These amendments included a five-year presidential term and a presidential election system; the abolition of the president's power to impose emergency measures and the right to dissolve the National Assembly; the restoration of the National Assembly's authority to investigate and audit state affairs; the strengthening of the National Assembly's checks on the executive branch; and the establishment of a new Constitutional Court to enhance the power and autonomy of the judiciary. The political landscape achieved a comprehensive constitutional amendment that

revised 37% of the existing constitutional articles. The agreed-upon amendments were passed by an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly on September 21, 1987, and confirmed in a referendum on October 27, 1987, with 78.2 % of the votes cast in favor (Im, 2014, 613-623).

However, the process of amending the constitution resulted from collusion among elites in the institutional political sphere, thereby excluding the pro-democracy coalition of workers, students, and citizens who were the primary driving force behind the popular mobilization. After the June 29 Declaration, representatives from civil society movements, including the National Movement for a Democratic Constitution, the Korea Confederation of Trade Unions, the Federation of Korean Industries, women's organizations, and farmers' representatives, voiced their desire for constitutional reform, but their perspectives were not included in the political discussions surrounding the content of the amendment. As civil society groups were marginalized from the amendment process, critical issues that needed attention were overlooked in the 1987 constitutional amendment proceedings. For instance, matters such as the military's political neutrality, the characterization of the Gwangju Democratization Movement, and workers' rights to participate in management and share in profits were either inadequately addressed or omitted from the negotiating agenda. This illustrates that the democracy the civic movement painstakingly achieved through grassroots mobilization and struggle was not reflected in the process of institutionalization through the constitution; instead, it became a byproduct of elite collusion within the establishment (Im, 2014, 613-623).

2.4. Time of Neoliberalism State (1990s-2000s)

In late 1997, Korea faced an economic crisis often referred to as a national crisis comparable to the Korean War. This financial crisis, which originated in Southeast Asia and spread to Korea due to neoliberal globalization, nearly devastated the Korean economy, compelling the country to secure the largest bailout in its history ($55 billion) from the IMF. The IMF and the United States, which provided the bailout, pressured the government and financial sector to implement structural reforms across the economy and society, including the labor market, corporate sector, public sector, and financial system, as a condition for the bailout. The Kim Dae Jung government (1998-2003), given a neoliberal restructuring mandate, aimed to establish institutional arrangements that facilitated restructuring the corporate and financial sectors, including introducing a flexible labor market to ease layoffs and allow for the replacement of workers. Ultimately, the structural reforms in the economy and labor sector, driven by both external pressure and internal demands, transformed Korean capitalism into neoliberal capitalism after 1997 (Im, 2014, 642-645).

(a). Neoliberal Ideology and Competitive Individuals

Since 1997, neoliberalism in Korea has served as a social ideological hegemony, extending beyond its economic model. Neoliberal ideology has dominated Korean society entirely. Neoliberal discourse emphasizes the principles of market competition, profit maximization,

deregulation, market opening, economic liberalization, privatization, and the inefficiency of the public sector. It also sanctifies private property and prioritizes the private sphere over the public sphere. This ideology has permeated both the conservative regimes of Lee Myung Bak, Park Geun Hye, and Yoon Seok Yeol, as well as the liberal administrations of Kim Dae Jung, Roh Moo Hyun, and Moon Jae In. Neoliberal thought has influenced not only the economy but also the institutionalization and policy directions in education, public administration, and welfare. In particular, the Lee Myung Bak government (2008-2013), which advocated for a market-based approach, attempted to privatize public sectors directly related to citizens' lives, such as health insurance, water supply, and highways. It also tended to reject and abandon the state's role as a public good in education through various pro-business deregulation policies (Im, 2014, 736-739).

A society dominated by neoliberal ideology is characterized by individuals prioritizing selfish interests, pursuing competition, performance, and profit maximization without regard for broader societal concerns. In this society, personal profit is the dominant value, leading to a decline in the sense of community. In an environment of self-reliance and winner-take-all, society becomes polarized into the haves and the have-nots, and the differences in education and other conditions between these groups lead to further polarization. Indeed, polarization in Korean society, as manifested in income, wealth, and education disparities, has accelerated since the IMF era. The income share of the top 20% of the population has been steadily increasing, while the income share of the bottom 20% has been decreasing. The Gini coefficient remains high, above the OECD average, and Korea is classified as one of the countries with the fastest-growing income inequality among OECD members (Ryu 2023). Consequently, the values of caring, solidarity, empathy, and consideration for others in an ultra-competitive, ultra-individualistic society are increasingly losing ground. Issues such as bullying, hatred of the weak, obsession with exclusive rights, extreme materialism, isolation, loneliness, and suicide are gripping the entire society. Korea's suicide rate sharply increased after the IMF financial crisis and has remained the highest among OECD countries for more than two decades since the 2000s. Korea's suicide rate is more than double the OECD average.

2.5. Time of the Welfare State (2000s-20s)

Korea became a full-fledged welfare state in the 2000s. Welfare policies were introduced under the military government of Park Chung Hee, including worker's compensation insurance (1963) and health insurance (1963), and later under another military government, Chun Doo Hwan, which established the national pension (1988). However, these initiatives were actively expanded by the democratic progressive government following the 1997 democratization. During the Kim Dae Jung administration (1998-2003), major social welfare programs were reorganized and expanded, with the state taking a more direct role in providing welfare through programs such as social assistance and unemployment benefits. Under the Roh Moo Hyun administration (2003-2008), the scope of social services expanded significantly, with the

intention of achieving universal welfare. During the Moon Jae In administration (2017-2022), the government actively sought to enhance care through initiatives such as introducing a child allowance, establishing a state responsibility system for childcare, expanding national health insurance coverage, and increasing the basic pension allowance.

Care policies have been newly introduced or significantly expanded since the 2000s. Regarding childcare, state responsibility for the care of preschool children was institutionalized through the 1991 Infant Care Act, followed by a comprehensive revision of the same law in 2004, which introduced universal childcare. For elderly care, the Long-Term Care Insurance for the Elderly was enacted in 2008, institutionalizing elderly care in the form of social insurance. This change has expanded elderly care from a minimum level of institutional support for older adults without family members or those with low incomes to a universal level of care for all elderly individuals with long-term care needs. However, other factors contributed to this expansion of care policies, making care secondary, strategic, and instrumental (Kim forthcoming).

(a). Care as a Crisis Response Strategy

In the early 2000s, the discourse surrounding the 'crisis' of low birth rates and aging came to the forefront of Korean society. In 1983, the total fertility rate fell below the population replacement level of 2.06, and by the early 2000s, it had already dropped to the low 1s. Since 2018, the total fertility rate has remained below 1.0. Concurrently, Korean society has been experiencing rapid aging, with the proportion of the population aged 65 and over increasing from 7.0% in 2002 to 10.9% in 2010, 16.7% in 2021, and 18.4% in 2023 (Hong 2023).

Care policies were introduced as an immediate response to this demographic crisis. Several childcare policies have been proposed to alleviate the care burden on families, which has been identified as the primary cause of the declining birthrate. Additionally, elderly care policies were proposed with the intent of shifting care from private to social services to ease the care burden caused by the aging population. This aim is also explicitly noted in the rationale for enacting the Long-term Care Insurance Act, which serves as the foundation of the long-term care insurance system. The rationale for the act highlights that caring for the elderly at home is challenging due to the aging population, the prevalence of nuclear families, increased social participation by women, and rising costs. This burden is recognized as a serious social issue that society must address urgently.

(b). Care by the Market

The neoliberal ideology of privatization and deregulation has spread to the welfare sector. Since the 2000s, governments have adopted a strategy of utilizing the private sector to implement care policies rapidly and efficiently at a low cost. To expand and quickly disseminate care policies quantitatively, the government opted for the marketization of care, where private institutions operate care services. In the case of long-term care insurance for the elderly, there is a high dependence on the private sector when examining long-term care service providers. Regarding

childcare, only 16.4% (5,437) of the total 33,246 childcare centers in 2021 were publicly funded. Private and family childcare centers accounted for 73.4% (24,494) of all childcare centers (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2022).

The government anticipated that increasing childcare provision by private organizations through the market would facilitate the swift growth of childcare services and enhance quality through user choice amidst competition among private entities (Seo 2017). However, contrary to the government's expectations, the marketization of care has led to excessive competition among private agencies, resulting in a decline in care quality, poor working conditions for care workers, and limited user choice (Kim 2016; Choi 2018).

(c). Economic Growth and Job Creation by Utilizing the Female Labor Force

Since the 2000s, care policies have been framed as a strategic industry for job creation. The goal was to generate social service jobs to meet the increasing demand for care. Global economic growth without corresponding employment results in job shortages; hence, the government stresses that proactive job creation investment is essential. In particular, the government has focused on examples from other countries where the impact of creating female jobs in the social service sector surpassed that of the entire service industry (Min et al. 2007). Consequently, the care policy was viewed as part of the women's job creation strategy, and bringing the inactive female population into the labor market and utilizing them economically was chosen as the primary approach for economic growth.

The primary focus of the government's social service job expansion strategy was on low-income homemakers aged 40 and older seeking re-employment. This initiative aimed to reintegrate women in this age group from the non-economically active sector by creating social service jobs while also providing care at a relatively low social cost through their involvement. Consequently, care jobs became increasingly concentrated among women, particularly low-income, middle-aged, and older women.

3. Multiple Temporalities and the Structure of Oppression Surrounding Care

The multiple temporalities examined in the previous section did not unfold sequentially after earlier events faded away. The periods of anti-communist warfare, industrialization, democratization, neoliberalism, and the welfare state coexisted over an 80-year span. While Bloch (1935) demonstrated the coexistence of pre-modern and modern times in interwar Germany, Im (2014) highlighted the contradictions within the conflicting multiple times of modern Korea, noting that the synchronized periods benefited modernization but hindered the development of a more mature democracy. On the other hand, this section aims to demonstrate that the compressed times of coexistence form the framework of systematic oppression surrounding care.

3.1. Care That Falls Short of Standard Citizenship

The anti-communist ideology and military culture prevalent during the era of anti-communist warfare, along with the labor ideology of industrialization, established 'soldiers' and 'workers' as the archetypes of ordinary citizens. Although the Constitution of Korea was enacted in 1948 and asserts that all citizens are equal under the law, the representative image of a citizen that Korean society pursues and predominates is that of the 'soldier,' characterized by a strong physique and loyalty to their organization, and the 'worker,' defined by diligence and a commitment that allows for no leisure. The anti-communist ideology, military culture, and labor (diligence) ideology created the ideological and legal foundation that positioned individuals who were neither soldiers nor workers as second-class citizens.

Korea is the only divided country in the world that maintains a robust conscription system. All male citizens must serve 2 to 3 years of military duty, as the Constitution mandates. Those who fail to fulfill (or cannot fulfill) their military service are often perceived as defective individuals, frequently overlooked by the military, and are likely to face discrimination and disadvantages in various aspects of social life, including employment. During the Park Chung Hee military government (1963-1979), individuals who did not serve in the military faced severe sanctions, including bans on public office and overseas travel. They were branded as "factors that undermine national unity and social discipline" and "non-citizens," and were even defined as enemies of society (Choi, 2018, 116-117). Even today, those who evade military service are restricted from traveling abroad until they fulfill their military service obligations, are ineligible for passports, and cannot be employed as civil servants until they reach the age of 40. Additionally, they face obstacles in acquiring business licenses and permits from the state (Military Manpower Administration, 2015). Despite the Constitutional Court's ruling that the 'military service bonus point system'—which offers employment benefits to those who have completed military service—is unconstitutional, a survey of companies revealed that 86.5% of respondents supported the introduction of this system, 88.6% indicated that the experience gained through military service was beneficial in performing their jobs and for their organizations, and 90.6% preferred candidates who had served in the military over those who had not (Kim and Choi 2013).

Korea is also the country with the longest working hours. As of 2021, it recorded the highest average annual working hours among the 31 OECD countries, totaling 1,915 hours—314 hours more than the average for member nations (1,601 hours). This figure exceeds Germany's by over 50%, with Germany having the lowest working hours at 1,349 hours. Additionally, Korea had the highest percentage of 'long-time workers,' defined as those who work more than 48 hours per week. The OECD average for this group was 7.4%, while Korea's was significantly higher at 18.9% (Park 2023). Recently, the Yoon Suk Yeol government (2022-2025) unveiled a plan to reform the working hours system, aiming to increase the maximum working week to 69 hours. The popular recent book *The Overworked Society* critiques the situation of long

working hours in Korea, examining the causes and characteristics of the deep-rooted 'diligence ideology,' where long hours, diligence, and sincerity are viewed as criteria for success (Kim 2013).

In Korean society, individuals who do not conform to the traditional image of soldiers and workers, such as those in need of care or those who care for others, are often viewed as deficient and burdensome. They are frequently subjected to social disdain, degradation, and contempt. Numerous familiar, socially accepted slurs demean the elderly, children, people with disabilities, and mothers who care for their children. The derogatory terms '*mamchung*' and '*neugeumma*,' which refer to mothers, have become quite common. Furthermore, elderly care facilities, welfare centers for the disabled, and childcare facilities are perceived as 'hate facilities' by residents, sparking debates for and against their establishment in communities.

3.2. Care Neglected as the Responsibility of Families and Women

Patriarchal motherhood during the anti-communist era required that families and women be responsible for caring for children and supporting parents within a hierarchical system defined by strict divisions between public and private spheres, as well as male and female labor. Modernized motherhood, emerging from the gendered division of labor during industrialization, represented a distinct form of patriarchy; however, it still inherently associated housework and child-rearing as rational and scientific tasks of mothering. Both patriarchal 'pre-modern motherhood' and industrialized 'modern motherhood' establish the structural foundation for Korean society's neglect of care as a responsibility of women and families.

Despite the recent influx of public care policies, care continues to be a significant burden on families and a primary responsibility for women in Korean society. For instance, despite a notable increase in the childcare budget over the last two decades, Korea's female employment and labor force participation rates have consistently ranked among the lowest in OECD countries. As of 2023, Korea's female employment rate stands at 61.4%, while its labor force participation rate is 63.1%, placing it 31st out of 38 OECD countries for both metrics. Notably, the employment rate for women with children under the age of 15 is significantly lower than that of major industrialized nations with comparable economic and population sizes. As of 2021, Korea's employment rate for women with children under 15 was 56.2%, which is 12.0 percentage points lower than the average of seven countries with a per capita national income of $30,000 or more and a population exceeding 50 million (68.2%) (Cha 2025). This demonstrates that, despite the growing public care infrastructure, children are still predominantly raised by their mothers.

Women in Korea also spend significantly more hours in domestic care than men. According to the latest Living Time Survey, the number of hours of weekday housework for adults has not changed much, from 3 hours 22 minutes for women and 39 minutes for men in 2014 to 3 hours 10 minutes for women and 48 minutes for men in 2019. While women's hours of housework

have decreased slightly and men's hours have increased slightly, as of 2019, women spend 2 hours and 22 minutes more per day on weekday housework than men (Statistics Korea 2020). Conversely, when women are employed, their paid labor hours increase, yet their caregiving hours do not decrease significantly. This suggests that women are often compelled to choose between caregiving and paid work or face the double burden of managing both (Yoon, 2018, 192-193).

Therefore, 'pre-modern motherhood' and 'modern motherhood' have become the social standard for judging what constitutes a normal mother. Women who do not or cannot provide care face social criticism. Women who do not have children or who choose not to have children are often looked down upon and pitied, while women who cannot be devoted mothers are disparaged and belittled as selfish and deviant. Furthermore, the 'maternal ideology' is internalized by women themselves, and those in dual-income families often experience self-blame, guilt, and feelings of inferiority for not being able to care for their children properly, thereby failing to fulfill their maternal responsibilities.

3.3. Marginalized and Unrepresented Care

In 1987, Korea achieved democratization after nearly 30 years of military authoritarian rule, thanks to its citizens' widespread solidarity and tireless resistance. Unfortunately, however, the post-democratization process was anything but democratic. In a series of subsequent processes for democratic institutionalization, including constitutional amendments, the voices of civil society were marginalized and unrepresented, reducing hard-won democracy to collusion among political elites. Following the civilian government's takeover of power in 1992, grassroots democracy movements flourished, and the civil society sector continued to expand and develop. Yet, civic forces were still underrepresented in discussions on current issues and struggled to secure a seat at the negotiating table. In particular, in the field of care, it has been dismissed as a private, familial, and feminine concern, thus being marginalized from so-called 'elite politics' in both the political and civil society arenas.

Of course, some social movements can be described as care movements, such as voluntary childcare cooperatives at the local or village level and non-profit civil society organizations that support care workers for the elderly and those with disabilities. Thus, it is difficult to argue that these movements have not had a significant social impact, drawing public attention to care-related issues, publicizing them, and influencing their political and institutional reflection (Kang, 2018). However, care movements have often been perceived as mere mothers' gatherings and excluded from the decision-making arenas of civil society and mainstream politics.

The Korean domestic workers' movement exemplifies this issue. Domestic workers in Korea are excluded from the Labor Standards Act, which contains a clause (Article 11) stating it does not apply to them, leaving these workers without legal protection and regulation. Organizations representing domestic workers have consistently highlighted this injustice to the government

and the National Assembly, urging new legislation to include them; yet, mainstream political forces have failed to respond effectively to their demands. Additionally, domestic workers' organizations have been marginalized and unrepresented by traditional trade unions, hindering their ability to find active support and engagement. Although the National Assembly passed a resolution in 2012 calling for the submission of a motion to ratify the ILO's Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, the proposed Domestic Workers Act was repeatedly shelved before it could be enacted (Um, 2023). It was not until 2022 that the law was finally established, but, as a representative from a domestic worker organization recalls, convincing the government and the National Assembly's standing committee required "a thousand times" of effort over the years (Choi, 2024).

Due to the entrenched barriers in elite mainstream politics, a care movement is emerging that seeks innovative approaches to political influence, diverging from traditional methods. This movement is represented by 'Moms for Politics' established in 2017. It is a voluntary civic organization comprised of mothers raising children who aspire to cultivate a caring environment that ensures gender equality through direct political participation. Since its founding, the organization has expanded its focus to encompass education, welfare, the environment, and peace, actively engaging in initiatives to address contemporary issues from a maternal perspective (Moms for Politics 2018). Participants in Moms for Politics are viewed as creating new opportunities for political engagement by identifying themselves as political actors capable of bringing care issues to the forefront and advocating for institutionalized solutions. They creatively leverage legacy media and various online platforms in this process. Consequently, it exemplifies the potential for mothers to emerge as political actors by utilizing diverse media spaces linked to their private lives and public institutions (Choi & Choi 2023).

3.4. Market-driven, Survival-of-the-fittest Care

Since 1997, neoliberalism has been the dominant social ideology, deeply ingrained in the lives and relationships of individual citizens as well as the direction of state policies. The market system, which is focused on efficiency and profit, has made us forget that we are all dependent and interdependent human beings with universal care needs. The profit motive of this market system has failed to respond proactively and sensitively to the care needs of vulnerable individuals, putting the status of caregivers at risk. Care has become a matter of self-reliance that must be managed within the market, resulting in a structure where those with financial means can access more comprehensive care (or purchase it), while those without struggle to gain even minimal care. This has led to widespread inequality in care based on socioeconomic status.

For instance, in Korea, the burden of private care expenses is rapidly rising to the extent that new terms related to care, such as 'care bankruptcy,' 'care murder,' and 'care hell,' have emerged. The number of 'care provider unemployed' individuals who resign from their jobs to care for their families due to the high care costs is also on the rise. As care expenses, exceeding

hospital bills, continue to rise yearly, the government appears to be exploring various public support options. A recent survey revealed that care expenses, which totaled 5 trillion won in 2014, surged by 38% to 6.9 trillion won in 2018. The opportunity cost, including wage losses incurred by family members caring for patients, also increased by 17% during the same timeframe, reaching 7.7 trillion won (Kim & Ahn 2024). According to another survey, hiring a caregiver at a nursing home or other facility will cost 3.7 million won per month in 2023, which exceeds 60% of the median income for households in their 40s and 50s. The cost of hiring a caregiver is increasing by about 10% each year, and it is reported that it often costs more than 5 million won per month to employ an experienced caregiver (KBS, 2024).

The government has also actively implemented a system that leverages the market to provide and manage services in the public care sector. It believes that allowing private organizations to deliver care through the market will enable efficient, rapid, and widespread access to care services while ensuring user choice in a competitive environment among private organizations, thus guaranteeing better quality of care services (Seo, 2017). However, contrary to the government's expectations, care service providers have utilized policies to reduce the number of care workers or to freeze or lower their labor costs, ultimately leading to poor working conditions for care workers and a decline in the quality of care provided to recipients.

For instance, childcare workers, who represent the essential workforce in the childcare sector, endure challenging working conditions, including low wages, long hours, and a lack of guaranteed rest time. By the end of December 2020, approximately 70% of childcare workers were employed as private and home childcare providers, with most earning only the minimum wage (Kim and Kim, 2021, 72). Another survey found that 94.7% of private and home childcare workers earned a monthly wage below the minimum wage (Kim, 2022). Likewise, caregivers, who are the essential workforce in the elderly care sector, also face job instability, low salaries, challenging working conditions, and violations of human rights. A survey revealed that the average monthly working hours for caregivers in nursing facilities were 177 hours, with an average wage of 1.55 million won, whereas visiting caregivers worked an average of only 88.9 hours per month, earning approximately 650,000 won (Lee, 2017).

Ultimately, the marketization of care driven by neoliberal principles has increased the vulnerability of those socioeconomically disadvantaged in accessing proper care and has rendered care providers themselves more socioeconomically at risk in their provision of care.

3.5. Instrumentalized and Feminized Care

The expansion of care policies in the welfare state since the 2000s involves utilizing care to address various social needs and concerns. Care is regarded as a tool for population and economic policy. Care policies have been proposed as an immediate response to the demographic crisis of declining birth rates and aging populations, as well as a component of economic strategies aimed at harnessing the female labor force and creating employment opportunities.

Care policies, presented as responses to the population crisis, needed to be expanded rapidly to ensure the country's survival. Consequently, the government adopted a policy strategy that utilized the private sector to disseminate and quantitatively expand these care policies. As a result, the government has actively promoted the marketization of care, where private institutions primarily operate care services. This, combined with the prevailing neoliberal ideology, has contributed to a deepening inequality in care. Furthermore, care policies aimed at leveraging women's labor force and creating social service jobs have led to an increase in the feminization of care. This suggests that while care has become socially institutionalized outside the home, women continue to be the primary providers of care. Although women's re-entry into the labor market has increased, and the creation of social service jobs has been successful, the new jobs are predominantly low-wage and low-skilled, with gender bias. Care workers are typically female, middle-aged, and in temporary positions.

Currently, 89% of social service workers in Korea are women, including social workers and preschool teachers, while 93.5% of care and health service workers, such as nursing assistants, caregivers, and after-school teachers, are also women. The percentage of women among domestic helpers and babysitters who focus on household chores or childcare is 99% (Kim and Lim 2020: 2-4). As of 2022, 99.5% of childcare workers are female (Ministry of Health and Welfare 2022). In elderly care, 6.1% of caregivers are male, whereas 93.9% are female, with 62.9% of caregivers aged 60 and older. The majority (53.6%) of caregivers are employed on a part-time contract basis, and the percentage of contract workers is relatively higher among women than men and tends to increase with age (Lee & et al. 2022, 26).

While the proliferation of care policies has led to an increase in care-related jobs, it has not resulted in quality jobs or positions that ensure good care. Governments have focused on boosting job numbers to meet the demand for care yet have overlooked who provides that care, the conditions under which they work, and how they are treated.

Conclusion: Towards State-building with Care

This paper introduces the multiple temporalities of modern state-building in Korea over the past eighty years, since 1945, and demonstrates that these coexisting temporalities act as structural constraints on care. In the broader context of state-building, various periods have been marked by anti-communist warfare, industrialization, democratization, neoliberalism, and the development of the welfare state. The anti-communist ideology, military culture, patriarchalism, maternal ideology, developmentalism, modern family, modern motherhood rooted in the gendered division of labor, labor ideology, elitism, and market-centrism were created and propagated during these times and formed the ideological, political, social, economic, and legal foundations for the systematic exclusion and discrimination against care.

The anti-communist ideology during the militarization period and the labor (diligence) ideology during the industrialization period viewed 'soldiers' and 'workers' as ordinary

citizens. Those who required or cared for support that did not align with the standards of normal citizens were regarded as individuals who fell short of these standards. Additionally, the ideological and cultural foundations of the system were rooted in the 'paternalistic motherhood' of the anti-communist era and the 'modern motherhood' shaped by the gendered division of labor of the industrialization era, which positioned care as the responsibility of women and families. Although the country transitioned to democracy from military dictatorship in 1987, elitism in the political structure has posed a significant barrier to the growth of civil society movements, including the care movement, as a political force. Neoliberal ideology, which has deeply permeated Korean society since the 1997 IMF crisis, has been steeped in market principles akin to religious beliefs, failing to adequately address the needs of those requiring care and leaving care providers socioeconomically vulnerable within the market. Care has also become a commodity to be addressed in the marketplace, creating and reinforcing inequalities based on financial status. Since the 2000s, care policies have emerged and expanded within the discourse of the welfare state, yet they continue to be regarded as a subset or secondary tool of population or economic policies.

In summary, individual time becomes a single wire in the cage, while multiple co-existing times form a net that intersects to create a structure of oppression surrounding care. For instance, developmentalism and the ideology of economic growth during the industrialization period established a framework for the gendered division of labor that confined the domestic sphere to women. This gendered division of labor continued during the formation of the welfare state, with many jobs created through care policies being caregiving roles primarily for women. In essence, these times reinforce each other, leading to the feminization of care and the perception of women as care providers. Additionally, the elitism that emerged during the democratization period has obstructed civil society's political participation and power. In particular, the care movement has been shaped by patriarchal ideology and the structure of the gendered division of labor, facing exclusion and devaluation by other labor-centered social movements, which has hindered its potential to evolve into a significant political force. Thus, the devaluation of care in Korean society, the feminization of care, and the various discrimination and disadvantages that caregivers encounter both at home and in the marketplace stem from multiple yet systemic structural constraints surrounding care throughout 80 years of state-building.

Korea now requires a significant transformation from a structure lacking care to one that embodies it. In this context, numerous initiatives related to the transition to care are currently in progress: a shift toward a caring society, a constitutional amendment focusing on care, and a care service system that aligns with the military service system, among others. A new era is emerging regarding integrating and responding to this national framework of care. In the face of unprecedented challenges, it will be intriguing to see if Korea can effectively translate its

experience of non-simultaneity of simultaneity into K-care and the vision it can present to the world.

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