

The Women Begin to Walk Before the Camera Once Again: Reality and Fantasy as Seen Through *Tour of Duty*

An Interview with Kim Dong-ryung (Filmmaker)

Tour of Duty is a work that is possible precisely because two directors have had a relationship for over 10 years with the locals who live in this military base town. You could say that it was particularly via the works *Me and the Owl* (2003), *There Is* (2006), and *American Alley* (2008) that it became possible to form the fundamental idea behind *Tour of Duty*. Due to the departure of the American military from the northern part of South Korea's Gyeonggi province, the military base town is disappearing through urban redevelopment. As such, more so than just recording the space and people, it was a time when some kind of means of reconstruction was necessary. In an attempt to find a way to reconstruct their memories, we engaged in numerous dialogues with three women whom we had been in contact with for a long time. As we brought our heads together and puzzled through it, we worked out an idea. *Tour of Duty* is the product of that idea.

If out of that you feel a sense of cold or dark, or of a dispassionate life, rather than the aim of the directors, it is likely a reflection of these women's feelings. This is because each and every normal, everyday moment was recreated one by one in consultation with the protagonists of this film. If the audience expects some kind of intimacy, it is likely that the impression they will get will rather be one of coldness. At the same time, movies are seen from various points of view, and so it is not the place of the director to dictate such things.

Following *Me and the Owl*, Park Kyoung-tae became focused on the relationship between the director and his or her subject through *There Is*. At the same time, through *American Alley* Kim Dong-ryung endeavoured to use the process of forming close ties with the women, those of the kind invisible to the eye, to poetically portray the fragments of their lives. Through these two works these two directors were able to become aware of the filmic possibility in the "space" of the base town. Through forming deep ties with people over time, they began to be able to see more broadly that space which is the base town.

Our lives, the homes and alleys we inhabit, in addition to the villages and cities, as well as our fellow human beings who live with us in the same space: although they are all connected, they are arranged by our inherently unequal capitalist society. The women, biracials, and other peoples of the base town live in relation to the space of "the base town," and in the process of living there fit together their various feelings and memories like the teeth of gears. Rather than examining these women fully within the context of their relationship to the space they inhabit, outsiders view them

only as the victims of prostitution and racial discrimination. In short, there is a fear of objectification. In response to this these two directors attempted to represent the relationship the women and biracials of the base town have with that space where they lived for many long years.

Leaving aside Park Myo-yeon, who did not leave the restaurant she ran because of trouble with her legs, Park In-sun and Ahn Sung-ja often walked the alleys of the base town. They walked around with determination until both themselves and the director were satisfied. In truth, Park In-sun walks the alleys of the base town from early morning to late night to collect trash. In the past she prowled those alleys in order to find American soldier customers. Ahn Sung-ja, a biracial who is half-black, continues to walk those base town alleys that had vanished back into the memories of her past self. Park Myo-yeon is still walking her own space in the restaurant. In this way, rather than interviews filled with these women's feelings and testimonies, we aimed to show how each of them use their bodies to move through their respective spaces. Ahn Sung-ja's part in particular uses a number of dramatic elements. This is because in the numerous stories this always talkative woman told us, which were based on both actual experiences and rumors, there were many elements of fantasy. And because her fantasies emerged in an attempt to heal a deep trauma, they strike a deep chord in the hearts of the listeners. Together with us Ahn Sung-ja wrote the dialogue and worked directing scenes. She speaks in a fascinated manner of past, as if there is no boundary between the worlds of reality and fantasy, and we hoped for the movie itself to be able to be seen that way. We felt uncertain because of all the chaos when we first started, but at some point we realized that a world like that was possible, and to our amazement we realized that it was possible to achieve it together. Although it took a lot of time to edit.

There was no script prepared for the on location shots. The protagonists' feelings and movements at that moment at that place were important. Be it how they would walk, how they would gaze up at the sky, if they would peer in once into a window as they walked, if they would walk quickly or slowly...we consulted about every single small movement. As Ahn Sung-ja walked the alleys of the base town, she endeavoured to express with her body the content mixed with fantasy that she recalled, but in actuality it at times looked no different from how a normal woman would walk. The thing that was special about how she walked was that she was walking once again the alleys of the town she and other sex

workers and biracials had walked in the past.

Park In-sun is the same. She also walks before the camera once again those alleys she had walked tens of thousands of times over the forty years when she spent every day living at the base camp in Uijeongbu. While this is a choreographed narrative film, at the same time we should view it as statements of their memories as expressed through their bodies. The scene in which she is painting a picture is also the same. While we filmed that scene both us the directors and she herself were filled with anxiety over what kind of painting it would be. She brought trash, and as she was painting the picture there, she naturally began talking about such things as wanting to meet her daughter. She is hoping that her daughter, whom she parted from when she could no longer stand her

husband's harsh abuse, will one day come and look for her, even though there are still the vestiges of her past as a sex worker. In the movie we reproduced this via having her act of painting a picture be as her writing a letter to her daughter.

Park Myo-yeon as well continues to walk the space of that restaurant's kitchen where she must have opened and closed the refrigerator tens of thousands of times over the past nearly forty years. Thereby this film, though it was made through on-the-spot improvisation, was also made through repetition, and, though it filmed reality, also filmed unrealistic scenes.

Interview conducted by Han Tong-hyon (Sociology)
via e-mail on September 20, 2013

(Translated by Mia Lewis)

■ Screenings

Tour of Duty [IC] 10/12 16:00– [CL] | 10/14 15:30– [A6]