

# WAR AND CINEMA IN THE 20TH CENTURY

North and South Korean imagery in the Post-War  
filmography

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**Abstract:** This written work attempts to analyse the importance of cinematography in the shaping of ideological ideas in North and South Korea. In order to do that, two movies with similar plots about the Korean War were examined, one for each country, and afterwards, the imagery of those is delved into. This paper will contrast the image North Korean soldiers have in both movies as well as the representation of women. This work also considers the moral values thrown in North Korean's movie society in addition to the influence of cinema in the creation of the idea of anti-communism in South Korea.

## 1. PRESENTATION

The original title of this end of degree project was *War and Cinema in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, but due to the length of the time-period and all the different conflicts that occurred during that century, it was necessary to focus interest in only one war. During World War II, the use of cinema and propaganda was widely spread with propagandistic goals but in the course of the Cold War this practise became far more common. Because the topic would still be too wide if we chose to talk about the entire Cold War, it was necessary to narrow it down more. In the end, the war chosen was the Korean War. This war has been a topic that often is skipped in the classroom but its aftermath and consequences are a matter that captures nowadays our media's attention due to North Korea's external policy.

In order to write this paper, two movies were used as direct sources: on the one hand, *Myung ryoung-027* (Order no. 027) and, on the other, *Piagol*. My first intention was to analyse films that were produced in a similar year and, also, to try to find two movies with similar arguments. Unable to come upon two films that met those criteria, I decided that it was more important to find two motion pictures where the main topic were the ideological struggles that a group of soldiers have to face due to the war, rather than the time they were made. Also, I changed the approach of the topic and instead of talking about the use of cinematography during the actual war, I decided to focus on the use of the war imagery as a tool that helped to shape the historical memory and identity of both nations after the conflict. To write a good analysis on the importance of movies in the creation of historical memories on Korea, it would have been necessary to examine more than one film per country, but that would be a far way extended paper.

Firstly, this paper is going to aim to explain how cinema started to be accepted as a direct source in the academic research and the obstacles it went through in the process. Since both movies are historically contextualized in the Korean War, the second section of this written paper focuses on doing a historiographical research about the war. Next, both movies are going to be analysed and, finally, there will be some brief conclusions.

Ultimately, there are two main goals within this work: in the first place; to stress the importance on the use of motion pictures in the creation of national identities and

social values and, secondly, to compare how two equal themes are treated from totally different perspectives and how that may affect, or give form, to the political agenda.

## **2. HISTORY AND CINEMA: A NEW APPROACH**

The use of cinema as a primary source in academic fields is quite a recent issue. It was not until the early 70's that movies started to be recognized as a historical source and, thus, they started being used as a tool to create a contra-analysis of the society. At the university, this idea was very disconcerting and it was not, at least at first, very well accepted.

Traditional art, painting, sculpture, architecture and so on, have always been accepted as a tool in the construction of historical memory. Paintings, museums and big collections were accepted by the upper classes of society, but something as popular as cinema did not make the cut. However, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century films were widely used as a tool to reach into the common people and in some places, like the Soviet Union, cinematography was considered “the seventh art”, and the historical importance of films was recognized. It was not until later that cinema was acknowledged as an art worldwide and, in consequence, that it should also be considered when it came to the construction of the historical discourse. Moreover, for a long time - especially in Europe -, the press was a mean of opinion that shaped the evolution of official politics. In present day, this has changed. Nowadays television, radio and press, as well as the internet, all combined have become “the fourth power” and are regulated by their own rules. According to the needs of its objective or time-period, the historian has relied on certain sources and adopted some methods or others in their studies, however, it is clear that the inclusion of cinema as one of those sources was very problematic. Even nowadays cinema is still despised by some scholars and is not always considered a valid source of information due to its interpretation being imprecise <sup>1</sup>.

Despite this, thanks to the analysis of films we are able to take a deeper look in the society that produce them; we are not only talking about the ideas that shape the society, but also their costumes and principles or values. Because of this, movies have been considered earlier as a primary source in other disciplines such as anthropology.

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<sup>1</sup> Ferro, Marc. *Cinema and History*. Detroit: MI: Wayne State University Press, (1977): p. 15.

Also, some countries were more premature in the inclusion of cinema in the academic research, for example; France, Germany and United Kingdom <sup>2</sup>. There is also another phenomenon tied to the cinematography and that is the utilization of the video as a tool to preserve historical memory through oral testimonies that are edited and then spread as documentaries. However, even though audio-visuals offer another vision of the subject of study, because of its technical mechanism, like for example removing a part of an interview so the documentary will only contain the director's view of the matter, it can create many mistrust and, therefore, it may lessen the value of the source.

However, cinema is a tool that helps to create a non-official contra-history, this is, it does not rely on the written documents that often only cover the memory of institutions and not so much the memory of common people. Thanks to this, cinema becomes an active agent of history and it can motivate awareness among society. Nevertheless, it also must be kept in mind that there is also an "official" history in cinema and we consume it in the form of blockbusters or movies financed by governments. The interrelations between history and cinema are multiple, ranging from the simple representation of historical facts to the explanation of our time and our society, or mainly, as agent of history <sup>3</sup>.

Images are creators and reflect models (real or imagined) that shape a way of thinking the present, the past and the future. Thus, films, TV series, etc. can serve as both as document of what has been filmed as well as contra-analysis of enormous significance of the societies that have created them, and may be the result of specific contemporary interests or strongly rooted practices of cultural traditions. As a first-rate transmission vehicle, cinema has become an important agent of history, due to its intentionality (sometimes critical, some other times accommodative, propagandistic, etc.), and not only in order to influence the collective imagination, but to generate historical events such as social phenomena, controversies and censorship. It would be also interesting to keep in mind that most people gain knowledge in history through film and television and not so much through historiography. This means that historical

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 17.

discourse can be moulded through films and series where certain moments or characters are promoted, to while others are forgotten or blurred <sup>4</sup>.

When cinema becomes an art, its pioneers take part in the history with its works, documentary or fiction, to which from the first moment they confer them a doctrinal meaning or a mechanism to exalt the masses. For example, on the one hand, in Britain, they used it to glorify monarchy and to emphasize its work for the society and, on the other hand, it was also used as a bourgeois propaganda. As time passed, nations' leaders realized about the role that cinema would play in the shaping of societies and politics and prepared to appropriate it and to put it at the service of their interests. According to Ferro, it is evident that filmmakers, consciously or unconsciously, are at the service of a cause, a predetermined ideology <sup>5</sup>.

A film is a testimony, in spite of being a documentary or fiction, and correctly researched, reveals motivations and ideas that otherwise there is no other procedure to study. Cinema has elements that can reveal ideological and social aspects of which the filmmaker was not aware or even consciously rejected. Thus, the use and practise of specific scripture modes become an instrument to shape the main ideas of the film. In addition to that, filmmakers could also self-censorship themselves. Finally, censorships imposed by governments are also worth to mention <sup>6</sup>.

In this way, any film has, like any cultural product, political action or any industry, its history. At the same time, this industry also has its network of personal relationships, its power structure of people and a system where hierarchies and honours are graded, as well as privileges and efforts <sup>7</sup>.

There are two main steps that have to be followed when it comes to scrutinize a movie; first of all, a historical context of the film has to be made and, secondly, a lecture of the historic content of the motion picture must be done. A cultural phenomenon such as cinema must be analysed in its civilization, its diachrony and

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<sup>4</sup> Barrenetxea, Igor and Andoni Elezcano. "La imagen cinematográfica como fuente y agente de la Historia." *FILMHISTORIA Online* Vol. 26, nº 1 (2016): p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> Ferro, Marc, *op. cit.*: p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 25.

within the same culture. These are the definitive guidelines to follow for anyone who questions about the relationship between cinema and history <sup>8</sup>.

The cinematic reading of history raises the historian's problem of his own reading of the past but this is a problem that is present whenever a historian analyses a primary source and interprets it. The sources used by traditional history are a structure as carefully hierarchical as the society to which the work is directed to. Within that structure cinema has occupied one of the lowest position <sup>9</sup>.

To summarize, it is well known that no one writes history innocently, but this criterion had never been more evident than at the birth of the 20th century, precisely when the cinematographer appears. Despite this, the historic and social reading of the cinema allows access to areas not visible from the past of different societies.

### 3. THE FIRST HOT WAR OF THE COLD WAR

The Korean War was an armed struggle between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK) that took place between 1950 and 1953 <sup>10</sup>. The Korean peninsula is located in the far east of Asia and its surrounded by the Sea of Japan to the east and the Yellow Sea to the west. These two nations are nowadays divided by the Korean Demilitarized zone and while the northern part is richer in minerals, the southern part has better lands for agricultural proposes due to its orography, various rivers and clime <sup>11</sup>. Both the DPRK and the ROK could be considered "new nations" that had been built after 40 years of Japanese colonialism, multiple wars that followed, such as the war against Japan (1937-1945), and the political and social crisis that came after the separation of the peninsula <sup>12</sup>.

This peninsular war, the Korean War, had been ignored by the American historiography specially if we compare it with all the academic works done about the Vietnam War. This was mostly due to a historiographical phenomenon, which insisted on only giving importance to those battles that had a lasting impact upon national

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid* : p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Millet, Alan R. "Introduction to the Korean War." *The Journal of Military History* 65 (2001): p. 923.

<sup>11</sup> Maglio, Federico Martin. "La Guerra de Corea." 2006. *FMM Educacion*.

<http://www.fmmeducacion.com.ar/>: p. 2. Consulted on the 2nd of February, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Millet, Alan R, *op. cit.*: p. 924.



domestic development. Also, this war was caught between World War II and the Vietnam War (which produced a generational political trauma in the United States) and it did not have a lasting impact in the American consciousness. In the history of international conflict, the Korean War is just another war caught in the decolonization and postcolonial political succession. During this period, the client states located in the Middle East and the colonies of Asia and Africa faced an unexampled opportunity to declare their independence <sup>13</sup>.

There is a clear pattern in those national liberation wars. Firstly, they confront the occupying power with terrorism and guerrilla warfare but they also deft negotiation and promises of future profitable relationships. Those guerrilla groups, in the Korean case, based their appeal and political organization on their resistance to the Japanese occupation. The main goal after the war against Japan was to transform the communal and agrarian culture that characterized all of Asia (except Japan) into a modern socio-economic system that would transform the village. Once the war of national liberation was over, the leaders of the revolutions proved they were better at taking power than governing <sup>14</sup>.

Two predominant political movements arose in twentieth century Korea and both of them were dedicated to the idea of the creation of a strong and modern Korea, sufficiently transformed to use military to preserve its independence from China and Japan. Both movements were revolutionary, not just in their dedication to driving away the imperialists, but in their vision of a new Korea <sup>15</sup>.

According to Millet, the rivalry between “Christian-capitalism and Marxism-Leninism in Korea dates from 1920 but they had one common ground: both movements were targets of all forms of individual and collective repression by the Japanese”. Nevertheless, there were some elements that set them apart; for example, the Christian-capitalist modernizers had the advantage of pride of historical place in Korea reformism, opposition to Japanese colonialism and political activism <sup>16</sup>.

When on August of 1945 the Liberation Day arrived, the two Korean revolutionary movements transferred their parallel struggle against Japan to a direct

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: pp. 923-924.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 925.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 927.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 927.

confrontation with each other, a conflict that Millet says would have occurred even without the division that United States and Soviet Union created <sup>17</sup>.

In 1919, a coalition of fifty nationalist leaders signed and published a Declaration of Independence near Independence Gate, *Tongnium*, a monument to antiforeign resistance. All but one of the signatories was a practising Christian or member of *chondogyo* a Korean religious movement that mixed Christianity with traditional Asian spiritual values. The protest marches chanted “Long Live Korean Independence” and waved the Korean national flag. However, the Japanese colonial army crushed the movement, killing in the process 1000 Koreans at cost of nine security forced lives. They also arrested 19500 Koreans, executed or jailed 3000 and burned thousands of homes, schools, churches, and temples. The Samil Independence movement was considered a failure <sup>18</sup>.

As a direct consequence, the collapse of the Samil Independence encouraged the leftist revolutionary option of Marxist-Communists. In 1918 there was a Bolshevik effort to enlist the Korean expatriates in the war against the Russian “whites”. These Koreans provided the initial leadership of the Korean Communist Party and the Korean Communist Youth Association, which set up organizing committees within Korea in 1925. For twenty years, the Korean Communists surged and decreased its influence in a period of successful repression. When the Asia-Pacific War of 1941-1945 began the Communists had no decisive advantage over the other expatriate Korean nationalists <sup>19</sup>.

The Asia-Pacific War deepened and accelerated the pre-revolutionary socio-economic upheave of the Korean people and heartened the leaders of the two Korean revolutionary movements. The Japanese war effort drained Korea. Even though Korea escaped direct physical destruction, civic despair deepened and the public social and economic infrastructure deteriorated. Wartime mobilization forced Koreans into an ever more difficult position in their relations with the Japanese. The police power ruthlessly applied, made survival and collaborationism virtually synonymous. “Pure” patriots existed only in hiding or exile. The Communists disappeared underground and became inactive or joined part of the anti-fascist war effort in China or Russia <sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 925.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 928.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 928.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 928.

The Korean War began in August 1945 in the classical pattern of what Mao Zedong called “a People’s war of national liberation”. The conflict in Korea, was a People’s war with a clear difference: two revolutionary liberation movements followed parallel paths to power, but succeeded in dominating only half of the country. The division was asymmetrical in almost every way. The ROK got a population twice the size of that the DPRK and the best arable river valleys, but North Korea got all the hydro-electric power and coal and mineral resources as well as the Japanese-built industrial base sited near the energy sources. Both sides attempted to establish a single national government for Korea through all measures short of full-scale war: economic intimidation, the creating of “fronts” and coalitions, denouncing the American and Russian occupation governments, assassinations and betrayals. In 1948, the separation between both states was established. The division of the country had been action of the United States and the USSR, not of Korean themselves, who had never accepted the division as legitimate or permanent <sup>21</sup>. Communists (with soviet assistance) crushed all non-Communist opposition north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel by 1950, the nationalist-modernizers had far more difficulty eliminating the challenge of the South Korean Labour Party <sup>22</sup>.

The Korean War that everyone is familiar with (1950-1953) is the third phase of the Korean People’s war, a war that began with an invasion across an international border (as established by the United Nations) and ended with an Armistice Agreement (still in force) in July 1953. As stated in the article by Millet, the conflict had two war aims:

1. “Victory in terms of a united Korea as pursued by both the Koreans and their international allies.
2. Some sort of negotiated temporary status quo ante bellum, acceptable to all the belligerents but only to the two Koreans after their great power patrons assured them of continued military protection and economic assistance” <sup>23</sup>.

The discovery of the direct instigator of the Korean War has been a topic widely discussed and it is being used as a way to place the blame on one another. Wilbur

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<sup>21</sup> Weathersby, Kathryn. “Soviet Aims in Korea and the origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950: New evidence from Russian archives.” *The Cold War International History Project working paper series*. Washington, D.C: Florida State University, 1993: p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Millet, Alan R, *op. cit.*, p. 929.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 932.

Hitchcock, a member of the American Military Government in Korea, wrote an article published soon after that war, began examining arguments in favour of Soviet responsibility but since he found no foundation to explain a Soviet adventure in Korea he came to the conclusion that the invasion was ordered by Kim Il Sung without instructions from the Soviet Union nor their knowledge. The earliest accounts agreed with the interpretation of the United States government, to some extent due to the absence of Soviet documentaries sources <sup>24</sup>. Years later, the blame was put on North Korea without taking into account the part South Korean provocation may have played by assaulting *Haeju* (a North Korean town near the parallel) and South Korean government's declared policies towards de North, including closer relationships with the United States <sup>25</sup>. This matter still needs a deeper analysis, unfortunately, due to the sensitive nature of the topic is difficult to make a detached research of the topic.

#### 4. MOVIES

##### 4.1. *THE NORTH KOREAN VISION: MYUNG RYOUNG-027 HO* (ORDER NO. 027)

*Myung ryoung-027* is a North Korean film launched in 1986 and directed by Kim Mo Jung and Eung Suk Kim. The production of the film was subsidized by the Korea February 8 Film Studio and Korean Film <sup>26</sup>. Korean Film is the principal producer of featured film and it was founded in 1947. Since 1945, arts and mass-media have been used in order to reach the population with the government's messages <sup>27</sup>.

Totalitarian regimes are characterized by an ideology that provides some ultimate meaning, sense of historical purpose, and interpretation of social reality based on a single mass party, and concentrated power in an individual or small group. To gain and maintain power, totalitarian leaders rely heavily on propaganda that espouses their ideology and aims to render its content. The North Korean state has gone through tremendous lengths to implant ideology in daily life and to block alternative influences. As a result, the DPRK is a system of thought, which prefers self-reliance, sacrifice, and

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<sup>24</sup> Weathersby, Kathryn, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Gupta, K. "How Did the Korean War Begin?" *The China Quarterly* (52) (1972): pp. 713-714.

<sup>26</sup> IMDB. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0254594/>. Consulted on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February of 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Dukalskis, Alexander and Zachary Hooker. "Legitimizing totalitarianism: Melodrama and mass politics in North Korean film." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 44 (2011): p. 53.

fierce nationalism while demanding intensive and extensive participation by the population <sup>28</sup>. Those themes are heavily featured in the movie that is analysed in this paper.

The preceding analysis of regimes suggests that in totalitarian systems, legitimacy rests on guiding ideology that is actively constructed and propagated by the government. In North Korea, films have played an important role in spreading ideology since the very early days of the state. Because of the self-conscious use of film as a tool of ideological diffusion, it is an excellent lens through which to view North Korean ideology. Movies, as Dukalskis and Hooker state, reveal how the leadership wants its citizens to think, act and be <sup>29</sup>. Furthermore, former leader Kim Jong Il had been heavily involved in cinematic efforts to construct the government's legitimacy. He has been credited with numerous films and stage plays and has elaborated his own theories of art and cinema <sup>30</sup>.

*Order no. 027* chronicles the tragic, and nearly suicide mission, that a North Korean troop has to carry on with; they have to blow up a South Korean base near the frontier. The main element featured in North Korean films is melodrama; the use of dramatic and violent experiences with the aim of exalting the feelings of the public, and this film is no exception.

Even though the film does not give an exact date of the action, it is clearly stated that the historical background is the Korean War. Once they are entrusted with the mission they have to make contact with a North Korean spy, a woman whose name is Un Ha, that is infiltrated in the South Korean army. After they fail to contact each other several times, a South Korean captain starts to suspect Un Ha and eventually they find proves of her true political alliance. She manages to escape and gets where the North Korean troop is. Once there, she gives them valuable information about the base they must attack. The North Korean captain realizes that his entire troop will die in the mission so he chooses to sacrifice himself so the rest of the soldier can escape. The movie ends with the rest of the group returning safely to the central base while the final shot is Kim Il- sung in his military clothing with a text that reads "*Immortal is the life*

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: pp. 54-55.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 56.

<sup>30</sup> Clear indicator of the interest of Kim Jong Il in cinema can be found in the kidnapping of two South Korean directors, Shin Sang-okk and Ch'oe Eun-hui, who were taken to Pyongyang where they directed several movies for the regime.

*dedicated to the great leader and the party*". The ultimate goal of any propagandistic film is to portray how an ideal citizen should behave by emphasizing not only self-reliance, but also sacrifice and communal dedication to building a prosperous and morally pure nation <sup>31</sup>.

Most of the length of the plot is built around that last sentence and how each soldier is willing to sacrifice his and her life in the name of the *Fatherland*. According to Dukalskis and Hooker, it is likely that the cultivation of the ideology of the Worker's Party in North Korea, both during the interwar years and after the Korean War, had to accommodate the traumatic reality many people would no longer be with their families. In the face of this reality, the Party, primarily through the iconography and hagiography of the Great Leader Kim Il Sung, would forge itself as both mother and father. These qualities include, but are not limited to, the pervasive use of the Korean non-gender specific word for parent in reference to the Leader and the use of the word "motherland" in all internal propaganda while simultaneously using the word "fatherland" in all English language the Korean Central News Agency releases, which is the official news agency of the country <sup>32 33</sup>.

However, there are some other ideas where the argument is built upon, for example, the fraternal relationship every soldier has with their superior, the importance of the North Korean cause and the use of music as a valuable tool in the creation of a national collective sentiment. These ideas are embodied in the different personalities that the characters have and every one of them is the personification of all the traits that a good citizen should have.

Rather than featuring an individual person as the main character, the film narrates two different stories that have two protagonists, which eventually bump into each other. On the one hand, we have the story of the North Korean battalion led by captain Chang Gyon and, on the other hand, there is the narrative of the infiltrate female, Un Ha.

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<sup>31</sup> Dukalskis, Alexander and Zachary Hooker, *op. cit.*: p. 57.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 58.

<sup>33</sup> Something similar happened in the Soviet Union where the traditional father figure, the tsar, had been overthrown and a father-like figure had to be re-established to prevent chaos. Therefore, both Lenin and Stalin were represented as the fathers of the nation while the country itself was the mother. Pisch, Anita. *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters, 1929-1953: Archetypes, Inventions and Fabrications*. The Australian National University, (2014): pp. 225-227.

Chang Gyon and his troop are meant to represent the brotherly union of the inhabitants of the country and the equality between them; even if the captain has a higher rank because of his military merits, he does not look down on the rest. What is more, a soldier takes the freedom to write the captain's mother telling her son is all right because "*you [Chang Gyon] are too busy to do it yourself*" and the captain thanks him his gesture.

One meaningful moment where the equality between the soldiers is captured is when they patiently wait for two soldiers to return to the group in order to have lunch (one ball of rice with some seaweed for each). He acknowledges every one of them and treats them as sons. This is not a trait only given to the captain, but the same scene is shown at the end of the movie but with a colonel hugging and thanking individually each soldier for their work. In the end the military organization is a reminiscence of a traditional family structure: the older and wiser people are the ones who have to take care of the youngsters. In this case, the captain has the moral obligation to bring all the soldiers safely and is repeated twice the idea that the captain cares about them. Also, it is clearly stated that under no circumstance is anybody going to be left behind. Two representative moments of this idea are, firstly, when a soldier goes to explore the territory and does not come back so the whole squad goes to him; and, secondly, when one of the soldiers is injured and says he is a burden for the team but the rest refuse to leave him alone. The idea of the importance of every soldier is established when Chan Gyon says that he does not fear anything as long as he is with his unit.

Another main theme that appears during the movie is sacrifice in the name of the greater good and the country or the non-importance of the individual suffering, mostly physical, comparing to the big picture. A common trope is that when there is an injured soldier they will continue to walk until they complete their mission. They will also never get tired and faced impossible conditions like running 12 kilometres in an hour. In spite of this, the biggest sacrifice is made by the captain. In an early scene is shown how he wishes to be able to do the mission alone so nobody would get killed. Once they are attacking the base, some South Korean soldiers try to escape in a helicopter but the North Korean captain is able to cling himself to the helicopter and he blows a bomb that takes him and the rest of the passengers. Before he explodes the bomb, he throws a letter to his soldiers where he wrote that he is proud of them and that he is happy he is able to finish his duty.

This theme is also present in the storyline about Un Ha in a dialogue where she reveals that she had to leave her hometown and family to serve in the army and she adds that she has no regrets because she is helping her country.

Un Ha's story helps us to understand gender roles within the North Korean society. It is worth stating that the rest of the characters in the film never refer to Un Ha sexually or that she is never looked down because of her gender. Moreover, she is able to perform all the same duties as her partners. These are some striking differences compared to the way South-Korean movie *Piagol* treats its female characters. However, there are some moments in the movie where it is suggested that gender specific roles exist within society, for example, women are the only ones working with teleoperators. Also, Un Ha says once the war is over she is going to become a teacher, which is a traditional job for women. The reason why she wants to become a teacher is to "*teach them how their happiness was made*".

Music is also used as a way to communicate some ideas. Firstly, there is a soldier who wants to be a musician as soon as the war ends; however, he is killed by a South Korean soldier in yet another melodramatic scene. During his funeral, they sing a song that appears frequently during the movie; the first time being when the troop starts marching at the beginning, another time during the soldier's funeral and, lastly, when the film ends.

Music is also a force to be reckon when writing academic research on cinema. It is recognized for its strength as an interpellator of social identities and collective memory. It carries in its harmony, metrics and melody, memories that evoke political situations as moments of national joy, times of repression and social loss. Music can be a tool for the reconstruction of data and collective facts; an issue that is being made in the focus group model and that could be facilitated by resorting to it. Music becomes a vehicle for expression, it not only facilitates the reconstruction of valuable information for those who draw up and execute such programs and policies, but is also useful as a mechanism for the development of group life histories, therefore it is useful for the management of social grief<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Frith, Simon. "Hacia una estética de la música popular.", F. Cruces and al., *Las culturas musicales. Lecturas de etnomusicología*. Madrid: Trotta, 2001: pp 413-436.



Finally, it would be interesting to talk about the way South Koreans are portrayed throughout the movie. When a North Korean troop is passing the frontier by train they come across some South Korean citizens. These people are represented as gamblers and with no remorse when they hit young children. One of the North Korean soldier steps up in the defence of the children in a clear symbolism. Another thing that is used to distinguish northerners from southerners is religion. At the time of Japanese invasion in 1920, this separation was already made between Korean citizens and is something that this film still reflects. South Koreans wear big crosses in their necks and they are even seen collectively praying seconds before North Koreans invade their base<sup>35</sup>. Last but not least, many of the South Korean military equipment has “US army” clearly written on them.

#### 4.2.AND THE ANTICOMMUNIST PERCEPTION: *PIAGOL*

*Piagol* is a South Korean film launched in 1955 and it was directed by Kang-cheon Lee. It is a dramatic movie and its historical period is the third phase of the Korean War. The production of the film was subsidized by Baekho Films and had backing and support both from the military and police during production<sup>36</sup>. This movie tells us about the internal conflict that a North Korean troop face due to their communist ideology and behaviours. It is said that it based its scenario on a press release from the North Chölla Province Police Department in the capture of the Ppalch’isan communist guerrillas<sup>37</sup>. Piagol Valley is located between Banya peak and Nogodan, on Jirisan Mountain, and it is named like that because the way leaves fall in the valley turning it crimson red. At the entrance to Piagol Valley, there is the largest temple in Jirisan Mountain, Yeongoksa temple<sup>38</sup>, which is featured in this movie.

A big debate surrounded *Piagol* when it was premiere due to its “anticommunism” nature, which will be a matter explained deeper later on this paper. The screening of the movie was prohibited for violating the National Security Act and

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<sup>35</sup> It is interesting to observe that in 1900, only 1 per cent of Korean population was Christian; in 1950, only 8 per cent; now, 29 per cent. Source: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/08/12/6-facts-about-christianity-in-south-korea/>. Consulted on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May of 2017.

<sup>36</sup> *IMDB*. n.d. [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0371877/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0371877/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1). Consulted on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February of 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Lee, Hana. “Anticommunism in popular culture: the evolution and contestation of “anticommunist films” in South Korea.” *Asian Journal of German and European Studies* (2016): p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> *VisitKorea*, [http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/ATR/SI\\_EN\\_3\\_1\\_1\\_1.jsp?cid=264280](http://english.visitkorea.or.kr/enu/ATR/SI_EN_3_1_1_1.jsp?cid=264280). Consulted on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March of 2017.

experienced difficulties over growing differences in opinion within the government upon completion over its censorship. The Ministry of Education approved its screening under the condition of editing or deleting several scenes, but the Armed Forces Information and Education division in the Ministry of National Defence opposed the motion. In addition, although the Department of the Army's Office of Information and Education Division approved of the film, the Ministry of Home Affairs commented that it was difficult to see *Piagol* as an anti-communist film. Meanwhile, critics spoke out in favour of *Piagol* as a great anti-communist film, but the rationales behind judging it as an anti-communist film or not as such were in fact identical as we are going to see later

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This debate was exclusively due to the theme of humanism pervading the film. There was a great divide over whether to highlight humanist themes by showing the inhumane and immoral acts of the communists in order to criticize them, or depict humanistic party members in order to juxtapose the superiority of humanism over communism. This is clearly something that we see during the film embodied by Captain Agari (a fervent communist) and secretary Ae-ran (also an eager communist but, in the end, she chooses individual liberty over the *Fatherland*) or soldier Chul-soo (who questions whether all the personal sacrifices they had made were justified).

*Piagol* should have been praised as a great anti-communist film, but if it was a case of the latter, it would be regarded as exerting a "bad influence" on society and very dangerous. This was because teaching the logic behind communism in order to criticize it had the reverse effect of possibly teaching audiences communist ideology. The fact that the protagonist, the object of the audience's empathy, was a communist violated the absolute antagonism that formed the basis of anticommunism<sup>40 41</sup>.

Other reason why *Piagol* was doubted to be an "anti-communist film" was due to the ROK army not making an appearance during the movie. However, even though the

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<sup>39</sup> Lee, Hanna, *op. cit.*: p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Tension between humanism and politics is an issue that is not sole in South Korea but something given in many other nations. A very interesting example is the Francoist film *Rojo y Negro* (about the CNT, whose flag had the same colours than the Falange's), that was banned by Francoist authorities. The film features the love story between a militant of the CNT and a Franco supporter. This motion picture was censored 3 weeks after its premier because the audience empathised with the CNT activist. Source: Elena, Alberto. "¿Quién Prohibió Rojo y Negro?". *El espíritu del caos: representación y recepción de las imágenes durante el franquismo: (Una recopilación de secuencias. Revista de Historia del Cine)*. Ocho y Medio, 2009: pp. 143-174.

film unnaturally superimposed a waving south Korean flag over the protagonist's face in order to prove that it was an "anti-communist" film, the filmmakers continued to face accusations<sup>42</sup>. There was a main reason that explain this situation: anti-communist films were not clearly defined since their inception to begin with, and, also, this was true to the whole concept of anticommunism. As a result, the many controversies over the coexistence of anticommunism and humanism in 1950-60s anti-communist films brought the ruling class to tolerate the combination of the two in the end. It also enlightened the awareness of North Korea as still part of the same people and nation<sup>43</sup>.

As it was stated before, the film has three main protagonists. Firstly, we have the captain of the troop whose name is Agari and he is the biggest representation of the North Korean regime in the film. Secondly, there is his secretary called Ae-ran who is also a fervent follower of the communist ideology but at the end of the movie she shoots the captain and flees to South Korea. Last but not least, there is a soldier called Chul-soo who is not happy with the imposition he faces due to the government.

Captain Agari is portrayed as a cold-hearted murderer. Whenever a soldier of the troop has a problem (like an injured arm or somebody falls because he cannot keep the pace) he does not hesitate to shoot or insult them. It is also said that there was once a reactionary that tried to surrender to the captain but he killed him and ate his body. Lastly, he does not show any respect for the women in his troop and he rapes one of them as well as trying to rape his secretary Ae-ran a few times. The ultimate aim of showing all of these behaviours is to dehumanise all communist, because, at the end of the day, captain Agari is a character that embodies the fanaticism that is commonly associated with communism. A meaningful moment where this is represented is when the captain has been shot by Ae-ran and the last thing he does is to take out a diploma that his superior gave him and holds it close to his heart.

Looking into the storyline of Ae-ran we see that her character development builds around on the importance of one-self beyond politics. We are firstly introduced to Ae-ran as a person who puts first her ideology rather than relationships ("*reactionaries are the enemy, does not matter if they are brothers*"). She also praises a soldier that just killed the mother of one of the soldiers in the troop and does not hesitate to shoot some reactionaries when they are attacking a village. However, it can be seen

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 14.

that she is not happy with the way the captain treats her and starts questioning if she is really free and happy serving the party. Also, when she is speaking with Chul-soo it is clear that she also questions if she could get into heaven if she is a communist.

As we have seen before, religion is a theme that appears very briefly in both movies but it is a big distinctiveness between both societies. The experience of the churches and religion on North and South Korea was decidedly different. In the northern part, Christianity was seen as a threat to the communist rule because of the considerable influence that Christian leaders had in local politics. Furthermore, the party quickly forbade the creation of Christian political parties. The first clash between the two sides occurred in March of 1946 when the government opposed the planning by local churches to hold the first commemoration of the 1919 demonstration for independence. After that, the government deliberately conducted all their important affairs on Sundays to interfere with church activities. Things went further when the government required all church leaders to be part of the Christian League of the country in 1948 and by 1950 any church worker that was not in the league was arrested. Before the start of the Korean War, many Christians would escape to the south and those who remained in the country were arrested and executed <sup>44</sup>.

On the contrary, in the southern part the situation was more amicable and the period following the war provided a unique opportunity for evangelization. Foreign aids, hundreds of million dollars annually, given to Korea from “Christian countries”, particularly the United States, fuelled Koreans’ favourable perception of Christianity. There were also distributed food and medicines to families in need and many of those who became aware of the church through its charitable work later took big interest in its doctrine and were converted <sup>45</sup>.

Ae-rans’ uneasiness about her soul is the first sign of her change in political alliance. The second sign comes when Chol-soo asks her to pass the frontier with her but she is afraid she will not be accepted in the south due to being a sinner.

In the climax of the film she is the one that kills captain Agari because he is attacking Chol-soo. Even though they both survive to the captain’s attack, Chol-soo dies when they are escaping to South Korea so, in the end, Ae-ran is the only one of the

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<sup>44</sup> Kim, Andrew E. “A History of Christianity in Korea: From Its Troubled Beginning to Its Contemporary Success.” *Korea Journal* (1995): p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*: p. 45-46.

troop that survives and is able to go to freedom; freedom being represented with the South Korean flag being super positioned with her figure.

The last main storyline is the one that follows Chol-soo. Since the beginning of the movie he questions the party and the decisions they are making, for instance, he says that they cannot trust what the officials say because they also lied about Liberation Day coming soon. Other soldiers scold them for saying things like that but it is apparent that most of them have exact same thoughts as him. It is also revealed that the only reason why he is no deserting is because she is in love with Soju, a woman that follows the troop and she is in charge of doing laundry and cleaning. This is often a reason of discussion between Ae-ran and Soju; the first one states several times that Soju has a weak communist spirit because she only does domestic chores. That being said, Chol-soo and Ae-ran run away once the death body of Soju is discovered.

The death of Soju is the event that triggers the climax of the film. After being shot off-camera, she manages to return to the base to inform that South Korean troops are taking *Piagol* and that the central base has been taken. There is only one soldier that hears this and she takes advantage of the state Soju is in to rape her and after that he hides her body using some leaves and returns to the North Korean base but he does not say anything. However, there is another North Korean soldier that witnesses the scene that just has happened. He unearths Soju's corpse and he also rapes it. This is a common trope in war movies produces in South Korea; the worst thing that could happen to a person is not death, but the humiliation of the body after death <sup>46</sup>. The film ultimately presents a critique of the North Korean army as unethical and part of a system which persecutes and abuses the weakest members <sup>47</sup>. In the end, due to the discovering of Soju's abused body, mistrust emerges in the troop and they begin to attack each other until Ae-ran is the only survivor.

Overall, nowadays could be challenging to see *Piagol* as nothing more than an anti-communist film; during most of the running time of the film North Koreans are portrayed as fanatic, unethical, violent and flat characters and the only person who is able to gain the public's sympathy is the one who desert to the south. Nevertheless,

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<sup>46</sup> Elfwing-Hwang, Joanna. "Disaster Narratives in the South Korean Cultural Imaginary." *Korea Journal*, vol. 55, no.3 (2015): p. 21

<sup>47</sup> Martin, Daniel. "South Korean Cinema's Postwar Pain: Gender and National Division in Korean War Films from the 1950s to the 2000s." *The Journal of Korean Studies* (1979-), vol. 19, no. 1, 2014: p. 98.

*Piagol*, and other war films released during the 50's, helped to shape the definition of anti-communism films and this movie, and its controversy, are a valuable source in the process of understanding what changes of mind were given in the South Korean government and society in general. Also, the analysis of several war movies during different time periods could help to understand how the perception that southern people had towards their neighbours has changed.

## **5. CONCLUSSION: ONE TOPIC, TWO VISIONS**

Thanks to the analysis of these movies we can reflect about a few topics. This paper has sought to stress the importance of cinema as a source due to its relationship with the society that produced it. It is clear that cinematography can have two purposes when it comes to the use of it as a source. Firstly, when correctly inspected, it becomes a great reference to understand the moral values and way of thinking of the society that produced the movie. Besides, it cannot be ignored the influence it has when it comes to the creation of the historical memory. A great part of the historical memory is created by movies, literature, television and videogames. These are some of the most consumed consumption goods in our society, so, without doubts, media helps shaping the conception of history in the people. However, media creators are not that much interested on being historical accurate than being profitable, thus, many times exactness is put aside in benefit of being attractive. This being said, media producers, mostly the ones writing about historical facts, should be more aware of the influence they have in shaping the perception of the past and should contrast their facts with academic researches.

Another point made in this paper that is interesting to bring in the conclusions, is the role that cinema played in the configuration of the definition of anticommunism in South Korea. In the immediate aftermaths of the war they were neither the government nor politicians the ones establishing what anticommunism was, but movies themselves were. As movies about the Korean War were released, the definition of what anticommunism was started to get clearer. This helps us to emphasise the active role that movies have in society.

Looking into the content of both films, due to the striking difference on the representation of North Korean soldiers in both movies, it is very difficult to understand

which are the main values of the northern army. Surely the truth lies in the middle of the two representation but the isolation policy of North Korea makes the matter difficult to analyse. However, it is safe to assume that the representation that both movies have about the same group of people, is the perception that is wanted to be passed on in each society. Both movies use melodrama with this aim in order to create some sort of emotional response on the audience.

Also, the way women are represented on each movie is very different. Even though South Korean soldier Ae-ran is one of the protagonist of the film, her role is largely conditioned by her gender. The fact that she is a woman is constantly brought up and she and Soju face many humiliations due to this. Their gender is something that triggers many events and the fact that the object of the audience's sympathy are mostly women is not a coincidence. In contrast, North Korea's movie also features a female protagonist but the narrative does not progress in the fact that she is a woman. Whether this is something exclusive to this movie or is a common issue in the cinematography of North Korea cannot be affirmed with only analysing one movie but it is surely something remarkable.

Finally, this paper suggests a further research. On the one hand, the analysis of multiple movies from each country with the goal of studying the evolution, or lack of any, of the themes stated in this writing. On the other hand, to try to analyse the further influence that cinema has had in the creation of historical memory.

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## 7. APENDIX

<p>Title:</p>	<p><i>Myung ryoung-027 ho</i> (Order No. 027)</p> 
<p>Year:</p>	<p>1986</p>
<p>Genre:</p>	<p>Drama, War</p>
<p>Duration:</p>	<p>1h 17 min</p>
<p>Language:</p>	<p>Korean</p>
<p>Country:</p>	<p>The Democratic People's Republic of Korea</p>
<p>Directors:</p>	<p>Ki Mo Jung and Eung Suk Kim</p>
<p>Production:</p>	<p>Korea February 8 Film Studio and Korean Film</p>
<p>Script:</p>	<p>Sang Uck Ri</p>
<p>Special effects:</p>	<p>Color, 1.85:1, 2096 m, 35 mm, Spherical</p>
<p>Cast:</p>	<p>Sung Choi Cha, Yong Chol Choe, Pong Ho Han</p>
<p>Producer:</p>	<p>Joseon Yeonghwa (theatrical) and Monkran Video (video)</p>

Title:	<p style="text-align: center;">Piagol</p> 
Year:	1955
Genre:	Drama, War
Duration:	1h 50 min
Language:	Korean
Country:	Republic of Korea
Director:	Kang-cheon Lee
Production:	Baekho Films
Script:	Kang-cheon Lee
Special effects:	Black and White
Cast:	Kyeong-hie No, Ye-chun Lee, Jin Kyu Kim, Jang-kang Heo, Wang-guk Yun
Producer:	Byeong-gi Kim