

Reading and Reflecting Upon Precarious Lives of Capitalism through Korean Drama *My Mister*

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Abstract *This paper is an attempt at highlighting and illuminating the precarity of Lee Ji-An, the protagonist in a popular Korean drama My Mister. The drama is a slice-of-life narrativization of struggles, challenges and disappointments faced by temporary workers engaged in inhumane conditions beneath what their education should be able to afford them. Through this discussion, the endeavor is to investigate how the precarised lives of selected main and supporting characters function as a screen, projected-upon and reflecting the precarity of millions of people whose everyday lives resembles that of the characters. Cinema as a medium is a potent tool that allows for the viewer to walk in the shoes of the protagonist, the longer form of dramas allow for a sustained engagement and therefore are even more poignant in their affect. Precarity essentially stands for a feeling of insecurity that can only be felt and not very well explained, dramas like My Mister also acts as a linguistic tool for putting into affect and emotion what cannot be put into words. The discussion will seek to carve out the sources and expression of four main emotional responses to precarity through the life trajectories of characters that qualify as Precariat (Guy Standing). The effect of a life of abject insecurity and uncertainty on the life, body and mind of the sufferer and their family members are highlighted to challenges popular notions and accepted definitions of the bodies that qualify as being worth attention and consideration (Judith Butler).*

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1. Introduction

A precarious life is the experience of a life lived in the absence of predictability, characterized by extreme vulnerability, and shrouded in a sense of a bone-deep insecurity that consumes the present to create a stable future. In the absence of any anchor to guide the present situation, a subject is rendered invisible in their struggle for a life that can at least be lived if not enjoyed. Precarious life according to Judith Butler characterizes “such lives who do not qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable. And in this way, precarity is rubric that brings together women, queers (sic.), transgender people, the poor, and the stateless” (“Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics”). The othering of a disadvantaged population can be for any of the reasons like sex, caste, class, economic status, gender, personal choices, and geographical location. Precarity characterises a state of living while precariousness is rather an experience personal to the subject who lives with the reality of not being recognized as a human being. This experience plays out in the day-to-day life in thoughts, feelings, and interactions one engages in. A precarised existence, while ignored by the majority as mere poverty or absence of means requires not only an extreme amount of physical and mental labour but also some degree of performativity and emotional labour, as this paper will discuss.

Guy Standing in *The Precariat* (neologism combining the terms precarious and proletariat) terms the Precariat as “a class in the making”: a group of people who have underpaid jobs and are situated in an uncomfortable situation between the shrinking core of manual employees and socially ill misfits living off the dregs of society. The Precariat is not a class of misfit-beyond-help who can easily be blamed for their condition, and neither are they able to secure daily employment that can sustain them, despite endless efforts. Thomas Zaniello further adds to this definition and claims that “The precariat ‘consists not just of everybody in insecure jobs’ . . . but it also consists of those no longer in control of their lives, economic or otherwise” (6). Precarity thus is a loss of control of one’s life due to factors external to one’s control while still being blamed for being in the driver’s seat.

But the precariat is an incredibly elastic classification that would include both Uber drivers in New York City and pedal cab drivers in Bombay, both recyclers of e-waste in China and the Dalits of India who service latrines, and both tomato pickers in Immokalee and

diamond miners in Sierra Leone, in short, any class of workers whose society has created a class of workers without recourse to job security or benefits. (Zaniello 7)

Cinema of Precarity or the cinema created to depict the precarity of lived life as its primary concern, presents visually, the insecurity and vulnerability prevalent in the world around; a condition that exists in abundance but is masked by people with good jobs and steady income, especially in urban areas (Berlant 192). Multi-story shopping malls, flashy billboards, and picture-perfect uploads on social media propagate an idea that the majority of people can afford and aspire to the lifestyle projected on these screens. This not only leads to false aspirations but also pushes a considerable chunk of the population, concerned only with being able to procure the next meal, right under the rug. When concerned only with buying the products displayed on the racks, one may quite easily look over the muted existence of the salesperson putting everything in place. A salesperson with their own life, condition, struggles, due dates, deadlines, compromises, and precarity are all rendered unworthy of attention. Christian Ferencz Flatz in "Film as Social Visibility" explains that "Films indeed resemble expressive bodily behaviours" in that they help visualise and adequately demonstrate the process of othering that renders a human being invisible and therefore precarious (156).

Films enable one to visualise the process of othering, the unsaid layers of responses and attitudes that render one invisible, an unconscious undercurrent that requires zooming into, that cinema can afford. Tracing this trajectory of othering brings the society that does the othering under analysis and this depiction "is far more telling as an index for their (precariat) struggle for social validation than any concrete particular situation of perception and interaction could be" (156). The inside life of a temporary worker can only be looked into via carefully crafted cinematic representations. Literature in that context might fall short due to literacy and attention span being of prime importance for adequate reading. Films allow for a large number of people to objectively observe the lived life precariat who had until then only existed at the margins.

The task that the selected drama *My Mister* performs, is to bring the precariat out of their invisibility through a medium that is visible to the masses. The camera in the cinema of precarity focuses on various elements and facets of a precarious life be it unemployment, zero-hour contract jobs, gig labour, part-time jobs, domestic violence, poor housing and sanitation, exploitation, lack of food and other resources, etc. Lives according to Judith Butler become precarious when they fall

under the category of lives that do not qualify as grievable in the sense that the loss of that life will not be qualified as a loss (“Precarious Life, Grievable Life” 31). Precarity in the purview of this paper refers to the experience of living an unrecognizable life, that is laced with the difficulty of one’s living conditions amidst a constant pang of fear that comes with the absence of a secure future. One where promises of a good life no longer mask the precarity of this historical present (Berlant 196). A precarious existence is “anything that can be expunged at will or by accident; and its persistence in no sense guaranteed” (Butler, *Performativity* 2). A condition of being constantly in a state of dependency: of having to ask for favours and being dependent on other people’s benevolence. This dependency might last a lifetime or for as long as the benevolence lasts.

This paper seeks to analyse the depiction of precarity in the South Korean Drama *My Mister*. The focus of the analysis will be on the depiction of various frames and dialogues that highlight the precarity of the protagonist and other characters and the role of community and society on their condition. An attempt is also made to highlight the condition of society where a misconception prevails that precarity is a result of laziness and greed; the precariat is looked down upon for not having done enough, for not having fought for themselves enough. The general masses are made to believe that everyone who is or seems to be doing well for themselves has crossed hurdles of life to make it this far by the sheer result of their unwavering persistence and determination that the precariat is “too lazy to cross”. Hard work is wrongly labelled as the determining factor that stops a precariat from creating a better future for themselves. Not only does this dump the entire burden of responsibility upon the precariat but also conveniently relieves the society, community, and the state welfare systems (responsible for enabling their citizens to be able to do enough) of their accountability.

Lauren Berlant in her seminal work *Cruel Optimism* highlights the cruelty of an optimism that is associated with hoping and fantasizing about a good life that is supposed to manifest at some point in the future. The cruelty lies in the ever-widening gap between firm attachment to one’s sweet fantasy and the absence of the required cognitive/structural frame within which that fantasised good life would be possible (Vij 18). This gap does not serve as a reality check and neither does it guarantee that the fantasy will be nipped in the bud. In the absence of the ability to visualise a better future, living today would become unbearable. On the other hand, nothing can actively be done to narrow down the gap unless their precarity is made visible. What is left behind are suspended subjects “not quite

recognizable as subjects”, and lives “that are not quite—or, indeed, are never-recognized as lives” (Butler, *Frames of War* 4). The cinema of precarity affectively depicts this optimism and the disappointment that comes with its deflation.

My Mister represents the inner worlds of a corporate employee and a temporary worker and also throws light on other aspects of their personal lives including family, personal economy, desire and hopes for the future. These depictions not only make the primary text relevant concerning capitalism but also enable for an understanding of the frustrations that arise despite one’s employment in a highly coveted and respectable office job. A precarised future, built on an uncertain present can only be felt and barely be conveyed in words. It is not enough to say “I am insecure about the future” since that is a condition felt also by the most luxuriously placed humans who endeavour to better their circumstances. As Ritu Vij remarks: “Vulnerabilities, because measured on an identical quantified register can only yield a comparative valuation: those at one end marked by wealth and security, those at the other end by deprivation and lack” (16) eliciting that quantifications can only possibly reveal uniform differences. The cinema of precarity documents this insecurity with the luxury of not being dependent on dialogue and action for its conveyance; silences, background music, cinematography and the camera angle play a rather important role in conveying what mere words cannot. As Berlant succinctly puts it: “Cinema of Precarity melds melodrama and politics into a more reticent aesthetic to track the attrition of what had been sustaining national, social, economic, and political bonds and the abandonment of a variety of populations to being cast as waste” (201).

My Mister, a South Korean drama/TV series premiered on Korean television on March 21, 2018, with a nationwide rating of 3.9 while the final episode concluded with a rating of 7.3. A rather slow narrative in the beginning not only caught pace but also the popular approval of the audience as it progressed. Portraying characters from a middle-class background that idealise a nine-to-five table job, the drama captures the dynamics of families trying to stay afloat in an unforgiving economy, employees embroiled in office politics and amidst all this, emerge two people whose lives are jolted out of their individual precarities into rather forgiving and liveable lives by the end of the drama. The series, directed by Kim Won-Seok, and written by Park Hae Young, received critical acclaim, winning Best Drama at the 55th Baeksang Arts Awards: one of the most prestigious

entertainment awards in Korea, awarded for excellence in film, television and theatre.

The drama is a slice-of-life, relatable narrative, the frames are beautifully orchestrated, the cinematography is soothing and the background tracks add a wonderful nuance to various scenes with their poignant lyrics and heart-wrenching melody. A non-glamourised portrayal of life as it is lived goes on to hit the nail on the head with its depiction of scenes of daily commutes of office workers crammed in the metro, mindless marathons to make it on time during the office hour rush, the seemingly endless struggle to create a good life for oneself and one's family pay check to pay check while also juggling loan repayments and increasing expenses. All with a backdrop of overarching insecurity about the future along with a looming fear and anxiety that all the soul-stifling efforts of today might not be enough after all.

2. A Precarious Workplace

Lee Ji An owes money to a ruthless debt collector for a debt that her mother incurred and ran away with, leaving the former to constantly face the wrath of the debt collectors. Ji An is also running behind on her bill payments to the care facility taking care of her mute grandmother who was paralysed from the waist down after being beaten by a debt collector herself. The care facility threatens to evict the grandmother onto the streets if the bills are not paid, this forces Lee Ji An to abduct her grandmother thus adding to her burden. The debt collector, Gwang-Il is the son of the man murdered by Lee Ji An and believes that torturing her is justified and that she deserves it for causing him such irreparable loss; he also believes that the law was too easy on a murderer like her. Ji An on the other hand believes that being beaten by Gwang Il is how she can repay for her sins and quietly takes the beating despite having served her term. In all of this, one has to constantly remind oneself that this is a twenty-two-year-old whose vulnerability and lack of knowledge are being used against her time and again by people who are equipped to help her, and probably would if they did not have to lose their money.

Lee Ji An is an orphan, whose parents did not leave her any assets to live by. She is seen living in an extremely unsafe and dingy part of the neighbourhood, where in the absence of CCTVs she is extremely vulnerable to physical attacks which cannot be reported due to lack of evidence, moreover, her dwelling renders her

essentially invisible in an urban setting. She has no access to quality food, reliable shelter, adequate clothing, access to medical facilities and other necessary conditions that make life liveable. Life can only be lived, in the true sense of the word, in the presence of conditions that make life liveable. A precarious life's insecurity can be alleviated only when the conditions of living are made conducive by the governing body and the society. A life in the absence of conditions that sustain it cannot be properly lived. Personal agency takes a back seat in a case where one is surrounded by unfavourable conditions. (Butler, *Precarious Life* 147).

In the absence of conditions of life, Lee Ji An constantly finds herself knocking on locked doors with no hope of ever opening until Park Dong Hoon is forced to take notice of her. Having crossed paths in a corruption scandal that could have cost Dong Hoon his job had Lee Ji An not acted the way she did, the two form a unique bond over the course of the drama that enables both of them to walk out of their suffocating lives. Out of her selfish needs (as we later realise) she steals an envelope of gift vouchers sent to Park Dong Hoon as a bribe, which is essentially a trap laid out to have him fired. While Park Dong Hoon is tempted to keep the money, Lee Ji An's actions not only help him keep his job but also make him a respectable figure in his workplace. The anxiety of having received a bribe, coupled with the shock of having been framed without having offended anyone and the sheer relief of escaping the situation unscathed forces Park Dong Hoon to take notice of an employee who until now had been as invisible as the air. The desire to get to know her propels a series of actions that make him feel more and more responsible towards a young adult bearing the burden of life at a point when most people her age would only be struggling to make it to the end of the semester. In light of facts that are eventually revealed about Lee Ji An's precarious situation, the act of stealing ceases to matter and is seen more as an attempt at survival than an attempt at harming Park Dong Hoon.

Moved despite himself, Park Dong Hoon is solicited by images of distant suffering that compel him to act (Butler, *Precarious Life* 135). Lee Ji An's precarity forces Park Dong Hoon to respond, burdened by an ethical obligation that forces him to take notice of the face of the other that impinges upon him (Levinas). Dong Hoon provides her a sense of safety, security and inclusivity. He treats her to dinner for having helped him earlier, a treat that later turns into a norm where he also sends food for her grandmother at times. He makes her dwelling comfortable by alerting his friends in the neighbourhood to keep a check

on her and also helps carry her grandmother on his back whenever the need arises. He educates her about government welfare schemes that could allow for her grandmother to receive treatment free of cost and also the fact that she is not responsible for taking over her mother's debts if she does not want to. She eventually pays off the debt in full after the debt collector engages in a physical altercation with Dong Hoon. He additionally forgives her over and over for behaving the way she does, he does not chastise her for being different and makes it a point to appreciate whenever she does something noteworthy—even her smallest feats are met with gratitude from him.

His forgiveness becomes the first of many conditions of life that make the fantasy of a good life possible for Ji An and successively helps her make better choices. Butler in her discussion of Levinas' Ethical Philosophy points out that "those who act upon us are clearly other to us; it is precisely *not* by virtue of their sameness that we are bound to them" (Butler "Precarious Life, Vulnerability and Ethics of Cohabitation", 139) To be affected by the face of the other requires my response-ability, the ability to not be threatened by the other's otherness but rather celebrate it in all its variety. Dong Hoon's incessant attempts to ensure Lee Ji An's safety without expecting anything in return (although it is later revealed that Lee Ji An had been incessantly working to make his life better as well) essentially exemplifies the idea that "the life that is *not* our own is also our life" (Butler "Precarious Life, Vulnerability and Ethics of Cohabitation", 140). Despite being in a higher position of power, Dong Hoon's actions are never observed to come from a place of mockery and rather are always honest attempts at alleviation of her misery.

3. Making Visible

Lee Ji An's life is made visible when Park Dong Hoon fights for it. Engagement in a labour that entails not only physical exhaustion but also psychological and affective exertion renders Lee Ji An completely dependent upon the goodwill of people around her. In a conversation with Park Dong Hoon she laments that no one has ever shown kindness to her more than three times and is surprised that Dong Hoon did not back off after the three gesture mark; to this Dong Hoon reassuringly replies that three is a lot in a world like ours. There are snippets of Lee Ji An in school and a uniform but the current scenario reflects that she is not educated enough for her times. The suggestion is that she probably was unable to complete her education due to her trial for murder and the subsequent desperation

to meet due dates. In the absence of a provider, the state did not take responsibility to enhance the workability of its citizens. The employment schemes, if there were any, did not trickle down to people who needed them the most. It is later revealed that she could have legally refused to take on the debt and could have saved herself years of physical abuse had someone educated her about it. The Precariat cannot solely be blamed for the lack of awareness in a Capitalist state.

The "Hobbies and Interests" section on her resumé mentions one hanging word: "달리기" which is Hangeul for "Running". Dong Hoon while selecting her resume comments that this "simple" description is perfect for a job that does not require much else. The drama highlights that her job, which does not pay enough, requires her not only to be quick on her feet, which essentially means to be engaged in physical labour throughout her day. Her work environment additionally implicitly expects an affective labour from her which is an unsaid requirement that humans of capitalism seem to have internalized. Since her time spent in the office is not producing any material commodity, her work can essentially be categorized as immaterial labour, that is labour that yields service, knowledge, communication, or such. Michael Hardt explains Affective Labour as labour in the bodily mode that produces social networks and forms of community (Hardt). It does not suffice to be good at one's job or in this case, to be good at running. One also, in a capitalist setting, is expected to bring forth an amicable personality that helps create a warm environment to work in. This labour is highly gendered and related to power, class, and one's footing in society as Hochschild explains:

It seems, then, that middle-class children are more likely to be asked to shape their feelings according to the rules they are made aware of... More precisely, the class messages that parents pass on to their children may be roughly as follows. Middle class: "Your feelings count because you are (or will be) considered important by others." Lower class: "Your feelings don't count because you aren't (or won't be) considered important by others. (Hochschild 159)

4. Affective Subject of Precarity

Affective Labour can then be described as a labour where one is expected to curve all their feelings into a profitable smile, especially the negative ones. This expectation is inversely proportional to one's place on the social ladder and women still are expected to smile a lot more than men are for the same work as

they are expected to be better able to manage their heart due to conditioning from birth. Moreover, men's emotions are generally considered more valid and relevant compared to woman's so when "a man expresses anger, it is deemed 'rational' or understandable anger, anger that indicates not weakness of character but deeply held conviction. When women express an equivalent degree of anger, it is more likely to be interpreted as a sign of personal instability" (Hochschild 173) In this distinction, the anger of a manager is questionable while that of a CEO, for the same situation, is not. When emotions become commodifiable, it does not matter if they are real or a product of mere pretension. Instead of being an expression of one's state, they become a forced action, a product of labour that one engages in for the sake of others' ease. This emotional expectation makes people like Ji An a subject of ridicule while further pushing them to the peripheries of the social circle. "In fact, any woman who is not willing to do affective labour on call—smile appropriately, tend to hurt feelings, knit social relationships, and generally perform care and nurturing—is viewed as a kind of monster" (Hardt and Negri 134).

On various occasions, Lee Ji An is condemned by her colleagues for not behaving properly, for being too rude, too brash, or too uncouth. Her behaviour, while by no means out of the ordinary, is peculiar for others as she does not try to make them comfortable through a smile or small talk. She barely speaks to anyone in the office, does her job as she is told to, hardly ever smiles and is a little less than gentle in her dealings. The colleagues feel irked by this unbothered attitude of hers to the point that they consider her less of a human for being a non-permanent worker and yet not putting the effort to be nice to people who work with her. Sara Ahmed points out that "Affect Aliens are those who experience alien affects" for it is only a happy smiling face that would ever convey the "signs of being or having been adjusted" (Ahmed 2). Not only is the smile important to make people around to feel less threatened but also does the job of keeping collective disappointment from the exploitative capitalist system in check.

Affective engagement plays a greater role than one would expect in the daily life of a precariat; it includes the task of obscuring the contradictions of the double reality of precarity and capital, as they are experienced at an individual level, thereby reducing precarity to a problem of bad attitude, something that can be cured with a shift in attitude or perspective/emotional tailoring (Veldstra 3). Therefore, Lee Ji An, is not offered help after she collapses but is advised to behave properly in the office. The idea remains that, for someone like her, having

a job should be more than enough. This added expectation leads to a double negation of precarity, not only is a precariat expected to be invisible and quietly do the jobs that do not cover sustenance let alone existence, but they are also not-so-implicitly expected to do it with a smile for the sake of others whose sense of responsibility will trigger a guilt if faced with the suffering of the other. A worker alienated due to precarity is alienated from their own emotional self while being expected to bear the burden of that alienation all by themselves. Unable to figure out what to feel, how to feel, when to feel or which of their emotions are real and which ones are being faked for the sake of others, leaves them utterly confused and evokes contrary responses to what one would expect. Ultimately, employability and sociability are not achieved by mere existence of a jovial personality but require the emotional labour of an amusement park (Veldstra 7).

5. Affective Labourers of Precarity

Along with an Affective obligation, there are various affects that a precarious worker undergoes by virtue of being in an insecure environment. Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos mention a list of affective states that a precarious labourer is impinged upon by, which include but are not limited to: Vulnerability, Hyperactivity, Simultaneity, Unsettledness, Affective Exhaustion, Cunning. While there are ample instances of these throughout the drama, this paper will focus on the last aspect, that is, cunning. Lee Ji An offers herself as a weapon to the CEO. She promises to create situations where two of the CEO's adversaries would be caught indulging in acts that would ultimately lead to the termination of their tenure, in exchange for a large amount of money. Her precarious being renders her controllable, easily manipulable, essentially a weapon that can easily be discarded. She understands her invisibility and is not ashamed of using it to her advantage. She is seen (with the help of a friend) recording personal conversations, organising the abduction of a senior employee, spiking liquor, stealing, and performing various tasks—which she might not agree with personally and ethically—in exchange for money. The narrative focuses heavily on money, often engaging with questions like who has it, who wants it, how they get it, who is going to take it from them, how to save it, how to invest it etc., as it is in one's day to day lived reality which highlights the precarity in the Anthropocene. It is money that forces Park Dong Hoon to show up to work with a smile, money is the main motivation for Sang Hoon and Gi Hoon to work as cleaners and it is money that can afford them any respect and social standing in society.

Sang Hoon and Gi Hoon are Park Dong Hoon's brothers who are unemployed, precarious in a more intellectual than material sense as their everyday needs are being met but it is their intellect that is not engaged enough. Their existence is not as bleak as Lee Ji An's due to the presence of a support system that cares about them and enables them in every aspect of their life. The cleaning business is owned by their friend before they take it over, their cleaning is done as a part of a business, the profits of which are earned by them personally; unlike Lee Ji An who breaks her back for the service of others. They are not forced to steal food, have heating systems installed in their home, can afford to eat out with their friends every day and feel embarrassed at the idea of working as cleaners even though one's own business essentially signifies privilege. The debt collectors who visit them to collect their dues are not as vicious as those who haunt Lee Ji An and bodily injury is not a part of their lived reality. Judith Butler claims that all of us are born precarious and that "precariousness is coextensive with birth itself (birth is, by definition, precarious), which means that it matters whether or not this infant being survives, and that its survival is dependent on what we might call a social network of hands" (Butler, *Judith Butler: Precariousness and Grievability* 14). This Social Network of Hands is what keeps the brothers afloat. It is only by extension of Park Dong Hoon that Lee Ji An gains access to this network that not only makes her feel safe and protected but also makes her feel like her life could amount to something—a sense of having a future that is not allowed to a precarious worker. Their community and their family safeguard them against all possible disappointments that a precarious existence in an unforgiving world has to offer.

6. Social Network of Hands

Park Dong Hoon extends the support of his community to Lee Ji An, an offering that helps her feel cushioned, this feeling of safety and inclusivity allows her to make difficult decisions for a better future. This future oriented outlook was absent in her previously where all she wanted to ensure was staying alive in the present to pay the bills and take care of grandmother. From not dying to wanting to live, the drama records a shift in her priorities and highlights Park Dong Hoon's unrelenting kindness as the reason for the same. "Our precarity is to a large extent dependent upon the organization of economic and social relationships, the presence or absence of sustaining infrastructures and social and political institutions" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 148). These social and economic relationships or the social network of hands allow Lee Ji An to repay her debts,

have a respectable funeral for her grandmother, find a safe shelter that does not force her to be on the run, get punished for her misdeeds to prepare for a better future and ultimately find a job that she enjoys.

During an interview regarding Park Dong Hoon's promotion, she says that her time spent at that company was the first time in her life that she had felt like a human being thanks to Park Dong Hoon's attitude towards her. The aim of the meeting was to target Park Dong Hoon for being so close to a female employee half her age. Her gender precarises her as much as her situation by birth. She is seen as an easy element that could be framed, whose loss of job would not create such an effect in her life as much as it would create in Dong Hoon's. To be relegated to a rung below that of the human further justifies the fact that precarity is not just an economical condition but also one that requires a safe environment for the material lack to be alleviated.

Gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space; how and in what way the public and private are distinguished, and how that distinction is instrumentalized in the service of sexual politics; who will be criminalized on the basis of public appearance; who will fail to be protected by the law or, more specifically, the police, on the street, or on the job, or in the home. Who will be stigmatized; who will be the object of fascination and consumer pleasure? Who will have medical benefits before the law? Whose intimate and kinship relations will, in fact, be recognized before the law? We know these questions from transgender activism, from feminism, from queer kinship politics, and also from the gay marriage movement and the issues raised by sex workers for public safety and economic enfranchisement ("Performativity Precarity and Sexual Politics" Butler, 2)

She is tried for her crimes and receives adequate punishment with the help of Park Dong Hoon's wife who is a lawyer by profession. Park Dong Hoon after having figured out that her phone was tapped, feels a variety of emotions but primarily feels immense gratitude towards a young child who while listening to his private conversations put her entire self on the line to make his life bearable. No one had attached such value to his life and presence prior to that. He had roles to fulfil as a brother, son, father, and husband but for Lee Ji An, he was worthy of respect just for taking notice of her. The attitude of disinterested resignation that he lived his life with led to an unfulfilling experience of life not only for himself but also for those related to him. Lee Ji An's words of constant motivation not only made

the suffering of his seemingly perfect life visible but also provided for him the emotional conditions of life that had been lacking so far. In listening to the private conversations of another human being, she is, for the first time brought into contact with what it means to have a family and a community. Park Dong Hoon, in his experience of witnessing Lee Ji An's zeal is motivated to do better with his life and hence resigns from an unmotivating job to start working for himself.

In helping the other, both the protagonists found the saviour that they had secretly been hoping for, this safety net enable them to accept the lack in their life and embrace the joy that comes with being surrounded by people who care, instead of feeling burdened by it as Dong Hoon used to. Exemplifying Butler's argument that "the life of the other, the life that is not our own, is also our life" (*Precarious Life, Vulnerability and the Ethics of Cohabitation* 140) since the notion of an individual life is derived from their sociality in a world where one is constantly dependent on others for their survival. In a Levinasian sense that would essentially mean that one wears vulnerability on their sleeve for others to claim and the other claims it as their own while both are simultaneously defined by that very ethical relation (Butler *Precarious Life* 140). Park Dong Hoon's friends accept her as their own, accept her precarity with an empathy of having lived the better and worse days of life. They accept her as a human who is battered due to the lack of resources in her situation and not as an irresponsible person who couldn't do better thus guaranteeing her the right to belong to humanity without asking for a justification for it (Butler *Precarious Life* 143).

7. Conclusion

The series ends on a very hopeful note. Warm-toned scenes portray the gloomy-so-far characters laughing and giggling with their peers and seeming to be doing well for themselves. Up until the last scene the cinematography had been toned in morose shades of blue and grey and the protagonists were never once seen enjoying a moment of laughter or mental ease. Dong Hoon's previous team members at work who played a role in making work bearable for him have now all quit their jobs to work in Dong Hoon's new venture. The idea that precarity is not permanent, and neither is it only in the control of those suffering to be able to alleviate it, resounding loud and clear. Lee Ji An finds a job as a sign language trainer, a skill she always had but never had adequate impetus or knowledge to monetise it. Dong Hoon has finally been able to work on his weaknesses and take charge of his choices and responsibilities. Alienation according to Standing is the

affective consequence of precarity and these characters are no longer alienated— from themselves or their society—nor helpless characters left alone to their suffering. The characters in *My Mister* find fulfilment through their desire. Their quest was not at the expense of ethical responsibility towards the other and was towards a desire for the possibility of a future that would be better than the present moment. Meenu Gupta while discussing the need for ethics in our everyday life states that: “Happiness is not causal or effective, but a way of life” (12). Dong Hoon and Ji An are seen to have found that way of life eventually but not on their own. The crutch must come from the outside, even if it is not profitable to do so.

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