6

Demilitarizing the Urban Entertainment Zone?

Hongdae and the US Armed Forces in the Seoul Capital Area

Spoiling the Show?

> There are so many foreigners [in Hongdae]—some of them are really bad people. American soldiers, you know. They misbehave. It's not safe for women there at night. I don't like to go there … There are also decent foreigners, but the bad ones really spoil it for everyone. (Hyo-jin, 25-year-old student)

A group of ten friends and acquaintances had already assembled at Club O., a large Indie venue at the heart of Hongdae, when I realized that the evening could possibly turn into one tense occasion. Karen, an English teacher from the UK, had just sent me a text message that she was on her way and would bring a few soldiers along. I looked around, sizing up the assortment of Korean and foreign activists, leftists and punks gathered in this venue. A charity concert was just about to begin, with the goal of collecting money for overseas survivors of the "comfort women" system. My friends knew about my research and were supportive of it, but actually hanging out with GIs in their free time, and on such an occasion, would be another matter altogether for quite a few of them.

When Karen arrived at O., I was relieved to see that Karl was among the guys she had brought along—he was an Asian American soldier who was already well known among some of the people assembled, and who had, after a bit of reluctance, been welcomed into their circle. The two other guys, Tony and Steve, who were both white Americans in their mid 20s, seemed to be respectively uneasy and excited to be at Club O. "What an amazing place," exclaimed Tony, who, like Steve, was wearing a baseball

cap to hide his short cropped hair. Karl, I knew, always smirked at such attempts by soldiers to disguise themselves on their nights out in Hongdae. He himself, at any rate, was never taken to be a serviceman by Koreans who did not already know his profession. And indeed, the guys seemed to be wearing their caps to no avail tonight, either—from the corner of my eye, I saw that three of the people who had sat with us earlier decided to move away from our group now.

Tony, a big and boisterous man, immediately started a loud conversation with Karl about his tour to Iraq that Karl had finished the year before. The softer-spoken Steve, who had just attempted to explain to a Korean friend of mine that they were all English teachers, looked rather mortified when he heard their talk. Repeatedly, he shushed Tony and Karl to get them to keep their voices down, even telling Tony in the end, "Dude, you are being disrespectful here" as the official event had already begun. Practically the moment the young soldiers had sat down with us, a Korean American woman had taken the microphone and started to read out a text on the comfort women issue that ended with a thunderous "End all Wars!" Tony looked at me for a moment now and then said with a smile: "Right. Time for a beer, what do you say?"

While It'aewŏn's emergence as an entertainment district is inextricably linked with the US base it is situated next to, the history of Hongdae in central Seoul is firmly connected to a learning institution in this area that has given the district its name—Hongik University (Hongik Taehakyo, also known by its abbreviation Hongdae). Founded in 1946 and well known for its highly regarded arts departments, this university would see a significant expansion of its programs and facilities from the 1980s onward,[1] which fundamentally changed the character of the originally quiet residential area around it that is today part of Seoul's Map'o district.

Attracting several private art institutes to the neighborhood in the early 1990s, eventually shops, stores, and a handful of bars and live clubs opened as well (Cho 2007; Chun 2002; Lee M. 2004: 70). The appearance of live venues, in particular, was quite remarkable: after the heyday of live music in It'aewŏn in the 1960s and 1970s, rock bands performing in front of an audience had gone out of style by the 1980s. It was only in the 1990s, and especially in Hongdae, that this entertainment concept regained some ground in South Korea. Of crucial importance for the renewed interest in live music performances in Hongdae was the 1994 opening of Club "Drug," a punk-rock location that would be among the first of many venues to promote the homegrown music of local alternative bands in this area (Cho 2007:47).[2]

The late 1990s and early 2000s then saw the emergence and rise of yet another type of establishment in Hongdae that many of those loyal to the live music scene viewed with much contempt: one dance club after another opened, playing hip hop, techno and other forms of dance music, and attracting ever new types of people to the district. Suddenly, "there was an increased clustering of people engaged not only in fine arts and music, but also in film, publication, design, advertisement, and internet development" (Lee M. 2004: 70), a combination of actors that necessarily left its imprint on the neighborhood, too. The opening of these new clubs would make Hongdae decidedly sexier in the eyes of many. For instance, in contrast to traditional "night clubs" that could be found in other parts of Seoul—usually expensive establishments in which businessmen could enjoy the company of young women who had to be paid for their services—these new types of clubs normally had a relatively low cover charge, had no female hostesses on the payroll, and generally left it to the visitors themselves to create a steamy atmosphere. In this way, the notion that short-lived sexual adventures free of charge could easily be attained in this neighborhood was born in the clubs of Hongdae.

The speedy gentrification of the district[3] that had occurred over the previous decade or two seemed nearly complete by 2007, when I first came to Hongdae myself. At the same time, the "old Hongdae" was an image that lingered on, and talk about how the "real" Hongdae had been "ruined for good" was certainly one of the favorite topics of conversation among many of the people I would meet there. I soon learned, though, that the push of new capital, lifestyles, and people into the area had not led to a complete displacement of its more alternative audiences. Young artists, musicians, and adherents of alternative lifestyles have de facto refused to let themselves be driven out of this space. Nowadays, they either cling to the Indie cafes, bars, and clubs left within the otherwise thoroughly commercialized areas, or simply loiter in the streets of the neighborhood if the weather permits them to do so.[4]

Around the same time that Hongdae's reputation as Seoul's party headquarters grew, a new specimen emerged on this urban stage that would, in the eyes of those who still imagined Hongdae as a haven for young left-wingers, cause even more trouble than the indifferent hordes of Korean clubbers: foreign residents living in the larger Seoul metropolitan area also started to come to the neighborhood at weekends, with their arrival quickly classified as a major source of annoyance by many. Yuna, for instance, a 30-year-old peace activist I occasionally met up with, had spent most of her 20s hanging out in Hongdae, and was certainly not alone in

her views that foreigners were the culprits who brought about the demise of Hongdae. Ten years ago, she told me, the neighborhood was not only the center for Seoul's alternative music scene, but also a place for dissident thought and action. But "then all those … sorry … all those foreigners started to come. It totally ruined the independent culture, instead it just became about clubbing and corporate shops and restaurants."

Among the—predominantly Western—foreigners who frequent the neighborhood nowadays, one group, in particular, would soon be singled out as fundamentally responsible for the dissolution of the alternative district. US soldiers, seeking to leave behind the claustrophobic camptown areas designated for them, had started to come to the area *en masse*. They were drawn in by the free-spirited atmosphere, the large concentration of entertainment facilities, and, in all likelihood, also the availability of a large number of young Korean women who were curious about getting to know foreigners in the clubs and bars of the area. And with Hongdae's left-wing youth having been widely exposed to depictions of US soldiers as potential criminals throughout the years, US servicemen were now judged to be *the* prime offenders bringing their favorite neighborhood down.

In what is to come, I shall outline yet another materialization of the at times highly conflict-ridden encounter between US soldiers and civilians in the vast urban space of Seoul. What kind of (predictable or surprising) repercussions did the appearance of significant numbers of US servicemen have in this entertainment district that was understood by many to be *the* territory of dissenting young people? Some remarkable similarities and differences can be made out between It'aewŏn and Hongdae in the ways that the presence of US servicemen in these neighborhoods has been dealt with. As laid out in the last chapter, some of the elements of violent imaginaries (which emerged out of a political project in the 1980s and 1990s) have been incorporated into the very way the neighborhood of It'aewŏn is being territorialized. It'aewŏn's stakeholders have to some degree managed to capitalize on the bad reputation of camptowns, insofar as they have turned the notion of It'aewŏn as a sinful terrain into a tool that allowed them to attract new Korean audiences, too. In Hongdae, however, quite a few of the district's visitors, together with media commentators who have tried to make sense of this neighborhood, have chosen familiar negative depictions of US servicemen in order to actively keep American soldiers out of Hongdae, while simultaneously making moral claims about an area that had seemingly lost its old essence by becoming too entangled with foreigners.

If a territory, in line with Brighenti's (2010) understanding that we introduced in the last chapter, is indeed a set of practices that allows participants to connect the past with the present, read the signs of the landscape they find themselves in, and share a particular space in a purposeful manner, then Hongdae, just like It'aewŏn, is a heavily contested corner of Seoul that requires much everyday maneuvering by those engaged in it. And while overt forms of politics seemed rather inconsequential to most of the people I met in It'aewŏn, Hongdae is at heart a "leftist space" to many of its visitors, which has made the arrival of GIs on this urban stage an exceptionally explosive issue. In Hongdae, too, violent imaginaries have been turned into a social practice among local actors that is essentially about (re-)claiming a territory. But in this part of Seoul, these place-making struggles are also turned into a contestation over who gets to call the shots in the major processes of urbanization (see, for instance: Harvey 2008, 2012) that are constantly reconfiguring the densely populated space of Seoul.

Before attending to how various people occasionally come to a clash over the presence of GIs in Hongdae, in the next section, I shall first give a more concrete sense of this district's diversity by taking the reader on a quick tour through the neighborhood, and by presenting a few impressions of how the debates around US servicemen in the 2000s have played themselves out locally. In the following two sections, I will then look into two rather interesting occurrences that only tangentially involved US soldiers, but that were still *made* to be about their presence in the neighborhood. The first one—a scandal over a party organized by foreign English teachers in late 2004—directly touched upon an inconvenient matter that has preoccupied several generations of Koreans since the arrival of US troops on the peninsula: the issue of local women voluntarily engaging in sexual relationships with foreign men. The second occurrence involves a case of public indecent exposure by two young Korean punk musicians, an event that was taken as an(other) opportunity by the Korean media to paint Hongdae, where these young men primarily spent their time, as a neighborhood full of foreign-bred social evils: "Hongdae," one news reporter exclaimed at that time, "is now an area hot with youthful passion that has degenerated from being mixed up with foreigners" (quoted in Koehler 2005c).

In the final two parts of this chapter, I shall focus on the Korean milieu that these two punk offenders emerged from. A group of young punks I encountered in Hongdae was exceptional in the sense that they were not only outspoken about US soldiers in Hongdae but also held anti-militarist

convictions that went beyond the conceptual horizon of most other anti-US bases activists I encountered. They tended not to shy away from addressing previously unassailable areas of South Korea's homegrown militarism, such as mandatory male conscription. Paradoxically, this group of people was often forced begrudgingly to share their favorite hang-out spaces with GIs who were visiting the same outdoor areas, music venues, and bars that they also liked to gather in. In this context, the participation of some of the punks in the extended struggle surrounding Taechuri—a small village south of Seoul that was partly destroyed in 2006 to make space for the expansion of a US base nearby—led to discussions over the US–Korea military alliance between "Hongdae GIs" and these young anarcho-punks.

Hongdae's Forbidden Fruits

The lockers at Hongdae subway station are usually all occupied, the little containers filled with colorful stockings, short skirts and high heels, whose owners come to collect them only on the weekends. Young women—first dressed in plain jeans and T-shirts—emerge from the subway gates in the early hours of the evening, grab these clothes and then head for the public restroom nearby to change into their Hongdae outfits. A space close to the mirrors is hard to come by on those occasions—too many women shuffling around, checking the state of their hair, clothes, and shoes, while putting the finishing touches to their make-up. Fully transformed in the end, they make their way up the stairs and head into the night, only to return to the restroom many hours later, in time to get changed into their "decent" clothes again before the last subway arrives that will take them back home to their parents.

Following the large numbers of young people toward Hongdae's subway exit number six can turn into quite an ordeal on such weekends—at times, it may take a visitor a good 15 minutes to cover the few hundred meters that lead you outside the station. The experience of overcrowding usually does not end with one's emergence into the open air; instead, the next challenge is to make your way past the hundreds of young people who are waiting in front of the exit for their friends to arrive. Occasionally, groups of Christian performers use this area to sing about Jesus to those who are gathered there, and young men push their way through the crowd, handing out leaflets advertising yet another newly opened club.

Walking into a side street filled with little stores selling make-up, cellphones, and accessories, then past a long row of busy barbecue

restaurants where large numbers of students enjoy their grilled meat with nearly endless supplies of *soju*, you will soon arrive at a major avenue that leads up to Hongik University. Near the rather imposing main university building, the houses are all filled with up-scale shops, restaurants, clubs and bars that have flashing neon signs attached to their entrances in an attempt to lure more people in. If you keep to the right now, you will find another side street lined with little boutiques that sell "Hongdae style" fashion, next to quaint little coffee shops where any beverage will cost you 6,000 won ($5) or more. Some of the most popular hip hop and dance clubs are located nearby, and at one prominent Karaoke bar that rises several stories high into the sky, you may catch a glimpse of people performing their favorite songs behind a glass-covered front: young Koreans singing in little see-through cubicles, dancing to a laser show of their choice. While still gazing at this spectacle, the visitor is being pushed forward by endless numbers of partiers—hipster boys wearing fedoras and checkered suits, punks with studded black leather jackets, gangs of Emo kids drifting by, a girl dressed up in a sexy cop costume, handcuffed to her most recent boyfriend for the length of the night.

Follow another side alley, and you will end up at the indisputable center of gravity of Hongdae: a little park that is known as the *Hongdae Norit'ŏ* (Hongdae playground). On warmer weekends, the so-called free market takes place here, with handmade jewelry, paintings, and clothes being sold during the day. Once the sun goes down and the vendors slowly disappear, the playground by no means grows quieter: street musicians gather large crowds around them, playing free gigs until the police arrive, B-boys are cheered on by those watching them display their skills, groups of hippies assemble for a drumming session, and sometimes makeshift theater performances are put on during warm summer nights for the amusement of people walking by. Kids of all subcultural denominations loiter at the curbs of the sidewalks, make themselves comfortable on the swings or slides meant for children, or simply sit on the dirty ground, where they pass around drinks and food that can be bought cheaply at a convenience store across the street. A couple of times a night, the famous "makkŏlli man" makes his rounds, a middle-aged street vendor who drags his cart filled with home-made rice wine (*makkŏlli*) through the streets, and entertains people with free samples of the beverage and a small dose of his outgoing personality—both to be enjoyed in this outdoor location, the cheapest and most diverse Hongdae venue of them all.

Mike is a bear-sized, heavily tattooed US soldier I occasionally run in to while hanging out at the Hongdae playground. He is with another,

equally intimidating looking military guy tonight. They just returned from an Italian restaurant nearby, Mike says, and loudly complains to me now that the waiters there had continuously given them dirty looks throughout their meal. So eventually he went over to say hello and talk to them for a while, but the conversation did not go very well, he says: "You know, usually people just start to revise their opinions a bit when they see, oh, this person is actually not that bad … Not those guys, though, oh no." While chatty Mike readily tells anyone who asks that he is a soldier, his friend announces to me tonight that he is in education. I size him up for a second, and then I let it go; not the type of guy to call a liar to his face. He tells me he is trying hard to find a Korean girlfriend these days, as he would never be able to learn this language otherwise; then we talk about Europe. He tells me he has European ancestry and asks me whether men there look similar to him, and if I believe that he would blend in with the crowd. He certainly does not blend in here in Seoul; at the Hongdae Noritʼŏ, people sitting nearby keep glancing at him and his friend in a curious fashion.

From Itʼaewŏn to Hongdae, it's a 30-minute ride on Seoul's subway. From Tongduchʼŏn in the north, or from the Pʼyŏngtʼaek area in the south, however, it will take you a good one and a half hours via public transportation to get to this inner-city neighborhood—a substantial commute that brings together a number of places that, in the eyes of many, could not be further apart. Bosan station, nearly the last stop on Seoul's subway line no. 1, for instance, connects Tongduchʼŏn's heavily contested camptown with the glitzier city center of Seoul; a remote subway station that was only opened in 2006, and has allowed soldiers to access the capital with greater ease.

The swift and ongoing integration of such marginalized areas outside of Seoul into the capital's public transportation networks is but one symptom of the breathtaking urban development that has been remaking the wider Seoul region, where, because of a severe lack of affordable living space within the capital itself ever new territories have been incorporated into one gigantic, sprawling urban space. This process of urbanization that is affecting much of the northern half of South Korea has also inadvertently undermined an informal containment policy targeted at US camptowns and their inhabitants that we have discussed in previous chapters. The quasi-"ghettoization" of foreign soldiers proved to be a strategy that was entirely undermined by Seoul's dramatic ascent as a megacity during the latest era of globalized capitalism.

The increasing number of GIs who started to come to Hongdae in the early 2000s, however, caused much concern among local club owners in particular, who were afraid of losing their Korean clientele because of the arrival of these new guests at their venues. The soldiers, one rumor at that time went, had started to charter entire buses to get from remoter base areas such as Tongduch'ŏn to Hongdae, and "GIs were becoming such a common sight in Hongdae that Koreans started calling it 'Hong-itaewon'" (Chun 2002). With anxiety over US servicemen in Hongdae massively on the rise, in late October 2002, US soldiers coming to the neighborhood were faced with signs at various clubs, notifying them that they would be barred from entry to these establishments:

> The first thing you now see at the threshold of the 10 [Hongdae] clubs is a yellow, 60-by-45 centimeter sign in English. In bold, black capitals it says: "We sincerely apologize, but due to many previous bad experiences, GIs are no longer permitted to enter Hongdae clubs." The letters in "GIs" are bright red. Right next to the sign is usually a red sign that warns, again in English: "Things not to do at Hong-dae clubs." The list provides hints as to what the "previous bad experiences" may have been: drugs, fights and sexual harassment. (Chun 2002)

This ban on US soldiers, incidentally, happened just a few months after the accidental death of Shim Mi-sŏn and Shin Hyo-sun, two teenagers who were killed by a US military vehicle in the summer of that year. In the fall of 2002, expectations were running high in Seoul and beyond that the drivers involved in the death of the two schoolgirls would receive a jail sentence. When the two were then cleared of negligent homicide in a US military court in November, protests in South Korea quickly spread, bringing tens of thousands of protesters to the center of Seoul.

In the midst of such public turmoil over the US military presence in South Korea, the atmosphere that US soldiers stepped into whenever they entered Hongdae in late 2002 was indeed very tense, and on occasions bordered on the hysterical. For instance, a wild, unconfirmed rumor was making the rounds at the clubs and bars at that time, claiming that a US serviceman had stabbed a young Korean woman at a club that was popular with GIs: "According to the rumor, the woman died immediately, and the GI was handed over to the US Army and nobody knows if he was punished" (Chun 2002). Hongdae club owners, together with concerned student activists from Hongik University, then held meetings to discuss the increasingly controversial presence of US military personnel in

Hongdae and jointly decided on the ban: "The students say they have seen enough of the 'arrogance of GIs'. And that the soldiers 'have an attitude that Koreans should be grateful that the U.S. Army is there to protect the country'" (Chun 2002).

The US Armed Forces, alerted by the furore in Hongdae over their soldiers, reacted within a month and, due to "force-protection concerns," put the entire neighborhood off limits starting from 2 December 2002. This action meant that, for their own safety, all troops and their dependents were to stay out of the area from 9pm to 5am. The order would be lifted only on 1 May 2006, after "Korean National Police, U.S. military police and force-protection officials [had] conducted a combined threat assessment, officials said" (Flack 2007). However, seven months later, when Army Private Geronimo Ramirez raped a 67-year old Korean woman at the end of a night of partying at Hongdae, in the midst of the ensuing public storm of outrage the authorities were forced to revise their position again.

The ban on US soldiers going to Hongdae, which has once again been lifted in the meantime, was still in place during the period of my field research in 2007–9, yet US soldiers frequenting the area were not exactly hard to spot. Having grown somewhat cautious in the way they acted while in Hongdae, servicemen tended to stay away from certain clubs and venues where they knew they could run into trouble, and often used baseball caps to cover up their short-cropped hair. Just like Mike's friend and Steve, whom I met at Club O., many would tell you at first that they were English teachers if asked about their profession. Paradoxically, the fact that US soldiers were not exactly invited to join the ongoing parties made this space even more attractive to some of them. Karl, who was a 26-year-old Asian-American serviceman, explained his passion for this neighborhood to me in the following way: "It's very, very far away from It'aewŏn, and all these other areas for the military. It's more like a college town atmosphere. 'Cause there actually is that university right next to the place … It feels like home."

Karl, who holds a humanities degree from a US college back home, was often thinking back warmly to his formative student years before he had joined the army. Like other GIs I met, Karl was also keenly aware of the many debates surrounding the US Armed Forces presence in South Korea. The feeling of unease he felt when out in town was often heightened by the fact that Koreans often mistook him for a local man, and at times started to berate him when he spoke in English to them. He had only recently arrived in Korea after a deployment in Iraq, and would occasionally talk about the various signs of post-traumatic stress disorder that he observed

in himself since his Middle Eastern tour came to a close. While hanging out in Hongdae, he was usually a cheerful and amicable companion, but every once in a while I saw him get terribly drunk, which would inevitably lead to hostile situations with inebriated Korean men. A few months after I had left the country, I heard from friends that he had gotten into a bad fight with a group of young Koreans at the Hongdae Norit'ŏ because he had accidentally antagonized them in the early morning hours, and that he stopped coming to Hongdae afterwards.

Figure 6.1 The Hongdae Norit'ŏ (playground)

Yanggongju Revisited: "Are Western Bastards That Good?"

I met Min-ho, a 32-year-old Korean office worker, in a popular foreign hangout in Hongdae, where we struck up a conversation at the bar. I had just lost sight of Suzie, my 23-year-old American acquaintance, who had taken me to this venue. "Popular with GIs," she had explained beforehand, but once we arrived at the club, I saw that the place hosted a very mixed crowd of young Koreans, civilian foreigners, and a few men here and there who looked like they could be servicemen. English teachers like Suzie, who had graduated from a college in the Midwest just a year earlier and who usually spent her weekends in Hongdae, were very welcome in clubs like these. Just as in the bars of It'aewŏn, in this venue, too, English could be more frequently heard than Korean among the effervescent crowd.

"Are you Russian?", a Korean man addressed me in English. He sported a stylish leather jacket, washed out jeans, and one of those black-and-white fedoras that could be spotted by the dozen in the streets of Hongdae those days. "Why, do I look Russian?" I had grown a bit wary of being asked this question by Korean men; in It'aewŏn, it had usually proved to be a thinly veiled inquiry as to whether or not I was a sex worker. My new acquaintance just laughed, "Russian women are the most beautiful on earth, don't you think?" His name was Min-ho, he said; he spoke excellent English, and I asked him whether he had ever lived abroad. Never, he replied, but he adored foreign women, and listed the nationalities of a few of his ex-girlfriends now. Min-ho had learned how to speak English in the bars of It'aewŏn, he explained. He had even played in a band with a few soldiers for a while, that's where he learned practically everything he knows about foreigners, he added with a smirk.

After years spent partying in It'aewŏn, nowadays he preferred Hongdae, because "this is where the real parties are happening. I mean, just look at this place," he said, vaguely pointing at the foreigners and Koreans around us who could barely move forward, as the club was increasingly packed with people now. At this moment during our chat, a Korean woman, seemingly in her early 20s, who had been flirting heavily with a white, muscular guy with shaven hair across the bar from us, laughed so loudly at a comment of her acquaintance that the flow of our conversation was interrupted. We both glanced at this other couple now. "Look at that," Min-ho said to me without a hint of irony, "so shameful. All these Korean girls, they just come here with one thing in mind, to have sex with a foreign guy."

Min-ho's comment somehow cut to the core of many similar conversations I had had during field research. Liaisons between Korean women and Western men that began in Hongdae, I was to learn, were frowned upon by the most diverse set of people I encountered in Korea: young Korean men who often used strong words such as "disgrace," or "shame," when talking about this issue; a Korean housewife who warned her daughter in front of me to stay clear of Hongdae and all its scary foreigners; an It'aewŏn-based sex worker who complained that Hongdae's women were giving it up for free, thereby ruining the market for sex elsewhere; and Korean activist-types who told me that certain corners of Hongdae were off-limits to them because they did not want to have to share a venue with US soldiers and the "irresponsible" women who hung out with them.

The troublesome issue of local women freely engaging in sexual relationships with foreign men was also at the center of a public dispute that erupted in late 2004. The affair was triggered by an "advertisement" posted

in the *English Spectrum*, a (now defunct) online forum that was popular with foreign English teachers working in South Korea in the early 2000s:

> Party humpers, Just so there's no confusion … English Spectrum and I will be hosting two parties at MaryJane's in Hongdae on BOTH the 14th (Friday night) and the 15th (Saturday night).
>
> Each party will be slightly different. On the 14th, it will be much the same as the last two; meaning some sex in the female bathroom, some late night dance floor grinding and partial nudity, mixed in with the addition of some clothes-allergic professionals who should be making a guest appearance that night.
>
> On the 15th, we will be holding an MC'ed Sexy Game Night. We will be selling drinks at an exceptionally low price from 9–12 to get everyone hammered prior to the games. From 12 to about 4 am, we'll play a bunch of team-oriented, guy-girl-guy-girl games, each for small prizes. This will be mixed in with a fair amount of dancing (hip hop and otherwise) intermissions.
>
> Both nights will be fun, but a little bit different. If you can make one or the other or both, please come and join the fun. The 15th will be a good time to meet new people and develop some interesting relationships.
>
> The Playboy

As a follow-up to this post, a series of pictures were uploaded to the same website, showing that the party had indeed provided everything "the Playboy" had promised. The pictures of partially exposed Korean women and half-naked white men partying excessively, doing the "bubi bubi dance"[5] or making out with each other would then be leaked to the Korean news and blogosphere, after which the entire English Spectrum website was searched by Korean "netizens" for content that could be considered sexually degrading to Korean women.

And with comments such as "There is nothing good about Korea except that it's easy to sleep with the women and make money," or another user calling Korea "the Kimchiland where it's easy to score with the women and make money," they were certainly finding enough to keep the scandal afloat for the next few weeks (Koehler 2005a, 2005b). Such statements were used by the Korean media, bloggers and other internet users to depict male foreigners in the country as potential sex delinquents, whose favorite adult playground, Hongdae, had seemingly been turned into a pit of immorality, where the corruption of young Korean minds and the

seduction of their bodies was the usual game of the night. Together with US soldiers, English teachers were now to become the new central figures representing the sexually corrupted and corrupting Westerner, who should be kept away from local women at all costs.[6]

On a very superficial level, there are some quite evident parallels to be made out between this particular scandal and earlier crime stories involving GIs, given that these English Spectrum parties, in the eyes of Korean netizens, also involved a triangle of aggressive foreign actors, local female victims, and an entertainment space of ill repute—three components that proved so central to the older discussions surrounding camptowns. And indeed, these resemblances were further highlighted in a rather crude fashion in the online discussions surrounding the young Korean females who were depicted so compromisingly in the leaked photos. With the women's names and addresses leaked, they suddenly found themselves exposed all over the Korean web and would go through much harassment and public shaming over the next few months, with some of their critics bringing these camptown resemblances into play. "Some online articles [...] said we were prostitutes, western princesses ["yanggongju"], and brothel keepers" (Choi 2005, quoted in Gusts 2009), one woman involved in the scandal said. Comments directed at the women labeled them as "Foreigner's whore! Why don't you shut down your club?" Another person queried: "Why don't whores like you just die quietly," while others asked them: "Whores, are Western bastards that good?" (Shin 2005).[7]

In this way, the notion of the "Hongdae yanggongju" was born—a term that establishes a curious link between a derogatory notion that was primarily used for sex workers employed in the GI clubs in the kijich'on areas of the country, and contemporary female visitors in Seoul's Hongdae entertainment district who occasionally chose to hook up with foreigners. As we may remember, the original usage of the word is indeed most tightly linked to camptown territories, and the very word "yanggongju," sociologist Kim Hyun Sook has argued:

> relegates Korean women working in militarized prostitution with foreign men to the lowest status within the hierarchy of prostitution. Since the end of the Korean War, this category has been extended to include Korean women who marry American servicemen (pejoratively called "GI Brides"). In postwar Korea, the epithet "yanggongju" has become synonymous with "GI Brides", so that Korean women in interracial marriages are also viewed as "yanggongju". (1998: 178)

In the tumultuous 1980s and 1990s, as we have seen, the "yanggongju" also became a central figure for the Korean nationalist left, whose actors established this social type as a potent (yet mute) symbol of a nation, understood to be constantly in danger of usurpation by powerful outside forces (see also Cho G. 2008: 89ff). This explosive baggage that came with the label of "yanggongju," then, was in a sense transported through time and space, and re-activated in the midst of the public commotion triggered by the raunchy party in Hongdae. Given this context, one can only concur with Wagner and VanVolkenburg, who have argued in a piece on English teachers in Korea that "the branding of these women as '*yanggongju*' was highly significant in sparking a nationalist movement, as this label reproduced a well-known 'folk devil' of Korean society capable of provoking strong feelings of righteousness" (2012: 211).

The anonymous online attacks on the young women, which usually involved attempts to label the females involved as treacherous whores who have betrayed the nation, together with the more restrained and toned-down discussions by news reporters (who focused mainly on the aspect of "female sexual degradation" at the hands of foreigners) certainly paint a rather disquieting picture. The treacherous whore vs. misguided victim dichotomy that served as the predominant lens through which camptown women had traditionally been made sense of, was now taken out of its original context and moved to an inner-city entertainment district where the vast majority of actors engaged in sexual encounters without monetary incentives playing a role. In all its unsavory details, this scandal also shows how enduring the legacy of over half a century of camptown prostitution is in the public imagination, and how quickly old slurs and insults that emerged in camptown areas can resurface in times of perceived crisis, when Korean women's actions, in particular, are seen to be in need of rebuke.

"*Sexual Harassment of National Proportions*"

With foreign influences in South Korea for many decades mostly embodied in the shape of the GI, foreigners living in South Korea today hail from a number of countries, backgrounds, ethnicities, religions, and occupations.[8] While we may be "witnessing the very incipient stage of a process of gradual de-ethnicization of Koreanness, as Korean identity is being broadened to include plural cultures and multiple ethnicities" (Lee J. 2010: 19), the fear of losing this essence of "Koreanness" is also on the

rise in a country where many citizens have long taken active pride in their extreme ethnic homogeneity. Within a "context of intensifying globalization of the South Korean economy and the consequent multiethnicization of its population" (2010: 19), spaces of consumption such as Hongdae, which increasingly function as *transnational* realms of hedonism and desire, have become signifiers to many for the broader capitalist processes that conquer ever new urban frontiers, irrespective of local histories.

These underlying concerns over rapid social change are equally visible in the debates around another scandal that broke loose just six months after the conflict over the "English Spectrum" parties. The incident, this time involving young Korean men, would once and for all prove to those already suspicious of Hongdae how far the putative corrosion of innocent youth had progressed in the streets of this neighborhood. On 30 July 2005, MBC television network aired its hugely successful live show *Music Camp* in its usual afternoon slot. This event, taking place once a week, sought to introduce new and promising live bands to its predominantly teenage audience. This time, a Hongdae punk band called RUX had been invited to perform a song in a studio setting in front of a largely female teen crowd, with the show simultaneously being broadcast live across the country.

RUX, a band that had acquired significant local fame in the gritty bars and clubs of Hongdae, had generously invited many of its street punk friends to come on stage together with them, I was told by Jil-Sung, a punk friend of mine I knew from the Hongdae Playground. Among others, two members of the punk band Couch had gladly accepted the invitation by RUX. "They got very excited immediately and started to think of ways to show those big TV guys what they really think of them and the shit music they promote," Jil-Sung explained. "They said they would drop their pants on stage, and we all laughed at the idea. Frankly speaking, no one thought they would really do it."

But indeed, when the moment came, the two musicians pulled their pants down and "exposed their genitalia while continuing to dance. The scene was broadcast for about four seconds. The two musicians [...] were arrested almost immediately after the show" (Kim T. 2005). Together with the two offenders, the lead singer of RUX, who had not actually exposed himself, "was also arrested for having invited the members of Couch, aged 20 and 27, on the show" (Kim T. 2005). The two Couch members would face a courtroom a few months later for their misdeed, and after prosecutors had initially demanded hefty sentences for the two of them (up to two years of prison time had been requested), they eventually walked away with 10-month suspended sentences (*JoonAng Daily* 2005).

The media, in the storm that broke out immediately after the incident, unsurprisingly had much to say about these "Punk rockers' privates in affront to Korea's 'bourgeois'," as one creative newspaper headline read at the time (*Chosun Ilbo* 2005b). For instance, the "unprecedented affront to Korea's conservative mores" (*Chosun Ilbo* 2005b) was decried as a form of sexual violation, as a *Korea Times* editorial on August 1, 2005 stated: "The independent rock band's behavior is inexcusable by any standard, as it was nothing but a kind of sexual harassment of national proportions" (quoted in Gusts 2005). Conservative newspaper *Joong-Ang Ilbo*, in another editorial, went for a similar line of argument by stating that "it's as if they've committed sexual violence against all viewers" (quoted in Gusts 2005).

Inadvertently adding fuel to the fire, an off-hand remark by the lead singer of RUX brought further unwanted attention to Hongdae as a place that bred deviant behavior. In an interview, he "said that the kind of performance seen during the MBC broadcast is common at clubs in Hongdae region, a hot clubbing district. 'We are free to perform there. Sometimes we break a guitar or bottles of beer', Won said" (Jin 2005). As a consequence, a policeman interviewed by the *Chosun Ilbo* promised that their investigation was going to be expanded "into unhealthy and corrupt performance venues and related businesses near Hongik University" (*Chosun Ilbo* 2005a).

A few days earlier, Seoul's mayor at that time, Lee Myung-bak (who would later be voted into the presidential office), had already chipped in and vowed to take action against the entire Hongdae Indie scene. His proposal was that blacklists of "indecent" bands should be drawn up, with those finding themselves on the list being permanently barred from performing at events organized by Seoul City or institutions related to it (Jin 2005). In a prompt reply to Lee's suggestions, politician Kim Hyun-mee from the leftist Uri Party accused Lee of trying to bring back the "discipline of Yusin," an open reference to the dictatorial times under Park Chung-hee, who famously had a vendetta against the alternative music scene in the 1970s (see Kim P. and Shin 2010). "I'm not sure if deciding who can and cannot be invited to performances under Seoul City is up to the mayor, but it's really an anachronistic and absurd order," Kim said. "[…] To call for a blacklist, label 'indie' culture subversive and try to restrict it is something the ghosts of the Yushin era would do" (*Chosun Ilbo* 2005c).

Finally, ten days after the indecent exposure, a *Herald Business News* article took the opportunity to remind its readers once more of the other great social evil besides raunchy punk performances that could be found

in Hongdae: the sexual fraternizing between local women and foreign men. The clubs near Hongik University, the article claimed, were quickly changing into a foreigners' "paradise for hunting women." Recalling the (at that time recently revoked) ban on GIs in the clubs, the article's author stated that the good old days, when foreigners were not welcome in Hongdae, were now regrettably long gone. The article comes to the conclusion that:

> Hongdae is now an area hot with youthful passion that has degenerated from being mixed up with foreigners. As the recent act of indecent exposure by a punk band on live TV showed, the diversity and individuality of the area in front of Hongik University is nowhere [else] to be found. As the number of foreigners with more of an interest in [...] one night stands than in the music increases, there are many women coming to the clubs in search of "blue-eyed men." (quoted in Koehler 2005c)[9]

Figure 6.2 Live music show in Hongdae

Anti-Militarist Punks in Hongdae

On a typical Hongdae weekend night, it is quite easy to spot them at the Hongdae playground: a group of young Korean punks, many of whom are heavily tattooed and pierced, virtually all dressed in black. The girls wear torn stockings and black leather skirts with their heavy combat boots,

the boys are typically clad in black jeans and hoodies that are covered in self-made patches they have sewed onto their clothes. Some carry bullet belts around their waists; others show off their studded leather jackets in this open-air space. And most certainly, whenever they have gathered at the Noritŏ, they can be seen drinking rice wine or the cheapest beer from a shared bottle.

While the young women of the group are typically still in high school or work in temporary jobs at the bars or stores nearby, the men keep themselves afloat with random jobs: working at convenience stores, bar-tending, or delivering food for various restaurants in the neighborhood. The hourly pay is usually small, but they typically get paid in cash at the end of a working day, which allows them to take their money straight to the Hongdae playground or a cheap pub nearby to hang out with their friends. Whoever is making a bit of money at any given time, so goes the ethic among them, is responsible for buying the alcohol that is to be shared with everyone else who decides to show up.

These young people's thorough disengagement from "Korea proper," where ambition and hard work are counted among the highest social values these days, gives them much time to maintain their close relationships with each other. Quite a few of them have dropped out of high school or are on the verge of doing so; only a few of them have even attempted to get a university education and none have succeeded. Their circumvention of a formal education may not strictly speaking be a choice, however: similar to the early punks in Europe and the US during the 1970s, most of the young men and women involved in the street punk scene of Hongdae come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, which makes enrollment in exceedingly expensive Korean universities[10] difficult, to say the least.

Regardless of their lack of formal education, this particular group of punks has made a strong effort over the years to politicize themselves and their circle of friends. Appalled by the start of the Iraq War in 2003, some of them joined anti-war protests and in this way became acquainted with various left-wing activists. By befriending foreign anarchists (who were traveling through the country or working in Korea as English teachers), or through reading radical blogs and forums, they would inform themselves on the political matters that were important to them. They subsequently showed up at Esperanto classes, went to lectures and teach-ins organized by radical alternative learning groups, staged little protests against newly opened corporate coffee shops in Hongdae, and eventually got themselves

involved in the struggle over the small village of Taechuri that was to make room for the expansion of US military base Camp Humphrey.

Jae-sŏk, who is in his mid-20s and among the oldest punks at the Noritŏ, functions as a role model for the younger people in this group. I had heard rumors before that he had actually grown up at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), so one day, I asked him about it, and he explained to me that he does indeed hail from a village so close to the DMZ that his family were under a military-imposed curfew every night while he grew up. The original village had been destroyed during the Korean War, and the government had eventually offered the land for free to repopulate this area. "Half of the [new] villagers came from the North," Jae-sŏk explained.

> They hated the North Korean government so they escaped from there, and many are still living in the village, being unable to return to their hometowns. My uncle is one of them. My uncle came down to the South to meet up with my father and aunt.

The other half of the villagers, he contended, consisted of poor people from South Korea:

> Back then [when the village was resettled], everyone was scared of the war breaking out again. So the only ones willing to move there … half of them couldn't go back to their hometowns [in the North], and the other half just came for the free land. All of them poor people.

Following this, he explains to me that he got interested in a left-wing kind of politics due to his poor family background, too:

> When I see capitalism I find that it is really despicable. My family is poor; we have been going through a tough life. Of course I have been a lazy fuck, but [*laughs*] … I see this poverty continuing through the generations. My mother is a really hard-working person. But as she continues to live a hard life, and as she works 365 days out of the year, it doesn't seem like we are getting any closer to getting out of this poverty. […] When I got to know Jae-bong [a punk friend of his], I took part in these kinds of [political] conversations for the first time in my life. […] And one day we watched TV, and the news reported that thousands of workers were gathering in central Seoul, that they would fight [the police] with iron pipes and bamboo spears. It was freaking shocking. Yeah, I could sense that they were mistreated and that they were angry.

> Because I was also someone who had always been mistreated and angry. That was very, very impressive.

South Korea's ubiquitous militarism is another issue that Jae-sŏk and his friends were mostly troubled by; not only was the presence of US troops in the country a matter of great concern to them, but also the fact that most of the young men in their group would still have to face their mandatory military service in the years to come.[11] Jae-sŏk and several of his friends were playing with the idea of becoming conscientious objectors and serving an 18-month prison-term instead of joining the Republic of Korea Army—a choice that was during those days much discussed among male left-wingers in the anti-US bases movement. Their close friend Hyŏn-jun, I was to learn, had already made up his mind, and was only months away from going to jail when I first met him in 2009.[12]

Hyŏn-jun, then 23, told me that he originally came from Pusan, but he started coming to the Hongdae neighborhood of Seoul already while he was still a high school student living in Korea's second largest city: "It's not like I adored Hongdae, but it was actually the only place in all of Korea where I was able to breathe, that allowed for my cultural survival," he explained. At first, Hyŏn-jun was rather enchanted by the neighborhood because:

> I thought of all those small communities in Hongdae as parts of a cultural and political commune movement, and thought it was all really revolutionary. But then I witnessed a lot of those communities falling apart, and then I gave up investing hope into it.

With his new-found identity as conscientious objector and anti-military activist, however, he said that "nowadays I keep wondering for myself if there is anyone here at all who has empathy …"

Hyŏn-jun's exposure to military matters came early, while growing up in a poor neighborhood in Pusan, squeezed in between the US military Camp Hialeah, and the Yangchŏng installation for Pusan's Korean Military Police:

> Because the city was so rapidly expanding, these two military bases were all of a sudden located in the middle of the city, so they were scheduled for eviction. What I remember about the military base is the dirty, dusty walls and the barbed wire on top of it. And no entrance signs. That's that—I never saw anybody emerging from the base, and I never got to see the inside of it either. Once a year, there was a really big [display

> of] fireworks happening on US Independence Day—the entire city was excited about it. Also, it was fun to talk with the other kids about the prostitution district [that was located right next to the base].

Only in 2002, when the death of the two schoolgirls Shim Mi-Sŏn and Shin Hyo-Sun triggered a wave of protests throughout the country, did the proximity of the US military base become something for then 15-year-old Hyŏn-jun to reflect upon. He would soon join the protests, too, and during the rallies, he:

> would swear at the GIs who were sitting in the watchtowers behind the walls, or I would write graffiti on the wall or on the ground, things like "Fuck off, US Army". I am thinking today that my negative perception of all military groups began back then.

A few years after these events, having followed the headlines coming out of the Iraq War closely, he would then join the anti-bases activities at Taechuri, where several other Hongdae punks had also started to get themselves involved.

From Hongdae to Taechuri

Just like Hyŏn-jun, a number of his Hongdae punk friends would be drawn into the left-wing activism surrounding the US military presence in the country during the mid 2000s. One decisive moment that personalized this issue for these young people was the conflict over Taechuri, a small village near P'yŏngt'aek that stood on land slated for the expansion of US Camp Humphreys. In April 2003, the South Korean and US governments had announced their decision to relocate the troops stationed at the Yongsan Garrison in central Seoul to this military base in the P'yŏngt'aek region, which would make an expansion of that post necessary in order to meet the needs of its growing population of US soldiers and their dependents. The Korean Ministry of National Defense then began to contact landowners in the village of Taechuri to inform them that their plots were to be seized, with some compensation money being offered to affected locals. In July 2003, a collection of farmers made up their minds to resist the government's move, with the distinct goal of preventing the Ministry of National Defense from expropriating their farmland (Yeo 2006: 43).

Within less than a year, the local conflict became much larger when a national campaign was founded that brought together over one hundred non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civic groups, and individuals under one temporary framework (Yeo 2006: 44f). Dozens of Seoul activists would now move to Taechuri to support the villagers in their struggle, and, with hundreds of people joining them for days or afternoons whenever they could make the time, the small village next to the US base soon turned into one big bastion of anti-military activism. Every night, a candle-light vigil was held in the elementary school building of Taechuri, with musical performances, poetry readings, and speeches delivered to keep up the spirits of those involved in the struggle; a nightly action that was repeated over 600 times and only came to a halt on 4 May 2006, when the school was finally destroyed in the midst of violent clashes (Yeo 2006: 48).

The coalition initially focused on exploring all legal options and engaging in negotiations with the ministry, but their arguments would fail in the courts. Eventually, matters escalated into physical confrontations that took place in Taechuri itself (Kim J. et al. 2006: 7). On March 15, 2006, for instance, hundreds of farmers and their activist supporters engaged in violent clashes with the riot police that had been deployed to the village in their thousands. And in early May of the same year, 12,000 riot police descended on the village, where they fought with 2,000 activists trying to defend the local elementary school (Yeo 2010, see also Yeo 2006: 34f). Taechuri, at that point in time, looked much more like the DMZ than an ordinary farming community in the center of South Korea; checkpoints, barbed wire, and hordes of young military recruits in full riot gear stationed nearby had become an ordinary sight, making it increasingly clear to the farmers who remained that civilian life in this area was to bow down to the pressures exerted by the local armed forces protecting the interests of the US military.

The intervention of a group of Hongdae punks in this kind of struggle on the very outskirts of the Seoul Metropolitan area was at first viewed as an oddity beyond belief by the elderly farmers in Taechuri, Jae-sŏk and his friend Jil-sung told me. Jil-sung, a 22-year-old punk, explained that there was even "an article written about us on one of those nationalist-leftist newspapers. [T]hey wrote that it was impressive to see these funnily dressed young people guard the village with a bottle of rice wine in their hands [*laughs*]." People eventually warmed up to the unlikely visitors from downtown Seoul, though, and even asked them to perform their music for them at one of their daily evening gatherings. "We refused … Jae-sŏk was

trying to tell them that some of the old people might be getting a heart attack or something like that if we played …"

Reflecting on their positionality in the village, especially with regard to the more seasoned activists around, Jil-sung added, "We never thought of ourselves as integrated there. We felt like foreigners there." Much of their sense of estrangement from the activists in Taechuri he attributes to a matter of social distance:

> There were so many student activists there, too. And we felt very distant from them. It was kind of a class issue, I guess. We would think of them as being raised in middle-class families, and slowly getting into reading Marx, and somehow joining Student Unions, while their parents paid for their tuition. Yeah, very different from us.

Jae-sŏk was the one who had initiated their first journey to Taechuri, which the younger Jil-sung attributes to Jae-sŏk having "some kind of charisma. [Back then] you were there and talking about all this new political stuff that we never heard of, and all these kids thought, 'Wow, that's so cool, we should be [in Taechuri], too!'" In order to stay updated with the events unfolding in that village, they would keep themselves informed on a Korean web forum called "Anarclan," where the newest developments concerning Taechuri were being discussed by a small group of netizens with an anarchist background. Jae-sŏk explains how the internet was crucial in how they finally shaped their decision to go to the village to show their support:

> Back then we were all living together, sharing just one computer, so we were all looking at the same stuff [online] together. So we were interested and kept following this issue, and so we got to know the problem better, and we were getting more agitated by it.

After their first visit to Taechuri, they would go there again whenever time, money, and the general mood would allow it. Once, in the summer of 2006, the idea of going to Taechuri came up in the middle of a drinking session at the Hongdae Norit'ŏ:

> *Jil-sung*: So we were all drinking at the Norit'ŏ together … I was pretty drunk and I suddenly said, let's go to Taechuri. So I said, let's go to Taechuri tomorrow morning. Then we kept on drinking, and everyone was like, yeah, let's go, let's go, that's a good idea. But you and Jae-bong

had your bikes with you. So all of a sudden you announced, "We will go ahead with our bikes now." […] So you and Jae-bong took off on your bikes in the middle of the night. And then the next day, at around 10am, we called you. "Are you there?" And you guys said that you were sleeping under a tree next to this riot police station [that had been erected near the village].
Jae-sŏk: Yeah, they stopped us from entering the place. And then it was kind of a tense atmosphere. So we couldn't get in.
Jil-sung: Have I told you how I got there that day? I called you guys once I got there, asking where you guys were. I went there the next morning, right after my work was done. I was there, but there was no bus running that was going to Taechuri. So I just stole a bike and rode it there. And the riot police were not checking me at all, they just let me pass by.

The thousands of riot police deployed at Taechuri during those tense months of 2006 were predominantly made up of recent conscripts to the Korean military. Among those young men in uniform that the Hongdae punks faced during the struggle over the village were also a number of friends and acquaintances. Jae-sŏk recalls a strange encounter with an old friend on the outskirts of Taechuri, who was there as part of a riot police unit he was serving in:

I remember that back then on the bus—there was riot police getting on, and then dragging people out of the bus who were not residents of the village. And me and K. and C., we were looking pretty suspicious. But we were hoping that we could perhaps still pass as residents. But then … one of the riot police who were kicking people out of the bus that day was a guy that I knew from when I was a kid. […] He didn't recognize me. Or he had just started his service and didn't dare to say anything. Yeah, he was kind of acting like a robot. And I thought that if I talked to him now that it could cause trouble so I didn't say a word.

After the struggle had ended in a defeat for the farmers and activists, Jae-sŏk had an opportunity to talk to some other friends of his who had served there as riot police to discuss their—largely divergent—experiences of the clashes in Taechuri: "Yeah, they were saying something like how they were beating up grandmas [*laughs*]. T., he was in the Special Forces that were destroying the Elementary School. T. says it was pretty horrible." And Jil-sung chirped in: "Yeah, that's how it goes. Just thinking of it—them

having to be there—and thinking of all the other students and protesters, and how they could just quit and go home …"

Not only would the involvement of a number of Hongdae punks in the Taechuri struggle bring about discussions with South Korean military recruits that they knew. It also raised a number of debates among their foreign friends in the Hongdae neighborhood because of the presence of quite a few US military members in the area, who attended Hongdae punk shows or sought to hang out with the punk kids at the playground. In this way, the Taechuri issue was turning into a controversial issue within Hongdae too, as it forced Korean punks and US service members to ponder their alliances and the complexities of belonging to the same alternative scene and sharing the same small entertainment area in their free time, while simultaneously finding themselves on different sides of the trenches when it came to the base expansion issue.

Jil-sung, for instance, acknowledges that in principle there would have been much potential for him to shape friendships with the soldiers he came to meet in Hongdae, but that in practice things got rather complicated with GIs after Taechuri for him. He was struck by the fact that many of them "also didn't finish high school, they were also poor fucks back home. And listened to the same music. But still, in the end it didn't work for me." He relays one instance when he hung out with two US soldiers at the Norit'ŏ that brought this point home for him: "I think I had fun hanging out with these two GIs 'cause they kept buying me drinks, you know. And then I talked to them a few more times …" Things soon got bothersome for Jil-sung, though:

> I kinda started thinking that is was a mistake to hang out with them after a while, though. They kept annoying me so much, cause they would come to the park, and try to talk to me, and I think it was mainly stuff like, "We want to pick up some chicks, you gotta help us, cause we don't speak Korean."

On another occasion, a GI he knew wanted to discuss anarchism with him, which in Jil-sung's view did not go very well:

> And then I was telling this guy, "You should get the hell out of the military, 'cause it's shit." And he said, "Yeah, you're totally right." He told me he had just bought a punk T-shirt online, and his boss found out about it, and said he couldn't have that inside the base. I think it was related to some kind of political symbols on the T-shirt and he

couldn't have those. And then he was saying something like, "Yeah, I'm an anarchist. I wanna be an anarchist, 'cause my superiors, they are all like … like commies, you know" [*laughs*]. And I was like, "Yeah, man, yeah, I get it." And ever since then I started to completely ignore him.

Exit the Demilitarized Zone, Enter the Temporary Autonomous Zone?

Despite the many misgivings that Jil-sung and his friends at times voiced towards GIs, it was still striking to see how on a number of occasions I would find them hanging out with GIs like Karl, Mike, and others. Drinks would be shared, jokes exchanged. On occasions, things could get uncomfortable, and one party or the other made sure to move on in time. The common denominator that allowed these Hongdae punks to temporarily sit and party together with GIs can perhaps be attributed to their mutual recognition that they were all socially, politically, and to some degree economically marginalized in the country they found themselves in, and perhaps also to their wish to escape potentially totalizing societies for the length of a night, be it that of late capitalist Korea or that of the United States Armed Forces. The temporary fraternizing, however, was clearly not enough to tear down barriers between people when the hangover subsided the next day.

Paradoxically, Hongdae, even though it is a thoroughly gentrified neighborhood these days, is at the same time also a space that allows its visitors many liberties that cannot be attained in other parts of the country. At times, Hongdae has been the source of much moral panic, as it is understood to be a Korean terrain that is being contaminated by foreigners who no longer stay within the set boundaries of the few spaces that have been allocated to them in this country. While the Korean media have repeatedly focused on the pollution of Korean youth through putatively highly sexualized foreign males, the many other experiments going on in this area, and in particular the small-scale political contestations within Hongdae, have usually been overlooked.

US soldiers, as we have seen, have played a significant role for a while as the putative sources of all evil within this neighborhood. US servicemen, within this context, have also often been blamed for the complex urban processes that have led to the rapid commodification of an "alternative" neighborhood. The anarcho-punks I encountered, however, have mainly criticized them as putatively willing pawns of a militarist-capitalist system

that Korea is deeply integrated into as well. The struggle surrounding Taechuri in 2006 was most certainly a key moment for quite a few of these young people—it was their own coming-of-age moment that first allowed them to politically channel and express their at times rather vague feelings of unease amidst hyper-militarized Korea in political terms.

Another point to take note of is the way in which this Hongdae youth is actually diverging from the ideological path laid out by their minjung elders. Politicized by their deep-seated sense that they are misfits in hyper-capitalist Korea, they have learned to engage with the social world around them by looking for ideological clues to be found beyond the borders of the peninsula. Thoroughly disenfranchised from the Korean Dream of rapid development, utterly uninterested in all issues concerning North Korea, and usually countering Korea's putative role as a victim with cynical remarks about their country's increasingly strong involvement in capitalist and militarist projects across the globe, they have to some degree stepped out of the nationalist framework that their minjung elders were so keenly attached to, and have actively looked for inspiration in global radical movements. In such a way, they may have quietly snuck out of the barracks for a while, and opted to live in a temporary autonomous zone (Bey 1991)[13] they have carved out for themselves within the limits of Hongdae.